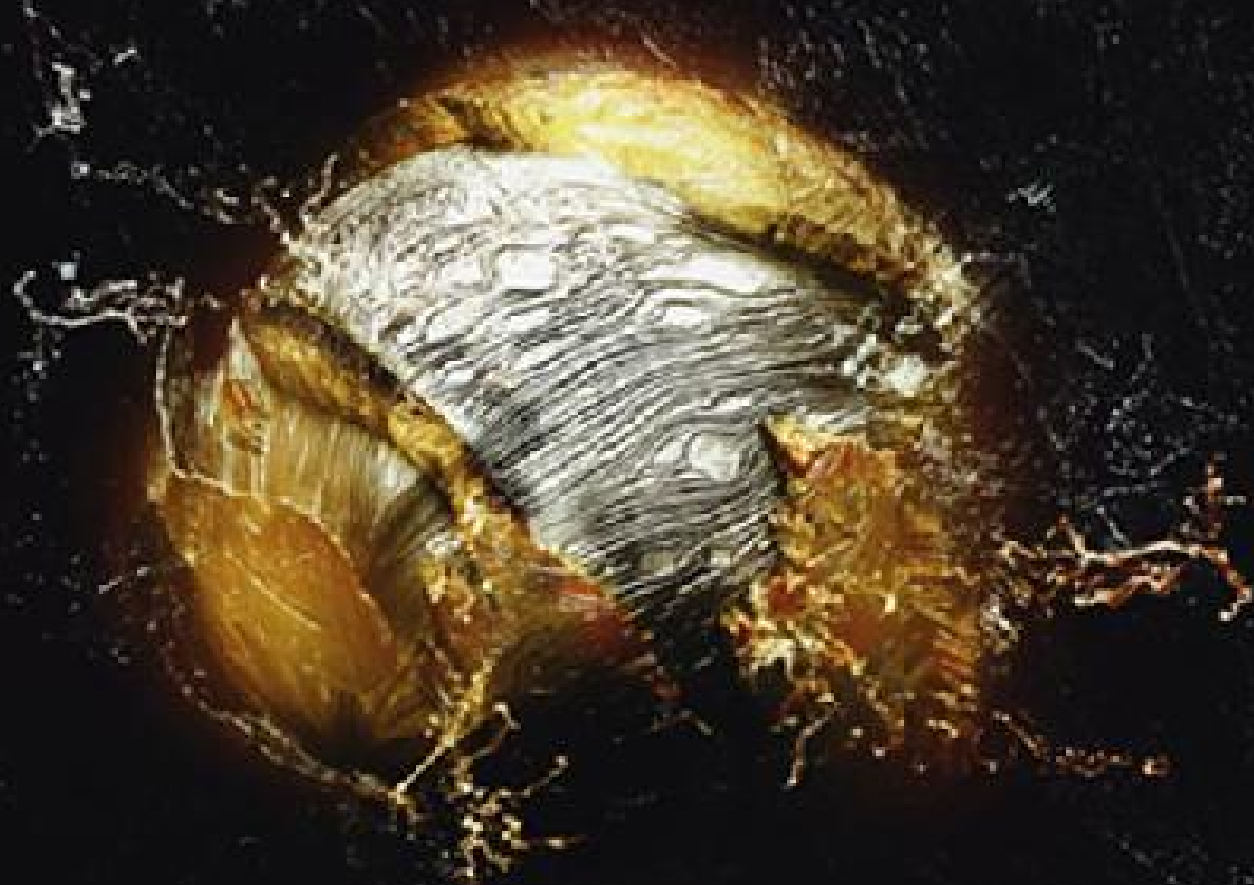


# DARK RECKONING

MAGES & MAYHEM



BESTSELLING AUTHOR

NICHOLAS BELLA



NICHOLAS  

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BELLA

BAD BOYS NEED LOVE TOO



# Dark Reckoning

Nicholas Bella



Dark Desires Publishing LLC

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## DEDICATION

Thank you to everyone for your support and I'll always do my best to keep you entertained.

Special Thank You to Heidi Ryan for catching these damn gremlins. We make one hell of a team. Thank you to my amazing PA, Lindsay Crook, you're a rockstar!

Thank you to every reader who took a chance on me and my crazy imagination. You all make doing what I love that much sweeter. I really appreciate you so much.

Much Love to you all,

Nicholas Bella



## THE VIPs DEDICATION



Thank you so much for your generosity, loyalty, and support. I can't express the level of my gratitude, but please know that I am extremely appreciative and blessed to have fans like you.

You are all amazing!

With all my love,

Nicholas.

# THE VIPS

ABENA MIREKUA  
 ALEXUS WILKERSON-LESHOURE  
 ALLISON HALL  
 AMY STONHAM  
 ANITA  
 ANONYMOUS  
 APHAEA  
 ARTHUR LIM  
 BETHANY STANTON  
 BETHANY STANTON  
 CANDI CONSTAIN  
 CAROL HUGHES  
 CAROL INGHAM  
 CATALYN ROGERS  
 CHANTEL CORBETT  
 CHERYL ADDINTON  
 CHERYL KAISER  
 CHRISTINE SNEDECOR  
 CHIZOMAM DURU  
 CINDI BASS  
 COLLEEN  
 DANIELLE N. CHANEY  
 DANIEL  
 DARIA BRAND  
 DARKYS90  
 DEBORAH MASKE  
 DELORIS JENKINS  
 DENISE MESSICK  
 DENISE  
 DEVOTED READER  
 DIANNA GUI  
 DONNA CORLFY  
 ELAINE LANCASTER  
 ELANA CRAVEY  
 ELIZABETH OLIN  
 EVA BUETTIKER  
 FLAVIA SCHAMBER  
 HEATHER DISTASIO  
 IDA SCHOENBORN  
 IJEOMA OBIDEGWU  
 IRENE JIA  
 JAIME ENNIS  
 JAN BACON  
 JESSICA SNYDER

JIM PETZOLD  
 JOSETTE  
 KAREN COOLS  
 KAREN FORD  
 KATHLEEN HALLIDAY JOHNSON  
 KISHA MORRIS  
 LADYP  
 LLIGHANNE OBEIRNE  
 LEXY  
 LISA WILCOX  
 LORE FERRY  
 LUCIE GERMAIN  
 MARETE JONES  
 MARK ROMERO  
 MARTISA HUTCHINSON  
 MARYNNE BENDER  
 MB JUNKANIMEGRX  
 MELIA  
 MICHELLE DUNCAN TORRES  
 MICHELE HOUSTON  
 MICHELLE STARR  
 NORI  
 ORMA MARS  
 PAULINE HOLST  
 QUAY JACKSON  
 RENATE SCHIER  
 RENE MANTZ  
 ROBYN HAILLS  
 SHANNA M ANDERSON  
 SHERRY LONG  
 SIMONE HUGHES  
 STACEY HEANEY  
 SUSAN BEATTIE  
 TAMEKICA WRIGHT-LEE  
 TAMMY DOUGLAS  
 TIFFANY PADILLA  
 TIFFANY RIVERA  
 TINY PEZPEZ  
 TOUNORRIS WALKER  
 VERONICA UCHE  
 VICKI MILLER  
 VIBBER PEDERSEN  
 YVETTE  
 YOLANDA RUIZ FABIAN

B A D A S S E S

LEGACY MEMBERS THE FIRST VIPS (FORMER PATREONS)



## Chapter One



**T**HE POWERFUL MEMBERS OF the Echelon Imperial glared at us from their respective places behind the ornate table. I could feel their impressive auras and I knew they were in a class of their own. As I glanced at each one, I got to the end of the table and noticed there were two new spots that were vacant. The front of the table where the other sigils were engraved was blank. I pointed at the two seats.

“Is that for Sage and me?” I asked.

Kakashi nodded. “We must act quickly and that is why the both of you will join the Echelon Imperial today.” Like before, he spoke with full authority. So much so, it sent a chill down my spine.

“And what does that look like, us joining you?” Sage asked. I turned to see that his jaw was tight, which I’d come to learn was him barely containing his rage. We’d been transported once again, against our will, to face the Council and I knew that pissed Sage off big time. He was a man who was used to

being in charge and twice now, the Council took that power from him.

I reached out, taking his hand into my own in my attempt to calm him. I felt his fingers tighten around mine and it gave me some reassurance.

“You will undergo a binding ritual where our magic is linked,” said the Irish red-headed, female mage who still hadn’t offered her name.

Sage scoffed. “This sounds like some bullshit to manipulate us into giving you our powers.”

“An ignorant, rank amateur mage like you would see it that way,” said the mage with the long chestnut brown hair and eyes. His French accent sounded as snobby as he was.

Sage pointed at him. “That was your last motherfucking time talking to me like I ain’t shit. I don’t know who the fuck you motherfuckers think you are, looking down on everyone from your perch with your self-inflated egos, but I am not the one you fuck with,” my lover warned.

“Enough!” Kakashi snapped, raising his hands. “Whatever issues we have with each other... they end now. We must be in union moving forward. A Dark God is now walking this earth.” He looked at us, then at his fellow mages. “Do you even know what happened the last time a Dark God roamed Earth?”

“Humanity spiraled into chaos?” I asked. I wasn’t trying to be a smart ass, but it just seemed like that was where he was

going.

“So, basically, a regular day of the week,” Sage added with a healthy dose of sarcasm as he was still bristling at what the arrogant mage had said to him, the insult. “There are always people willing to harm others for personal and financial gains. Why is this so dire?”

“See what I mean? Ignorant,” scoffed the chestnut-haired mage with a dismissive gesture toward us.

“And foolishly arrogant to boot,” added the black, female mage.

Sage attacked then, snatching his hand from me and sending two powerful fireballs at both mages, who had to react quickly. The mages put up a barrier that blocked the intensity of the fire that flared out against the invisible barrier and evaporated. The room vibrated from the energy of the magic displayed and the other mages were in an uproar, some leaping to their feet and yelling.

“You bastard!” the black, female mage roared.

“I warned you to stop insulting me,” Sage shot back.

A black, male mage slammed his hands on the table. “You’re too uncouth to be a member—

“And yet, you want us to join. You need us,” Sage snapped, interrupting the mage who was speaking with a Somalian accent.

I felt caught between my mate and the Council’s more irate members going at it and I didn’t know how to calm either side

down. I looked at Kakashi and he was sitting there, his eyes closed, and I wondered what he could be thinking.

“Because we need you to clean up the mess you created,” retorted the red-headed, female mage.

“Bullshit, you fuckers were twisting our arms to join you before that because you fear our power,” Sage snapped.

“Fear you? Don’t be ridiculous! The two of you are like children with access to a nuclear weapon. You aren’t responsible enough to have such magic,” the male, Somalian mage with the dreadlocks chimed in. His voice was deep and authoritative.

“You don’t get to make that decision,” I snapped. Finally unable to tolerate any more from them. “You have the nerve to sit there in judgment of what we’ve done. Everything we did was to help someone else. Or to save our own lives because we were under attack from a whole coven of mages. And not one of you bothered to lift a fucking finger to help us or protect our clan. We were nearly wiped out! And you sit there and act like you have the right to tell us that we aren’t worthy. Be honest, you’re just jealous that our power is greater than yours.”

“Don’t be so quick to think that, boy,” said the chestnut-haired mage.

“We blocked your spying and nullified your magic that prevented us from using our own magic in this room. And you had no idea. My mate is right. It’s about time you put some

respect on our names,” I said, then jerked in surprise when Sage slapped my ass lovingly.

“Not only are we extremely powerful mages, but I’m the first and only of my kind. Mage, shifter, and vampire,” Sage said.

I nodded. “And I’m no longer just a human mage. I’m something stronger. I can heal faster and I may very well be immortal, as I am now linked to Salino. The new vampire emperor.”

“Talk shit now,” Sage challenged the mages, who looked at us with a mixture of annoyance and some fear, even if they didn’t want to admit the latter.

“I’ll ask again,” Kakashi said, breaking the silence. “Do you know what happened the last time a Dark God breached this plane?”

Sage huffed but shook his head.

“No, what happened?” I asked.

“His poison had spread across half of the content of Europe and Asia. The more heinous acts people committed, the more powerful he became. People died at alarming rates; humanity wouldn’t have survived the month of his rising. This was over seventeen hundred years ago. Humanity had almost eliminated itself as the Dark God, Sana Doré, fed off the misery his influence had created. Eventually, he would have gained enough power to open a portal to hell and bring forth his army, to make his home on this plane.”



“How did he come into this world?” I asked.

“Was it because a contract was broken?” Sage asked. I could tell he was calmer now and so was I.

“There are other ways a Dark God or Goddess can breach the veil,” the French mage said. “It has happened only twice before. The first time was how shifters were made—all shifters—and it was at the hands of a human who had sacrificed an entire village of men, women, and children as an offering to the Dark God to grant him the wonders and powers of a god.”

The other mages were quiet as the French mage spoke, even Kakashi was poised in his regal position as we all listened.

“At that time, many eons ago, it was a Goddess who answered. The Dark Goddess Ka’ Tel El-Savue, and when she came into this world, she created beasts out of the animals here. Those beasts, who could walk on two legs as well as four, began to ravage the land, killing, raping, and feeding off of the humans. It took the sacrifice of the Council to be able to send her back. The beasts remained and over time, the new Echelon Imperial was able to kill those beasts, but what had been left behind were the females they’d impregnated. That is how shifters were born. The new Echelon Imperial allowed them to live because they had their humanity.” The French mage steadied his stone gaze on Sage. “So, you see, your kind lives by the grace of the Council. You should show some respect.”

Sage huffed. “Were any of you on that Council?”

They all remained silent.

Sage smirked. ‘Yeah, that’s what I thought. Shut the fuck up.’”

The blonde fairy-looking mage scoffed. “The arrogance of that one. As if we don’t have the power to—”

“Let us not waste time with threats,” Kakashi said, cutting her off with a raise of his hand. He looked at Sage and me. “The second time this event happened, it was a Dark God. There was a time when griezels were truly invulnerable and extremely dangerous because they could not be killed, only contained by magical means, as no cell that long ago could have held one captive.”

“Not even destroying their hearts or brains could kill them,” added the red-headed female.

“The human who made that pact had made an ironclad one,” said the Somalian mage.

“All of that changed when the original griel who made the bargain found a way to sever the ties by using a spell in hopes of ending his own life and thus the life of every griel in existence,” Kakashi said, taking over. “He did die, but his death opened the door for the Dark God, Sana Doré, to come. Also, griezels didn’t die, because they were bound to Doré, not the original griel the way vampires were bound to their emperors. And the Dark God still needed them to do his bidding. However, they did become vulnerable. That is why now you can kill them by destroying their hearts and brains.”

Hearing that had me very concerned. “How did you stop him? The Council back then, I mean,” I asked.

“I’m glad you’re taking this seriously now,” Kakashi said. “Before I answer that, are we all on the same page that our petty squabbles pale in comparison to what we must do? Of what lies before us?” He looked at Sage, then at the other mages, who were showing their asses, in my opinion.

“You’re right,” admitted the chestnut-haired, French mage.

“I just want to make sure that when Adrian and I bind ourselves to you that we aren’t getting played. What will happen to our powers? And furthermore, is this some sort of leash you’re trying to put around us and our abilities? I think the question is fair to ask if you want our trust. For fuck’s sake, the other five of you haven’t even bothered to introduce yourselves. What we want from you is the barest minimum,” Sage said, and I agreed with him.

Kakashi nodded. “And you’re right. Let us rectify that.” He looked at the male mage at one end of the curved table and motioned for him to go first.

The Somalian mage sighed, then nodded. “My name is Xirsi Ali, and I’m older than I look,” he said.

“How old? Like centuries?” I asked.

He shook his head. “The oldest mage here is Kakashi and he is a little over a century old. But mages don’t live forever. With magic, we can prolong our lives, but that is it.”

Both Sage and I looked at Kakashi and my mouth slightly dropped, because he looked no older than thirty-five at the

most. And yet, he was over a hundred years old. I was impressed.

“You claim you’re immortal, do you even know if that’s true?” asked the red-haired woman.

“And your name?” I asked. My eyebrows raised inquisitively.

“Kyla MacKenny,” she replied. “Have you performed any test to verify your immortal status?”

I shook my head because we really hadn’t had time to do anything like that. I’d just discovered I’d need Salino’s blood to survive only a few hours ago. I really didn’t know much about what had happened to me or how much I’d truly changed. “No. I discovered that I can heal very fast and that I need to drink Salino’s blood today. And I did say that I might be immortal. I don’t really know.” I heard Sage cough as if it was his way of telling me to not reveal too much. I shook my head at him. “No, Sage, they need to know. If we hold something back, then during the binding process, something may go wrong.”

“So, you’re ready to do the ritual?” he asked.

“I want answers to our questions, too. But I also want to stop this Dark God from destroying our world,” I said.

“And I want to know how combining our powers with theirs can do that.” He looked back at the Council. “But first, you all can keep introducing yourselves,” Sage said.

The chestnut-haired mage, who was pretty handsome, rolled his eyes but went next. “My name is Aldéric Garnier and I’m only forty-two, though I look much younger.”

He did. He looked like he was twenty at the most.

“So, the magic you share, is that what’s giving you a long life?” I asked.

Kakashi shook his head. “Each mage here has used their own spells to extend their lives.”

“But your magic is combined?” Sage asked.

Kakashi nodded. “In a way, yes.”

“So, if we merge our magic with yours, with what Adrian and I are, does that mean you’ll become immortal too?” Sage asked, and it was a question that was also on my mind.

Kakashi shrugged. “Not how it works.”

Damn, he was being annoyingly vague.

“Maybe that’s only because none of you were immortal to begin,” Sage pointed out.

Kakashi narrowed his eyes as if he were mulling over Sage’s words. “Anything is possible. Understand this. We are not stealing your magic. Nor are we binding it. What we are doing is combining the essence of our magic, so when it comes down to handling business as a full Council, we’ll be able to do so with even less risk to ourselves because we’ll all be that much stronger. Do not think that you are the strongest mages among

us. Every mage sitting here is the strongest of their coven. We each have our own grimoires that only we have access to.”

“Not to mention, magic is inherited throughout the generations from those of the Council who came before,” Aldéric said.

“So, what about controlling us?” I asked.

Kakashi shook his head. “The binding process is a unity of trust between mages on this Council. We’ll be able to tap into the power shared between us and you will also be able to do the same. It is how we function as one. We are not trying to control you, but we cannot allow you to continue to cast spells without guidance. Spells that violate the rules that we are governed by. You are powerful mages and you must act with impunity. Your actions have consequences.” He waved his hand. “Finish the introductions so I may continue the story.”

Damn, okay, I could see why he was the leader.

The blonde female mage nodded and went next. “My name is Rene Cassidy, the youngest here at thirty-five.”

“And my name is Maryanne Ingham,” said the black, female mage.

Both women were American. Maryanne’s accent was midwestern, whereas Rene’s was Californian. I took in everything Kakashi had said and I wanted to know more. But I felt a little better about the ritual they wanted us to undergo in order to join the council.

“Thank you for *finally* telling us your names,” Sage said, and my mate didn’t bother to hide his annoyance.

“I will continue now,” Kakashi said. “What took place over seventeen hundred years ago will not be found in any history books, though the cities that were destroyed when the Dark God was sent back to his plane were discovered in 2017.” Kakashi rose and walked around the table to stand before us and in his hand, he held a black rock with a bright blue light that glowed in the middle of it. “Do you know what this is?” he asked Sage and me.

“No,” I said, because I’d never seen anything like it before.

“What is it?” Sage asked.

“This is the Eye of Aldeliér,” Kakashi said. “Do you know what this does?”

Both Sage and I shook our heads.

“This is imbued with the essence of the God of Fortune, Aldeliér. It allows us to see the past, what is, and to see the future of what could be,” Kakashi said, then he turned to the other mages. “Let us show them.”

The mages rose from their seats and all joined him in the middle of the room before us. They circled him and placed their right hands on his shoulders and arms and I could feel the magic flowing and knew they were channeling their magic into Kakashi. He closed his eyes and whispered something to the orb he was holding. The bright blue light inside of it began to glow even brighter until it became so intense, both Sage and

I had to shield our eyes. When I heard screaming, I opened them immediately, only to see that we were no longer in the room, but had somehow been transported back in time.

“Holy shit,” I exclaimed and looked around to see that Sage was beside me and it was just us two. He took my hand into his own because I didn’t know what the fuck was going on, and I was certain he didn’t know either. Were we really thrown back into the past, or was this just an encompassing vision?

Someone ran our way, screaming in terror, their clothes were robes, like tunics. The man kept running toward us and I moved behind Sage to get out of his way.

“Stay, I don’t think we’re actually here,” Sage said.

I wasn’t so sure... it felt too real. I looked around at all of the carnage. Bodies lay everywhere, some still charred and smoldering. Homes were on fire, trees were on fire... hell, the damn ground was on fire! The man ran right toward us until he ran past Sage and me. But while I was focused on him, I didn’t see the woman who ran right through Sage and me and I experienced what felt like a chill down my spine.

“Did you feel that?” I asked Sage.

“Yeah,” he said, then turned around. “Oh shit!” His mouth dropped open and it was the first time he looked afraid.

That triggered my own fear and curiosity and I turned around quickly to see what had spooked him. I jumped back, my body hitting the brick wall that was Sage, but he held me against him, protecting me. Before us was a battle of epic



proportions. Five mages stood around one man who had been levitated in the air. He screamed in rage and cursed at them as they chanted, ignoring his threats and insults.

They were speaking another language, but I could still understand them. Beneath my feet, the earth shook and cracked. It all felt so real, I ran away when one of the cracks traveled between my legs. Sage was still holding my hand, so I ended up dragging him with me.

“Baby wait, stop!” Sage called out.

I turned to him in a panic. My breath came in quick pants, I could hear my heart hammering in my ears, and felt it beating in my chest. I’d never known such fear. “We have to leave now,” I yelled.

He released my hand and took hold of my shoulders, shaking me a little, forcing me to focus on him. “It’s not real, baby. It’s a vision. We need to watch to see what they want us to learn,” Sage said in a voice that was calm enough to settle my nerves... just a little.

My chest was heaving in my excitement, but what he said made sense. It was just, I was scared. I nodded and took several deep breaths. If he could remain coolheaded, then so could I... I hoped. I turned back to watch the spell the mages were working. There was a mixture of white and black mist coming from the surrounding mages that encircled the Dark God as he roared and turned but was unable to escape. The mist was now gray as it swirled around the Dark God tighter and tighter like a vice until he couldn’t move. The mages all

sank to their knees, growing weaker, but they continued to chant their spell. The body of the Dark God began to turn into black smoke inside the gray mist and his screams faded as the smoke was sucked into what looked like a ruby encased in a steel cage. Once all of the smoke was inside, the ruby turned black, but the earth didn't stop shaking. It was at that point, the mages of the Council fell. Their bodies remained motionless. Somehow, I knew they had all died.

The people who'd witnessed the spell and were in hysterics because of everything that had happened became even more frightened as they pointed in one direction, and then tried to run. That was when Sage and I turned to see what they had been looking at, and my mouth dropped open. Rushing toward us was a wall of water at least two hundred feet high, maybe even higher. All around us, people ran in a panic, but with a wave that high, there was no escaping their fate. My breath caught in my chest and I wrapped my arms around Sage, who just held me. I still didn't know if this was real for us or not, because I could feel the ground shaking beneath my feet. I felt the heat of the fires that were burning out of control all around us, and could smell the embers. Was a vision supposed to be this interactive? Were we about to die?

The tsunami was upon us and I screamed in terror as the massive wave rushed toward us with all of the wrath of nature. Oh my god, was this what it was going to be like in order to deal with the Dark God that had escaped because we broke the contract between the vampires and El-Kazier?

“It’s just a vision... just a vision,” I heard Sage say as if he were still trying to convince himself that what we were seeing wasn’t real. His heart pounded in his chest so hard, I could feel the impact against my face, which I had pressed to him.

I turned to see the tsunami again and I only had seconds to accept that this was how it all ended over seventeen hundred years ago. The destructive impact of the wave hit me so hard, both Sage and I were flung off our feet and I blacked out.

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“Are you back with us?” I heard a familiar voice ask and I blinked several times. I opened my eyes slowly, my vision cloudy, but the last thing I remembered was the wall of water killing me.

I screamed, my arms flailing and I felt strong hands grabbing me and holding me close to a muscled body I was used to and found comfort in.

“Baby, calm down,” I heard Sage’s voice penetrate through my panicked state of being.

I forced myself to breathe slowly while I gathered my wits about myself. I saw Kakashi standing over me, his expression was patient but still regal.

“What... happened?” I asked. My heart raced, but I could feel my jitters settling as I became more aware of my surroundings.

“Gather your senses first,” said the mage with the sexy French accent. His name was escaping me at the moment.

I struggled to sit up because I was still a little disorientated, so Sage gave me aid. He let me lean on him, and it was exactly what I needed after going through that ordeal. I wiped my eyes and looked up at Kakashi, now that I was running on all cylinders again. “What happened? Was that actually a vision or were we transported back in time?”

“A bit of both,” Kakashi said. “That is the power of the Eye of Aldeliér. What you saw was how the Echelon Imperial of their time had to deal with the Dark God, Sana Doré. And the great sacrifice that was made to save the world. But even with all of that, two cities were completely lost to time. All of their inhabitants were lost with it. Neapolis, Tunisia, and Eleutherna, Crete. Both were destroyed in 365 AD.”

“What caused the earthquake and the tsunami has gone unknown and will continue to go unknown as no one survived. Not even the mages, but their powers went back into the ether to be given to the descendants of their covens,” Aldéric said, his name finally coming back to me.

“And the power that bound them, given to them by the ritual of the Echelon Imperial, also returned to its fount,” Kakashi said.

“So, does that mean when we take on this God, we’ll die too?” I asked. “Because I’m seeing a trend here.” The two stories I’d learned about the Council taking on a Dark God and Goddess all ended with them dying.

Kakashi sighed, then shrugged. “I don’t know, and that is what I hope to avoid. I rather like living. What I do know is that we must fight him regardless of whether or not we live or die. Turning a blind eye will only leave this world at the mercy of the god who will destroy it. Would you like to see what is and what will be?”

“Will it be like it was the last time?” I asked, because I really didn’t want to be trapped in a vision of that magnitude.

“Yes. Can you handle it?” Kakashi asked.

I sighed heavily. I could, but I really didn’t want to. However, I thought it was important that we did so we knew what we were about to go up against. “Show us,” I said, speaking for both me and Sage. I turned to him. “Right, baby?”

Sage nodded. “Might as well know what we unleashed.”

Ugh, when he put it like that, I couldn’t help but feel guilty. Of course, we had no way of knowing that by helping Salino break the link with his vampire emperor, Lord Barron, we would also be breaking the contract. Especially since we’d successfully reinstated the bond between vampires. This was a fucked-up situation. Now knowing what I knew about the past, I could understand some of their hostility toward Sage and me. Still, if they hadn’t been so arrogant and frankly, mean when we first met, we would have been more open to them. I think it was safe to say that mistakes were made all around.

“Or...” Kakashi paused.

“Or?” I asked, waiting to see what he was going to offer.

“Or would you prefer to see what is happening now and then use your imagination of what the future holds if we are unsuccessful?” Kakashi asked, giving us a choice.

“Show us what’s happening now,” I said, and then I remembered that Sage should have a choice too. I turned to him. “Is that okay?”

He nodded. “Yeah, let’s see what’s happening now.”

Kakashi nodded once. “Very well.”

Sage and I rose to our feet and Kakashi and the other mages began to chant again. This time, Sage and I were prepared and the vision that materialized had us standing in a dark alley. There was some creature that looked to be feeding off the blood of a human woman. The creature’s skin was pale and sweaty looking. Its hair was nearly gone and only a few strands still clung to a scabby skull. The creature held the female victim with hands that resembled claws, which reminded me of Nosferatu, really creepy. When it was done feeding, it turned toward us and I took a step back. God, it was hideous! Red eyes and a bloodied mouth full of razor-sharp fangs. It then climbed up the wall to the rooftop and disappeared. A few minutes later, the corpse of the woman twitched once, twice, then multiple times. Finally, it stopped convulsing and she climbed to her feet with a shaky balance. Her eyes were red. She reached up, touching her teeth that weren’t as sharp as the creatures were, but they were no longer

human-looking teeth either. She then climbed up the wall as well, following the same direction the other creature took.

Fuck, this... this was a major problem. I didn't need to see a vision of the future to know what was going to happen to humanity if we didn't stop the Dark God. "Sage, did you see that?" I asked.

"Yeah, I saw it," he said, and his tone was deadly serious.

The vision of the dark alley began to shimmer until it dissipated. Again, we were back with the other mages. I took a deep breath and looked at Kakashi. "The Dark God El-Kazier is creating these things?" I asked.

Kakashi nodded. "When he feeds on the blood of a human, or even a supernal, that is what they turn into. Those made from supernals are much stronger than those made from humans, but yes. And when they feed, they make more, so you see why time is truly of the essence as their hunger seems insatiable."

"Is this just happening here?" I asked.

Kakashi shook his head. "All over the world. The Dark God is not bound to one location and can teleport wherever he wants."

"Jesus!" I gasped.

Sage pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. "Do we know how to stop him, preferably without killing ourselves in the process?" he asked, then lowered his hand and looked at Kakashi.

“The spell that dealt with the Dark God and Goddess is known to us. However, we would like to use it as a last resort. But as you’ve said, if we can find a way to take down El-Kazier and survive, that is what we would like to do. Your help is not only needed, but it is necessary. You are linked to El-Kazier through the magic you used and the blood flowing through your veins. That automatically gives us some advantage. And the very fact that between the two of you, there are spells that are unknown to us that may be known to you. And in our own grimoires, there will be spells that include the entire Council as it is now. And once our magic is linked, you will become even more powerful. The ritual is life-binding.”

Sage frowned. “Wait, hold the fuck up. Does that mean if one of you dies, we die too?”

That was actually going to be my question, but Sage beat me to it. I looked at Kakashi, waiting for him to answer.

“No, Sage. We are not bound that way. How it works is that we can tap into each other’s magic. We can also combine our magic when we need to take on a huge task. For instance, twenty-seven years ago, a vampire killed a human on live TV. Fed on their blood and ripped their heart out.”

I scoffed because I’d never heard of anything like that happening. I decided to voice that thought. “I have never heard of anything like that going down. I mean, that would be on the internet today, even on some conspiracy theory blog if people thought it was a hoax back then.”



“Me either, and unlike my lover here, I was actually alive at that time,” Sage said.

Okay, so he got me there. But I did have the internet and surely, something like that would have been known.

Xirsi nodded. “Exactly, you know nothing about that incident because of us. We had to wipe the world’s mind and destroy the vampire who committed the crime by breaking the rules. He tried to cause chaos by exposing the world of supernals to humans. Can you imagine what would have happened next?”

“I can imagine,” I said. And if we didn’t stop the Dark God in time, I wouldn’t have to imagine anymore.

“It is also why the incident that happened seventeen hundred years ago is also unknown to all except those who are chosen to become a member of the Echelon Imperial. That is why griezels don’t even know their own history. It was necessary then to work a spell to erase what had happened by the new Council that had been formed. Even though the Dark Goddess had been sent back to her realm, the damage she caused was still prevalent all over the world. Same thing happened when the next Echelon Imperial formed after sending the Dark God back to his realm in the vision you saw. Humans would have known about supernals to this day had the Echelon Imperial Council of seventeen hundred years ago not acted,” Kakashi said.

“Just how many of these events have you erased from all of our minds?” Sage asked.

“Supernals have been quite reckless in the past and even now. We are kept busy,” Kakashi stated.

“Fuck, you are powerful,” Sage said under his breath, but I heard him just fine.

Kakashi sighed and stepped closer to us. “We can take on this Dark God, but not without losing our lives possibly, or the lives of millions, maybe even billions. As you now know the level of destruction that will happen when trying to send a Dark God back to their realm.”

“What about trying to kill one?” Sage asked.

“I’d imagine the destruction would be even more catastrophic. It’s bad enough simply sending one back. Do you really want to see what would happen if we killed one?” Xirsi asked. “I don’t know about you, but if we do survive, I’d still like a world left to live in.”

Sage was glaring at him. “So, in other words, you have no idea. You could have just said that instead of being an ass.”

Kirsi opened his mouth to say something, but Kakashi raised his hand. “I, on the other hand, am open to the option of killing one.”

Aldéric gasped. “You are?”

Kakashi nodded. “We don’t really know what will happen if we manage to kill one. Maybe the amount of magic it took to send them back in the past is what killed those Councils. It is no easy feat to trap a powerful being like that and open a

portal to their realm to transfer them back. In any case, we won't know until we try."

"That's if there's even a spell that can kill a Dark God," said Kyla.

"I aim to find one," Kakashi said.

"Shit, I'm with him," Sage agreed.

"You've barely cut your teeth on that grimoire of yours. Nobody cares what you think," Aldéric snapped.

Sage snarled, then growled. "Want to test my skill, bitch."

"Oh my god, we need to get along. This isn't helping. From this moment on, we will be working as one to save this world and keep the peace between not only the supernals, but between humans and supernals," Maryanne said, her brown eyes sincere as she looked at Sage, me, Xirsi, and Aldéric.

Of course, I didn't know why she directed that at me, I wasn't about to throw down just then, but whatever.

"I'm in a mood," Aldéric said.

"And I don't give a fuck," Sage snapped back. "We're here and we see what needs to be done now. I don't care if you like me or Adrian. But if you give me attitude, you're going to get it back. My nature won't allow anything less than me standing my ground."

"Shifters are made from beasts, after all," Kayla said.

Sage's beautiful gray and golden eyes panned over to her and I could feel his anger rising, it was that palpable. I reached

down, taking his hand into my own. “It’s okay, baby.”

He turned from her and kissed my temple and I could feel his temper cooling. “I’m good.”

“All right. Sage, I’m ready to join, are you?” I asked him.

“Not quite,” he said, then looked back at Kakashi. “You didn’t finish explaining this life bond you’re asking us to make.”

“Ahh, yes. If one of us dies, the link we had with them is broken. Their magical essence is then returned to the ether, so to speak. Left there for the next member to absorb. But we do not all die if one dies. That is not how it works. However, once the link is made, only death will break it. Now do you understand?” Kakashi asked.

The man really had a way with words, that was for sure.

Sage nodded. “Yeah, I get it now.”

Something Kakashi said earlier came to mind and I needed answers. “You said that only the mages chosen to become members of the Echelon Imperial have gained access to the knowledge of all those events that were erased by a spell. How does that happen?” I asked.

“Once you complete the ritual and our powers are linked, you will begin to receive such knowledge. It won’t happen immediately. Over time, you’ll get this knowledge in dreams or waking visions,” Kakashi said. “The knowledge of every member who came before us is passed down to the next

members. That is why a ritual must take place after you've purified yourselves," Kakashi said.

"Ahh, I see. That's intense," I said.

"It's not as simple as a handshake and a membership card," quipped Aldéric with more attitude than was necessary, in my opinion.

Sage rolled his eyes and scoffed. "You can kiss my entire ass, just so you know," he told the mage and to my surprise, Aldéric chuckled. Sage returned his attention to Kakashi. "Since we're being all forthcoming, you need to know how my magic works, because I'm a dark mage."

Kakashi nodded. "So am I, and so are Kayla and Aldéric. Everyone else uses light magic."

Well, that explained a lot.

"So, that's why he and you are assholes, and she's a bitch," Sage said, motioning to each of the three, then he looked at the other light mages. "What're your excuses for being mean?"

"Your ineptitude and off-putting attitude," replied Xirsi.

"Ineptitude? I do believe we achieved our goals working our spells," Sage pointed out. "Magic has a price and we never know what that price is until after the fact."

"Had you been wiser in the ways of magic, you would have known to never perform that spell in the first place. There was another way of severing the line without breaking the contract," Kakashi stated, then waved his hand. "But that is neither here nor there at this point. What's done is done."

Now that I thought about it, it kind of explained why so many other mages had turned Salino down in the past. Maybe they knew something we didn't. Or maybe they just didn't know how, that was also a possibility. In any case, it was in the past.

“So, you're a dark mage in control of the Council,” I said.

“Did you think only light mages could be members of the Echelon Imperial?” Aldéric asked.

Sage smirked. “Honestly, I did. You all seemed like the stuck-up type.”

“Ouch,” I said.

Sage looked at me. “Well, you're an exception, baby. Most light mages I've met are judgmental as fuck and look down on dark mages. So, like you, I'm surprised they let one govern over them.”

“Looks like judgment goes both ways,” I said under my breath.

“Is that so?” Sage asked, an eyebrow cocked.

I nodded. “We're opposites, our magic works differently. Yours is used to harm, mine is used to heal. I think that's what makes us so unique and powerful.”

“It certainly plays a part,” Kakashi said. “Opposites attract, as they say. We are each the anomaly of our covens.”

“Kakashi, I thought you have to do bad things for your magic to work?” I asked.

“Who’s to say that I don’t?” Kakashi asked with a sly smirk. “When I showed the griezels king what you’d done to one of his own, I took great pleasure in that. Make no mistake, I am not a good person, Adrian. I kill because it suits me and keeps me powerful. However, I am the oldest and strongest mage on this council. That is why I am its leader, not because I am noble like yourself and the others.”

I shook my head. “Don’t sell yourself too short because you are noble. You’re saving lives and willing to risk your life to save the world. That means something. I get why you’re in charge now.”

Kakashi tilted his head as he stared at me as if trying to figure me out. “You have a rather simple way of looking at things on the surface, but in reality, you’re more complex than what you seem.”

Okay, he kind of lost me there.

“I agree,” Sage said.

“You do? You think I’m simple and complex?” I asked.

He nodded. “You’re simple in your honesty, baby. But in that simplicity are all of the multifaceted layers that make you so amazing and beautiful to me.”

“Well, now I was really blushing and if this situation wasn’t so serious, I’d definitely want to jump Sage’s bones right there. “I get it.” I leaned up and kissed him, then returned my attention to Kakashi.

“Adrian’s right about not selling yourself short just because you’re a son of a bitch,” Sage said in his signature style. “You didn’t have to take up the mantle on the Council. You, Kayla, or Aldéric, but you did. Because you know that it’s important. I didn’t know just how important until today, so that is why I will join.”

“It’s our duty. I see that now,” I added.

“Speaking of your curious nature, we should test to see if Adrian is really immortal,” Kyla said.

“Why is that so important?” I asked her.

She raised an eyebrow. “Don’t you want to know?”

“Yeah, but I want to know why you’re so invested?”

“Yeah, I’m curious to know why too,” Sage added. “What benefits will you get out of two immortal mages linking themselves to you?”

Kakashi smiled. “We don’t know. Never has there ever been a shifter—vampire—mage like yourself on the Council.” He turned to me. “And after what you told us, whatever is going on with you is also unique. On top of that, never has the Council inducted two mages who were linked by the same magical lineage bond. We each have our own line, our own grimoire, but with the two of you, one cannot exist without the other and be at full potential. And if one is gone, then so is half of the magic you’re capable of. We have no idea what will happen to us once we complete the link. But that isn’t anything that will deter us, because we know what is at stake.”



“Do you need to know if I’m immortal before we do it?” I asked, because I didn’t want anything going wrong.

Kakashi shook his head. “Not really, but if you want to know... Xirsi.” He turned to the Somalian mage. “Please.”

Xirsi walked over to me. “Stand still. This won’t hurt, but you will feel my magic working inside of you.”

I nodded, because I had to start trusting them at some point. Might as well do it now. “Okay.”

Sage was watching intently as Xirsi pressed his hand to my chest and began to chant something that wasn’t in a language I was familiar with, but it sounded Somalian. I felt heat flowing into me from where his palm rested on my body and that heat began to spread as it tingled, making me giggle like a fool. He removed his hand.

“Oh, he’s immortal,” Xirsi said. “He is also part vampire linked to Salino.”

Well, I was glad to know the truth.

“Does that mean if Salino dies, we both die?” Sage asked.

Xirsi nodded. “It does. It also means that Adrian must continue to feed off Salino and him only. Your blood won’t do, nor anyone else’s.”

“You could sense all of that when you touched me?” I asked.

He nodded. “I was able to read your aura.”

“Intrusive, but it got the job done, I guess.” I didn’t know he was going to discover all of that about me, but I was glad to

know. I wasn't all that thrilled that the only blood I could drink to survive was Salino's.

"Fuck," Sage groaned.

I turned to him. "What's wrong? Isn't this a good thing that I'm immortal? Now we can always be together."

"Oh, that part makes me very happy. I'm just pissed at the fact that not only are you bound to Salino like I am, but you can only feed from him. You know what an asshole he is," Sage said.

I nodded, understanding. "Yeah, I figured that would annoy you, but it's another issue for another time." I wasn't going to worry about that. Besides, I didn't think Salino would refuse to feed me. If nothing else, he needed me.

Kakashi cleared his throat, drawing both Sage's and my attention. "Now, if we've gotten all of the chit-chat and questions out of the way, I will ask you once more... are you ready for the ritual?"

Again, I looked at Sage and he looked at me. I raised up to kiss him. "Are you ready?" I asked him.

"As ready as I'll ever be," he said, then kissed me one more time before turning to face Kakashi. "Okay, so... let's do this."

## Chapter Two

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**K**AKASHI NODDED AT US, then motioned to a door.  
“First, you must purify yourselves.”

“Purify ourselves?” I asked, wanting clarification.

“You must both submerge yourself in the anointing bath from head to toe. Then once you are done, you will don your Imperial robes,” Kakashi said.

I looked at the black robe he was wearing, and he wasn’t the only one. All of the other mages were also wearing black robes with gold sigils on the back and on the front. “Will the robes be like yours?”

Kakashi nodded. “Yes. These robes are vital to us when we work spells.”

“What about that tattoo on your neck?” I asked, because I’d noticed how each member had one that matched the sigils on their robes.

“Yes, you will get one, but it is more of a brand than a tattoo. It will help channel our magic as well as increase your own,”

Kakashi explained.

Okay, not a bad mark to have.

“What else does this ritual involve?” Adrian asked.

“You will drink of our essence as we all drink of yours,” Kakashi said. “That will be your blood imbued with your magic. All of our combined essences will be in one bowl, which is also magical. We will all drink at the same time. It will leave us very weak afterward, for about an hour. But that is all there is to the ritual.”

“What if I can’t drink the blood since I can only drink Salino’s?” Adrian asked.

Kakashi waved his concern away. “You’ll be able to drink it once you’ve been purified. Do not worry.”

“Does that mean he’ll be able to drink anyone else’s blood?” I asked.

Kakashi shook his head. “No. Only this because his blood will also be linked along with the magic. It is part of the ritual.”

I sighed and scratched my eyebrow before looking at Adrian. I knew he was ready to get the ball rolling. I personally didn’t want to do this, but I knew I had no choice. We unleashed an unspeakable evil into the world and we had to stop it. I followed behind Kakashi as he led Adrian and me into the anointing room. It was another place that looked lavish with a large pool in the middle with swirling, sparkling water that looked unusual, to say the least. In fact, the best way I could

describe it was that it looked like liquid gray, black, and white marble stirring itself. Normal water didn't look anything like that, and I could sense the magic coming off the water in waves. The ceiling was high and there were both angels and devils carved into the walls, making this room look like a sanctuary.

“Please, undress,” Kakashi said.

I stripped out of my clothes, as did Adrian, and Kakashi's eyebrows knitted at the ring on my cock. “Magical?”

I shook my head. “Pleasurable.”

“Ah, I see. Please,” Kakashi said again, then gestured toward the pool.

“So, is this the only meeting place?” I asked as I dipped my toe into the pool, then snatched it back, shaking the drops of water off. “Damn, y'all couldn't have heated this motherfucker up?” The water was ice fucking cold. As a shifter, I could withstand a lot of intense temperatures, but that shit wasn't normal.

“It's warm to me,” Adrian said as he slipped into the swirling waters. “Feels so good, actually.”

“You think this is warm?” I asked Adrian.

“It's like a hot spring in a way. So relaxing. It's cold to you?” he asked, a curious expression on his gorgeous face.

I nodded, then looked at Kakashi. “What's up with that?” I asked, because if something was wrong, there was no way I

was getting my black ass into that water to boil, freeze, or whatever the fuck.

Kakashi nodded. “For dark mages, the water is cold. Deal with it,” he said.

“Why?”

“The magic of the pool is judgmental, you could say.”

“So, it is trying to say that I’m coldblooded because I’m a dark mage?”

He shrugged. “If so, it’s not wrong.”

I snorted because I couldn’t really argue there. “Okay, so how long do we need to be inside?”

“One hour,” he answered.

I raised both eyebrows. “Will my body acclimate?”

Kakashi sighed. “You won’t die from it.”

“Fuck,” I hissed under my breath, then stepped back into the freezing water. “Ah shit,” I said as I began to submerge my entire body. I shivered and Adrian walked over to me and held me close to him, trying to warm me with his body. It was working a little. I wrapped my arms around him, holding him close to me, mainly because I loved him that much.

“You should both go under and do so for a full minute,” Kakashi said.

“Fine,” I said, then looked at Adrian. “You ready?”

He nodded, and together, we took a deep breath and then held it as we sank deeper into the water. It was thick in

substance, like a creamy soup, and still freezing cold to me. I felt stuff floating around me and through me, making me shiver even more. Adrian shook in my arms and I knew he must have been feeling something too. I had no way of knowing if we were experiencing the same sensation or not. As soon as our minute was up, we popped up and wiped the water from our faces.

“Oh man, that was so fucking weird,” Adrian belted out.

“I feel violated,” I said, then turned to look at Kakashi. “What was that?”

“Your bodies were being purified,” he replied.

“Of what? Toxins?” Adrian asked.

“Not that kind of purification. Your magic is still your magic, but now your body is open to receiving and giving. That is the sensation you experienced. You may both climb out of the pool now,” he said.

I frowned. “I thought we needed to be in here an hour?”

“You were,” Kakashi said. “That minute to you was an hour for me. That is how the purification pool works. Come now.”

Wow, that was kind of cool and unnerving at the same time. Like were we in some kind of portal during that process or what? “Why was time different?” I asked in order to get some answers.

“You were in a form of stasis. Fully aware of your experience, but the magic works differently inside of the

purification pool. That is all I can explain, because that is all I know,” Kakashi said.

I supposed that would have to be good enough. I climbed out first and helped Adrian out. I really couldn't complain, because that fucking water was torture and I was glad time had sped by. I wasn't looking forward to spending any more minutes in there than I had to. Next, Kakashi handed us the black robes that were made out of crushed velvet. They didn't have any sigils on them yet. I guessed that came later. We put them on and tied them up. I grabbed my clothes, and Adrian did the same, then we followed Kakashi into another room where the other mages were waiting. All were standing around a large ornate bowl that had eight crystal chalices surrounding it. Kakashi walked over to them and pointed to where Adrian and I were expected to stand.

We put our clothes on the floor, as there was no other place to put them, and then walked over to stand in the designated spots. I looked into the bowl, which had a liquid inside that glowed a bright green. Kakashi instructed us to repeat after him and we all did. As we did, we each cut ourselves with the same knife and bled into the bowl. The liquid that once glowed green began to turn red and the consistency got thicker.

“Now, we fill our chalices,” Kakashi said.

Adrian and I did like everyone else, and dipped the crystal chalices into the bowl, gathering the liquid. What was remarkable was that everyone had the same amount in their



glass regardless if they took a little or a lot. I knew because I had taken a little and I still had a full chalice.

“Now, I will raise my hand and when I lower it, we must all drink at the same time. This is crucial,” Kakashi said.

Adrian and I nodded.

Kakashi raised his hand and when he lowered it, we all drank the liquid. I could taste the blood, but also the magic flowing in the blood, and my god, it was powerful! We all put the chalices back on the table and the room seemed to shimmer. Before I knew what was happening, I stumbled backward, then fell to the floor. Adrian did the same, but the other mages simply sat down and closed their eyes. I felt a burning on the right side of my neck. I covered it with my hand as I rolled over onto my back. I stared up at the ceiling that seemed to swirl like a whirlpool. My head was spinning and I felt a nauseous roll inside my stomach. I closed my eyes and everything just faded away.

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When I came to, the other mages were all standing and looking at me. I groaned and rolled over onto all fours. I looked over to see Adrian was still out cold and I crawled over to him.

“Leave him,” Kakashi said. “Do not interfere with his process.”

I looked up at Kakashi. “Is he okay?”

He nodded. “He’s fine. It’s been an hour, he will rise.”

“He better,” I snapped.

“He will rise,” Kakashi repeated.

I sat back on my ass next to Adrian and waited for my baby to open those pretty green eyes of his. While I waited, I looked down at my robe to see that a gold sigil was on it, as if it were part of the fabric.

“Is this on the back too?” I asked Kakashi.

He nodded. “Yes.”

Magical robes, indeed.

After five minutes passed, Adrian began to stir and then moaned as he came to, eyes blinking.

“Hey baby, you feeling okay?” I asked him.

“Help—help me up,” he said, his voice a little groggy.

I did, and I let him lean against me until he gathered his strength again.

“The ritual is now complete,” Kakashi said. “The robes you wear are yours to keep. You are to wear them whenever we perform spells. You will notice the robes now bear your own sigil as it pertains to the Echelon Imperial Council. They must never get into the hands of another person, especially not another mage.”

“Not to say that will ever happen, but what if it does?” I asked.

“Bad things you don’t want to happen, that we won’t want to happen. Just don’t,” Aldéric said.

I looked down at Adrian’s robe, and he was doing the same, and right there on the front was a sigil that represented the magical essence that was his.

“You will also notice that you now bear your distinctive sigil on the side of your necks. That was the burning sensation you felt,” Kakashi said.

I remembered that moment right before I passed out. I lifted my hand to the right side of my neck and felt something etched there, almost like a tattoo.

“It’s there,” Adrian confirmed. “What about me?” he asked, then turned his head to the left.

I nodded. “Yeah, it’s the same one that’s on your robe,” I said, looking at the black mark now on his soft, tanned skin. To be honest, he looked pretty badass with it there. It was such a unique design, as was my own.

“Are we supposed to keep them hidden?” Adrian asked anyone willing to answer.

“Not necessarily. However, if other mages see it, they may get jealous,” replied Kyla.

“Well, I could give a fuck less about their petty jealousy,” I said.

“I’m sure you don’t,” Kyla remarked. “Some of us keep it covered when we are in public to avoid unwanted questions as

well. So many want to join our Council, but only the elite are worthy.”

Adrian scoffed and I knew why her words irked him. He didn't come from money, or even a little change. He grew up dirt poor and arrogant attitudes like those who felt as if they were above all others pissed him off.

“And who decides who is worthy?” he asked, and I smirked because I knew it was coming.

“The Imperial Pool. For if one is powerful but not worthy and they enter the pool, it will strip them of their magical ability,” Kakashi stated.

“What the fuck?!” My ears lit up as well as my temper. That was some pertinent information his ass had conveniently omitted. “You motherfucker, that's something we would have liked to have known before we got our asses in that fucking son of a bitch!” I snapped.

“I knew beforehand that you were worthy. Therefore, there was no cause for concern or any reason to add any undue stress on your part,” Kakashi said with a dismissive gesture.

That diabolical asshole.

Adrian handled the news better than me with a shake of his head and a sigh. “Is there anything else we need to know?” he asked.

“When we return to the meeting room, you will notice that your sigils will be engraved on the table and chairs,” Kakashi said.

I rose to my feet and helped Adrian to his. That was when I noticed that the sigil was also on the back of his robe too, and it was bigger. “Hey, check my back, is my sigil there like yours?” I turned around so that he could see.

“Yes, and it’s pretty wicked-looking too,” Adrian said.

“If you’re done checking yourselves out, please follow me,” Kakashi said, and Adrian and I did just that, making sure to grab our clothes before we left that room. Now that we were back in the meeting room, Adrian and I saw the sigils on the front of the table where we were to always sit, I suppose. Our sigils were also on the front and back of the chairs. The room was electrified with magic that I felt like I was a part of.

“The sensation you feel is the bond that we all now share. Your magic helps protect this realm,” Kakashi said.

“Realm?” I asked.

He nodded. “This safe haven does not exist on the normal plane.”

“But I drove to it before,” I said.

“You drove to the address we gave you because we made it so. The address we gave you does not exist. You will be able to come here whenever you need to from now on as you’ll always be able to sense this place,” Kakashi said.

“Is this far from where I live?” I asked since the address didn’t really exist. I still tried to wrap my mind around that, because it looked pretty real the last time Adrian, Shi, and I were here.

He shook his head. “You’re still thinking in terms of a physical location. It will take you seconds when you teleport, and within five minutes if you drive. You will sense its location as you get closer. It’s never far from you no matter where you are, and only members will be able to see and feel it,” Kakashi said.

“So, if I’m driving, it will just appear out of nowhere for me?” I asked.

Kakashi nodded. “You could say that, yes.”

Well, that cleared up my confusion.

“Okay, so now that we’ve been inducted, what next?” Adrian asked. I could tell he was ready to get started on taking out this Dark God.

“What next, indeed,” Kakashi said. “You need to study your grimoire and we will study ours. We need to find a spell that can locate a Dark God. We also need to find a spell that can trap him or send him back to his dimension without destroying whole cities in the process. We need to find the right magical objects to do this. So, we each have a lot of research to do. Now that our powers have been linked, our grimoires may have more spells.”

“Your grimoires change spells too?” Adrian asked.

The mages all nodded. “What, you thought you were the only special ones?” Xirsi commented.

“We are the elite of all mages. Our magic is unlike any other mage’s. Your place was always with this Council. Now, I think

you understand,” Kakashi said. “We must act quickly to find out whatever we can. I have seen the future, my brothers and sisters, and it does not bode well if the Dark God El-Kazier is left to run amok on this earth.”

“What about what happened before? You said you knew the spells of old. How did the previous Council locate the Dark God?” I asked.

“The old-fashioned way, as they couldn’t locate either the God or Goddess using magic. Their magic was blocked by them. They had to travel, follow where the chaos was at its worst, and hope they could trap them. I’d rather not have to go through such extremes... or bother,” Kakashi said.

He wasn’t the only one. “What’s the time frame we’re looking at?” I asked.

“A week at the most before all hell breaks loose, literally,” Kakashi said. “The mayhem has already started. I’m sure we’ll be seeing reports on the world news within the next twenty-four hours.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” I cursed under my breath.

“How do we get back home?” Adrian asked, and I could hear the urgency and fear in his voice.

“Teleport,” Kyla said.

“I don’t know how,” Adrian replied. “I know it is one of the powers I can learn, but I don’t know it.”

“When you get home to your grimoire, I suggest you practice that,” Kakashi said.

“I’ll send you home,” Maryanne said, and then she snapped her fingers.

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I felt a solid platform under my feet and I stumbled to the sofa, falling onto it. Adrian did the same and neither one of us could talk right away as we had to deal with the effects of the transportation. When the room stopped spinning and my stomach settled, I looked around, noticing that we were in our living room.

I turned to Adrian. “Are you okay, baby?”

He swallowed hard and nodded. “I hate the way that shit feels.”

“You and me both,” I agreed. I noticed our clothes were on the floor and we were still in our ceremonial robes. “Let’s get our clothes back on.” I rose from the sofa and helped Adrian to his feet. We went into the bathroom, showered—with no fucking involved—then dressed quickly. I contacted Shi, texting her, letting her know that we were okay and back at home. I also told her to grab Adrian and me a few sandwiches from Romero’s Corner Bistro, their most popular, so Adrian could taste why they’re one of my favorite locations.

*What happened?* Shi texted back.

*I’ll tell you when you get here. For now, I’m starving.*

*Do you need blood?* she asked.



*Yes, and food.*

*I'll bring you both,* she said, and that was her last text.

I sighed and tossed my phone on the cocktail table and leaned my head back on the sofa.

“It’s been a long, busy day,” Adrian said as he settled on the sofa next to me. We were both dressed in T-shirts and sweats. I didn’t have any plans on leaving the house after what we had gone through.

“So, we’re now members of the Council,” I said.

“Yeah, and it’s so weird because a month ago, I had no idea they even existed. To think that they’ve been behind the scenes all of this time keeping the peace,” Adrian said.

“Now, we’ll be expected to do the same,” I said, and I wasn’t all that interested in being some gatekeeper. My plate was already full and quite frankly, so was Adrian’s. But even if we hadn’t unleashed a Dark God into our world, the Echelon Imperial was going to force us to join one way or the other. It couldn’t be avoided.

“We need to look at our grimoire to see if there are any spells we can use,” Adrian said. “We don’t have time to waste.”

“Shi is on her way with food. Let’s eat first, then research. We’ll be able to concentrate more with full stomachs,” I suggested.

Adrian nodded and laid his head back on my shoulder. “What if we can’t stop him?”

“I don’t think that’s the problem. Kakashi knows how to stop him. But what we’re trying to avoid is the carnage we witnessed seventeen hundred years ago. Wherever we take down El-Kazier, I’m willing to bet he’ll be in a big city. The last Dark God was in a big city in those times. And two cities were completely destroyed trying to rid the world of Sana Doré. That will be millions today. That’s what we’re trying to avoid,” I said. “But if we can’t, millions will die and it will still be worth it to save the billions we can.”

“I don’t want to lose anyone,” Adrian said, and I knew he would. “We need to be able to trap him in a way that takes him into another plane. One where the people of our world won’t be affected. Or at least seal him off.”

“If we can. If not, we need to be able to at least take him someplace remote enough to take him down. Preferably not an island, or anywhere with a fault line or volcano,” I said. I let my fingertips run up and down the length of Adrian’s back. It felt good to touch him and I knew he found my hands on him comforting.

“Those creatures he’s creating, we need to contact Salino to let him know. If he can make them out of vampires or griezels, they need a heads up,” Adrian said.

“You’re right, and I need to let my Pride know. When Shi gets here, I’ll have her gather who she can and put everyone else on the same page. I want them here where they can be protected,” I said.

“I get to see you be the big, bad Lion King,” Adrian said as he looked up at me, grinning.

“I’m always that, baby,” I said, then leaned down, kissing him. I decided to contact Salino to bring him up to speed. I was too tired to use our mental connection. Instead, I called him and he answered on the fourth ring.

“Is this an emergency because if not, I’m very busy,” Salino said by way of greeting, with his snooty, French ass. Between him and Aldéric, they were working my nerves.

“Yeah, it is,” I shot back.

He gave a hefty sigh and it made me curious as to what had him stressed out. Heavy was the head that wore the crown. He was the new vampire emperor, so I guessed his hands would be full.

“What is it?” he asked.

“We have a problem. When Adrian and I severed the link to the Dark God that gave vampires their powers, we unleashed him into this world,” I said, just getting to the point.

“Oh shit,” he hissed.

“And he’s feeding on humans and supernals alike and turning them into monsters. Like fucking rabid-ass zombies in a way. And every person they feed on turns into whatever the fuck they are,” I said.

“Did something happen to you and Adrian? I felt a ripple in our link this time between both of you. I did call out to you

telepathically and on your cell, but you didn't answer. I knew you were alive, so I didn't panic," Salino said.

For a second, I wanted to say, "Aww, you cared." But this wasn't the time for my signature sarcasm. Also, it kind of made me happy that he would have panicked if something had happened to Adrian or me.

"We had to join the Echelon Imperial. There was no other way around it. Together, we need to stop the Dark God. I'm telling you so you can let the vampires know this is a problem we're all facing," I informed him.

"That's just one of the problems I'm having to deal with," Salino said. "Now that you've told me about this Dark God and the creatures he's creating, I understand the sensation I felt before."

I frowned. "What kind of sensation?"

"The connection I share with thirty of my vampires has been severed. I can feel every vampire connected to me in my line, and I know when they die because I felt it when I killed Oscar," Salino said. "I have reached out to my vampires to see if anyone knew anything and they didn't. I figured I was under attack from the other emperors. But now you tell me about the Dark God. If he can feed on vampires and turn them into these things you speak of, I wonder if that's what happened to them. Did you see one of these things? Did it try to attack you?"

"No—I mean, I saw it, but not face to face. It was with the help of magic that gave me a vision of what was happening. I saw it feeding on a human and what it looked like and what

happened to the human less than a minute after they had died. At the rate these things can transform others, the world could be overrun with them in a few weeks' time. Hell, in a week, Chicago might be doomed. That's why we have to work fast," I said.

*"Mon Dieu,"* Salino said.

"At least now, we know why no other experienced mage would help you before," I said, accepting the fact that I was inexperienced enough to not know what I was doing wrong by breaking the contract. I thought that by re-establishing the link, all would be well.

"And I'm selfish enough to not have changed anything had I known. I'm also confident enough to believe in you and Adrian that you can fix this," Salino said.

I sighed and turned when I heard the door open and Shi entered with Nadia. I held up a finger, letting them know that I was on the phone. "What's going on with you?" I asked, because he'd been stressed when I called and alluded to having multiple problems.

"Impending war. I've been contacted by two of the other emperors who want my head. By severing the link, I have prevented all vampires from gaining more power," Salino said.

I sat up because that was some shit I didn't want to hear. If Salino died, I would too, and Adrian as well. His problem just became our fucking problem. "And you didn't think to call me and tell me? If you die, we all fucking die," I snapped.

“I’ve been a little busy today, Sage. After leaving your home earlier, I received the phone calls. First, they wanted to know what had happened and then I told them. That’s when they wanted my life. For fuck’s sake, they don’t even like each other.” Salino said the last part under his breath. “Yet, they pretend as if I killed a good friend of theirs. It’s all a rouse. Their anger is because I cut off our link to gain more power. That is all they care about.”

“Shit,” I said.

“What’s wrong?” Adrian asked me as he entered the room.

I just put the phone on speaker. “So, what do we do?” I asked.

“I’d love to say one problem at a time, but apparently neither problem can wait. Do you know how these foul creatures can be killed?” Salino asked.

“No, but fire could be a good guess and decapitation works for everyone. That and removing the hearts,” I suggested.

“I’ll alert my vampires to be on the lookout and to kill any they may see,” Salino said.

“What about the other emperors?” I asked.

“They will send their assassins first, and if that doesn’t work, they will come,” Salino said.

“Assassins? Wait, what’s going on?” Adrian asked, his tone full of concern.

“Fucking emperors have declared war on Salino for severing the line,” I said, bringing him up to date.

“Oh my god,” Adrian gasped and ran his fingers through his dark hair.

“In the meantime, I will contact my royal court. Keep me posted,” Salino said.

“Yeah, you do the sa—”

“Wait, don’t hang up yet,” Salino interjected. “I realize now what you can do for me.”

“Ahh, hell... I know I’m going to regret this, but we have no choice. Our lives are linked to yours, so what do you want?” I asked.

“You and Adrian are my strongest weapons. I’ll need you by my side. I need you to figure out a spell that can kill them before they kill me. And if possible, link ALL vampires to me,” Salino said.

“That’s how we got into this trouble in the first place,” Adrian snapped.

“The genie, as they say, is already out of the bottle. The Dark God is no longer linked to vampires. So, by severing the line of the other three emperors and connecting their vampire lines to me not only ensures your own survival, as I will be alive and no longer challenged, but every vampire will be under my rule, which is better for humanity, do you not agree?” Salino asked.

Shit, I looked at Adrian and he looked at me. We couldn't argue with that logic. "That does make sense. However, I'm not going in blind like the last fucking time," I said.

"Meaning?" Salino asked.

"Meaning, we need to speak with the Echelon Imperial to make sure we wouldn't be opening a bigger can of worms." Adrian picked up what I was putting down and ran with it. That was my baby. We were so in tune with each other.

"Fine," Salino huffed. "Do your research, but know that we are at war already."

"Fuck... and this day started off so promising," I said, and just hung up, because I really didn't want to hear anything else from Salino. I wanted to toss my phone against the wall, but I needed the damn thing. I looked at Shi. "Food?"

She gave Adrian and me two bags that smelled delicious. "I have questions."

"I need to feed first," I said, then looked at Nadia, who was holding a man in a leather jacket with duct tape over his mouth. "He'll do."

"Are you going to do it right here?" Adrian asked.

Ahh, that was right. The last time he saw me feed, it was my first time. "No," I told him, then gestured for Nadia to step out of our home with the man.

"You should get used to seeing him feed," Shi told Adrian.

"Not your business, Shi," I reminded her.



“No, no... she’s right, Sage. I don’t want you to feel like I’m afraid, ashamed, or grossed out, or anything like that,” Adrian said.

I snorted a laugh and walked over to him, kissing him. “I know you don’t. But you also don’t need to see me kill this guy. It’s one thing to watch me feed and the person lives. It’s another to know that I’m going to kill him,” I said.

My dinner to be struggled in Nadia’s iron grip and made all kinds of noises behind his gag, but he was of no concern to me. I kept my gaze on Adrian.

“Is he a bad guy?” Adrian asked.

I nodded. “He is scum,” I said with certainty, because I’d already read his mind. However, I would have fed regardless, because I was that hungry. “But you don’t have to see me do it.”

“No.” Adrian shook his head. “The Echelon Imperial proved today that I am immortal because I’m linked to Salino. I need to be able to deal with all of your vampire side, Sage. Just...” he looked at the sofa and frowned. “Just don’t eat him on that sofa, because I love that sofa. We already have to get rid of the dining room table.”

I laughed. “Is it because you don’t want to sit where someone died?”

Again, my intended victim tried to fight to free himself, but couldn’t.

Adrian looked at the man and blushed. God, he was so fucking cute when he blushed. “That’s not it. I just don’t want you to get any blood on it. It will stain it. Like you said, the man is scum. I won’t shed any tears.”

“I meant the table,” I said, remembering the griezels that were made on it earlier.

“Oh, yeah. It would feel odd passing the peas exactly where a dark spell was cast and someone died,” Adrian said.

“Ahhh, I see.” I chuckled and smirked, then walked over to Nadia, who kept the man under her foot as he was pinned to the floor. I knelt beside him and she moved her foot. I grabbed the man by his hair and lifted him to his knees, then turned to look at Adrian again. “Are you sure?” I asked.

He licked his beautiful lips and nodded. “This is natural for you, Sage. I do need to get used to it. Anyway, we both drink blood now.”

That was true. “I mean, you don’t have to get used to it right now. I haven’t even been a vampire for a full month yet,” I said.

“And yet, it feels like a lifetime already. One, because of everything we’ve been through. And two, because I feel so close to you,” Adrian said. “As if we’ve known each other for years.” He smiled.

Hearing him say those words made me want to take him into our bedroom and ravage his body like a wild beast. That would have to wait. We had a lot of shit to deal with. I felt my

hunger gnawing at me once more and decided to indulge. If Adrian wanted to see it, I wouldn't deny him. I yanked the man's head back and let my fangs extend before I struck. He cried out at first, then began to moan as my feeding gave him the best pleasure he'd ever had. I knew because he told me, begging me not to stop. He was a murderer and drug dealer, and wasn't even dealing my product, so fuck him all the same. I savored his blood as it flowed into me, moaning a little as I fed because it was just what I needed. Once his heart stopped and there wasn't any more blood coming my way, I pulled back and let his body fall to the floor.

“Get rid of that,” I told Nadia.

“Yes, boss,” she said.

I rose to my feet just as there was a knock on my front door. I motioned for Nadia to get the body out of view as I wiped the few drops of blood from my lips. I sucked my finger and thumb clean before I answered. I wasn't expecting any strangers, as they didn't have access to my penthouse. “You're back,” I said, seeing Jewel and Xavier standing on the other side.

Xavier sighed and nodded. “Is Adrian okay?” he asked.

I nodded and stepped aside, letting them in. They had been off on their own mission tracking down a killer. All of that was done now.

Xavier walked over to Adrian, hugging him. “I was worried. I called like three times and you didn't answer.”

Adrian hugged him back. “Yeah, I’m sorry. A lot’s happened today.” He pulled his cell phone from his pocket and tsked. “My phone is dead.”

Xavier sighed. “I’m just glad you’re okay. What’s been going o—” He paused when he noticed Nadia tossing the dead body over her shoulder. “What the fuck happened? Who’s that?”

“My dinner,” I said, then waved my hand so Nadia could dispose of it.

“You just killed someone in front of Adrian like that?” Xavier snarled.

I cocked an eyebrow, but before I could say anything, Adrian interjected.

“It’s okay, Xavier. I told him to,” Adrian said.

“Oh my god, you haven’t even been dating him long enough to be okay with watching him kill people, Adrian,” Xavier said, grabbing Adrian’s arms as if he needed to talk some sense into him.

“He doesn’t need you to babysit,” Shi snapped. “He’s a big boy.”

“When I need your input, I’ll ask,” Xavier shot back.

“For fuck’s sake,” Adrian said. “Look, Xavier, I know what I’m doing. And like I said, a lot has happened since you left. As a matter of fact, let’s all just sit down and eat first, then Sage and I will go into detail. Can we do that, please? I need a few moments of peace.”

Xavier sighed but nodded. “Fine.”

“Good. There’s enough food in here for everyone,” Adrian said, motioning to the bags he held.

Nadia had completed the task I’d given her and joined us as we ate. We all sat or stood around the kitchen island as we ate—according to Adrian—the best damn sandwich he’d ever had.

“I told you they had the best,” I said, smiling as I swallowed the last bite of my corned beef and pastrami sandwich.

“I never doubted you,” Adrian said, then turned to Xavier. “So, the police have that asshole?”

Xavier nodded as he wiped his hands and mouth with a napkin. “Yeah. The mom wanted to see him rot in prison.”

“Still too good for him,” I said.

“I’m sure people would say that about you, too,” Xavier commented.

I laughed. “Yeah, they probably would. Not that I give a shit.”

Adrian shook his head. “Don’t... just don’t.”

I nodded, giving in to my baby. His self-righteous friend could kiss my ass, but I tolerated him for Adrian’s sake. I did have to say one thing to him, though. “You know, Xavier, I can sense your desire for Jewel. Even before I became a vampire that feeds on pleasure, I could still smell lust. If you think

you're going to get anywhere with any of my females, you're going to have to come down off your high horse."

Xavier snorted. "Compromise my morals, you mean?"

I shrugged. "Or find some little sanctimonious church mouse to stick your cock into."

"The world could be ending, can we not bicker amongst ourselves?" Adrian asked.

Xavier's head turned sharply to him. "What do you mean the world could be ending?"

Adrian looked at me and I gestured to him to catch everyone up.

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"Holy shit," Xavier said after hearing everything we had to tell him.

Jewel was speechless as she sat on the sofa, her face a total mask of uncertainty and confusion. It was a lot to process.

"So, these monsters can turn anyone?" Shi asked.

I nodded. "That's why I want you to get my Pride here. I don't want to lose anyone."

"I'm on it," Shi said, then pulled out her cell and began texting.

"How do we kill them?" Xavier asked.

“You don’t,” I said. “Adrian and I saw one of those things in action. Ain’t shit a human can do against one of them. Remember, they’re taking out supernals.”

“With magic weapons, maybe...” Xavier tried to argue.

“Sage is right, Xavier. They are fast, strong, and I wouldn’t even want to take one on,” Adrian said.

“More are being made even as we speak, right?” Jewel asked.

I nodded. “I’m pretty sure they can kill twenty-four hours a day, which makes the situation we’re all in extremely dire.”

“And this shit with Salino. You have to save him now,” Xavier fussed.

“Keeping him alive saves us and everyone else as we’re Council members now. The first line of defense,” Adrian said.

“And you’re what? Some type of vampire now?” Xavier asked, his eyes studied Adrian as if he were looking for fangs to pop out.

Adrian sighed. “I guess. It’s not as bad as it sounds, though.”

“How can you say that? You’re not human anymore, Adrian,” Xavier said.

“So the fuck what,” I snapped. “Like being human is some damn reward.”

“It’s better than being someone who feeds off people,” Xavier said as he gave me an angry glare.

I laughed, because he sounded like an idiot to me.

“As if humans don’t do that,” Shi said. “There isn’t anything noble about being human. Don’t fool yourself.”

“What she said,” I added.

“Can we not argue?” Adrian interjected. “I’m what I am now. I’m not upset about it. Being this strong allows me to be able to help others. That’s what matters, Xavier.”

“Well, there’s your perspective,” I pointed out.

Xavier’s jaw tightened, but he remained silent—for once.

“Fuck, so much happened. And can we trust the Council?” Nadia asked.

“For now, I’m going to look at that as a good thing if it makes us more powerful,” I said.

“So, can the Echelon Imperial block your magic?” Shi asked.

“Will they be able to control you?” Nadia asked.

“No... I mean, if they were being completely honest with us, they can’t control our magic. Can’t control us. But we are stronger as a group now and can tap into each other’s magic and combine our powers. According to them, we were always destined to become members of the Echelon Imperial,” I said.

“Apparently, they are the elite and so are we,” Adrian said with a lot of mockery. “That’s how they put it. They each have powerful grimoires like ours.”

“At least your sigils look cool,” Shi commented.

“Yeah, and from what they told us, they also attract jealousy from other mages,” Adrian said.



“We’re powerful enough to handle them,” I said, because I wasn’t worried about other mages. I never was.

“So, what do we do now?” Jewel asked.

I sighed. “For now, Adrian and I will go to Salino’s home. Put up a barrier there to protect him. Then we need to contact the Council to ask about this spell that Salino wants us to work. It could save his life and in turn, save ours. We need to know if it’s even possible and if so, what could be the consequences. Then we need to study our grimoire to see what kind of spells or objects we’ll need to get rid of the Dark God, El-Kazir.”

“Speaking of the grimoire, I should go get it before we leave,” Adrian said and I nodded.

“What do you need from me?” Xavier asked. “I want to help.”

“Right now, nothing, as you have no powers,” I said.

Xavier looked at me but didn’t say anything. He may not have liked what I said, but it was the truth. I mean, what could he do?

“Just stay here in the tower. It’s protected. Stay safe,” Adrian said.

“Fine. But if you need me...”

Adrian hugged him. “I know. You have my back.” He walked into our special room to gather the grimoire and whatever items we were going to need to make the barrier spell.

I turned to Nadia. “I want you to stay here with Jewel, Shi will come with us. But I need you here to make sure nothing happens.

“You can count on me,” Nadia said.

“Sage!” I heard Adrian scream my name and I ran to him, I arrived so fast, he yelped when he saw me. Everyone else came in behind me and we all looked at Adrian.

“Are you okay?” I asked, looking him over.

He had his hand over his chest and was breathing hard, but he nodded. “I’m sorry to yell like that, but I was caught off guard.” He pointed at the grimoire sitting in our safe.

“What the hell?” I pulled the grimoire from the safe and it was definitely bigger and heavier. I opened it up to see that over a hundred pages had been added.

“It has even more spells than before. Is this because we merged with the Council?” Adrian asked.

“It has to be now that we can draw on their power. He did say that their own grimoires contained spells after they’d merged. Shit, we need to look at this before we leave just to see what’s new,” I said.

“Is that the only thing that was alarming?” Xavier asked.

Adrian looked at him and walked over to his friend, patting his shoulder. “Yeah, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare everyone. It’s just... I so wasn’t expecting to see that our grimoire had changed that drastically.”

“But is that a good thing?” Xavier asked.

“Yeah, at least, that’s how I see it,” Adrian replied.

While my baby was talking to his friend, I flipped through the book and saw a brand-new barrier spell that required both Adrian and me to construct. “Hey, baby, look at this.”

Adrian came back over to me and looked at the page I pointed at. “That’s one powerful ass spell,” he said after reading it several times.

I nodded. “We need to put this on our own home before we leave.”

“I’ll get the ingredients and make sure to bring enough for Salino,” Adrian said, then he walked away to start gathering what we’d need to protect our own home before we left for Salino’s.

I took the grimoire and walked into the living room and began to move furniture out of the way to make space for the sigil we needed to draw.

“What are you doing?” Shi asked even as she and Nadia moved the sectional sofa aside.

“Making room to draw the sigil we’ll need to lock in the magic of the barrier,” I answered.

“Shouldn’t you do that in the basement or on the roof or something, so you don’t ruin the floor?” Nadia asked.

I shook my head. “The spell requires the blood of the owner and to be placed in the abode of the owner. It’s true that I own

this entire building, but I don't live in every location in it. Some are public access. It has to be where I lay my head. It's that specific, that intimate. It will need both Adrian and my blood to construct." I said Adrian's because he was the other mage working the spell, which needed the blood of the casters.

Speaking of my man, he came out of the room carrying a heavy duffle bag and he sat it on the floor beside me and huffed. "Okay, I got everything we'll need for this spell and the one we currently have on this place. Just in case Salino wants us to spell other locations. We don't have enough Dobinger Ash for all of that. But the spell we have on our home now should be good enough to protect any location from these things," Adrian said.

"So why are you making a stronger barrier?" Xavier asked, and I could tell he was genuinely curious, not critical.

"Because it's the best in our book. And if you're living here, I won't settle for anything less than the best," Adrian said.

"Makes sense. Like what do you look like putting the best barrier on Salino's home, but not your own," Jewel stated.

"That part," I said, pointing at her.

"Exactly," Adrian said, then he placed a magical chalice on the dining table. It was one that we had used before, as it was common for such spells. "I hate having to cut myself," he complained as he held the knife in his hand. He cut himself and let the blood flow into the chalice.

I chuckled as I walked over to the chalice. I took the knife from him and did the same, then watched as our blood combined in the spelled chalice that seemed to make it sparkle in the light from the overhead chandelier.

“It’s kind of pretty, isn’t it?” Adrian asked, then pulled his hand back.

My wound had already healed, stopping the blood flow. I watched as Adrian’s wound began to heal.

“Holy shit,” he gasped as he marveled at the skin knitting back together.

“You recover almost as quickly as I do, now.” He really was immortal and his healing was even faster and I guessed it was because he’d fed from Salino earlier.

“And that’s a good thing,” Adrian said, and I agreed.

“That is so weird,” Xavier said. “You’ve changed completely,” he said to Adrian.

“And are you okay with that?” Adrian asked him.

Xavier ran his fingers through his hair and nodded. “You’re my best friend, my brother. And you’re still you. Yeah, amigo, I’m okay with that.”

I watched them converse, but said nothing. Personally, I didn’t think Adrian needed Xavier’s approval. He was stronger, better, and he was mine forever. Even if Xavier wasn’t “okay” with it, none of that would have mattered to me.

“Let’s get this barrier in place,” Adrian said.

We spoke an incantation over the chalice to enchant the blood, then drew the sigil on the floor in the blood. He did his half and I did mine and we both chanted our own incantation to channel our magic into the sigil. Next, we sprinkled the Dobinger Ash inside the sigil, then on top of it as we repeated one incantation together. There was a spark of white flames that blared from the sigil and I felt the power of the spell flow through me and I shook a little from the sensation. The smell of burnt sugar and charcoal wafted from the sigil as it seared itself into the floor, then disappeared.

“Did you feel it too? The power?” Adrian asked.

I nodded. “Yeah, it’s serious business, this spell.”

“It is. I feel so safe now that we have it on our home, especially with so many people here,” Adrian said, then began packing away all of the ingredients.

“So, how does this spell work?” Xavier asked.

“It keeps you safe,” I said. “That’s all you need to know.”

“Sage,” Adrian said as he gave me a look. I guess he’d had it up to here with my attitude.

I chuckled and shrugged.

“Sage,” Adrian said again, and yeah, he was mad at me.

I sighed and nodded apologetically. Humans annoyed me to a point, especially ones who looked down on me. I was being petty, but I was also in a foul mood and taking it out on the only human in the room. “You’re right, baby. I’m sorry. I’ll let you explain it to him.”

“It’s almost like a Smart Barrier. When it’s activated, it constantly analyzes the danger element and will respond based on the threat level. It may lock down the place altogether if the threat level within fifty feet requires that level of protection, then nothing can get in. Or it may simply create a revulsion aura that turns the threat away. Or it can kill the threat, or incapacitate it. If someone is inside and they become a threat, it will determine what actions to take,” Adrian said.

“That’s actually pretty scary, Adrian. Like what does it constitute as a threat?” Xavier asked.

“Harm with malicious intent,” Adrian said.

“Don’t worry, if you’re lucky enough to get into Jewel’s pants and she tosses you around a bit, you’ll be safe,” I added.

Jewel smirked. “He might get that lucky.”

Xavier, who was rolling his eyes at me, turned to her. “Really?” he asked, with some hope in his voice.

“Jury is still out,” she replied.

“I’ll take that as a sign,” he said.

He was handsome enough to tempt Jewel, and the two did seem to get along well enough. I wouldn’t interfere. “Well, now that Adrian has explained the barrier, you all stay inside. If any of those things try to get in here, the barrier will protect everyone. You won’t have to do anything.”

“Good to know,” Nadia said. “You two be safe. Are you sure you don’t need me to go with you?”

“Now that the barrier is up, I think it’s best that you stay here, Nadia. I need you to make sure everyone gets here and is prepared if something goes wrong,” I said.

She nodded. “Consider it done.”

“Thank you,” I said. Shi and Adrian joined me and we left our home and climbed into the elevator.

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“Please try to be more patient with Xavier,” Adrian pleaded once we were in the car, heading to Salino’s.

“He needs to tone his bullshit down around me. I don’t need his ass judging me when he hasn’t even lived one human lifetime. He’s not a shifter or any other kind of supernal. He doesn’t know what our lives are like. He needs to keep his close-minded opinions to himself,” I snapped because I wasn’t in the mood for Xavier’s attitude or Adrian’s defense of it.

Adrian sighed. “I know how you feel, Sage. But the other side of that coin is the human side. You have never been human. You’ve never been a victim of supernals.”

I didn’t say anything as I thought about what Adrian said.

“You’ve never had to feel helpless as something you didn’t understand or couldn’t fight against was killing you for their own pleasure,” Adrian went on.

“And he has?” I asked, because I figured that was where Adrian was going with our conversation.



Adrian nodded. ‘That’s how we met. Five years ago, Xavier was attacked by a vampire. I saved him and we’ve been best friends ever since. He’s saved my life in return, too, Sage. He’s the only family I have, so please—”

I held my hand up and nodded. “I get it. I’ll give him a few passes.”

“Thank you, baby,” Adrian said, then tilted his face to mine and I leaned down to kiss him.

“So, this is what our arguments are like?” I joked.

He chuckled softly. “Better than some I’ve had.”

“I’ll keep them to a minimum. The last thing I want to do is make you unhappy, baby,” I said, then kissed the top of his head.

He held me closer. “Me too.”

We talked about our plans for Salino on the trip there while Shi multitasked by driving and making all the necessary calls to shut down my operations for the time being. I wanted my crew under lockdown until this could be resolved, and I hoped we could.

## Chapter Three

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# *Salino Lawrent*

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“SIRE, AN AMBASSADOR OF Emperor Jude Martin is here to see you,” notified one of my vampires.

I sighed because this was all a prelude to war. This day, I was supposed to be celebrating my victory and getting even more acquainted with my brother and best friend. That had all gone downhill after I’d visited Sage. The call I received in the elevator leaving Sage’s home was from the Emperor of Russia, Daniil Andreev. He was none too happy that I’d severed the contract vampires had with the Dark God. His had been the first call. An hour later, I received a call from the Emperor of Germany, Klaus Jager. He wasted no time with pleasantries and simply issued his threat. He said that I didn’t deserve to rise in power after my betrayal of not only my Emperor, Lord Barron, but of all vampire-kind. I simply hung up on him. Now, I had to deal with the ambassador of Emperor Martin.

“Let them in,” I told my subordinate. The best thing was that I could sense Sage and Adrian getting closer. They would be here in a matter of minutes. Good.

I waited as the door opened and a tall, average-looking man dressed in a black suit with a matching turtleneck stepped into my office. I'd never met him before, but I was certain he was here to issue some kind of formal declaration of war. I'd sent my brother, Sarino, and friend, Louis, off with one of my loyal children so he could help them get used to this new world. Earlier, I'd given them my blood and along with it, my memories. A power only the emperor had. They got to see the world advancing through my experiences. They had marveled at all the wonders I'd experienced and I hated that they hadn't had the opportunity to see everything I had first-hand. If I could piss on Lord Barron's corpse, I would, but I had the body burned and the ashes scattered.

As I looked at the unwanted stranger in my home, I kept my gaze regal because it didn't matter to me if they felt I'd earned the title or not. One fact that couldn't be denied: I was the new emperor.

"And you're here because...?" I asked.

He bowed his head to me. "Emperor Laurent, my Emperor, Jude Martin, would like an official meeting with you."

"If it's to declare war on me, he can take a number and get in line," I said.

The man straightened and I could tell by the look of agitation on his face that he didn't appreciate my response. Nor did I care. "Perhaps you misunderstood, My Liege. It is not a request. If you wish to avoid a war with my emperor, you will meet with him."

“And he is where?”

“Just outside of Illinois, in his territory of Wisconsin.”

“And he expects me to come to him?”

“He expects that, yes.”

“My answer is no. If he wishes to see me, he will do so where I say. I’ll meet him at the border of our states,” I said.

The ambassador didn’t respond right away and I could tell he was in communications with his emperor telepathically. He cleared his throat. “He will come to you,” the vampire said.

“At the destination I stated?” I asked.

“No, Your Highness, here.”

“Here?” I cocked an eyebrow at that.

“Yes. For now, I will take my leave.”

I didn’t bother to stop him. I wasn’t too keen on having vampires from other emperors’ lines in my territory. I certainly didn’t care to have an emperor coming to meet me on my own lands. I couldn’t tell if this was going to be on amicable terms or not.

Nakago knocked on my door. I knew it was him, I could feel my child. Telepathically, I gave him permission and he entered, then shut the door behind him. “Is everything okay?” he asked me.

I sighed and rose from my chair, then walked over to the window to gaze down at the city below. It was nighttime, and the people were thriving, most having finished their workday.

Vampires may not have gained any new powers, but we still maintained the ones we had. It would have to be enough.

“Sage and Adrian are on their way. Prepare a room for them, as I want them to stay overnight,” I said.

“Consider it done. What about Emperor Martin?” Nakago asked.

I turned to him. “He demands to see me. He insists on meeting with me here, in my own home—the arrogance! If he comes with a convoy, they will not be allowed within this sanctuary. If he thinks he’ll be able to intimidate me in my own territory, he will be disappointed. Sage and Adrian should have the barrier put up by the time I’m to meet with him,” I said.

“About what you informed me of, I’ve told the others to lock down and alerted our strike teams to be on the lookout for those creatures. To kill them on sight,” Nakago said.

I raised my finger. “Hold on. Bring me one of them alive.”

“Consider it done.”

“I want to see it for myself, and who knows, maybe Sage and Adrian or the Council will want to see it, too,” I said.

“You’re working with the Echelon Imperial?”

I shrugged. “According to Sage, he and Adrian had to join them today.”

Nakago’s mouth dropped open and his eyes widened. “Holy shit... that... that makes them even more powerful, with

influential ties. Do you know what this means?”

I nodded. “It means that I’m the only vampire emperor with not one, but two mages on the Echelon Imperial Council. When I meet with Emperor Martin, I want to make sure he knows just how mighty I am.”

Nakago nodded. “As for your brother, he is asking for you, he’s worried.”

“Send him in then.”

“Yes,” Nakago said, then left my office.

A few minutes later, my brother entered and I walked over to him, kissing both sides of his cheeks. He was dressed in one of my outfits he had picked out himself from my wardrobe. He looked like my doppelganger and even though our scents and auras were different, I could tell it unnerved my vampires and some humans under me to see him. I’d survived five centuries without my twin, hell, even I was still getting used to having him back in my life. His long, blond hair was in a ponytail whereas mine was in a French braid. So beautiful and innocent to this world just like Louis.

“Have you learned much today?” I asked as I caressed his shoulders.

“Overwhelmingly so, there is so much to experience. I’ve learned a great deal through your blood, but I want to do these things myself, like driving a car. And oh my, food... the food is exquisite,” Sarino said, a wide grin on his face. He was

speaking perfect English, with his French accent, his voice wasn't as deep as mine.

I chuckled and removed my hands from his shoulders as I nodded. "Yes, yes, so many improvements. Wait until you fly for the first time."

"Oh, I'm not sure about that," he said, shaking his head.

I laughed outright then, because I could only imagine why he was apprehensive. I'd had my own reservations when the contraption known as the airplane was first invented. "You will."

Sarino sighed and placed his hand on my arm. "I'm sure, but enough about me. What is going on with you? Everyone seems to be on alert and one could cut the tension with a sword."

"I've made new enemies, brother. We are at the cusp of war as the other emperors would have my head for severing our link to the Dark God that granted us our powers," I said because there was no point in lying. If we had to fight, then I'd have every vampire in my line ready for battle.

He patted my shoulder and then dropped his arm at his side. "I will fight with you. We've just been reunited. I will not allow anyone to tear us apart, not ever again."

I caressed his cheek. "Once my youngest child arrives, we will be able to come up with a strategy that may very well put the advantage in my court," I said. Some may believe I am always scheming, but that wasn't the case. I didn't wake up

this morning plotting to kill every emperor and take over their lines. However, that was now my goal.

“Sage?” Sarino asked. “I haven’t met him. He’s the other mage under your control, right?”

I smirked. “He’s the only mage under my control. His lover, Adrian...” I paused, because now that Adrian also needed my blood to survive, or so it would seem... then maybe he was also under my control. “Now that I think about it, yes. They are mine. However, they are stubborn, especially Sage. The lion shifter in him along with his own personality often fights back.”

“Don’t rule the way the last emperor did, Salino.”

“You know that I’m not like him. I could never. But you also know from my visions that vampires need a firm hand,” I said. “I will not take any weak stances, brother, even if I do make enemies. It’s unavoidable. When you’re at the top, the most powerful, you will always encounter those who want what you have.”

He nodded because he did understand. “Can I meet him?”

I nodded. “He’ll be here... well, now.” I could sense my child entering my home. Sarino stood beside me as we waited for my mages to enter. The door opened, as I expected, because Sage was a rude bastard who wouldn’t knock. I cocked an eyebrow at his attire, as I’d never seen him dressed so casually. “Laundry day?” I joked.



He huffed and Adrian trailed in right behind him dressed in the same type of outfit. Although, it was more common for Adrian to be in a pair of sweats and a T-shirt, I didn't think Sage owned any.

“Jesus fucking Christ, there's two of you,” Sage said, his striking gray/golden gaze roaming between my identical twin, Sarino, and me.

“A pleasure to meet you. My name is Sarino,” my twin said, extending his hand to Sage.

Sage shook his hand. “I can't say if it's a pleasure yet, to meet you, but time will tell.”

I sighed. “Rude,” I chastised.

Sage huffed. “I've had a long fucking week.”

“As much as I'd love to hear you two go at it, we've got work to do,” Adrian said, a duffle bag slung over his shoulder. “Where can we set up? I want to get this place under protection.”

“Very well, to bring you up to date, I have requested that my vampires bring me one of those creatures you mentioned. Also, one of the emperors is coming here in a matter of hours. I want you two by my side.”

“You said you wanted to take them all out? Is that still something you want?” Sage asked.

“Oh, yes, very much so,” I said.

Adrian scoffed. “So, you’re bringing the war to them, with us as your ace in the hole?”

“It’s the only way to ensure our survival. With every vampire linked to me, there will be no one who would dare challenge me.”

“Are you sure you’re just not trying to do this as some fucking power grab?” Sage asked, his arms crossed over his muscular chest.

“Understand, Sage, I was content with being an Archduke. However, I knew that in order to save my brother and Louis, I had to take the steps and risks I took. Now, granted, I didn’t expect the fallout of the Dark God, El-Kazier, breaking free as the price of our spell, but it is what it is. Now, at any time, an assassin could take me out. Do you want to continue to live your lives under that umbrella of fear? Had the other emperors not threatened my life, I wouldn’t feel the need to take theirs. I didn’t wake up this morning choosing violence, but here we are,” I said.

Sage nodded, because he understood, more so than Adrian, I thought. Because he was a shifter king and mob boss. Our worlds were very similar and he knew what it took to keep the vultures at bay.

“Well, for now, we’ll need to keep you protected. If you die, we die, and the Echelon Imperial may not be powerful enough to take out this god without damn near killing countless people in the process,” Adrian said.

“Excuse moi, pardon me for interrupting, but what in the hell is going on?” Sarino asked. “The Dark God, El-Kazier, is free? What does this mean?”

“The unfortunate price of the spell that was cast last night, Sarino. He is free and from what I’ve been told, that isn’t good for any of us,” I informed him.

Sage huffed. “Why don’t you bring him up to speed while Adrian and I construct the barrier? Where can we do it, because we’ll need space?”

“Can you do it in the garage?” I asked.

Adrian shook his head. “It needs to be more intimate than that. No one lives in the garage and the blood of the owner will need to be used, so the place where you live is the best location for the sigil we’ll need to draw.”

I frowned. “A permanent sigil?”

Sage nodded. “Yeah, but it won’t be one you’ll continue to see. This is a very powerful barrier spell. Once we make it, the sigil will burn into the building, encompassing it. It will truly be a safe haven. Not even a torpedo will be able to affect this place. We even put it on our own home to protect my pride, so you’re getting the very best in home security.”

“It’s probably the ultimate barrier spell because I didn’t see another one after we’d learned this one. Ever since merging with the Echelon Imperial, more spells are available to us—extremely powerful ones. Our grimoire has more pages than

before, at least a hundred. But with each new spell comes even rarer ingredients and artifacts needed,” Adrian said.

“For instance, we’ll need your blood,” Sage said. “You’ll hold the key for arming and disarming the barrier.”

“Will my vampires be able to come and go once it’s armed?” I asked, because this barrier seemed very intense. “And do I have to be home in order to arm or disarm it?” I needed to know all of the details.

Adrian nodded. “That won’t be a problem. Think of this barrier like a double lock and top-notch security system. There are layers to it.” He went on to explain to me how the barrier worked, and I found that alarming.

“That won’t do. The barrier may very well think of me and my kind as threats when we feed on humans, or if I have to torture and discipline,” I pointed out.

Sage shook his head. “This is why the barrier is linked to you. Anything that you don’t consider to be a concern is not considered a threat to the barrier. I have the same issues in my own home. If I need to feed or kill, I can still do so because I won’t feel threatened. It only responds to what I would deem as a threat.”

“Ahhhh, I see,” I said. “And what happens when it’s disarmed?”

“Then you’re not protected. It’s that simple,” Adrian said. “And you can disarm or arm it even if you’re not home, or before you leave. It still does its job.”

“And do I just say the words to make it work?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s easier that way than just willing it. But say you’re far away, then you can will it to obey and arm or disarm,” Adrian explained.

I nodded, because I understood. “I see. I do like this barrier, indeed. So, how much of my blood do you need?” I asked.

“About a cup,” Adrian said. “We’ll combine it with our blood to complete the potion needed.”

“Does that mean you’ll be able to control the barrier as well?” I asked.

Sage nodded. “We made it, of course. It’s unavoidable.”

I shrugged. “Very well.” I walked over to my liquor cabinet, removing one of my expensive glasses. I bit into my wrist and heard two sharp intakes of breaths. I turned to see both Sage and Adrian looking at my blood as it flowed into the glass. “Do you need to feed?”

Sage cleared his throat and looked away. “Nope. I fed earlier.”

I let my gaze pan over to Adrian, who looked like a dog begging for a juicy steak. “And you?” I asked, one eyebrow arched.

He licked his lips and nodded. “I’m... hungry.”

“For his blood. Why didn’t you tell me?” Sage asked.

Adrian sighed. “I was hungry back at the house, but I knew what I needed. I can tell the difference now. Since we were

coming to Salino anyway, and the sensation wasn't that intense, I just kept silent. But the feeling was getting more extreme as we got closer. I think after the ritual to join the Council, it took a lot out of me, too, Sage."

Sage growled, but nodded.

I rolled my eyes. "Jealousy doesn't look flattering on you, child."

"Fuck you," Sage said.

"Ah, ah, ah, remember what I said about that attitude of yours," I reminded him.

"Remember what I said... I don't give a fuck. I'm never going to be like Nakago or any of your other bootlicking vampires around here. You have your hold on me, but don't ever think I'll live eternity with your fucking boot on my neck, Salino," Sage snapped.

"Oh, I like him," Sarino said, grinning at the first-ever hybrid.

I scoffed at my brother, then turned to Sage. "Your lover needs to feed. Is that all right with you?"

Sage frowned. "Unlike you, I'm not trying to control him."

I smirked, then walked over to them, holding my wrist out to Sage. "The wound closed. Why don't you open another one so your man can feed from me."

Sage's eyes narrowed. "You're trying to start something."

“What would that be?” I asked. “I’m just asking you to reopen the wound.”

“You want to fuck us again,” Sage stated.

“Oh, I saw that memory, it was hot,” Sarino chimed in.

Sage looked at him from around me. “How—never mind.” He shook his head and looked back at me. “Fine.” He snatched my wrist and bit.

I gasped because his teeth were more vicious than mine, longer due to his animal counterpart. Also, he was none too gentle when he bit me. Truth was, I enjoyed his roughness. The blood began to flow and he took a few sips before pulling himself away. “Very good, child. Such restraint.” That pleased me because it proved just how powerful Sage was and his level of control at being a newborn vampire.

“Stop calling me ‘child’,” Sage griped as he handed my wrist to Adrian.

“No,” I said as Adrian’s mouth closed over my bleeding wound. “Get used to it, Sage... ahhhh,” I moaned in pleasure because Adrian’s sucking felt good.

The three of us watched Adrian feed from me, but only two of us looked on with the desire to fuck the young mage’s brains out. The connection I had with Adrian brought me closer to him. He pulled away, finally, licking his lips as he shivered in ecstasy.

“Oh god, that was fucking good. Ahhh, mmmmm,” he moaned, his eyes closed and head back as he licked his full,

sensuous lips.

“We should fuck that erection away,” I said, pointing to the tent in Adrian’s sweatpants.

“That’s my job,” Sage growled, and pulled Adrian closer to him. Of course, Adrian was completely out of it, still caught in the rapture of my blood.

I called to Nakago with telepathy. “Nakago will take you to my den. If you need a quiet space, that is the best location.”

“That will do,” Sage said.

There was a knock on my door, and I gave Nakago permission to enter and he did. “Take them to my den and get the throne room ready to receive Emperor Martin,” I said, then handed Sage the glass with my blood in it.

“Yes, sire,” Nakago said, then motioned for Sage to follow him. Adrian was kissing Sage’s neck and pawing at his crotch. I was certain the two would probably have to fuck if he couldn’t snap Adrian out of his lusty state.

Sage stopped, then turned before walking out. “Can you contact Damon, the Griezel King? Let him know about the threat we’re all facing?” He kissed Adrian as his man was all over him.

I frowned because I didn’t like having to deal with the pompous Griezel King. “Why don’t you call him since you want him to know?”

Sage broke his kiss and looked at me. “I’ll be busy doing this barrier and the last thing we need is for these creatures to be



turning unsuspecting griezels.” Adrian was kissing his cheek and neck now.

I rolled my eyes but nodded. He did have a point. “Fine. Go, do the spell.” I waved him off, then walked back over to my sofa, sitting down and crossing one leg over the other. My office door closed, leaving just Sarino and me in the room.

“Are you going to call that guy?” Sarino asked.

I nodded as I pulled out my cell phone and began searching my contacts. “We don’t really get along, he and I. But there is an understanding between us.”

“He was interesting... Sage, I mean,” Sarino said.

I nodded. “He’s a pain in my ass, but he’s mine.”

## Chapter Four

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# *Damon Aeneas*

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“**W** E STILL CAN’T FIND him, my Liege,” Terrell, one of my griezels, reported to me.

I frowned because he was supposed to be training my newest griezel, Skylar, who was now sitting at my dining table enjoying what he thought was a steak made from a cow. Not so. We could eat animals, but human flesh tasted better and made us stronger. It was best when it was fresh, but still delicious after the carcass had been dead for a while. That went for both animals and humans. As far as Skylar was concerned, he needed to get used to the flavor. As a newborn griezel, he needed to be at his strongest.

“When was the last time anyone saw Leonel?” I asked. Unlike vampires, I couldn’t sense specific griezels I had in my territory just because I was their king. I couldn’t track one down by that link, but I did know when I’d lost one because I felt it. That was why I was aware of the griezel Sage had killed—the son of a bitch. I wasn’t lying when I said I didn’t care about the griezel that he’d killed per se, once I found out who

he was by reputation. It was true, that griezal had been a problem, but still, I didn't take kindly to anyone killing one of mine. Leonel not showing up wasn't like him. He'd never let me down before and if something had happened to him, I needed to know. I could still sense him, but the sensation was fragile and that was alarming, to say the least.

"I spoke to Angela and she said he didn't come home last night. She thought he was working for you, as it wouldn't be the first time he had been working for you and didn't call to let her know he wouldn't be home. That's why she didn't panic. But after I had contacted her, she began to worry," Terrell said.

I didn't like this situation one bit. I'd felt something last night, a loss of a connection, but it also felt dark, corrupted. It was unlike anything I'd felt before. "Search for him. In the meantime, I'll contact Sage Tamir."

"Do you think he killed another one of us?" Terrell asked, a snarl on his face, because he didn't like the fact that the lion king shifter took such liberties.

I shook my head. "He'd be an absolute moron to pull that stunt twice. No, I'm calling him for the paperwork on the club."

"Ahhh, yes. Can't wait to dance in it."

"For now, look for Leonel," I commanded.

Terrell bowed. "Yes, my Liege."

He walked off and I pulled my phone out of my pocket just as it rang. "What the fuck?" I asked myself as I looked down

at my caller ID. I answered. “I didn’t expect to be hearing from you any time soon.”

“And I didn’t expect to be calling, but I need to inform you of a serious situation,” said the vampire Archduke of Chicago, Salino Laurent.

“Oh? And that is?”

“A Dark God has breached this plane and from what I’ve been informed of, he is turning humans and supernals alike into monstrous beings. This is happening all over the world and I have instructed my vampires to go to safehouses and for my strike teams to capture one and kill any others they see,” Salino said.

I knew he had to have been telling the truth because the vampire wouldn’t call me for a prank. It wasn’t his style, that much, I knew about Salino. What he told me had me confused and to be frank, unnerved.

“What kind of creature? And do you know how this happened?” I asked.

“Sage and Adrian are now members of the Echelon Imperial. That is how they found out,” Salino said.

Well, fuck. The last thing that vampire needed was a freak fledgling that was now a member of the most powerful coven of mages. “That doesn’t answer my question,” I pointed out.

“It happened and the beings it creates are savage beasts from what I’m told. It can’t pass for human. It has claws, fangs,

gray skin, horrid. It is believed if a supernal is turned by one, it will be stronger,” Salino said.

“Will you be able to sense if one of your vampires was turned? I mean, the ones you made yourself. I know as Archduke, you can’t sense all vampires,” I said.

“Well, I am no longer the Archduke, I am the Emperor,” Salino said. “And I have already sensed the death of several of my vampires.”

Well, that was unexpected news and concerning... very concerning. If Salino was truly the vampire emperor of his line, with Sage being his... he could take over the entire fucking state. My griezels would not be able to combat him.

“And how did that happen?” I asked.

He sighed. “Vampire affairs are of no concern of yours,” Salino said.

“It is if you plan on making a move on my territory now that you’re more powerful,” I retorted.

“Fortunately for you then, I am not concerned about your tawdry little territory and I never have been. Getting back to the reason for my call. I only wanted to alert you to the threat of the Dark God so you can protect your griezels,” Salino said.

He was leaving a lot out, but if he was serious about not trying to take over my territory, I could let it go. “Very well. I am, at the moment, unable to reach one of my griezels. The last time anyone had seen him, it was yesterday afternoon,” I said.

“If he’s been attacked by one of these monsters, then he’ll be far stronger than one made by turning a human. That is what I’ve been told,” Salino said.

“I will inform my griezels to be on the lookout. About this Dark God, since your child is now a member of the Echelon Imperial, what is the plan to send the god back to his realm?” I asked.

“I’m not sure, that’s something they have to work out. But that is also one of the reasons I told my vampires to capture one of these creatures. The more we know about them, the better we can defend against them and destroy them,” Salino said.

“I will do the same just in case your vampires are unable to capture one,” I said.

“As if that would be an issue, but sure, why not? Nothing wrong with having a backup plan, as they say,” Salino stated.

I huffed. “Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you for letting me know. Goodnight,” I said, then ended the call. God, that foppish bastard was annoying. And now that he was emperor, he’d be insufferable. I turned my thoughts from Salino to the monsters he spoke about. I called my right hand, Orma, and she answered right away.

“My Liege?” she greeted.

“We have a problem.” I began to tell her everything that was going on.

“Has a Dark God ever come into this world before?” Orma asked.

“No, never,” I said. At least, not to my knowledge. “In any case, we need to be very diligent. Until this matter is dealt with, I want all of my griezels gathered at our safe house locations. Assign five teams of my best hunters to track down these creatures and kill them. They are not to work alone, only in teams of two.”

Orma nodded. “Yes, Your Highness.”

I watched as she left, closing the door behind her. My home was one of the safe houses, and I had plenty of food stored for a hundred griezels to eat for a month. But what I didn't have was a barrier to protect all of my safe houses. Never needed one before, but maybe now I did. Damn it to hell! I needed to call Sage and ask for a favor. That son of a bitch, I know he's going to want his club back.

Fuck!

I actually growled as I pulled my cell phone back out of my pocket and dialed his number from my contact list. It took him a while to answer but when he did, he was breathless. Either he had been fighting or fucking before he answered. I figured it was the latter.

“I'll send the papers for the club later. It's been a hectic day and I've got more important shit going on. Don't worry, you'll get it,” he said by way of greeting.

“Did I interrupt something?” I asked.

“Had you called a minute earlier, I wouldn’t have answered,” Sage said.

I was right. “Well, I see you’re aren’t too busy to fuck.”

“And the reason you called was?” he shot back.

I sighed, because I needed to get to the point. “I’ve spoken with Salino and he informed me of this Dark God situation.”

“Yeah, I told him to call you so you could be on the same page,” Sage said, his breathing becoming more normal.

“And that is why I am calling. I have some of my griezels out searching to cleanse my territory of these creatures. However...” I paused because I really didn’t want to have to ask his ass for anything.

“What the fuck do you want from me, Damon? Just spit it out,” Sage snapped.

I sighed. “I’d like for my safe houses to be protected by a barrier. You’re the only mage that I know of, you and Adrian. Will you do it?” I asked.

“So, I’ll be keeping my club, then?” he asked.

“I can pay you for your trouble,” I said.

“Allowing me to keep my club is payment enough.”

“The club is mine and it was done in a fair trade. I’ll have to deal with a new griezel I didn’t want. Accepted a piece of shit blood for blood consolation prize after you killed one of my more skilled griezels. And you have the audacity to ask me to



lower my standards again... to suit you? Ask for something else," I snapped.

I wanted to keep the club, Fantasy. I deserved to be compensated accordingly.

"We should, the last thing we need is his griezels being attacked in one place and making more of those things because they're unprotected," I heard Sage's lover, Adrian, say in the background. I recognized his Georgia Peach accent. He was beautiful, it was the first thing I had noticed when I'd met him earlier. Too good for a beast like Sage, in my opinion.

"How nice that at least one of you has a level head in the relationship," I stated.

"You're asking me for a favor. Mind your manners, ghoul," Sage snapped.

"Mutt," I shot back.

"Oh, for fuck's sake," I heard Adrian fuss.

Sage sighed. "Keep the club. But I want you to donate to a charity of Adrian's choosing. A million dollars."

"Really?" I asked, and in the background, I heard Adrian ask the same question.

"Yes. He'll give you the details. You agree to that and we'll spell your safe house," Sage said.

"Safe houses," I corrected.

"What the fuck? How many do you have?" Sage asked.

"Four," I answered.

“A million for each one.”

“Deal,” I agreed. Four million was a drop in the bucket for me and a bargain for what I was getting, which was peace of mind.

“We’ll see you later. Gotta deal with a few things here,” Sage said.

“Just call me when you’re at my border. I’ll let my griezels know to expect you. I’ll text you the locations, but my home will be first,” I said.

“Fine. Call you later,” Sage said, then hung up.

I huffed and slipped my phone back into my pocket. I walked over to the window and gazed out. It was nighttime and the city looked beautiful with its twinkling lights. I wondered what was happening where I couldn’t see. What lurked in the shadows that was a threat to us all?

I guessed I would find out soon enough.

## Chapter Five

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**A**NNOYED, I SHOVED MY cell back into my pocket, then finished pulling my t-shirt back on. Adrian looked at me as he waited for me to join in to do the blood enchantment spell. He'd already cut himself and bled into the chalice. Salino's blood was inside, now it just needed mine.

“Are you mad at me?” he asked.

I huffed as I approached him. “Why would I be mad at you?” I cut my palm and bled into the chalice. The pain was brief and I was used to it anyway.

He shrugged. “Because I interfered with your business.”

I scratched at my temple, because the truth was, that did upset me. I wasn't used to anyone getting in the way of my business dealings. Adrian cost me my advantage. With enough arm-twisting, I was sure I could have gotten my club back. But at the same time, Adrian was right. The situation we're in was no time for such... negotiations.

I sighed and pulled my hand back now that my wound had closed. I wiped the blood with the moist towel Adrian handed me. “I won’t lie, because that’s not healthy for our relationship. So, yes... that did annoy me, but that doesn’t mean you weren’t right. Fact of the matter was, I needed you to do exactly what you did to snap me out of my normal state of mind when it comes to dealing with other rulers.”

“Are you still mad at me?” he asked, his tone softer now.

I shook my head and I kissed him, tongue and all, because I needed him to know there wasn’t a motherfucking thing he could ever do that would make me ever turn away from him. I broke the kiss when I felt we both needed to come up for air. “Baby, I love you. The club is nothing when you compare it to the fact that we needed to make sure none of his griezels get turned. Those fuckers are hard enough to kill as is. No telling what trying to kill one of them mutated will be like. You were right, I needed to focus on the bigger picture. I get wrapped up in my old ways.”

He smiled and gave me another peck. “Nothing old about your ways. You’re a lion shifter, fighting for territory is more natural to you than being a mob boss. I get that. I just knew that what he was asking was more important.”

I nodded. “It was. And besides, four million to charities of your choice is a sweet bargain,” I pointed out.

His pretty green eyes widened. “Yes, that was awesome.”

“Okay, let’s get this barrier up and running,” I said.

Together, we enchanted the blood like before, then Adrian reached into the duffle bag and pulled out the binding Dobinger Ash we needed to sprinkle on top of the sigil. There wasn't much of it left.

“We only have enough to do this house and Damon's,” I said.

“That's why I brought the ingredients to do the other barrier spell.” Adrian wiggled his brows and I laughed.

“That's my baby, thinking ahead.”

Adrian sprinkled the ash on one half of the sigil, chanting a spell as he did. He then handed it over to me to continue. I chanted my part of the spell and once the last of the ash was on the image, there was a burst of white flames that burned the sigil's design into the floor. The smell of burnt sugar and charcoal filled the room and slowly, the design began to fade away. However, I could still sense its magical presence. Just like it was back at my tower.

“You feel it still, right?” I asked Adrian to see if he also felt it.

He nodded. “Yeah, it tingles.”

“Okay, it's done. I need to call Kakashi to ask him about this shit Salino wants to do,” I said, pulling out my cell.

“Put it on speaker,” Adrian said.

“Do you even need that? Your hearing was good enough earlier when you were eavesdropping on my call,” I teased

with a playful smile, because I wanted to make sure he knew I wasn't mad.

Adrian smirked. "I'll admit, my senses seem to have increased since being linked to Salino. As far as I'm concerned, that's a good thing. I'm beginning to understand why you accepted your situation better than I thought you would after being turned into a vampire. There's a lot of perks," he admitted.

"A lot," I agreed.

"Anyway, I want you to put it on speaker, so Kakashi and I can communicate too in case I need to ask him anything," Adrian said.

I nodded. "Ahhh, I see. Okay." I began dialing his number and he answered faster than I thought he would. "Hey, I need to ask you a question."

"What is it?" he asked. Even over the phone, his voice was full of authority.

"Listen, we're in a bit of a situation over here since we severed the link between the Dark God and the old vampire emperor. Salino is being threatened by the other emperors and as you know, if he dies, Adrian and I will die. Salino wants to kill the other emperors and have all of their vampires linked to him. If we do that—I mean, if we can do that, because I'm not even sure if that's possible—what's the consequence?"

He sighed, and it was one of those sighs that was heavy in agitation. "As far as plans go, I can see the logic behind it."

“So, what’s the backlash?” I asked.

“The price is unknown, as you know nothing like what you’re asking has ever been done. I don’t know what consequence, if any, will take place. Contrary to popular belief... a somewhat falsehood that the Echelon Imperial put out there eons ago... not all magic has a price.”

“Why put out the lie that it does, then?” Adrian asked.

“To deter foolish mages or humans from making mistakes that do have high prices. It’s helped from time to time,” Kakashi said. “Not in your case, obviously.”

I rolled my eyes at the sly jab. “So, we can sever their lines and connect Salino?”

“Do you know how?” he asked.

“Well, we really haven’t had a chance to see if there are any spells in our grimoire that could help us,” Adrian said.

“I will help, because I’d rather your energy be put to actually finding a spell to track El-Kazir and kill or expel him. I’ll come to you, Aldéric and I have the spell that will do what you ask, but requires the power of three dark mages,” Kakashi said.

“Holy shit,” Adrian said. “Just how dark is that spell?”

“Not your concern since you can’t help with it. For now, Adrian, do what you can,” Kakashi said.

“Watch how you talk to my man,” I snapped. “Never forget that I’m very aggressive in my protection of what’s mine,” I

warned, because I wouldn't tolerate anyone disrespecting me or Adrian or my pride. I would die on that fucking hill, too.

Again, Kakashi sighed. "I'll try to remember that instinct in you. And I'd ask that you do the same. Never forget that I am a dark mage and will only tolerate so much attitude from anyone," he warned in kind.

"Don't start nothing, won't be nothing," I added.

Silence.

I figured we both got each other's message, so I continued. "Anyway, Adrian and I just set up a barrier around Salino's home," I said.

"What kind?" Kakashi asked.

"Seal of the Bound," Adrian supplied.

"Interesting that your powers have increased that much for a spell of that kind. Remarkable," Kakashi said.

"It seemed simple enough and we already had the ingredients," Adrian said.

"The ingredients are one thing, but the magical essence needed to flow from you into the spell through the incantation is another. The Seal of the Bound is the highest protective spell I'm aware of. You two have managed to do something very few have," Kakashi said.

"And that is?" I asked.

"Impressed me," Kakashi replied.

"Oh—okay," Adrian said and he looked so adorable.



I simply rolled my eyes, because I didn't give a damn if he was impressed or not. "Do I need to get anything for this spell to take out the emperors?" I asked.

"No, I'll bring what we need. Give me an hour," Kakashi said.

"Perfect—Oh wait. We'll need more time than that," I said, remembering my promise to Damon. "Adrian and I have to put barriers around Damon Aeneas' four safe houses."

"That is a good thing. He needs to keep his griezels protected. Members of the Council have ordered other mages to do the same for supernals in their cities. This is a time where we must all put aside our differences and petty squabbles because we are all in danger," Kakashi said.

"And the other mages are doing what you asked?" I questioned.

"I didn't ask, I demanded. And if they don't want to be punished, they will obey. That is the power of the Echelon Imperial. Had you and Adrian refused my offer to join us peacefully, you would have learned what a punishment from the Echelon Imperial Council of Mages would have felt like. Lucky for you, we avoided such... unpleasanties," Kakashi said.

"Don't think we're so easy to —"

"Yes, you are, Sage. You are easy for us to defeat. For one thing, you are both novices, just coming into your powers. Yet you're not even close to reaching your full potential.

Understand and remember that the mages on the Council, like yourselves, have been chosen because we are each more powerful than any other mages of our lines. We have been accepted by our Echelon Imperial ancestors through purification. However, the knowledge of the properties of magic that we possess makes us your superiors,” Kakashi said.

“Arrogance much?” Adrian mumbled.

Kakashi scoffed. “As are you, Adrian. Mages of our caliber deserve to be arrogant. For no one can do what we can.”

“Then why give me shit for my attitude?” I asked.

“Because you haven’t really earned your level of arrogance, young mage,” Kakashi said, making sure to put emphasis on the word young. “You will understand the difference when I perform the spell later on. Now, please, make haste on spelling Damon’s locations, I’ll be there in three hours. Inform Salino of our arrival,” Kakashi said.

“Yeah, I’ll get right on that,” I said with some attitude before I ended the call and looked at Adrian. “Fucking prick.”

Adrian nodded. “Yeah, he is. They are powerful, though. I felt it when we shared blood.”

“I felt it, too,” I agreed, because it was equally frightening and humbling.

“I can’t believe everything that’s happened today,” Adrian said, running his fingers through his hair.

I snorted. “This day feels like a fucking episode of that show where that agent had to stop a whole terrorist plot in one day.”

Adrian nodded and gave a sad chuckle. “That’s very accurate and it’s not even over yet.”

“Fuck, what time is it?”

He looked at his watch. “Almost nine.”

“Let’s go tell Salino his house is safe.”

“Wait, let me gather everything since we’ll be leaving soon,” Adrian said, then ran back over to the area where we had performed the spell and packed up our shit. Together, we left and made our way back to Salino’s office. I started to just barge in, but Adrian knocked first.

Fine.

Salino bade us in and we entered. “It’s all done,” I said.

He was in the middle of feeding and he’d stopped to let us in. “I know, I felt it.” He turned back to the human and sank his fangs again into the man’s neck. What I noticed right away was the pleasure the human was feeling. He gripped Salino’s arms, his cock was raging hard, and he moaned with every swallow of his blood. That was new, because the last time Salino fed from me, it hurt like hell. He was a pain feeder. The man arched, his body shaking through his climax. That was when Salino pulled back, licking the blood from his full lips. The human slouched on the sofa and drifted off to blissful sleep as if he didn’t have a care in the world.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my baby blushing at witnessing Salino feeding. He was complex to me in the sense

that he was both bold and shy. Always unpredictable, and I loved that about Adrian.

Salino rose off his human meal and walked over to us. “So, the spell is currently active?”

I nodded. “Yeah, and as you can see, you didn’t explode when you fed.”

“The human was willing and as you can see, he enjoyed every second of it,” Salino shot back.

“You’ll be safe, don’t worry. Like we explained, the barrier protects you and what you value. Which in your case is this building and the vampires inside. It’s programmed to act on your behalf of what you feel is a threat and then to which level,” Adrian said.

Salino wiped the drop of blood from the corner of his mouth and sucked his thumb between his lips and even that act was seductive. Made me wonder if he was doing it on purpose or not. “I want you both to stay here. I’ve prepared a room for you,” he said.

“Stay? Like forever or just the night?” Adrian asked.

“The night. Though you both are linked to me, we still need our space. I could no more tolerate having Sage live under my roof than he could,” Salino said.

“Shit, you’ve got that right. No way I’d give up my own peace of mind to be this close to you,” I said.

“I concur,” Salino snapped back.

“In the meantime, we have to take care of Damon’s safe houses, so we’ll be back,” I said.

“You can’t leave yet. Emperor Martin will be here in fifteen minutes. I figured he’d be traveling by car, but instead, he took his private helicopter. I need you both with me to make the statement I want to convey,” Salino said.

“You plan on challenging him tonight?” Adrian asked.

Salino shook his head. “No, but I just want him to know that I have two powerful mages at my side, nothing more. I can’t do that if you’re not here.”

“Would he try to attack you?” I asked.

Salino nodded. “None of the emperors are fond of each other and they’ve made me their enemy. I’m no match for their strength as they are extremely powerful.”

“Fuck, you’re needy,” I groused.

Salino rolled his eyes. “And you’re an ingrate.”

“Getting back to the emperor,” Adrian said, and his interruption quelled the back-and-forth Salino and I were engaging in. “If you think he’s going to try to make a move on you, that’s what the barrier is for.”

“But what action will it take if he attacks? I don’t want him to die, not until his vampires are linked to me,” Salino said.

Adrian and I looked at each other. He sighed and shrugged a shoulder. “We could disarm the lethal aspect of the barrier and

just do a protection spell in the room where the emperor will be.”

I nodded. “Yeah, that works.”

Salino nodded. “That’s the kind of initiative I want to hear.”

“After we deal with this emperor and send him on his way, we have to leave to help Damon,” I said.

“And I will allow you to take my private helicopter so you can run your errands faster... unless you know how to teleport?” Salino asked, looking from me to Adrian.

“Not yet, it’s in my portion of the grimoire,” Adrian said.

“Mine too,” I added.

Adrian shot a glance at me. “Really? How come you didn’t tell me?”

“Damn, baby, time has been moving nonstop the last three days. I discovered it when I was looking for a spell to bind us to Salino without us having to fuck him,” I said.

“Oh, it wasn’t a priority at the time, I get it,” Adrian said with a sly smirk, because he’d been the one to tell me that there was no other way around it and he was right. We had to fuck Salino.

Salino made an offhanded gesture. “Well, in any case, you’ll need to travel faster until you both learn that skill. Take my helicopter. It’s located on the roof.”

“Will the other emperor’s helicopter have somewhere to land?” Adrian asked.

“I have two helipads up there,” Salino said.

“Quick question, are you a pleasure feeder now?” I asked, thinking back to his recent feeding.

Salino smiled. “I’m whatever I want to be. I can feed on pleasure, pain, or fear. That is the power of the emperor.”

“Good to know,” I said.

“Do you want to experience what my pleasure bite feels like, Sage?” he asked.

“No, but if you ever bite me without my permission—”

“You are mine. I’ll bite you when I want, I don’t need your permission. Stop thinking that we’re equal, child,” Salino said, then walked away. “I’m only going to have so much patience with that attitude of yours.”

“Stop calling him a child if you want less attitude,” Adrian said.

“It’s actually a term of endearment,” Salino said.

“Not the way you say it,” Adrian shot back. And I was happy to see my man standing up for me.

Salino smirked. “I’ll say it sweeter, then.”

“How about not at all?” I asked.

He looked at me. “No, because I like calling my children that name. Understand, Sage, I am very protective of vampires I have a personal bond with. You were created by me in an unconventional way, but I still feel very connected to you. I will protect you and nourish you. That is why I don’t mind

feeding Adrian. So, when I call you ‘child’, you should think of it as me showing my sentiments toward you. You’re mine and the sooner you accept that fact, the easier our interactions will be.”

I understood the meaning behind his words and I just nodded. “Fine. Still, the tone.”

He rolled his eyes. “Very well, my child.” And this time, his tone was without the attitude.

I huffed and looked at my watch. “Listen, in three hours, two members of the Echelon Imperial will be here to take care of that problem you have with the other emperors,” I said.

Salino’s eyes widened, and it was probably one of the only times I’d ever seen him genuinely in awe and if I wasn’t mistaken... concerned. “You should have led with that.”

I shrugged. “I’m telling you now. It’s not like they’re at the front door.”

“What are they planning to do?” he asked.

“What you asked,” Adrian said. “To kill the emperors and link all vampires to you.”

“And what does the Echelon Imperial want in return for that favor?” Salino asked.

I shrugged. “He didn’t say anything about getting something in return. I think he just wants to do it to protect the power of the Council. Adrian and I are members now, we’re all linked. He doesn’t want to lose that. Besides, like you said, the Dark



God is already free, so the worst of breaking the vampire link has already happened.”

Salino gave me a side-eye glance as if he wasn't fully convinced. “In all of my existence, I've never had any dealing with the Council. To my knowledge, they don't grant favors.”

“What do you think they'll want then?” Adrian asked.

Salino sighed and walked over to the window, looking out. “Control over me,” he said finally. “Once I'm the sole emperor, I'll be the most powerful ruler in the world. There are plenty of supernal rulers, but they all have their territories and factions. There are various species and everyone has to stay in their place. Once I am the one true emperor, I'll have dominion over every vampire territory. My reach will be vast, my strength unmatched. On top of that, I'm linked to the two of you.” He turned around to face us. “I guarantee you, the Echelon Imperial is not doing this to protect you, but to own me.”

“Even still, would you refuse their help?” I asked. “After listening to everything you've just said, you'll still be getting a pretty big piece of the pie.”

“Depends on what they'll want from me,” Salino replied. “As for Emperor Martin, what will you need to prepare for him in case he does attack?”

“Where will the meeting take place? Here?” Adrian asked, looking around at Salino's lavish office.

Salino shook his head. “No, this is far too informal for rulers to meet.”

“You met me here,” I pointed out.

“We meet here because we are not on equal standing. Yes, you’re a lion king, but to me, you’re my child,” Salino said. “Martin is my equal, so we will meet in the throne room.”

I started to say something in response to us not being equals as we both were leaders. In reality, I outranked him in my mind back then, as I answered to no one, but I let it go. For Salino, I’d always be his offspring and that would be first and foremost. We needed to prepare and not argue. He led us to the room in question and it was even more gaudy than the rest of his home. Murals of vampires feeding, fucking, and partying were painted all over the walls. The floor was black marble with gold and silver veining—okay, I actually liked that part. There was one gold throne with an ornate design sitting on a raised dais near the far wall, with a red carpet leading to it from the double doors. The room was brightly lit with a dozen crystal chandeliers. There was a second throne on the carpet directly in front of the one on the dais. I assumed that was for Emperor Martin to sit. Equal, but not equal.

“Wow, this is so beautiful,” Adrian said as he looked around in awe.

I just gave him a side-eye glance, but said nothing. He was entitled to like garish shit if he wanted to. I wondered if he had any intention of redecorating our home. I’d let him because his happiness was paramount to me. I’d just have to deal with it.

“This room was always reserved for Emperor Galan when he’d visit. Every member of his royal court from Princes to Lords is expected to have a room with such opulence befitting his royal stature. This is the way with all vampire royals,” Salino said. “And now, it’s mine.”

He walked over to the throne and took a seat, and the way he did it, I could tell it was his first time ever sitting in the chair. He ran his fingers over the red leather armrest as he practiced several poses.

“Does it feel right to you? Like you belong there?” I asked.

“I feel the weight of its significance.” Salino looked at me, his expression a bit poignant. “I never wanted to be the ruler of my line, let alone all the others. But if my survival and happiness are dependent upon me becoming the emperor of all, then I accept the responsibilities. Remember, I only became Archduke so I could be present in the room for the ceremony. Not because I wanted the power the position granted me. It was five centuries’ worth of planning, sacrificing, and cunning on my part in order to make sure I could at least try to save my brother and Louis. I didn’t know if I could, but I never stopped trying.”

“You’re willing to do whatever it takes to reach your goals,” Adrian said.

“My goal is to live, Adrian. I don’t fear death, but I don’t desire it either. I am a thriving being who wants to see what comes next. I want to share that experience with those I love, my children and my family. If I could do this without being

emperor, I would. But that is not possible, for various reasons. One is that as a supernal, I'll need an army so I'm not challenged. Even the youngest vampire with no rank still has the protection of his line. I can never have the life I truly desire, but I can have some of it," Salino said.

It was probably one of the most profound things he had ever said to us and I understood his sentiment. We all just wanted our happiness, at least, I did. Fate gave me a gift when I walked into Adrian's office that day and like Salino... I would do whatever it took to protect what we had. Whatever it took.

Adrian sighed. "Well, let's make sure we keep you nice and safe," he said. "I will spell the room so that the people in it will be protected."

Salino nodded. "In that case, let me get Nakago in here, as he's my right hand." He closed his eyes and I knew he was summoning Nakago.

A few seconds later, Nakago entered. "You called me?"

"Yes, come stand here," Salino said, pointing to the spot.

I walked up to the dais along with Adrian and we both stood to his left. Nakago took his place without question. I wasn't sure I'd ever be that obedient—probably not, but I'd give Salino a little less heat.

"Is this everyone you want present for the meeting?" Adrian asked.

Salino nodded. "How do I get him out of my home if he tries to hurt other vampires here if he can't get to me? Remember, I

want him alive for the time being.”

Nakago’s eyes widened and he looked down at Salino.  
“You’re going to kill the emperors?”

“Ah, that’s right. You haven’t been informed of everything,”  
Salino said.

“Before you get into the details, let me put this protection  
spell in place,” Adrian said, then he knelt and pressed his hand  
to the dais and chanted his spell. I felt a surge of power flow  
over me. It actually stung a little.

“Ouch,” Nakago said and rubbed his chest.

“Yes, that was unpleasant,” Salino agreed, a frown on his  
handsome face.

“It’s because it’s light magic and because it’s protecting  
beings who aren’t innocent, it had to wash over you,” Adrian  
told us.

“Like holy water, and that’s why it burned,” I joked.

Adrian giggled. “Kind of, yeah.”

I looked at Salino. “If he does attack, I think we should keep  
him here. He can be the first emperor you kill and take over  
their line.”

Salino appeared to be thinking about it and he nodded. “How  
will you trap him? I don’t have any cell strong enough to hold  
an emperor.”

“We could make it strong enough,” I stated.

“The problem is getting him to the cell,” Nakago added. “You really don’t know how powerful a five-thousand-year-old emperor is.”

“No need. The protection spell I cast on this room will prevent him from leaving,” Adrian said, then he frowned. “Aw, but that spell won’t last for more than an hour if I’m not here to infuse it with more magic.”

I shrugged. “I think Adrian and I can come up with something.”

“I can use the freeze spell I once used on you and the demon. It’s stronger now and all I need to use is my will and the incantation,” Adrian said.

“That’s a plan. I knew you’d come up with something. Do you know how long it will last?” I asked him.

“According to the grimoire, twelve hours. I learned it the night I was looking for an alternative to sleeping with Salino. The current spell in the book for freezing will last twenty-four hours, but I’ll need the Pearl of Time, which I don’t have,” Adrian said.

“What amazing things you both discovered about yourselves while looking for ways to avoid fucking me,” Salino remarked with a roll of his eyes.

“And you still got lucky,” I retorted, and he scoffed. I returned my attention to Adrian. “That will work perfectly.”

Salino closed his eyes and I knew he was communicating with one of his vampires. “His helicopter is approaching. I’ll

lower the barrier.” He said the word “disarm,” and I felt a little tingle, very subtle.

“It’s down, I felt it,” Adrian said.

“Me too,” Salino added. “At least, now I know what to expect.” He turned to his Right-Hand. “As for the plan, I’ll fill you in later, Nakago.”

“All right,” Nakago said, not pressing the issue. He didn’t even seem upset that Adrian and I knew about it and he didn’t. He had that much trust in Salino. Probably that much love, too.

The door opened and a female vampire entered wearing a skirt so short, I could almost see her pussy. The shirt she wore exposed her cleavage and I bet a straight male would be drooling... or a chick into women. She bowed at Salino. “Your Majesty, your honored guest has arrived.”

“Bring him to me,” Salino said.

“Yes, Sire,” she said, then left.

Salino looked at both Adrian and me. “Ready?”

“To meet another insufferable vampire ruler, not really,” I said.

“Remember, he can’t harm us in this room,” Adrian stated.

“Is that the same spell that protects this building?” Nakago asked.

Adrian shook his head. “No, it’s a very simple one, but effective. It can only protect the people who were in the room

when it was cast. Once he enters, we can raise the first level of the other barrier, the one you felt. That is what we put on the whole building. It'll be enough to keep out any unwanted beings."

"And when he leaves, we can raise the full level of the barrier," I added, just to explain to Nakago how the barrier worked.

"He won't be leaving, though," Salino reminded us.

"Ah, that's right. I was just trying to explain the barrier to Nakago. Under any other circumstance, that's how it would go," I said, and Nakago nodded.

"Don't worry, I've got this," Adrian said, confidently.

I smiled because my baby was so badass.

A few minutes later, four of Salino's vampires, including the female from before, entered with another vampire who radiated power and self-importance. I knew he was Emperor Martin. He was tall, about six-three, and dressed impeccably in a black suit with a black, silver, and red tie. He actually had a cool satin cape with red lining and jewel-beaded lapels. It was flashy, not my taste, but I did have to admit, he had style. He was escorted to the throne, but he didn't sit. He stood in front of Salino, eyeing him up and down. The vampires who'd escorted him left, closing the door behind them.

Emperor Martin scoffed and shook his head. "You're sitting up there as if you deserve the privilege."



“I am an emperor, am I not?” Salino said, then gestured around us. “Is this not the Throne Room?”

“You call yourself an emperor,” the ancient vampire said with a sneer. “You’re unworthy. You’re a punk who stole something that he is not entitled to.”

“And you’re an uninvited guest in my territory and home who should conduct himself with more decorum,” Salino snapped back. “Why did you come?”

“I wanted to see with my own eyes Lord Barron-Price’s betrayer,” Emperor Martin said. “Because of you, vampires will never be able to reach our full power. What do you have to say for yourself?”

I looked down at Salino, because I’d never seen him in the presence of a vampire older than him. However, the situation was different, because although this vampire had at least forty-four hundred years on Salino, they were equal in status. I wondered if it would matter.

Salino smirked with a huff. “You ask me to explain myself to you. What makes you think you’re deserving of an explanation? My choice was my own.”

“Your selfishness has affected us all, boy!” Emperor Martin’s rage was barely contained as he nearly foamed at the mouth. “You arrogant and ignorant cur! Do you know what you’ve done? How your actions destroyed our power base?”

Salino shrugged. “I feel plenty powerful. I think it’s you who are greedy.”

“The gifts we were to receive at the sacrifice, you robbed all vampires of that. We could have very well become the most powerful of all supernals. A thousand years of preparing to honor the Dark God, El-Kazir, ruined—why?! I demand to know why we all must suffer for your selfish choice you claim was your own?”

Salino made a dismissive gesture. “We both know that any answer I give you will never be good enough to justify my actions in your eyes. Did you really come all the way here to bitch and moan about what can’t be undone? Please tell me that my time is not being wasted on something so trivial?”

Okay, damn, Salino could talk some shit, that was for sure. I knew as much from our own interactions, but I wasn’t a five-thousand-year-old vampire who could probably kill him f— holy shit! I jerked in response to how fast the emperor moved. Before I could even finish my thought, Emperor Martin advanced, moving at a speed that made him a blur even to me, but he was blasted back by a bright blue force. He screamed as his body went flying across the room, smashing into the opposite wall, cracking the plaster and destroying the mural. The vampire scrambled to his feet in a nanosecond and looked back at us, glaring with glowing red eyes and bared fangs.

My baby’s spell was top-notch. The other members on the Council could call us amateurs all day long, but the fact of the matter was... our spells worked.

Salino motioned to Adrian and I. “As you can see, I have two very powerful mages at my side. One is my child, and the

other is linked to me. I would think very carefully about your next words and actions, Emperor Martin.”

Emperor Martin growled as he stared intensely at the four of us. “Are they the ones who severed our line?” His voice was dripping with all of the ire he must have felt.

“Yes,” Salino said, as if he were proud of that fact. Hell, maybe he was.

The other emperor’s fangs retracted and he adjusted his clothing. “I see. There is nothing redeeming about you, Salino. Enjoy your brief time as emperor.”

“Are you threatening me?” Salino asked and crossed one leg over the other as if he had not one care in the world. Either that, or he had plenty of confidence in Adrian and me.

“Indeed I am, but not just me. You’ve made yourself powerful enemies, Salino,” Emperor Martin declared.

“I see,” Salino said and he tapped his finger on the armrest and I took that as his signal. Lucky for Salino, Adrian did too and he began to chant.

“What is going on? You dare to sic your fucking mages on me!” Emperor Martin roared. He turned to try and flee the room, but again the protection spell knocked him on his ass. He rose and whirled around at us, snarling with bared fangs. “What is this?”

“A spell to keep you in place because I knew you’d behave like a rabid animal, Jude,” Salino said, using the emperor’s first name, the way he had used Salino’s.

“Release me, Salino!” Jude demanded.

Salino shook his head. “I had very little hope that when you requested a meeting with me, you would be willing to forego all of the threats and posturing the other emperors were tossing my way. But you are all the same.”

“I gave you a chance to explain yourself, you refused,” Jude declared.

“I did it to save my brother and best friend from being slaughtered in the name of sacrifice to the Dark God,” Salino confessed. “There. Does that explanation satisfy your curiosity? Does it ease your nerves? Does it dissolve your contempt? Does it quell your desire for revenge?”

“That is your reason?” Jude glared at Salino as if he were trying to will his death with a look.

Salino nodded.

“I’ll kill you all!” Emperor Martin charged at us, but this time, not as fast.

I decided to show him more of my power. I used my vamp speed to intercept before he could reach the dais and I conjured up a wall of fire that caught the emperor in its flames. Salino, Adrian, and Nakago both had to get back as the flames licked all around us. Emperor Martin flapped his arms and slapped at the fire that was destroying his garments to put it out. He snatched off his cloak, tossing it away as it burned to a cinder. It was enough of a distraction to buy Adrian the time he needed to finish the spell which froze the powerful emperor

in the position of him in mid-run toward us again, claws extended and his face contorted in sheer rage.

I lowered the wall of fire, the heat of the flames disappearing as well. “Fuck!”

“Jesus Christ, that was scary, even with the protection spell in place,” Adrian gasped.

Salino’s chest heaved a little as he observed the scene. “That was... magnificent.” He rose and stepped off the dais to approach the frozen emperor, gazing at him in awe. “He would have killed us all had you two not been here. His plan was to be the first to kill me, as I had suspected.”

“Well, even if we weren’t here, you had that nifty barrier,” I pointed out.

Salino smiled and nodded. “Yes...yes.” He walked around the emperor, looking the man up and down and even touching him as if he were a fragile statue. “Is he aware of everything?”

I shrugged. “When I was frozen, I wasn’t. It’s like everything stops and you’re in deep sleep. At least, that was my experience with the first-level spell like that.”

“I honestly don’t know what he’s feeling. The grimoire doesn’t really give details like that about spells unless the spell is meant to do something like make a person feel pleasure or happiness,” Adrian said.

“Or pain and despair,” I added.

Salino nodded, then stepped in front of Emperor Martin. “Are you sure he can’t move? If you’re leaving to tend to

Damon, I need to be sure I will remain safe from him.”

“He’s not going anywhere,” I said, and pointed at the emperor who resembled a very life-like statue.

“I get that you’re confident, but this is the first time you’ve performed this type of freeze spell. We don’t know if it’s a hundred percent effective.” Salino patted my shoulder.

“Now you want to doubt my magical ability?” Adrian asked with his arms crossed over his chest.

Salino smirked. “I’ve always doubted it, but I also had faith in it, if that makes sense to you.”

Adrian frowned. “A little. I mean, Sage and I still have a lot to learn, but once a spell in the grimoire is replaced by another, it means that we have mastered it. The book is our teacher in that way.”

I sighed. “Besides, we can leave this room, and as you can see, he can’t. If you want to leave Nakago in here to watch him, you can.”

“But if anyone else enters, they won’t be protected,” Adrian added.

Salino sighed then. “I’ll take your word for it. If nothing else, I’ll arm the barrier. I just hate to lose the three hundred and sixty thousand vampires under his command.”

Both Adrian and I made sounds of disbelief. “How many fucking vampires?” I asked.

Salino repeated the number.

“Holy shit,” Adrian gasped.

“How many vampires will you be in control of if you become the one emperor?” I asked.

Salino looked up as if doing the calculations, then back at me. “About one point two million, roughly speaking. I have over a hundred thousand now from Galan’s line. Other emperors have more like Emperor Klaus Jäger, who has over five hundred thousand vampires.”

“That is a lot of vampires,” Adrian said.

Salino smirked. “Really? You think so?”

“Yeah,” Adrian answered.

Nakago laughed as Salino chuckled. “There are more humans in this city than there are vampires the world over. Our numbers are small so we can make sure our survival is guaranteed in our territories.”

“Okay, when you make that kind of comparison, I see your point,” Adrian said.

“Humans outnumber us and I believe that’s why the best thing for us to do is to remain hidden from their world,” Salino said, and I agreed.

Sure, supernals were extremely powerful and had all kinds of advantages over humans, but if mages joined the humans instead of us... that could really be a deciding factor. Best not to test those waters. “Look, we need to get going. I don’t think that son of a bitch will be going anywhere. But if his people start to get antsy, that barrier will keep them out.”

Salino hissed. “Yeeesss, his people would be expecting to hear back from him. I think I’ll raise the barrier when you leave as a precaution and just hope he doesn’t wake up or move before you can get back.”

“We won’t be gone long,” I said.

“Perhaps you should split up,” Salino said.

“Why the fuck would I do that?” I asked.

“Because, though my home here is protected, my other safe houses are not. I believe I’m in the immediate need. Not only do we have to protect my vampires from those things out there, but also any attack from Emperor Martin’s army. Once they can’t get in contact with him, they will act,” Salino said.

I sighed heavily, because the shit just kept fucking coming. “I should charge your ass for all of the trouble you’ve caused us.”

Salino rolled his eyes. “The way I see it, we benefit from each other. But let us not waste any more time. Send Adrian to Damon and you put barriers on my properties. Do you need more blood?”

“First off, I’m not sending Adrian any fucking where alone,” I said. “And secondly, yes, I will need your blood.”

“Not only that, but I need Sage in order to work the same barrier on his home that we did here,” Adrian added.

“Fine. Go with him, but then after you’ve completed the spell, I expect you to protect my homes. I can’t send vampires into Damon’s territory, but if he’s asking for your help, he



should provide Adrian with escorts,” Salino said, then he walked over to his cabinet and pulled out a vial of what I assumed was his blood and put it into a case. He returned, handing me the case.

I took it. “You keep your blood on stand-by like this?” I asked.

“From time to time, I award my most elite vampires with the treat that is my blood,” Salino said. “It promotes loyalty and competence.” He pointed to the case. “Will that be enough?”

I nodded. “Yeah, I’ll use this to root you to your other houses. Now, my barrier spell words are different than Adrian’s or even the one we installed here. Mine shuts down the whole place and anyone trying to enter will die. Anyone who knows the password that you create will be able to lock and unlock it, so to speak. But that’s how powerful my individual barrier spell is.”

“Impressive and dare I say, exactly what my safehouses need.” Salino smiled. “By the way, my password will be belle mort.”

I rolled my eyes and slipped his case with the vial of blood into my pocket. “You would be dramatic with it.”

“You lack culture,” Salino retorted.

“Before you two get out of hand, since we’re talking about defense, I want Sage protected too.” Adrian looked at Salino, head held high. “He may be very powerful, but I don’t want

him out there alone while he's going from one of your properties to the other. None of us need to be."

"I'll have Shi come with me," I said, then pulled out my cell to text her to meet me on the roof.

"I'm used to you having Shi and Nadia," Adrian said. "If I can't be your backup, I want you safe. We don't know what we're up against, Sage."

Salino smirked and nodded. "Awww, so sweet. So be it, I'll have MB accompany Sage. Go, and hurry back," he said with a wave of his foppish hand.

I rolled my eyes and motioned for Adrian to join me. Salino and Nakago began to talk as he brought his Right-Hand up to date and the female vampire from before led us up to the rooftop where Salino's pilot and helicopter were waiting. We ended up meeting Shi in the elevator and I quickly began explaining the situation. There was a female vampire waiting outside, fully dressed in combat gear, gun and sword included.

"I could take her," Shi boasted.

I chuckled. "Of course, you could." I had nothing but confidence in my females.

Adrian paused as he stared at the thing with an expression a child had when they saw Santa Claus at the mall and weren't sure they wanted to get any closer.

"Are you scared?" I asked him.

"A—a little. I've never been on one before."

I smiled. "They're fun. Come on."

The female vampire's gaze took us in. "I will be accompanying you to Damon's, but I'm not allowed off the copter," she said.

"Territory issues, I know. That won't be a problem. Shi will stay with you," I said. Because I was also breaching Damon's territory with a shifter.

My vampire guard opened the helicopter door and gestured for us to get in. Shi climbed in first and settled down. I handed her the bag with our supplies for the spell, then climbed in next. Adrian slipped his hand into mine and I helped him inside. It was that level of trust that just made me want to give him the world. We settled in and buckled up. I hoped we could return before Kakashi arrived.

## Chapter Six

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**T**HE HELICOPTER BLADES WHIPPED the wind up around us and I could hear how loud it all was even with the doors closed. It was a luxurious aircraft with Cherrywood paneling, plush, cream-colored leather seating, and even a bar. But I was still too nervous to really enjoy my surroundings. I gripped Sage’s hand as the thing began to ascend and he laughed softly and pulled me closer. Well, as close as my seatbelt would allow.

“My helicopter is a lot like this one, only it has black leather seating,” Sage said.

“You have a helicopter too?” I asked.

He nodded, then kissed the top of my head. He unbuckled his seatbelt and leaned over so he could get closer to me. “We haven’t had a long time to get to really know each other, have we?”

I shook my head and smiled. “And yet, it doesn’t feel like it matters. I love you, Sage, and I know you love me too. If we

get past all of this, we'll have—well, apparently—eternity to get to know everything there is to know about each other.”

“I feel like I already know you, though. I may not know what your favorite cereal or cartoon was as a kid—”

“It was Peanut Butter Captain Crunch and the Loony Toons was one of my favorite cartoons,” I answered, accidentally cutting him off in my nervousness and excitement.

He laughed. “What about now?” Oh man, he was so damn gorgeous and even his laugh was sexy.

I smiled. “I still love cartoons. Even the Loony Toons, but I also love anime and more adult cartoons as well. And though I don't mind Captain Crunch, it just doesn't compare to Cinnamon Toast Crunch as the king of all cereals to me these days.”

“Oh, I concur. I love the Crunch, too—Cinnamon, that is. And animation... all kinds. And Daffy is my favorite Loony Toon,” he confessed.

I beamed at him because it was another thing we had in common. “Mine too!”

Shi smirked. “And here I was thinking you were going to say Tweedy Bird was your favorite.”

I looked at her. “Why, because he's supposed to be some goody-two shoes?”

She nodded. “Thought you'd be able to relate.”

“I don’t even know him, but even I can tell he probably hates that little bitch. Naw, this one likes the bad boys. Sylvester, right?” MB speculated.

I rolled my eyes, but thought about it. It was true. I never liked any of the characters that were supposed to be the good guys. I laughed. “You’re right. Give me all the villains. I just found them more interesting.”

“You’re not wrong,” Sage agreed, and he brought my hand up to his mouth and kissed the back of it. “You know, I’m really happy that you’re immortal now. I don’t think I’d ever want to live my life without you.”

Aww, if that wasn’t the sweetest thing anyone had ever said to me. I felt my heart swell almost to the point where I thought it would burst from my chest. Gross if it actually happened, but it was how much I loved him as well. My feelings for Sage were all-consuming. I leaned over and kissed him for all I was worth, but broke it off with a yelp when the helicopter shook.

Sage burst into laughter. “Just turbulence, baby.”

“I don’t think I like flying in a helicopter,” I said.

“Just relax. Let’s check out the sights. Look at the city from this amazing view,” Sage said, and pointed at the window I had been trying to avoid.

“You should call Damon and let him know we’ll be there soon.”

“I’ll text instead,” Sage replied, then pulled his cell out and his fingers got to moving over the screen.

While he did that, I did muster my courage to look out the window. He was right, it was a beautiful view and the city was lit up with vibrancy and life. I did wonder, what would it look like in a week if we couldn't stop the Dark God? I didn't want to think about a future where humanity had no hope. Everything we did from this point on had to be moving toward preserving our life and our world as it was.

“Okay, he is waiting. We'll go to his house first, then to the other locations. Most are close to his home except for one which is on the border of his territory. That's about twenty to thirty minutes by car,” Sage said. “I also told him to have a team ready to protect you while you do those spells.”

“Does he have a helicopter too, or does he expect Adrian to drive to all of those locations?” Shi asked Sage.

Sage nodded. “I'll ask him.” He began texting again, this time it looked like there was some back and forth. “He has one and he's offered to let you use it to travel his territory faster.”

“I guess he would have one. Most rich people do, right?” I asked. Of course, I wasn't all that thrilled to learn that he did have one. I didn't want to say it out loud, but I would have preferred to drive—hell, even walk instead of having to get inside another helicopter. And next time, I wouldn't even have Sage with me.

Sage shrugged. “Some. Most rent when needed. I have more than enough money to afford the luxury of having my own. My own plane, I actually have two, my own yacht, and my own helicopter.”

“You have another plane and a yacht?” I asked. I thought it was just the one that we took to Florida. Had no idea Sage had two.

He nodded. “The one you know about is my personal private jet. Then I have one that’s big enough to fit over two hundred members of my pride. I also have several properties, one on forest land where we hunt on full moons.”

“I want to see it all,” I said, because I loved learning more about Sage.

He nodded. “You will. I want to share everything I am and everything I have with you.”

I tried to face him, but my seatbelt kept me restrained, so I unbuckled it to turn in my seat to face him. I reached up, caressing his face. “If we survive this battle, I’m never letting you go. I want to share my entire life with you.”

“I’m not letting anything get in our way,” he said.

“Sage,” was all I could say. I climbed into his lap, kissing him more passionately than I had when I was drunk on lust from drinking Salino’s blood. I ground my ass over his hard cock and we both moaned in pleasure. I kissed him all over his face. “I love you... so... fucking much,” I said between kisses to his forehead, cheeks, nose, and chin, then I glued my lips to his once more. My tongue slipped inside his hungry mouth and we kissed like there was no tomorrow.

“We’ll be arriving in three minutes,” our pilot said.



I pulled back because, for that moment, I'd forgotten we were in a helicopter going to Damon's home, and that we weren't alone. All I could focus on was Sage. My dick was poking a tent in my sweats, but I forced myself back into my seat and strapped in.

Sage was panting hard, as was I, because we were just that into each other.

I felt the heat rising in my cheeks and knew that I had to be blushing like crazy. I couldn't even look MB or Shi in the eye... not yet at least.

Sage chuckled as he brushed the back of his hand over my red cheek. "You're adorable."

I sucked my teeth and sighed, because I couldn't help but be a little embarrassed. I mean, had that pilot not said anything, who knows what I would have done. "You could have stopped me."

His smile was wicked. "And why would I ever do that?"

The heat in my face went up a few notches and he laughed again, before kissing me. His lips calmed me as they claimed me, and I was lost in him once again.

Sage pulled back and adjusted his pants as his own erection began to subside. "The first chance we get to have some alone time, I'm going to tear your ass up... again," he said.

I grinned at him. "You better. I'm yours." We'd had sex only a little while ago, but it didn't matter. I could never get enough of Sage.

He growled and the sound sent vibrations throughout my entire body. I couldn't see a future without Sage in my life. Like him, I didn't even want to imagine such turmoil. No, this was our chance at happiness and I wasn't going to let vampire emperors or Dark Gods get in our way.

“Well, I wasn't expecting to see that kind of show,” MB said with a smirk.

“Please don't tell me you're the bashful type,” Shi teased her.

MB snorted. “Not a word I've ever heard to describe me.” The look she gave Shi was almost challenging.

Shi gave her a shady side-eye, but remained silent.

If I didn't know any better, it would seem like the two of them were having their own pissing contest. Now, even I had to wonder who'd win in a fight between them. Considering I'm biased, my money was on Shi.

The copter landed and only Sage and I climbed out as the blades slowed their rotation. I still kept my head ducked low as we made our way over to Damon and his two bodyguards. It did surprise me to see that he had been the one to greet us on the rooftop. Once inside, he began to speak.

“I have one of those things you warned me about. Well, it's actually one of my former griezels,” Damon said.

My heart leaped into my throat and my pulse quickened. “Oh my god, you found one?” I asked, keeping pace with him.

He nodded. "I have teams of my best hunters out on search and destroy missions. I did want one alive, but according to reports, it was far too difficult to bind him. He had his griezels abilities and whatever else he gained after being turned. Very troubling. It took four of my best to take him down. After that encounter, I ordered everyone to the safe houses. I can't risk any of my griezels being turned."

Hell no, not if it took four of his best to take one out! "Can we see it?"

"Did any of your griezels get bitten by it?" Sage asked. He was right beside me as we walked to wherever Damon was taking us. He had the bag I'd be taking with me to Damon's other locations.

Damon nodded. "One, and he's in quarantine. I need you to see if he's infected and if he is, can you help him?"

"Shit, we don't even know how to stop what this is that's infecting them. This isn't like some disease that a spell could cure. This Dark God is creating a new type of supernal. For all we know, there may be no reversal. At this point, all of our attention needs to be on the source, and getting rid of it," Sage said.

Damon's jaw tightened, which clearly displayed his agitation, but he gave Sage a small nod. "What do you need to perform the barrier spell?" he asked, moving on.

"It's your lucky day, Damon. We'll be performing the same spell on your home as we did on Salino's, but just this location."

“Since I’ll be doing the barrier spells on your other houses, to cut down on time, please have your people prepare these ingredients,” I said, then listed the things I’d need to put the previous barrier spell we recently had on our home on Damon’s other safe houses. Simple items that were related to the property, like soil.

“Why not do the same spell for all of my locations?”

“Well, for one thing, we don’t have any more Dobinger Ash, which is necessary to seal the magic into the sigil. For another, it takes a lot out of us, even if we could get the ingredients, and we still have other spells to work tonight. Don’t worry, the spell that I’ll use is also very powerful. We trust it, and it’s better than having no protection at all, which is what you have now,” I said.

“Very well,” Damon said, then turned to the griezels to his right and rattled off the order. She nodded, then headed off down another hallway with her cell in her hand. “We’re here,” he said, then opened the door. He motioned for us to enter.

“You first,” Sage said.

Damon scoffed, but entered first. “As you can see, it’s quite dead.”

Laying on a table in the middle of a room that looked like it was made for torture lay one of those creatures I’d seen in the vision. Its chest had been split open as there was an autopsy in progress. There was a griezels in scrubs and protective gear poking around inside the chest cavity. The three of us stepped closer and Damon began to explain more.

“Leonel barely resembles himself, his features are... distorted. So little of him is left. They found him skulking around his home, about a half mile from it. That tells me he was trying to stay in familiar territory. A little bit of who he was, his memories, I mean, were still there, but according to my griezels, he was like a savage beast as they fought. Fast, his mouth is full of jagged sharp teeth.” Damon looked at his doctor or medical examiner, or whatever the griezel was. “Explain what you’ve discovered.”

The griezel nodded. “Yes, my Liege.” He looked at Sage and me, then back at the corpse. He used tools to open the mouth and that was when I saw all of the razor-sharp, jagged teeth inside. I couldn’t imagine the pain one would feel being bitten by that thing. “These teeth are still forming,” the griezel said. Then he pointed to one tooth that was a fully formed fang, then to another that was crooked, but was still growing in, pushing the old tooth out of the way. That explained a lot.

“Fucking thing is horrible,” Sage said as he peered down at it.

I looked at the corpse and tried to keep my food from earlier down, but I noted what the insides looked like as the griezel doctor explained what he’d discovered. I was impressed that Damon’s griezels were able to capture one of these things. I wasn’t going to touch it, but Sage was brave. He picked up two tools that were on a tray beside the table and fished around the inside, examining the organs as the doctor rattled off details.

“Those organs, as you can see, have atrophied. Griezels’ internal organs still function. We have waste, our bodies produce sperm, our blood still flows. Granted, not like a humans, or even shifters, but you get my point. With this thing, the only thing that works is the stomach. Everything else has or is in the process of shutting down,” the doctor stated.

“A true zombie, but a monstrous one,” I said. “God, it stinks.” The thing smelled like something that had been dead for a week while rotting in the hot sun.

“I can see why,” Sage said, wrinkling his nose. His sense of smell was even more acute than my own. I was surprised he wasn’t retching.

“According to my team, he smelled that way when they’d first encountered him,” Damon stated.

I looked back at the corpse. The thing was lethal and nightmare material if I ever saw one. Its skin was pale-ish gray, kind of sweaty looking. The hair had thinned and patches were missing from its scalp. Sage opened one of its eyes and it was black, the whole eye, not just the pupil. The thing gave me the chills and I shivered in fear and disgust. No telling how many more were out there and growing every minute. Jesus Christ, we really didn’t have a moment to waste.

It was a good thing that Kakashi had forced other mages to protect supernal homes. Humans becoming one of these things was bad enough, but a supernal? We wouldn’t stand a chance. I mean, Salino said there were a million vampires, and we

were only able to protect the ones in Chicago. Who was protecting the others? The horniness I'd felt earlier was all gone and replaced with severe anxiety. My heart began to beat like a piston in my chest and the room felt hot as I struggled to take deep breaths.

Sage took hold of my shoulders, turning me to him, then lifted my face to his. "Breathe, baby. Just breathe," he said, and his calm tone helped me to center myself. "We're going to get through this, okay?" he asked as he nodded.

I mimicked his movement, nodding my head. "Yeah, we'll get through it." I hoped we would. Once we got back to Salino's, I planned to scour the grimoire looking for any and every spell to help us prevent what was happening and what might be coming.

I took a deep breath, shook myself off, and then turned to face Damon, who was studying us in silence. "What about the one that was bitten?"

He gave a curt nod. "Follow me."

We did just that as he led us down on the elevator to what looked like a prison. It reminded me of the one in Sage's tower. Wow, it was so crazy for me to think I lived and worked in a luxurious skyscraper with a jail and torture chamber in it. My life was wild, but it was what I wanted, because I would forever be with Sage. As we were walking, one of Damon's griezels ran up to us, stopping our pace.

"What is it?" Damon asked. I had to admit, I thought his Greek accent was sexy as hell and he had a very commanding

presence about him. You could tell he was the king.

“It’s Daniel... he’s... he’s changing,” the griezels stammered in his flustered state. He was sweating and breathing hard and I knew it was simulated breathing. They didn’t need to breathe, but almost every griezels I’d ever met did because it felt natural to them, as they were all once human.

“Fuck,” Damon cursed and began walking toward the holding cell at a faster pace, and Sage and I followed. He burst into the room, and behind the cell was a griezels definitely in the state of turning into whatever the hell that other thing was. Damon approached the locked cell, but stayed far enough away so he couldn’t be attacked through the bars. “Daniel... are you still with me?”

Daniel twitched sporadically and gripped the bars with fingers that looked like talons with black nails. He hissed and stuck his tongue out, licking the bar. The pupil and iris of his eyes were black, but there was still a tiny bit of white. Didn’t make his eyes look less creepy, though. His mouth was open and I could see jagged fangs growing in. Also, his hair was thinning and there was so much of it on the floor of the cell along with his teeth. Clumps of his scalp were still attached to the strands. That explained the raw patches of skin on his head. Though the blood wasn’t flowing, as if it had already congealed. There was also a smell like decaying flesh emanating from him. The same scent that was on the corpse. I thought it was just because it was dead, but apparently not. That was just how they smelled. Revolting.



“How long has he been like this?” Damon asked.

“It... it just started to happen. I mean, he was sick at first, shaking and puking... then he passed out. But he still looked the same. He woke up ten minutes ago and started hissing and growling. He pulled at his hair, and it was just coming off with some of his scalp. That’s when I ran to get you, sire,” the griezels said.

“Are you sure he passed out and didn’t just die, then was resurrected as this fucking thing?” Sage asked. “I know when you sleep, you don’t breathe, but can you tell?”

“I see you know so very little about griezels, Sage. Didn’t I tell you our bodies function a lot like humans?” Damon’s gaze was on my lover.

Sage huffed. “I didn’t think dead things needed to breathe,” he retorted.

Demon scoffed. “I’ll ignore your insult and ignorance. We do breathe, our hearts beat, but at a slower pace. It’s enough to blend in with humans. Do you think we would have been able to co-exist with them if we couldn’t pass even a little?” Damon asked.

Okay, so I was wrong. Learned something new every day.

“Fine, but you don’t need to breathe, right?” Sage asked. I was glad he did, because I wanted to know.

Damon nodded. “That is true, but it still comes naturally to us and is beneficial for us when we do. It keeps our blood flowing and skin warm.”

Okay, so I was still kind of right, and now I knew even more about griezels.

Damon went on. “In any case, you did ask a valid question. What did the monitors say?” He turned to his panicked griezel, awaiting his reply.

The griezel swallowed hard, then spoke. “At first, he was responsive and answered the questions I asked him. But right before he got sick, he said that it hurt and that he felt cold. I figured once he woke up, maybe he’d be better, but that didn’t happen.”

“And when he collapsed, did his vitals stop?” Damon asked.

“I... I didn’t notice... I just walked over to the cage to see,” the griezel admitted.

Damon snarled and was quick with his backhand across the griezel’s face, knocking him to the floor. “I do not tolerate incompetency. Now, check the feedback.”

I saw the blood on the griezel’s lip, it was darker than mine, thicker too. But it didn’t look congealed like I thought it would. Like the corpse on the slab in the laboratory. The griezel nodded and apologized, and rose to his feet, then ran over to the computer monitoring station. I didn’t know Damon at all, but his looks were very deceiving. He didn’t appear to be someone who could put a griezel nearly twice his size in his place, but he had. His whole vibe screamed ruler. I thought it best not to say anything about his display of violence. Sage certainly didn’t seem to mind. Instead, I waited to hear the results of the monitor.

“When he went down, his vitals flatlined, my Liege,” the griezelsaid, then looked up from the monitor with a terrified expression. I couldn’t be sure what was driving his fear. Damon’s anger at his incompetence, or the fact that he just witnessed his own kind being killed and then turned into a monster. One that had no conscious, no remorse, no reasoning.

“This is very disturbing. We don’t get sick and will heal from any injury. This... whatever it is, it’s powerful enough to infect and kill a griezelsaid, then transform one in less than two hours. That’s how long he’s been in that cell,” Damon said.

“He would have turned instantly, I think, had he been drained of his blood and killed,” Sage said. “At least now, we know even their bites can fuck us up.”

“Holy fucking shit,” I gasped and ran my fingers through my hair. I looked at Sage and he was as concerned as I was by the worried frown on his face. “I’m so happy you called all of your pride to the tower.”

Sage nodded. “Protecting what is mine goes without saying.” He took his cell out and started texting someone.

“Checking on Nadia and everyone?” I asked.

“I will. First, I want to tell Salino to get all of his vampires to safety,” Sage said.

Yeah, that was a good idea. Salino had wanted to catch one of those things. Now, he didn’t need to and it was best if all of his vampires were under lockdown.

“He agreed. I’m glad he didn’t put up a fight,” Sage said. “I’m texting Nadia now.”

“Good,” I said, relieved. Of course, if Salino was trying to avoid losing any vampires to Emperor Martin’s, that was smart too. That was if he was under attack. I guess I’d find out when I got back.

Damon sighed. “I’d hate to see what kind of monstrosity a shifter or vampire being turned into one of these things would be.”

“Something we both agree on,” Sage said.

“Can he get out of there?” I asked, pointing to the thing in the cell because it was no longer a griezels. It was something we didn’t have a name for.

Damon shook his head. “Those bars are reinforced to contain a vampire Salino’s age. I’m confident it will hold him.”

I seriously doubted any vampire could be contained there since I knew about their abilities to turn into mist. One of their best-kept secrets, and one Sage had yet to figure out how to do. I wondered if he could since he was a hybrid. In any case, if those bars were that strong, maybe they’d be able to keep Daniel trapped.

“Continue to record everything and don’t leave him alone, call for assistance,” Damon ordered.

The griezels bowed his head. “Yes, my Liege.”

Damon turned to us. “So, do you think you can save him?” He held his hand up when Sage opened his mouth to speak. “I

know that you told me that curing them isn't your priority. But I just want to know if it could be possible. I'd hate to kill him if there is a way."

I looked back at the—whatever it was—in the cell and shrugged. "I don't know. We'd have to look into our grimoire. Like you said, griezels don't get sick, so I'm not even sure there's a spell that can cure him. And Sage... well... all of his spells are rooted into pretty much fucking people up." When I said that, Sage chuckled.

"If there is a cure, it would be either Adrian or both of us to do it," Sage said. "But I wouldn't get your hopes up. For all intent and purposes, that thing in there is dead. I don't even think it has a soul anymore. If it's like that corpse, its insides are already rotting away, which would explain the smell. Killing him may be the more merciful option."

Damon sighed. "Thank you for your honesty. I agree, I don't think he can be saved, but I will keep him here all the same. You never know."

Sage was blunt, but he wasn't wrong. I didn't know of any spell that could bring back the dead. At least, not yet. And still, we had bigger worries than just saving Daniel.

"If you do happen to find something, what would you need?" Damon asked.

I shrugged. "Could be blood, flesh, something personal, or nothing at all. We won't know anything until we study our book. And that can't happen until we get back to it after we're done putting up all of these barriers."

Damon frowned but nodded. “I understand. Very well, let’s get it over with. I can’t risk my griezels being attacked.”

“None of us can,” I agreed.

“We need to draw a sigil on the floor, so do you have an open space,” Sage told him.

“Will the underground garage do?” Damon asked.

I shook my head, then explained to him how the barrier worked. Of course, he had all the same questions Salino had and once Sage and I answered them, he was good to go.

Damon nodded and motioned for us to follow him to a room that was his gym. Mats were on the floor, workout and fighting equipment was all around, as well as a ring where I was sure plenty of sparring happened. “You can do it here, lift up that mat,” he said and pointed to a large mat.

We did tell him the sigil would disappear, but it really was his decision where he wanted the sigil to be. Sage and I began the barrier. Damon gave us his blood, Sage and I added our own, did the chant, and Damon watched as we worked the spell. Once complete, the magic washed over us and I saw Damon shiver from the sensation.

“Is it done?” he asked.

“Yes, it’s in place now. Do you have my protection guard available, because we have to go,” I asked. I thought about just how much more we had to do tonight. Sage still had to protect Salino’s other safe houses, just like I was doing for Damon, then we both had to get back to Salino’s main home to meet up

with Kakashi and apparently plan to kill every vampire emperor alive save Salino. On top of that, find a way to defeat a fucking Dark God.

“I’ve texted my people and they are awaiting your arrival. They also have everything you requested for the spells,” Damon said.

“Good. The Council is having mages safeguard the homes of supernals the world over. That’s how serious this is,” I said.

“Getting back to what Adrian asked. What about his protection detail?” Sage asked.

Damon held up a finger. “I have two of my griezels who will accompany him.”

“Four,” Sage countered, his gaze never leaving me.

Damon sighed and nodded. “Four it is.”

“I don’t want you to go anywhere without them, do you hear me?” Sage asked me.

I nodded. “Don’t forget, I am not helpless.”

He scoffed. “And neither am I, and yet you still insisted on making sure I had backup. Turnabout is fair play.”

“I won’t argue with you,” I said.

“Damn right, you won’t.” Sage winked.

I rose on my toes and kissed the lips that kept me mesmerized. My man was so beautiful and strong... and wicked. Of course, the fact that he was a dark mage didn’t

bother me like it did when we'd first met. It was just who he was and I loved all of him.

“Let's take care of business,” Sage said.

I nodded. I couldn't even imagine how many humans were being attacked all over the world. And if they could turn into one of those things in the span of two hours, the world wouldn't last three more days.

Sage kissed me again, then turned to Damon. “I don't think I need to issue any threats.”

Damon rolled his eyes. “No, you don't. I have a vested interest in keeping him alive. Anyway, do you know why this is happening?”

I looked at Sage and he looked at me. I certainly didn't want to tell him that he'd lost two griezels because a spell we performed had unleashed a Dark God into our world.

“We're not sure, that's why we joined the Echelon Imperial. We want to end this as fast as possible,” Sage said, which took the pressure off of me.

“So, you're now a part of the High Council of Arrogant Mages... as if you weren't already insufferable,” Damon remarked.

“You're welcome for your barrier spell,” Sage shot back.

“It's the least you could do,” Damon said.

Sage frowned. “Meaning?”



“You tell me?” Damon’s gaze didn’t falter as he stared Sage down.

“You know something I don’t?” Sage asked.

“I know when I’m being lied to,” Damon said. “Between you and Salino, you’re both hiding something.” He tapped his lips with a manicured finger. “I wonder what it could be? Did one of your spells backfire?” he asked, an eyebrow cocked.

“Like I said, we don’t know. In any case, I have shit to do and so does Adrian,” Sage said.

I watched the tense exchange take place between my man and the Griezels King, and I felt it was best to let them work it out. They were obviously feeling each other out, and if it helped me avoid having to confess, then I was on board.

Damon sighed and turned to me. “My helicopter is waiting.”

Immediately, my stomach clenched up and my heart began to race, because I wasn’t looking forward to riding in another helicopter and this time, I wouldn’t have Sage to distract me. “I can take the car.”

“I thought time was of the essence?” Damon asked. “Traveling by helicopter will decrease your time exponentially.”

“It’s going to be okay, baby,” Sage said.

I whined a little because I wasn’t looking forward to it. “Yeah, I know... I just don’t like it.”

“Don’t worry, I have the perfect traveling companion for him,” Damon said. “Shall we?” He walked off and began chatting on his cell phone, ordering the team who’d accompany me to his other locations.

Sage was at my side, my hand in his. My body was tired, and all I wanted to do was rest up with a nice little nap. But I knew I couldn’t. Just how long was this night going to be?

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We got to the rooftop and there were four griezels waiting by a black and gold helicopter. I was certain that it was just as luxurious as Salino’s was. The four griezels bowed to Damon, then opened the door.

“Sage handed me the duffle bag and I took it. “You don’t need anything from here?” I asked.

He shook his head. “No, I have Salino’s blood and his vampires prepared the rest for when I get to each house.”

I nodded.

“Adrian, you’ll be in good hands with my attack squad,” Damon said, then went on to introduce each member. “David, Trevor, Devonte, and Lexy.”

I looked at each one and they appeared as badass as one would think an attack squad would look like. Frankly, they seemed like some mercenaries about to go on a kill mission. I could admit, they made me feel a bit safer, especially since I

couldn't have Sage by my side. Also, I had to remember that I was very powerful these days myself, with the boost I got from the spell linking me to Salino. I said my pleasantries and kissed Sage goodbye, then climbed on the helicopter. The others climbed on with me, Trevor, Devonte, and David sat opposite me, while Lexy sat next to me.

“Don't worry, if we go down, I'll jump out with you before we crash and burn,” Lexy said.

I looked at her, my eyes wide. “Why would you say that?”

She laughed. “My king told me to put you at ease.”

I looked at Damon as the helicopter's blades began to rotate and saw the sly smile on his face. The son of a bitch. I looked out the other window to see Sage climbing into Salino's copter with ease. He was so brave... hell, about everything. Made me wonder if he feared anything because he always seemed to keep a leveled head during some pretty serious situations. I took a deep breath and settled as comfortably as I could in the seat and buckled up.

Trevor laughed, but he didn't buckle up. “Don't worry. Our king told us to protect you with our lives.” He winked and that did put me at ease. He was also pretty handsome, and according to what Sage had told me, the Griezels King was vain. He had a habit of picking beautiful humans to turn and this lot proved that to be true. They were all model quality.

Lexy reached over, taking my hand into her own as the helicopter lifted. “Just breathe... do you want Trevor to suck your dick to help you relax?”

I scoffed. “No! I’m with Sage.”

Trevor shrugged. “I don’t mind. I mean, you’re pretty hot. I bet you look so sexy busting that nut.”

“Oh yeah, probably whimpers when he comes,” the one called Devonte said, then winked and flicked his tongue out at me.

“Okay, this is what we’re not going to do. I don’t want to be flirted with. And if you don’t want my very possessive boyfriend to take offense, I’d stop right now,” I warned.

The group began to laugh and talk shit to each other, and I realized they were just fucking with me. It took my mind off of the fact that I was flying and before I knew it, I did feel more relaxed. Clever griezels.

I sighed. “Okay, where to first?” I asked.

“Our second largest safe house, then the other two,” Lexy said.

“It won’t take me long to do the barrier spells,” I said.

“Good.” Trevor popped some gum into his mouth, and then offered me some. I took a cube of the fruity gum.

“So, were you the crew who trapped that... thing?”

Trevor’s smile faded and he nodded. “Yeah, that’s why we were chosen. We’ve already had a run in with one of those things. It was the first time in my life... I was afraid. That thing was strong as hell and fast. I didn’t even know that it

could turn us by biting, but I just knew I didn't want to get bitten."

"The only good thing is we only lost two of our kind. With this lockdown, we're hoping to save the rest of us," Lexy said.

I nodded because I really wanted to keep them protected. "In a little while, you can all stay safe. This is something I think only the Council can take care of."

"You won't find me arguing about that," Trevor said.

"Magic made them, and it should be what takes them out," Devonte said.

I looked at the griezels who'd been silent the whole time, David. "And what are your thoughts?"

He looked at me, his expression unreadable and the scar going down his face made him look even more menacing. "I'll do whatever my king commands. If he wants me to fight, I'll fight. If he wants me to stay put, I'll do that."

A man of little words.

"How much longer?" I asked.

"ETA five minutes," Lexy said.

"Good. The sooner I can get these barriers set up, the better." I continued to look out of the window, and this time, I allowed myself to enjoy the breathtaking view. I did wonder just how deadly Sage's barriers would be. I hadn't seen them in action. Still, nothing was more hardcore than the one we could make together. I felt relief knowing at least Salino, Damon, and our

home had that level of protection. As my mind drifted, I became curious about what Kakashi would want from Salino and what they would need to perform that spell made for three dark mages.

Maybe it was best that I didn't know.

## Chapter Seven

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I FELT THE VERY moment I'd lost two of my vampires. Now that I was linked to every vampire of my line, I could feel when the link was severed. I didn't know if they were dead in the traditional sense, or if they'd been turned into one of those things the Dark God created. I'd been in telepathic contact with Sage and knew that he'd completed putting barriers on all of my safe houses and in the nick of time, as Emperor Martin's army had breached my territory looking for their ruler. I ignored them because they couldn't get in anyway. And there was nothing I could say to them that would appease them. The only one who could tell them to leave was Jude, and he was still frozen like a statue and sealed in the throne room. Last I checked, which was almost an hour ago, I counted three hundred so far. No doubt, thinking I was a coward, but I didn't give a damn what they thought. It wasn't them I was protecting my homes from anyway.

“How much longer until Sage and Adrian get back?” Nakago asked me.

“Hopefully, soon.” I walked out onto my balcony, and looked down. “*Mon Dieu!*” I gasped.

“What?” Nakago asked, then rushed to join me, looking over the balcony. “Holy shit. Is that them?”

“Yes,” I whispered as I gazed in shock at the sight of dozens of monsters surrounding the vampires. They were as Sage had described them. Hideous and terrifying. The vampires were huddled together, keeping their distance and it appeared to be a barrier keeping the two separated. Was it my barrier?

“It’s so many,” Nakago said, a frown on his face as he watched the scene below.

I shook my head. “This is just the beginning. We knew this was coming... why we prepared.” There were at least a hundred of them trying to break through the barrier.

“Is our barrier keeping them at bay?” Nakago asked because Jude’s vampires weren’t being attacked, just stalked by the creatures.

“I don’t know,” I said and continued to look on. There was a chorus of yells and panicked threats coming from the vampires who looked to be trapped between my home and an invisible barrier keeping them safe from the creatures.

My vampires who were inside began to contact me, letting me know about the monsters. I told them to remain calm, that our barrier would keep us protected. I sent the message out to all of my vampires so that they would remain calm.



One of the monsters tried to grab a vampire, who jumped away, but the monster was blasted back by the power of whatever had protected those vampires. That barrier Adrian and Sage put up was mighty if it worked this way.

“Looks like the barrier is doing its job,” Nakago said after seeing the results of the barrier.

The monsters couldn't climb my building either. When they tried, they were burned as if by electricity. Unfortunately, it didn't kill them, but they were learning not to try to get into my home, or attack the vampires trapped. Suddenly, I heard Sage's voice in my mind. He contacted me to let me know he'd be here soon. I turned to face my child, my favorite child, to be honest.

“Sage is on his way.”

“Good, having so many unwanted and uninvited bastards in our territory is making me very angry. I want to kill them all,” Nakago said.

I nodded, because it was our instinct. We were predators, after all, and protecting what belonged to us was how we survived. If all went to plan, even those vampires who'd gathered outside to attack me and mine would also belong to me if the spell could be performed. Time would tell. Nakago wasn't the only one feeling anxiety. I didn't fear death, but I didn't court it either. I wished the other emperors could have just left me the hell alone.

“It looks like we're all safe, at least for now.” I sighed and walked away from my balcony and over to my sofa, settling

down.

Nakago lingered a bit longer, observing what was happening below. Once he was satisfied that the monsters couldn't harm us, he stepped back into my office and looked at me. "Those things are creepy. I want to kill them so badly."

"Me too, but Sage was right. It's best that we stay safe until the Echelon Imperial can deal with the matter."

Nakago nodded. "At least I don't think any more of Jude's vampires will be coming."

I nodded. "Do you agree with me... about killing all of the other emperors?" I asked Nakago, because I valued his council.

He took a seat in the chair opposite me. "Yes, they've left you no choice."

"I didn't know that by severing the line, I would stop all vampires from gaining more power. I think if that hadn't happened, they wouldn't care that I'd killed Lord Barron," I said.

"Hell, I'm not going to lie, that kind of stung. No telling what powers we would have been granted after the ritual, but I totally understand why you had to stop it. I was with you one hundred percent," Nakago said.

I snorted and smiled. "Vampires are powerful enough, in my opinion."

"They see you as a selfish traitor."

I nodded. “Because I am. I doomed not only my kind, but apparently the entire world with my actions.”

Nakago shook his head. “But you didn’t know.”

I gave him a sad smile. “I... I knew something bad would happen. Magic that powerful never came without a hefty price. For centuries, I tried to get mages to help me, and they all refused. They all warned me that it was dangerous, but no one ever told me why. I figured whatever the danger was, I would pay the price. Even if it was my life. When Sage became my child, I saw it as a sign. Finally, I had a mage who couldn’t deny me. And through him, I also had Adrian.”

“I still don’t blame you, Salino. You were trying to save your brother. Family has always been important to you. And, let’s be honest, having all vampires linked to you, having to obey your edicts, it’s a risk Adrian was willing to take anyway. This wasn’t solely on you, Sage and Adrian wanted to help,” Nakago said.

“True,” I agreed. “And speaking of my lovelies, they’re nearby.” I could sense Adrian too. He was mine, but not in the same way that Sage was.

“Glad they’re back so we can get to the bottom of this shit,” Nakago said, then rose.

My sentiments exactly. I shivered as a sensation passed through me, and Nakago arched an eyebrow.

“What’s wrong?” he asked me.

“They lowered the barrier so that their helicopters could land. I sense Shi and four other supernals—griezels.”

“The barrier tells you the species of who enters?” Nakago asked.

I nodded. “It does and I like that,” I explained. Not even a minute passed before I felt the sensation again but it wasn’t like it was the first time the barrier was put in place. Not as acute and I wondered why. “The griezels are gone now and the barrier is back in place.”

“Do you think any of those things got inside while it was down?”

“No, I would have felt their intrusion.”

“Ahh, I see. Interesting.” Nakago nodded.

Well, yes it was.

About five minutes passed before Sage and Adrian entered, and I realized it was purely Sage’s arrogance to refuse to knock before entering my office. I would have to work on that with him.

“I see you have a situation down below. I also received your message about it,” he said. “It’s maybe twenty of those things down there... and a couple hundred vampires too.” I could sense that he was very worried, but he didn’t show it.

“Most unfortunate, but at least your barrier is doing its job,” I said, then arched an eyebrow. “Twenty? It was at least a hundred before you arrived.”

“Did they try to get in?” Adrian asked and I could hear the how afraid he was.

I nodded. “They tried, but the barrier burned them or pushed them back.”

“Seems like they won’t stick around under those circumstances. Not when they can find more food elsewhere,” Sage said.

“Were you able to lower the barrier without fully disarming it?” I asked.

Sage nodded. “Yeah. Just long enough for our helicopters to drop us off. I didn’t want to leave the building vulnerable, not even for a second.”

That would explain why the sensation wasn’t the same as it was before. I see there was a lot I was going to have to learn about it.

Nakago snorted. “I bet those vampires wished they had stayed their asses at home.”

No doubt. “How is the barrier protecting them, though? Or is it just protecting them because I don’t think they’re the bigger threat?” I asked, because I still didn’t fully understand the functions of the barrier.

“I... I don’t think it’s our barrier doing that. I mean, at least not all of that l-like protecting the vampires,” Adrian said, his voice had a tremble in it. I could sense the terror that flowed through him. It was delicious on my tongue because I could feed off it, but I didn’t.

Sage walked over to him, hugging him. “It’s going to be okay, baby.”

Adrian tightened his hold around Sage. “I’m just glad they can’t get inside. Those things, even seeing a few, are terrifying. When I first saw them, I froze in fear. Looking at them feels like the end of the world.”

Adrian was definitely someone who didn’t hide his true feelings and wasn’t afraid to show vulnerability. I may have shared in his concerns, but as emperor, I couldn’t indulge. Couldn’t allow myself to be that open with my emotion. I had vampires who could taste and feed off fear and they didn’t need to feed off me. I had to be a pillar of confidence so that they would always obey me and have faith in me to protect them. I didn’t have Adrian’s luxury.

“So, if you don’t think it’s the barrier, what then?” I asked.

Sage shrugged. “Another mage’s spell maybe?”

“But whose?” Adrian asked.

Again, Sage shrugged.

I thought about that possibility, then nodded. “In any case, they can’t get in and that’s all that matters to me.” I leaned forward, resting my elbows on my knees, hands clasped. “Tell me more about the griezels you saw that had been turned,” I said. Moving the conversation along, I hoped would keep them focused.

Sage released his lover then sat down in the chair while Adrian remained standing. “According to Damon, It was less

than two hours after being bitten and infected. It got sick first, then died, and once it resurrected, it's hair came out, eyes were turning black. Its teeth fell out and sharper, jagged ones started growing in. We're talking ten minutes tops, all of this happened."

"Griezels are already resurrected dead," I said, not in a way to correct him, but in reflection.

Sage nodded. "Yeah, Damon was fucking creeped out about that shit too."

"I believe two of my vampires have been turned as well. I no longer feel a connection to them. At this point, I don't know who they are, but they are in my England territory, I could sense that much," I said.

"Do you know if the mages in England were able to protect your safe houses there?" Adrian asked, and as he did, I sensed his fear subsiding. He was focused on the mission now.

I smiled and nodded. "I have been in telepathic communications with my royal court. They have been protected. Wise move on the part of the Council."

"According to them, this is what they do. Damage control," Adrian said.

"Well, that's your job now, since you are both a part of the Council. And speaking of them, when is this member coming?" I asked.

Sage looked at his watch. "He should be here soon. So, what do you want me to do about that unruly crowd of vampires

surrounding this place?”

I smiled, because when Sage’s attitude wasn’t directed at me, I found it extremely sexy. “I don’t think there’s anything you need to do. They can’t get in and those monsters can’t attack them.”

“They’re all gone now,” Nakago said, looking over the balcony.

“Even the vampires?” I asked as I rose to walk over to him.

“No, they’re still there and they look like they’re trapped,” Nakago said.

Sage’s brows creased, he rose, and both he and Adrian walked out onto my balcony with me and looked over. It was true, the vampires below were punching and kicking at some invisible force that kept them confined. I was certain, that wasn’t my barrier for sure now.

“Good, we don’t need them running about free right now,” Sage said.

“Those monsters couldn’t feed on the vampires or get in. They figured that out, so they aren’t entirely mindless. They have rational thought,” I pointed out, seeing as how not one of them was present.

“Scary part is, if they can think for themselves, that makes them more dangerous,” Adrian said.

Seeing as the situation had changed for the better, even slightly, the four of us returned to my office. We settled back to where we were before, only this time, Adrian did sit down.



Sage pursed his lips before speaking. "I still want to know who was protecting the vampires from those monsters."

"I'd like to know as well. That barrier was very powerful," I agreed.

His cell rang and he looked down to see who it was. "It's Kakashi," Sage said, then answered. "Are you here?"

I listened because I was the curious type.

"I am, however, I'm waiting for Aldéric to bring the last ingredient."

"How long will that take?" Sage asked.

"Not much longer," Kakashi said. I could clearly hear his deep voice over the phone and wanted to see if his physical appearance matched the gravitas of his voice.

"If you're here, is sealing those vampires inside that invisible cage like mice your handiwork?" Sage asked.

"It is. Foolish lot that they are. They were warned of the dangers of being out, yet they have exposed themselves. The others have been locked inside their safe houses, so you shouldn't be expecting any more to arrive. I will call you again once I'm ready to enter. You will need to lower the barrier. As for these vampires, they are protected and once they are under Salino's control, they can enter. I will be in contact."

I heard the call disconnect and Sage grunted and then slipped his phone into his pocket. "Well, at least we know whose magic trapped those vampires."

“Saved them is more like it,” Adrian said.

I nodded. “Very fortunate that he took initiative. Regarding this spell, what can you tell me about it?”

Sage shrugged. “All I know is that it’s a dark spell.”

“So, therefore, it may require...” I let my voice trail off as my gaze shifted to Adrian, who was sitting there with a frown on his handsome face. I cocked an eyebrow and pointed at him. “You will not interfere,” I warned, because this spell was important. This wasn’t the time for his moral dilemma.

Adrian rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to. Sage has performed several dark spells and I haven’t interfered yet. I know that’s how his magic works. I’m not even going to ask what it all will entail just to pull off this spell for you tonight. I don’t want to know... ever.”

I nodded. “That’s wise. In this case, ignorance is bliss. Are you hungry?”

He blinked as if surprised I was concerned enough to ask him. “Yeah, but not for your blood. Just food.”

“Nakago, please give Adrian whatever he wants. Have it prepared to his preference,” I ordered.

“I’m on it,” Nakago said, then he walked to the door and motioned for Adrian to follow him.

Before he left, he turned to me. “I think I’ll stay away from all of you until that spell is done.”

Sage rose and walked over to him, taking him by his arms. “Are you sure you’re okay with me doing this?”

Adrian gave Sage a sigh and nod. “I know it needs to be done to make sure we all live. I just want it over with. Frankly, I don’t care about those other emperors with their panties in a twist because they can’t have more power. Fuck them. They have been terrorizing humans and killing decent vampires to appease the Dark God for thousands of years. If they can’t live and let live, then they have left us no choice. We have more pressing matters than their rage and thirst for petty vengeance.”

Well, hearing Adrian—of all people—say what he said, I began to understand him a lot more and why he and Sage were mated. Opposites attract, but there was something about the both of them. Adrian wasn’t all good, and Sage wasn’t all bad, so to speak. That was why they could be together and not judge each other the whole time. A perfect union and one that benefitted me greatly. I had no complaints about destiny’s choice.

Sage kissed his man. “Thank you.” Adrian nodded, then left with Nakago. Sage turned to me. “You’re one lucky son of a bitch.”

I smiled. “As are you.”

Sage chuckled, then looked down at his cell. “Kakashi and Aldéric are ready and need access. I can lower the barrier.”

“I’ll have one of my vampires greet them.”

“All right,” Sage said, then he closed his eyes.

It took only a few seconds, but I felt it when the barrier was lowered. Sage then texted the mages to let them know they could enter. I sensed a spark of energy that tingled throughout my body right before Sage put the barrier back up. I really loved this new security feature. I contacted Renate telepathically and told her to meet the mages and escort them to my office.

“I wonder what the hell this spell—Oh shit!” Sage jerked and jumped back.

I leaped from the sofa, and hissed, my fangs bared as two figures I’d never seen before in my life materialized in my office.

“Fuck, Kakashi,” Sage said, his chest heaving as he frowned at who I now knew were the mages I’d been expecting. Their presence reeked of arrogance that was common among extremely powerful mages. To be so bold as to invite themselves in my office this way instead of being escorted as any house guests would have been spoke volumes. Now, I was even more concerned about what they’d demand of me for this “favor”.

I retracted my fangs and adjusted my clothing, as I had been prepared to fight. The mages looked at Sage, humorous expressions on their faces.

“Soon, you’ll learned how to do that,” said one of the mages and by his French accent, I knew he wasn’t the mage I’d heard

on the phone, which meant the tall Japanese mage was the one named “Kakashi”.

“You almost got attacked,” Sage said.

Kakashi brushed his long, jet-black hair from his intense brown eyes and waved dismissively. “I wasn’t worried.” My goodness, did he have a presence that almost made me feel small. He radiated confidence and his beard and mustache made him look even more regal. He then turned to me and I watched as Sage rolled his eyes. It would seem that my youngest child may have met his match with someone more obnoxiously cocky than he was. “My name is Kakashi Okumra, the Magi-Grande of the Echelon Imperial.”

The other mage went next. “My name is Aldéric Garnier, a member of the Echelon Imperial,” he introduced, and he was quite beautiful as well. Long chestnut brown hair and eyes that held more mischief in them than I liked. By his French accent, I could tell he had a Southern Marseillais dialect, which had a cadence I enjoyed.

“I am Emperor Salino Laurant,” I stated.

Kakashi smiled. “No doubt a rank you enjoy.”

I winked. “I don’t hate it.”

Kakashi nodded, then made another dismissive gesture. “Allow me to skip past all of the appetizers and get right down to the entrée. You want to annihilate all of your enemies and bring their combined armies under your line. This can be done, but not without a price.”

“Magic’s Price... what’s the cost?” I asked.

He shook his head. “Not Magic, mine.”

“Oh?” I was equally intrigued and apprehensive.

He nodded. “The spell we will perform tonight will make you the sole emperor of all vampires. You will gain in strength to match a vampire that is as old as the original emperors. With a bargain like that, would you not acquiesce to whatever I demand in return?”

Well, I’d be lying if I didn’t say that wasn’t just the sweetest deal. “And what is it that you demand?”

Kakashi smiled. “Nothing that you won’t enjoy. See, I plan on sweetening the pot. But, in doing so, I will link myself and Aldéric to you. Therefore, we will also gain some powers of a vampire...” And then he smirked. “Without the dependency for blood.”

“Holy shit, you can do that?” Sage asked and stepped closer.

I was still trying to process what I was hearing to be shocked.

Kakashi nodded. “Very much so. But it will take the power of three dark mages and one being a vampire as well.”

“Ahh, I see.” Sage frowned as if he was struggling to put two-and-two together. “Wait a minute, what do you mean a dark mage who is also a vampire?”

It was a question I wanted answered also.

“Exactly what I said.” Kakashi cocked an eyebrow. “As you know, there was no way before for a mage to become a vampire and keep their powers. During the transformation, the link to magical elements is severed. Same with shifters or griezels. Once a mage became one, they were no longer a mage. You, Sage, defied the odds being born a shifter and a mage. An anomaly indeed. I searched my grimoire for every spell there was to make me immortal and the most I could do was extend my life. I am still very much human and what little resilience I have pales in comparison. That is our price for the magic power that we possess.”

“Why wait till now to act?” Sage asked.

Kakashi shrugged. “The pieces of the puzzle weren’t in place before.”

“Meaning?” I asked because I couldn’t help but feel like I’d been manipulated. And by the glare on Sage’s face, he may have been feeling the same way.

“You should just be grateful,” Aldéric stated, then sauntered over to my sofa and sat down as if he owned the place.

“I want only to hear from Kakashi because he’s the one I’m dealing with,” I snapped. Aldéric’s lip curled in agitation, but he remained silent. I turned from Aldéric back to the mage in question.

Kakashi looked past me to Aldéric, then back to me. “Let’s just say that I had a hand in why Sage is linked to you. As I’ve stated, not all magic has a price. The spell Adrian did to save

Sage's life using your blood was an opportunity that I could not pass up. Not if I wanted to achieve my goals."

"You son of a bitch," Sage growled, his fangs bared.

Kakashi snorted. "Oh, spare me the fake outrage. You've been living it up as a hybrid since the day you were turned. You love being a vampire, shifter, and mage. So, put the fangs away."

"Motherfucker," Sage retorted, but he did retract his fangs.

"So, you made it so that Sage was turned by my blood. What about Adrian?" I asked.

Kakashi shook his head. "Everything that happened that night, I had nothing to do with. At that time, your actions had been blocked by me." He winked at Sage. "Very smart, I might add. I was impressed. The sigils tattooed on your flesh, is that how?"

"Yeah, because you fuckers were too damn nosy," Sage said.

Kakashi chuckled. "The moment you both came into your powers, we felt it. Everyone on the Council. It was then that I started to watch what you did next. I saw when you were shot, and the spell Adrian was going to use. I prepared a spell of my own to link you to him because I needed a dark mage who was also a vampire to do the spell I want to do. I took a chance, not knowing if it would actually work. But considering you were already a shifter and mage, I had high hopes. "

"How come you didn't just do the spell Adrian did yourself?" Sage asked.



“I couldn’t. It’s a light mage spell that Adrian used, not to mention, it was a spell only known to him. Some magic is quite universal. And some, as you know... is specific to that particular mage,” Kakashi stated. “I needed my spell to corrupt his in order to link you to Salino.”

Sage snorted and shook his head. “You’re a real piece of work.”

“You’re not the only one with aspirations,” Kakashi said.

“How come you didn’t try to stop other mages from destroying our line?” Sage asked. “I mean, you almost missed your opportunity had I been killed.”

I didn’t interrupt, because I was just as intrigued and wanted answers to questions I didn’t even know existed. I let them talk.

Kakashi shrugged. “Well, for one thing, I wasn’t alive for a good portion of that. And when I realized who I was and the power I possessed, I did my part to protect you both until the day came when you came into your power. I had a vested interest in keeping you alive, remember.”

“What about Adrian’s family?” Sage asked.

“Honestly, I didn’t care. It wasn’t until I realized that his line was connected to yours that I began to intervene. I saved his grandmother, long enough for her to give birth, then for her daughter to do the same, until Adrian was born,” Kakashi said. “Then I protected him, as his mother lacked magical ability.”

“How?” Sage asked and he sat down in the chair to make himself comfortable.

Kakashi sighed and sat down beside Aldéric on the sofa. I decided to sit as well, because this conversation was more in-depth than I thought it would be.

“It wasn’t easy to find you, but when I did, I placed a spell on your birthmark to seal your identity from other mages. I did the same to Adrian’s grandmother until she was discovered. I also did it to Adrian when he was four. You don’t remember because I took on the guises of people you trusted. But that is what protected you... well, it did until you decided to ruin the seal with that very stylish tattoo over your birthmark,” Kakashi said, then waved. “Doesn’t really matter, I was going to remove my magic anyway since Adrian had come of age.”

“Why remove it?” Sage asked.

“Because it was time. The only way to get you and Adrian together was to let the magic do what it was meant to do. You were fated to meet, after all. Fated to be together. I had no idea you’d be shot with a magic bullet, or that Adrian would find a spell to save you the way he did. I would have intervened with a spell of my own to save you, but my spell would not have turned you into a vampire. It would have just been me using dark magic to counter the poison and cleanse it from your body. The spell Adrian used was exactly what I needed to get you into the place I needed you to be. And it was a spell that only Adrian knew. When he performed the spell, I cast a bit of

my own magic into it. That is how you became linked to Salino.”

Sage shook his head. “You are a devious son of a bitch.” He looked at Aldéric. “And what about you? What’s your part in all of this? What do you gain?”

“Immortality, strength, speed, and some of the abilities of a vampire... without having to cast spells. And quite frankly, we’re preparing to take on a fucking Dark God, one who is extremely powerful and it’s not anything any of us have experienced. I want all of the advantages that I can have in order to survive,” Aldéric said.

Well, I couldn’t fault that logic.

“As you can see, I’ve been doing you favors for a long time now,” Kakashi said.

Sage threw his head back and laughed. “Oh, go fuck yourself, Kakashi. Everything you’ve done has been for your own self-interest.”

“And yet, you have still benefited... you, Salino, and Adrian,” Kakashi said. “And here I am, willing to do you another favor. Should I not get something in return? Remember, you came to me with this dilemma.”

“So, you’re the reason why I’m a vampire, but not why Adrian is linked to Salino?” Sage asked.

Kakashi nodded. “Correct. What happened to Adrian was Magic’s Price. The Dark God being released was Magic’s Revenge. Now, we have a lot to do. You know what I want,

but let me tell you more.” He turned to me now. “Salino, in addition to becoming stronger, you will become immune to fire, you and every vampire. That should appease any vampire upset that they didn’t grow in power.”

Well, that did perk my interest. “And how will you do that?”

“Sage’s most lethal power is fire. He is linked to you. I can manipulate that so you’ll be protected from his power,” Kakashi said.

“This is all sounding too good to be true. What is the downside?”

“Well, if you do die, I am not planning on dying with you. Your link to the magic my power grants you after we perform this spell will die with you. It will be the end of vampirism. Every vampire will become human,” Kakashi said.

I rose then and walked over to the window, because what he said both excited me and terrified me. No longer would my life be linked to every vampire in a way that would protect me. If I die, vampires would just be human again. Some, I knew for certain would love that. Most, though, would detest the idea of being merely human, so that was the silver lining. If I accepted this spell to link me to all vampires, I’d be giving up the only security I truly had, but really, did I have a choice?

“I know what you fear,” Kakashi said and I turned to face him.

“Oh, and what do you think you know of my fears?” I asked him.

“You don’t like being vulnerable, but you already know you’re going to accept my price,” Kakashi said, and a chill ran down my spine at his accuracy.

“What you’re asking me to agree to... it is... unnerving,” I said.

“Well, that is the risk, however, you will be more powerful than any vampire alive. You will have the most powerful mages of the Echelon Imperial at your side. Anyone would be a fool to seek to do you harm,” Kakashi said.

“So, does this spell make everyone on the Echelon Imperial Council immortal?” I asked.

Kakashi shook his head. “Only Aldéric and I will gain in power.”

Sage laughed again. “Well, isn’t that just more of the same from you? Why not? Aren’t all of our powers linked? Aren’t we a team or some shit like that?”

“Did you not pay attention when I explained how our powers worked before? If one of us were to die, the Council would lose the link, but that is it. What happened to one of us, does not happen to all of us,” Kakashi explained.

“So, do they even know you two are up to this?” Sage asked.

“No,” Aldéric said with a wicked smile.

Sage smirked. “And why not? Is it because you know they’d disapprove?”

“I’m not fucking any of the other members of the Council. I don’t care if they approve of my actions or not. And since you’re so concerned about their approval, they would be against what I plan to do in order to guarantee our survival. Tell me, Sage, do you really give a fuck about the Council’s opinion when it comes to saving you and Adrian? Because right now, if Salino dies, so will you and Adrian.”

“You got me fucked up if you think I give a shit about any of you,” Sage said, then rose. “Let’s get this over with. I’m exhausted and we still need to take out the Dark God.”

“Fine with me,” Kakashi said, then looked at me.

I admit, my feelings were a little hurt when Sage said he didn’t give a shit about any of us. Did he also mean me? I figured we’d gotten past a lot of our distrust for each other. We’ve been through a lot. I decided to ask him telepathically.

*You can kiss my ass, but no... I do care about you... just a little. Enough to not want to see you die, even if we weren’t linked. That was for the Council,* Sage said.

*Ahhh, my sweet child,* I said.

He gave me his middle finger, and I laughed.

“I see you two are having a private conversation,” Kakashi said. “Emperor Laurent, are you ready?”

I nodded and took a deep breath, releasing it slowly. “I am. What do we need to do?”

Kakashi turned to Aldéric. “Prepare the spell.”

Aldéric rose. “This will get bloody, do you have a particular room where you want us to do it?”

I’m glad he warned me because I did not want my Persian rug to be ruined. “One of the feeding rooms should suffice.”

Kakashi walked over to me, placing his hand on my shoulder. “Come over here, Sage.”

Aldéric joined us and so did Sage. Aldéric placed his hand on something that wasn’t there, at least not to my eyes. Kakashi placed his hand on Sage’s shoulders.

“Okay, show me where the room is,” Kakashi said.

I understood what he wanted from me. I closed my eyes and imagined the room and I felt Kakashi’s magic flow into me and then there was a jolt of energy, wind, and what felt like static crackling inside my body. I didn’t like the sensation one bit. I opened my eyes and staggered away, falling against the wall. My body shook from the power of whatever teleportation spell he’d used to get us into the feeding room I’d envisioned. I looked at Sage and he was sitting on the floor, head bowed, breathing hard. I turned my attention back to the other two mages, and they were fine. Yes, they were powerful.

“This will do nicely,” Kakashi said as he looked around at the cement room.

“I’ll set everything up,” Aldéric said, then he snapped his fingers and a human appeared. A man wearing black pants, a shirt, and a priest’s collar. His mouth was gagged and his wrists and ankles were bound by magic because he couldn’t

speak nor move, yet nothing physical was keeping him from doing so. Therefore, it had to be magic. Considering who'd captured him, it was no mystery. The display of power was why so many supernal were leery of mages. They may be human, but they were nothing to be trifled with. Especially, not these three dark ones, or Adrian.

I stood by and watched as Aldéric drew a sigil with many intricate designs on the floor. It looked like a three-point star inside a triangle. I was expecting it to be a circle. "Why the triangle?" I asked, because why not ask?

"Because each point represents one of the other three emperors," Kakashi explained. "As for the star inside, three points for the dark mages whose essences will be needed to conduct this spell must be prominent, not equal."

"That answers my question. I have another. What will happen to me after this spell is done? Everyone else is getting the hookup, what about me?" Sage asked.

Kakashi smiled. "I was wondering when or if you were going to ask that. You'll get physically stronger, too. I'm not entirely a hundred percent sure about this part, but your lions may also change."

"Change how?" Sage asked, concern in his tone. He stepped forward.

"Stronger, they may also become hybrids. This spell is extremely powerful and somewhat unpredictable because there are variables I can't account for. All I needed was a mage who



was also a vampire. You're also a shifter, so I can't be all that certain about what will happen," Kakashi said.

"Will it harm them?" Sage asked in all seriousness.

"I don't expect that, no. It's not as if this spell is directed at killing them. None of their blood is being used. The only thing I don't know is if they'll gain in power or not, because you will," Kakashi said.

"What about Adrian?" Sage asked. "Will anything happen to him?"

"Again, I don't know. But are you willing to see what will happen if we don't perform this spell?" Kakashi asked.

Sage huffed and shook his head.

"That's what I thought." Kakashi turned from him to look at me. "Do you also have any questions that won't change our predicament if you don't like the answers?"

And I thought Sage was a sarcastic prick. I stood corrected. I decided to ask since I did. "Do you need my blood? These sort of spells usually do." In my limited experience with magic, every spell that I had cast for my benefit always needed my blood. From the ring on my cock, to the spell that made me emperor, to the barrier guarding my home.

"We will, but not yet. Yours will be the last to go into the spell," Aldéric answered instead, then he stepped back and Kakashi took over setting up the sigil. He added symbols and words in a language I wasn't familiar with. Aldéric began to undress the human he'd brought, removing only his shirt. The

man was innocent and terrified, as he should be. At least, his sacrifice wouldn't be in vain.

I looked at Sage and he was quiet and just watched. My child was a curious one and vicious. I knew he didn't care about the holy man we'd kill on this night. He'd do it because, like me, we knew what would happen if we didn't. Still, it was good that Adrian had removed himself from this process. I did wonder what Adrian would think about everything we'd learned tonight. The part that Kakashi played in their lives long before they'd ever met him.

"If you need my blood, what about the other emperors?" I asked.

"We have theirs," Aldéric said.

I raised both brows in surprise. "Oh really?"

Aldéric nodded.

"Even Emperor Martin? Because he's under a spell here and trapped in the throne room," Sage said.

Aldéric nodded. "I got his already."

Sage frowned. "Wait a minute, how did you get into the room to get it?"

"We didn't," Aldéric said.

I harumphed. "Care to elaborate?" I asked. The emperors were known to be very cautious and selfish, for lack of a better word, over whom they gave their blood to.

Aldéric smiled. “Told them we were going to kill you because it was your fault the Dark God was released. In order to do so, I needed their blood for a spell that would destroy you and the traitorous vampires of your line.”

“I see lying isn’t beneath you.” I cocked an eyebrow.

“Ahhh, you’re good. Not many people would have been able to tell if I was lying,” Aldéric admitted.

“There was a certain twinkle in your eye, which told me you were being mischievous.” I shrugged. “Honestly, I just took a wild guess based on that.”

“You’re a very shrewd person, Emperor Laurent. I like that,” Aldéric said.

I didn’t like being lied to, especially about threats to my life. “So, what did you tell them?”

“Well, after Sage’s phone call with Kakashi, we knew what we needed, so we set out to get their blood. They were all too willing to give it in order for us to create barriers on their homes. Of course, we only told them we’d protect their main home from your retribution. They fear the mages you have under your command,” Aldéric said. “That is why they haven’t come to attack you in full force. If you were powerful enough to kill Emperor Galen and restore the line, they had no idea what else you could do.”

“So, you scared them into giving you what you needed,” I stated to them.

Aldéric snorted. “Is it really a lie when you’re out to get them? Isn’t that what we’re doing? Making sure you kill them before they can kill you?”

“Touché,” I said.

“They were all too relieved to have a member of the Echelon Imperial on their side,” Aldéric said.

“This better not be some kind of fucking trick you two are up to,” Sage said, his expression hard and full of warning as he glared at Kakashi.

Kakashi rose and stepped away from the design, examining it. “No trick. I want power and immortality. This is the only way I can get that. I’ve planned and waited too long to pass up this opportunity.”

“Kyla was very curious about gaining immortality. She’s a dark mage, why not add her?”

“I told you already. This spell calls for three mages, one of who is already a vampire. That alone excludes Kyla. And furthermore, she isn’t my lover,” Kakashi said.

Sage and I both looked at Aldéric and the cheeky curd blew us a kiss. “What will you tell them once they find out?”

“The truth, it’s not like this doesn’t need to be done. And they already know... it’s not in my nature to do favors without getting something in return,” Kakashi said.

“I’ll take your word for it,” I said.

“I’ve got another question. Can we use our magic on each other?” Sage asked.

“Don’t get any ideas,” Aldéric warned.

Sage turned to him. “Don’t give me any reason to.”

“To kill or to heal?” Kakashi asked, breaking the tension growing between my child and his lover.

Sage looked at him. “Both.”

“No one mage on the council can use their magic against or for another. It takes three. It’s a failsafe to prevent betrayal among members. Say you decided to attack Aldéric, or vice-versa, you would not be able to harm each other. However, if two members of the Council join you or Aldéric, then the magic will be effective,” Kakashi explained.

Sage growled. “Another thing I would have liked to have known before agreeing to join.”

“Again, would it have mattered? For one thing, I wasn’t going to give you a choice. For another, we can’t save this world without you,” Kakashi said.

Sage huffed and looked away and I knew what his body language meant. He had his answer and it wouldn’t have mattered.

Kakashi smirked. “If there are no more questions, let us begin. Everyone, undress as this will get bloody.”

Good thing I picked the feeding room. I begin to strip along with everyone else. I paused when Kakashi removed his shirt

and saw the numerous tattoos and brands on his body. Sigils, all of them, and I wondered what they meant.

“I see you’ve been busy casting spells on yourself,” Sage said, his beautiful gray/golden eyes scanning the bodies of both dark mages.

Kakashi pointed at the tattoo on Sage’s chest. “You as well.”

“Any of those the reason why you’ve lived as long as you have?” Sage asked.

Kakashi nodded. “The magic is wearing off, though. I’m starting to age more. This one here.” He pointed to a large one on his pec. “Protects me from light offensive magic.”

Sage cocked an eyebrow. “So, none of Adrian’s attack spells will affect you?”

Kakashi smiled and winked. “It’s only wise to make yourself as invulnerable as you can. I’ve paid Magic’s Price many times. And I don’t regret it.”

I looked at Aldéric and he had some of the same sigils on his body. He also had a handprint that looked like it was burned on his right ass cheek. I pointed at it. “What’s the story behind that one?”

Aldéric looked in the direction of my finger and laughed. “This one staking his claim,” he said, nodding at Kakashi.

“It means I will always know where he’s at. Always sense his emotions. I can call him to me if he’s in danger and vice-versa. He’s mine and I won’t let anyone hurt him,” Kakashi said, and his tone was almost like a warning.

“I was about to criticize you for keeping a magical leash around your lover, but I get it,” Sage said.

I looked at my child and felt a desire for him again. His body was beautiful, a treat that I enjoyed every inch of the night I got to indulge. God, so much had happened in the last few days. There was no time to let any of it settle. I knew I was emperor, but I didn't feel like it yet. I'd only been emperor for a little over twenty-four hours.

“It's time. Come,” Kakashi said, and motioned for us to gather around the sigil. “Sage, Aldéric, each of you stand at the upper points, and I need you to stand in the middle.”

Each point had a circle around it and that was where he wanted them, almost like the point was directed at the dark mages. I stood inside of the three-point star and watched as he poured the blood from three vials onto each point of the triangle except the one that was at the top where he finally stood. He looked at me expectantly, and I held my hand out because I didn't need him to tell me he was ready for my blood. I winced as he cut my palm with a nasty little dagger that had a jagged and serrated blade unlike any knife I'd ever seen, and I sensed the dark magic that flowed through it. The cut stung, too, and was taking a long time to heal. My blood dripped on the sigil and a red line glowed that connected all of the six points together.

“Kneel,” Kakashi told me and I did.

He grabbed the holy man and put him inside of the star where I stood and began to chant. Once he did, I felt

something grab me, anchoring me to the sigil. It felt like a heavy weight was inside of my body, pinning me in place. I couldn't move. I looked to see that Kakashi's eyes were closed, as were Aldéric's and Sage's, and they began to chant with him. Through my link with Sage, I could tell he was drawing power from them. The human was crying, but that was all he could do. He couldn't scream, couldn't beg for his life, and he sure as hell couldn't run. I felt power flowing inside of me that burned and throbbed. I felt hot and cold at the same time. I swayed as the room faded in and out of my vision. A wooziness came over me, but I couldn't fall over. My fangs extended all on their own and my mouth opened. I was no longer in control of my own body. I was surrounded by darkness as if everything around me had faded, leaving me in an abyss. All of a sudden, I tasted blood. Delicious blood, enhanced with the flavor of fear, gushed all over my face and body. I drank it in as it poured into my mouth and down my throat. Innocent blood and along with it, the human's memories. A life spent doing good and helping others find their way. His blood was rich and thick, a treat. I didn't make a habit of killing innocent people, but this blood... I would allow myself to enjoy.

The blood stopped flowing and I came to my senses and regained some control of my body. I looked up to see that Sage, Aldéric, and Kakashi all had blood splattered on them and their mouths. Had they drunk too?

“Open your mouth,” Kakashi commanded of me and I did.



With his knife, he cut himself and bled into my mouth, then Aldéric did the same, but not Sage. My body surged with the blood of the two dark mages. The power I felt flowing into me before only intensified and I cried out in pleasure and pain. That was when the blade of the knife slit across my throat in a flash of white-hot pain. My eyes bulged in shock and I jerked as my blood erupted from my jugular. Both Kakashi and Aldéric were upon me, drinking from the gash. They took what they needed, but not enough to drain me dry. My wound was slow to close and Kakashi continued to do the spell. He drew sigils on my body in blood, the ones that matched those branded into the sides of their necks, and I was helpless. Then the three mages held hands as Kakashi did the incantation. It seemed as if Sage was completely out of control of his own body. The room began to get hotter and then there was a lightning bolt of pain that shot up my spine just as a burst of fire shot from the sigil, engulfing us.

My first instinct was to run, but I couldn't move and, as the fire blazed, I realized it didn't hurt me. Suddenly, the flames vanished, dying down into a smolder, but it wasn't over. The blood from the five points began to rise into little wobbly, shapeless bubbles. The incantation continued and the blood shot inside of me, my body absorbing it through my skin. If the power I felt before was enormous, what I felt now made me feel invincible, like a god. The orgasm from the unconventional feeding that hit me was the strongest I'd ever experienced and I felt my seed squirt all over me and I could only imagine the mess we were all making.

Finally, Kakashi stopped chanting and I felt the weight of my body crash, and I fell limply to my side. All around me, Sage, Aldéric, and Kakashi collapsed to the floor as well, fully drained. My body hummed with energy and I shook from the last vestiges of my climax. All I wanted to do was sleep, but not while in this state. Not when I had questions.

“You... mother... fucker,” Sage rasped out in struggled breaths.

Kakashi was the first among us strong enough to sit up. “What... are you... complaining about... now?”

“I’ll... tell... you... in a minute,” Sage managed to get out.

I realized I was out of it during a great deal of the spell. Moments where I blacked out and my body was not my own. “Is... is it done?” I asked.

“It is,” Kakashi replied.

With some struggle, I sat up and looked around. Blood was all over the floor and some on the walls. The four of us were covered in blood and not all of it was from the human. Though, the human’s blood was the one that was on the walls. The human’s corpse had deep wounds carved into it in the shape of sigils that matched the ones on the floor. That prompted me to look down at my own body, because I remembered sigils being drawn on my body in blood during the incantation. I wiped the blood away, smearing it, and the sigils were there, like tattoos. There were three of them.

I looked up at Kakashi. “What are these?” I pointed to them.

Kakashi rose and came over to me, then knelt to look me over. He pointed to the one on my right pec. “This is what has linked you to every vampire alive. The other emperors are all dead. This one is my symbol and it links you to me. This one to Aldéric,” he said, pointing to two smaller symbols on my left pec.

I wasn’t all too fond of being marked this way. “Will they fade?” I asked.

He shook his head. “No. Small price to pay, I think, for all that you’ve gained. The sigil that you had the night you killed your emperor, the one that was on your chest... that is still there, beneath the surface. It only made itself known to Emperor Galen when it was time to perform the ritual. But these, they will forever remain.”

Well, I figured when he put it like that... I couldn’t really complain. My enemies were dead and I was even more powerful, I could feel it. I also felt the link to every vampire. That was the sensation that had me so exhausted before. I was overwhelmed by it, by them. I wondered what Emperor Martin looked like now. I had to see him. To see his corpse would confirm that he was truly dead for me.

“Hey, why didn’t I have to drink from him?” Sage asked as he rose to his feet.

Both Aldéric and I were the last to rise, but we were all standing there talking now.

“Because you didn’t need to be linked to him. This spell, only Aldéric and I needed to link ourselves to Salino,”

Kakashi said.

“So that you could get his immortality?” Sage asked.

Kakashi smiled. “Exactly.”

“And you’ve never done this spell before? How do you know there aren’t going to be any repercussions?” I asked.

“I don’t. Not really. Had the Dark God not been released, I would have been more concerned. But the worst has already happened. Say in the event that I do end up needing to drink blood, still, it’s a small price to pay for what I’ve gained. Nothing I’d worry about in the least,” Kakashi said.

“What if it’s only my blood you can drink,” I asked. Because that was how it was with Adrian.

“Then I’ll drink it. Would you dare to refuse me?” Kakashi asked and his expression dared me to say otherwise.

“I suppose not.” I looked at Sage and I could tell he had many questions twirling around in that inquisitive mind of his. As did I, and one came to me. “If and when we send this Dark God back to hell, will we be linked to him again like it was before?”

Aldéric shook his head. “No, the initial link that bound you to him is gone. You can no longer gain power from him. By the way, you’re all immune to fire now. With everything that vampires can do, to want any more powers is simply being greedy.”

“Gaining more power wasn’t the reason I was asking, but I see that’s what you’re assuming. I just prefer not to have to

give him a ritual every millennium and certainly not to sacrifice good vampires to appease him. But more importantly, if you kill him, will it kill all vampires,”

“No. I see you don’t understand the complexities of the contract that was broken that night. To keep it simple, all vampires are free of El-Kazir,” Kakashi said.

“That sums it up, thank you,” I said, then something he mentioned before triggered my next question. “Wait a minute, you stated that we are now immune to fire?”

Kakashi cocked an eyebrow, which made him look even more devastatingly handsome. “I bet you love those sigils now, don’t you?”

I rolled my eyes. I didn’t love them, but I could appreciate what they represented more. Well, actually, just the one that made me emperor of all. Not the two leechy ones from the dark mages... Then again, being linked to them was almost as good as being linked to all vampires. They would have a vested interest in keeping me alive, because they were using my power. Very well, I did love the sigils, but I didn’t want him to know.

“Can you just answer my question?” I asked.

“Because we took something from you and an exchange was made in the bargain. We are dark mages whose most powerful weapon is fire in all its incarnations. Through Sage being your child, we were able to give you have ability. You’re welcome, by the way,” Kakashi said.

“Enjoy your immortality and enhanced strength,” I shot back. Like he said, he gave and took.

“I will, as I’m sure you’ll enjoy being the only emperor,” he stated, and it let me know that he was someone who must get in the last word. I fought not to scoff.

Sage stroked his chin. “I need to test my lions to see if anything has changed. I also want to see if Adrian can drink my blood as well. If he can do that—”

“Then you’re hoping he won’t need to feed from me?” I interjected, finishing what I guessed would be Sage’s thought.

“That won’t change. He’ll always need Salino’s blood,” Kakashi said.

“But yours may be able to help if he can,” Aldéric added.

“Still, I need to know what has changed,” Sage said. Then he looked around. “Where can we wash up? I don’t want Adrian to see me like this.”

“Through that door is a large shower,” I said.

Sage pointed at the corpse. “Can I get rid of him?”

“His usefulness has been fulfilled. Yes,” Kakashi said with a coldness that even I found unnerving.

“Did he have any family?” Sage asked.

Aldéric laughed. “You’re a mob boss, act like it.”

Sage snapped at him, “You don’t know shit about me. Keep your fucking opinions to yourself.”

Kakashi studied Sage for a few seconds then sighed with a nod. “He did, but unless we deal with this Dark God, none of that will matter. Cremate him, bury him, sink his body into the ocean, whatever helps you sleep at night. Aldéric and I need to leave to study our grimoires.”

“What about the vampires outside?” I asked.

“You need to lower your barrier so I can release the cage I have around them,” Kakashi said. He began to gather his clothing from the floor and Aldéric did the same.

I did as he instructed and summoned my vampires to enter my home. I could sense them passing the barrier, which was an interesting sensation. I noticed it when Sage and Adrian, along with my vampires, had all returned.

“I can sense them coming inside past the barrier,” I said.

“Oh, that. Yeah, you’ll be able to sense those linked to you through blood, either human or vampire. You’ll also be able to sense those with power like shifters, mages and griezels,” Sage replied.

“Why don’t I sense everyone who enters, such as regular humans?” I asked. “They could be a threat.”

“Shit, be glad that you don’t. That could get really annoying, all the comings and goings of humans. You sense who matters. I felt it when all of my pride made it to my tower, so I’m at ease knowing they are all safe,” Sage said. “As for humans being a threat, the barrier will handle that.”

Well, that did make sense. The sensation didn't hurt, it was like a tingle, but more intense when so many were entering at once. Still, a small price to pay for such security. I nodded and Sage winked.

“Aldéric and I will take our leave now,” Kakashi said. He nodded at his lover, and the two teleported from my home while the barrier was lowered.

I looked at Sage. “Nice couple.”

He snorted a laugh and nodded. “I knew he was a son of a bitch the first time we met, but he's necessary.”

Once I felt the last vampire pass through the opening of my home, I sealed the barrier back into place. I sent Nakago a telepathic message to greet them and arrange for them to wait for me in the grand hall. “All right, all of the vampires who were outside are now safe.”

I watched as Sage raised his hands at the sacrificial lamb on the floor and it burst into flames. They burned so brightly, I felt the heat emanating from them. This was the perfect time to test if vampires were truly immune to fire. I walked over to the flames and slowly began to extend my hand.

“I guess you do need to know,” Sage said as he watched me.

I felt the heat intensify, but it wasn't blistering. Instead, it was more of a comfort, like cozying up to a roaring fire in the coolness of the room. I slipped my fingers into the fire and my initial reaction, my instinct, was to jerk back. I looked at my fingers and they were unharmed. Again, I stuck them back into



the fire. I had to bend over a little as the flames were starting to die down as they consumed the corpse. The fire was warm, that was it. No pain, no burning, nothing.

I barked out a laugh that was a mixture of wonderment and relief. “*Mon Dieu!*” I held my hand in the fire turning it this way and that as the flames caressed my skin. “This is remarkable.”

“Yeah, I bet,” Sage said. “You just better make sure vampires behave themselves as you promised.”

“Meaning?” I looked at him, a warning in my glare.

“Listen, I don’t really give a fuck what vampires do as long as they don’t fuck with me or what’s mine. But the reason Adrian agreed to help you sever the line was the story you pitched him about vampires not killing innocent humans under your control. You need to make sure you keep your word, especially now that vampires are even harder to kill with you being immune to fire.”

“All of the vampires are linked to me,” I said and pulled my hand back. “And I always keep my word.”

Sage nodded, so I figured my response was good enough for him. “We need to check to see if that emperor is dead.”

“I believe so. Like I said, I can feel every vampire linked to me,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, and you felt that after I performed the spell, but Galen was still alive. I just want to make sure those motherfuckers are dead,” Sage said.

I nodded. “I see.” It was important. The emperors were all over five thousand years old, and if they were alive, I would still be in danger. I would check on Emperor Martin, as he would be the truth revealed. He wasn’t going anywhere thanks to Adrian’s spell, so I decided to clean up first.

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Sage, Nakago, Adrian, and I stood over the lifeless body of Emperor Martin. The corpse looked to be a shriveled husk, gray and brittle. I’d only met the man a few times in my five centuries, so there was no love lost. I was relieved he was dead—him and the others. The less threat to my life there was, the better. So much had happened in the last twenty-four hours, I hadn’t even had a chance to enjoy any of my victories.

“Yeah, that motherfucker is dead,” Sage said.

“So, we managed to avoid one crisis, now we have to worry about the next one,” Adrian said, then hugged himself. “I guess we don’t need this barrier spell I put on the room.”

He said a chant and I felt a spark—not as intense as before—flow through me. It made me grunt from the sensation, but that was it.

“This room is free now?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yes, now anyone can enter.”

“You both have done amazing things tonight,” I praised.

“Well, Kakashi did his part. We can’t take all of the credit. He knew how to perform the spell, we didn’t,” Sage said. “And it might have taken too long to figure out a spell that could have, so there’s that.”

I nodded. “Is there any news about the current events?” I asked since I’d been indisposed for a while.

“There’s buzz all on the news about monsters attacking people,” Adrian explained.

Sage cocked an eyebrow. “Is there video proof or just people talking?”

“Video proof. It’s all over social media and even the news,” Nakago stated. “People are at the point now where they don’t know if it’s a real threat or a hoax.” He reached into his pocket, pulling out his cell phone. A few seconds later, he was showing us a video of chaos erupting inside a nightclub as hundreds of people were being attacked by multiple monsters. We didn’t yet have a name for the things that were causing so much drama. I snatched the phone from Nakago to really get a closer examination as it was my first time seeing what they looked like.

“*Putain de merde*, they are hideous,” I said under my breath as I watched the camera footage from the club’s security showing how viciously those things attacked. It was one thing to see them from afar, and another up close. There must have been a little over a dozen of them, but in a matter of minutes, hundreds lay dead. Then the footage continued to show some of the dead rising again and they joined in to feast on other

dead bodies and screaming victims. I clicked another video to see an attack that took place in London and the anchorwoman was still confused about whether it was a hoax or something we should all fear. In any case, the public had been warned to stay safe inside their homes.

Of course, I wondered just how safe they could be inside their homes from supernatural beings who most likely didn't need to be invited in. We never did unless you had a barrier. They were all doomed if Adrian, Sage, and the other Council members couldn't stop it. Hell, not just them... we all were.

I ran my fingers through my hair and returned the cell to Nakago. "How can you stop that?" I asked my mages.

"Fuck if I know," Sage said.

"According to the Council, this isn't the first time a Dark God has breached our realm. So, we do have a plan. We're just looking for one that won't kill us and probably millions more in the process," Adrian stated.

"What is the Council doing to prevent this hysteria?" I asked.

"As a member of the Council, I have no fucking idea. For all I do know, they may not do anything. I know I don't have any plans to go out there fighting individual skirmishes. Not when all of my attention has to be on the bigger picture. Maybe if people are afraid to be out and they stay home, that's better than nothing. I'm sure the other Council members are on the same page I am. We have to focus on the real threat," Sage

said. I knew that would be my priority. “Unfortunately, people would just have to die.”

“God, that sounds so cold, but I know you’re right,” Adrian said, and he looked so forlorn as he ran his hands over his face. He looked at Sage. “If we’re able to stop El-Kazir, then at least I’m sure the Council can just do a memory wipe. It wouldn’t be the first time they hid this kind of horror show. I’d actually be happy if people could forget this shit ever happened,” Adrian said. “It was just so terrifying seeing the people in the video filming others being attacked and killed or turned by those things.”

“Lots of shaky cam,” Nakago retorted with a frown.

Adrian shot him an annoyed look with a scoff. “That’s what you’re complaining about? People are running for their lives. Of course, they aren’t filming with a steady hand.”

“I just meant it was hard to see exactly what was going on, which may be why so many think it’s a hoax and won’t take the warning seriously,” Nakago clarified.

“Oh,” Adrian said. “Yeah, the internet has made a lot of people skeptics.”

I nodded. “The news pretty much just told people to stay safe if they have to go out until more information is gathered. Or to stay at home. I’m guessing the government and military will be getting involved and that will just make for more monsters.”

“Maybe we need to help on that level to prevent that. I mean, what if we can help the military fight those things so they don’t go in blind,” Adrian asked.

“Again, that’s a job for another mage, not members of the Council.” Sage wrapped his arm around Adrian, pulling him closer. “For now, maybe we can take turns looking at the grimoire. Why don’t you get some rest for now, I’ll look.”

Adrian looked up at him “Why don’t we look at it together in the morning? The spell we need may be for both of us. We need to stick together from this point on.”

“You’re right,” Sage agreed. “Oh man,” he sighed. “This was even more stressful than the night we helped Salino.”

“I don’t know about that. I was in an actual battle that night,” Adrian said.

Sage nodded. “Ah, that’s right. I stand corrected. While I was working the spell to sever the link of the Dark God and reconnect it to Salino, you were actually in the midst of danger, fighting for your life.” He took Adrian’s face into his hands, trying to plant his lips on Adrian’s. “The fact that you might have died still frightens me. Had it not been for that spell giving you power, you would have. Therefore, I’m very grateful for dark magic. Salino called it Magic’s Reward... maybe he was right.”

Adrian kissed him this time. “I was going to live no matter what. I had to get back to you.”

“Ugh, god, this little display of total devotion makes me want to puke,” Nakago complained and I chuckled.

“Not a romantic, child?” I asked him. I’d been watching my two mages converse and could see even more how much they loved and trusted each other. I also wondered if I’d ever be able to have sex with them again. Sage wasn’t the sharing type, but maybe? One could hope.

Nakago shook his head. “Not that damn sappy.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Sage said, tossing him the middle finger.

Nakago winked.

“We need to rest anyway,” Adrian said.

Sage nodded because I was sure he could see the logic in Adrian’s statement. I was exhausted and really did need the rest, so I could only imagine just how much more tired they were after performing so many spells in a twenty-four-hour period.

“That’s wise. Cairo is ready to take you to your room,” I said, having telepathically summoned one of my vampires to guide them.

“Thanks.” Sage and Adrian followed him out the Throne Room where Cairo was standing just outside.

Nakago was at my side as I made my way to the grand hall to address my new vampires. I entered the room and nearly three hundred vampires turned to face me. I could feel the confusion, resentment, and in some cases, relief coming from them as I walked through their ranks to the front of the stage.

The one thing that was universal among them was the sense of awe. I was more powerful than any of them now and the sole emperor.

I stepped up to the stage, and then turned to face them. “I understand that there may be a multitude of emotions and questions that you have. I’ll try to keep this simple, as I will be retiring soon. I’ve had a long day. Your emperors are all dead. They made the mistake of threatening my life. I have four very powerful mages at my side, one is my child and the others are linked to me. They are also members of the Echelon Imperial.”

At that reveal, I could hear quite a few gasps and see so many shocked and terrified expressions. I’d be lying if I didn’t love the fact that Sage and Adrian were now members of the Council. I also liked the fact that Kakashi and Aldéric were also linked to me, although, I didn’t feel like I could control them. They were just my silent guardians, so to speak. In any case, having them only increased my influence and bragging rights, as they say.

I continued. “Yes, our link to the Dark God El-Kazir has been severed forever. Personally, I don’t care. We can do away with that cruel and archaic tradition. I have no reason to kill vampires for a ritual to honor him. Every vampire in the world is now linked to me and the rules still apply. What happens to me will happen to you,” I said with a little embellishment. I needed them to fear any repercussions that could come from any attack against me. I went on. “There is good news. In gaining this new power, all vampires are now immune to fire.”



The crowd erupted into conversations as more shocked expressions and smiles spread among them. I allowed them the moment to rejoice. If they were happy, then it would make what happened a bit easier for them to accept. “Now, onto more pressing matters. As I’m sure you’re all aware, the world is under attack. The monsters who were trying to attack you are a result of the Dark God, El-Kazir, and his plan to wreak havoc, if you will. The Council is doing what they can to protect supernals and deal with the matter of the Dark God. In the meantime, you will remain here under my protection. Is this understood?”

One vampire raised his hand and I nodded at him to speak. “My Liege, why is he here?”

I didn’t bother to lie. “Because a pact was broken when I slayed my emperor. I, of course, was unaware of this consequence. But I would not change my actions even if I’d known,” I said, because I didn’t want anyone to get any misunderstanding. As far as I was concerned, this was inevitable.

Another vampire raised her hand and I gave her permission to speak. “What will we eat?”

“I have plenty of humans for you to feed on. Once I was made aware of the issues we’re all facing, I prepared. It was your old emperors who failed to plan in their need for revenge. Understand, I do not care that they are dead. I do not suffer fools, nor will I tolerate dissension. Speak up now if you refuse my rule,” I challenged.

The room remained quiet.

“Very well, for now, get settled.” I turned to Nakago.  
“Assign a team to help them get adjusted.”

He nodded. “Yes, Your Majesty,” he said. In the presence of others, he always addressed me by my title or with some variation. In this instance, it was important for the others to see so they could accept their new situation.

I stepped down and walked through the vampires as they parted with bowed heads. By the time I made it to my bedroom, every step felt like I had weights dragging behind me, I was that tired. I didn’t bother to strip, I simply collapsed on the soft bedding and allowed sleep to take me.

## Chapter Eight

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I WAS LYING IN bed with Adrian at my side, already blissfully snoring away. We may have just gotten a power boost, but it still took a shit ton of energy from us. The test I wanted to run on my pride would have to wait. Still, I needed to let Shi know that we were staying and I wanted her to stay as well. I released Adrian and snatched my cell from the nightstand, and sent her the message.

*Are you all right, Sage?* she asked.

*I'm fine. Just dead on my feet. I need to sleep. But when I wake up, I want to see if the spell we worked had any effect of you.*

*I hate that we have to stay the night. These fucking bloodsuckers keep giving me shady looks. I'm going to fuck one of them up.*

I laughed as I read her message. Don't have too much fun without me. I was certain if any fight did break out, Shi could hold her own. But more importantly, Salino wouldn't allow

any harm to come to Shi in the first place. Fact of the matter was, through me, he also had access to my pride. However, now that he was the sole emperor... he really was the most powerful supernal around... well, I'd take that back. There was a griel king who was rumored to be over six thousand years old living in South Africa. He'd be the most powerful. I wondered if Kakashi was aware of him or if he knew his real age? That was, of course, if he was even real.

In any case, I ended my conversation with Shi and pulled Adrian closer to me. I closed my eyes and forced the many thoughts that plagued me into silence. When I woke up, I'd deal with the troubles of the world.

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I pulled on a fresh t-shirt that Nakago had provided me. Adrian was also dressed in the outfit he was given. I slipped on the black jeans that fit me perfectly and by my reflection in the mirror, my ass looked great in them. Maybe I should wear jeans more often.

“Sage...” Adrian began.

“Yeah, baby?”

“The spell you did last night... are you okay?”

I didn't answer him right away. I knew what he wanted to know. We had killed an innocent man to work our dark magic. I should feel bad about it, but I didn't. Because I knew his death was both unavoidable and necessary and I didn't believe

in regretting things that could not be changed. And to be honest, if it would save Adrian from harm, I would have killed a thousand innocent people. I was selfish enough to care about who was and what was important to me. If this Dark God, El-Kazir, didn't pose the threat that he did, I'd be on the side of live and let live. But, what answer would—could I give Adrian?

“I'm fine, baby,” I said finally, and I hoped he didn't ask any follow-up questions the way he tended to do. *Let this one go, Adrian.* The room filled with silence for a few seconds, then he nodded.

“Okay, I just wanted to make sure that you're... fine with whatever you had to do,” he said.

“We did what we needed to do and I have no regrets,” I told him, and left it at that.

He gave me a look I couldn't quite read, but didn't ask me anything more about it. We left the bedroom to get started on the day's tasks. I tested Shi to see what was different about my lions. All good news. Not only were my felines immune to fire, but they were stronger and faster. All in all, the spell we worked was the gift that kept on giving. The vampires who had been stuck outside were now inside. From what I'd heard, Salino had gotten them all in line, letting them know their old emperor was dead and that he was the only emperor alive. I was sure they all felt it, but he made sure they knew it. They were getting adjusted now and I would bet some wanted his head, but wouldn't dare try to take it. Not only would Salino's

death affect all vampires, but he had powerful mages on his side and I wouldn't stand for anyone hurting him. Hurting Salino would hurt Adrian. I would kill any vampire who tried.

I was sure Salino told them as much after Adrian and I had gone to sleep, because we received quite a few looks as we walked through Salino's home to the dining room where food was being served. Some of their expressions held contempt, which I didn't give a shit about. Others were more in awe or even fearful—which was smart on their part. As Adrian, Shi, and I ate breakfast, we conversed.

“How's Nadia?” I asked Shi.

“Missing me, but she's okay. She said that those things did try to get inside, but the barrier you put up kept them out. So, at least we know it works,” Shi reported.

I nodded. We never got a chance to test the barrier on our own home, but seeing it in action keeping those monsters from climbing Salino's home, I had faith that my tower would be safe. Besides, I would have certainly heard something from my pride if otherwise.

“Xavier's fine too, I talked to him this morning. He was wondering if we were going to do anything about the monsters, but I told him that we couldn't until we dealt with El-Kazir. I just told him to stay put. I'd rather he be safe,” Adrian said.

“Was he trying to go somewhere?” I asked, because I didn't know why Adrian had to tell that fool to stay put.

Adrian sighed. “He is having a hard time being idle when people are in danger.”

I snorted. “And just what the hell is he planning on doing to help them from these monsters?”

“He wanted to know If I could cast a spell to make him stronger.”

I cocked an eyebrow. “Being human must suck.”

“Sage—”

I held my hand up. “I’m sorry. I’m sure Salino would turn him into a vampire if he really wanted to be stronger. But the fact of the matter is, even supernals are sitting this one out.”

“Not because you’re afraid. You’re only sitting it out because you don’t want to risk being turned. If a supernal is turned... they’re even deadlier than one that was turned from a human... right?” Adrian asked.

“Oh, I don’t doubt some supernal are just fine sitting idle because they are afraid. Not one of us want to become one of those mindless beasts. But for the majority, we protect our territory from threats, so it’s not easy allowing intruders to run amok. I want to fight these things. I want to rip them apart with my teeth and claws. But I have a job to do. So yeah, you’re right.”

“You think Xavier would allow himself to become a vampire?” Shi asked Adrian.

He shook his head. “He just wants to be useful. I think that’s where it’s coming from. He was in the military before we met.

Fighting is in his blood.”

“Well, maybe when all of this is over, if things can go back to normal, we’ll look in the grimoire to see what we can do for your brittle friend,” I said with a smile.

Adrian gave me a small laugh and nodded. “Yeah, I think that can work. He’s my partner and I’ve got this boost now.”

“He’s feeling left out?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Maybe. I don’t know. Maybe he just wants to be able to help me when I need it and not be sidelined.”

“Well, he’s not alone. Unless he can cast spells, he needs to just deal.”

“He has Jewel to keep him company. I’m sure he’s not too idle,” Shi said.

“Well, if he continues to pursue her, he’ll need to figure out what he wants. She’s a shifter, she’ll outlive him,” I said.

“Let’s deal with Xavier later. It’s time to look at the grimoire,” Adrian said, and I agreed. We finished our meal and got to work.

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“Hey, babe, let’s stop because we’re not finding shit in this book that can either help us defeat the Dark God, or find him, or even kill him,” I said. We’d been reading the book for hours and had gotten nowhere.



“Yeah, I agree. At least nothing on my end. But I think we do know how to kill all of his demons he’s unleashed.”

I cocked my eyebrow at that. “Really? How?”

“What about the spell you used to kill that entire clan of mages? They were all linked by the same magic and you took them out completely,” Adrian reminded me.

Oh shit, I had, hadn’t I? That was badass. “You might have a point. It’s not in the book anymore, but I remember it.” It was no longer in the book, because I’d learned the spell and it was now a part of my memory. That was how the grimoire worked, like even its magic was engrained in us. The spell did kill any who were all linked and I wondered if it would even kill the Dark God? Even though Kakashi had said that vampires were no longer linked to El-Kazir anymore, so we didn’t have to fear his death or return to wherever the hell he came from, I had my reservations. Salino still had the seal of El-Kazir hidden under the flesh on his chest. It flared up when we did the spell. I needed why that mark remained.

“Before even attempting to do that spell again on these things out there, I have to make sure we won’t be affected. Vampires may still have a link to El-Kazir in some way.”

“Ahh.,” Adrian nodded absently. “Yeah, I see your point. We need to see if the Council has anything,” he said. “I’m wondering if we’ll get other spells if we’re together? You know, since our magic is linked in a way where we can draw on each other.”

My baby made an excellent point. I agreed with him because the grimoire had a mind of its own. Sometimes, a spell wouldn't appear until both Adrian and I were looking at it, or at least together. I turned to the page that featured my teleportation spell, as Adrian had his own. "Now would be a good time to learn how to teleport. You and me. It's way faster than having to travel by conventional means."

"Would you believe me if I said I was kind of afraid to do that?"

I smirked. "Why?"

He shrugged. "What if I don't land where I intended?"

"Then maybe you can teleport away."

"What if I'm stuck?"

"Is that possible?"

"Like what if I teleport myself in the middle of a steel wall and I can't breathe or move or talk to do the spell again?"

I had to think about his concerns, because they were valid. Kakashi and the others made it look so easy. Not to mention, they seem to be able to teleport anyone without fail, like how they did Adrian and me both times. "I'll practice first, then."

"Okay, be careful."

"I'll just do it from one place to another. I won't go far," I said, because I didn't want him to worry. I didn't have his fear, mainly because I was really eager to learn how. Being fast had always been a perk as a shifter. The fact that I'd gotten even

faster since becoming a vampire only made me more powerful. Being able to teleport was the ultimate ability. I wanted to master it.

I studied the page, memorizing the chant that would become a part of me. I then stood up with Adrian watching my every move and began practicing how to pull the right elements of magic from the air around me to infuse with the magic of the chant. I felt the moment when the magic formed inside of me, bonding with my being. Now, I didn't have to speak it, only think it. I had to use willpower to get it to work and the first time I tried, I felt a rumble in my body, then a shiver, but nothing happened.

“How does it feel?” Adrian asked.

“Weird, like static shock floating all inside of me,” I said, then concentrated again and when I heard Adrian yelp, I opened my eyes. But I was in the same place. “Did I do it?”

“Yeah.” He was smiling, his expression beaming with excitement and wonder. “But it's like you just blinked out really quickly.”

Okay, so I was on the right track. I did it again, only this time, I envisioned moving to the corner of the room. I felt the sensation inside of me intensify, then settle. I opened my eyes again and this time, I was standing in the right corner of the room, exactly where I wanted to be. “Oh shit!” I laughed and ran my hands over my body to make sure I was all there and solid.

“Wow, baby.” Adrian rose and walked over to me. “How did it feel?”

Again, I explained the sensation to him.

“Did it hurt?” he asked.

“No, it felt good, actually. Like tickles. Kind of like when you have to piss so badly, then you finally get it out and that wave washes over you of relief. That’s what I felt as soon as the teleportation was complete. It’s quick, but satisfying,” I said.

“Okay, now I feel like learning myself,” Adrian said.

“A pleasure to be your guinea pig,” I joked.

He gave me a cheeky grin, complete with sticking his tongue out. I laughed and watched him sit down at the table with the grimoire and turn to the teleportation spell he needed. While he began learning how to teleport, I continued to practice, landing in places throughout Salino’s tower. I’d unnerved quite a few vampires, having popped up around them, then disappeared. That pleased me, because if they were afraid of me, then they’d be afraid of Salino and be less inclined to play stupid games. When I returned to the room with Adrian, he wasn’t there, but he popped back in five minutes later.

“Having fun?” I asked him.

He grinned and gave me a really goofy laugh like he was half delirious. It made me chuckle. I wished we were learning this under better circumstances. I wanted to be able to truly celebrate this advancement, but we couldn’t.

“Oh my god, it’s so much fucking fun!” he blurted out, then did it again, only to return a few seconds later with a huge, mischievous grin on his face. “I scared Nakago.”

“Good, fuck that pompous bastard.”

“We can teleport to people we want to see. That is so awesome!”

“I want to learn how to teleport others to me, like the Council can do,” I said.

Adrian nodded. “Oh yeah, that would be cool.”

I walked over to Adrian, taking him into my arms, and kissed him, because feeling his lips against mine was the sensation I needed at the moment. “We need to leave.”

“What about Shi?”

“I’ll text her. She can’t come where we’re going.”

“Why don’t you see if you can teleport her back to the house? At least she can be with Nadia and everyone else,” Adrian said.

It was a good idea. Shi, though she was my bodyguard, couldn’t enter the Council’s meeting location. Not to mention, I didn’t feel right leaving her there amongst strangers for the most part. “You’re right.” I pulled out my cell and texted her to come back to the room and she did.

“Where are we going now, Sage?” she asked, and she had her game face on and was dressed in a black track suit, no doubt a loan. But she looked ready to kick ass.

“You’re going back home. Adrian and I are going to meet with the Council. Do not protest,” I interjected when I saw it written all over her face. She’d opened her mouth to do just that, but we didn’t have time to argue. There was no point.

“So, now you’re discarding me too?” she snapped.

I frowned, because I didn’t like her tone or the meaning of her words. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Adrian slink back. Leaving this for me to handle. And I would. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

Her expression softened just a little, because she realized she’d pissed me off. “I... I just meant that I can help.”

“Oh? How? Explain to me how you can help, Shi. You need to get out of your feelings right now. We’re not dealing with some territory battle with a rival pack or pride. Or some griezels coven. We are in the thick of a fucking war with a Dark God—a powerful one at that. What do you plan to do to help me?” I asked, because I wasn’t in the mood for fake heroics. To me, she was sounding like Xavier at the moment. It wasn’t like I didn’t get it. She wanted to feel useful to me, but the fact was, she was better equipped to stay safe in our home.

She turned and huffed, then looked back at me. “I understand you. I don’t have magic. I can’t conjure spells, so I’m just useless to you.”

I looked up and released the air in my lungs slowly, then walked over to her, taking her face into my palm. “You are never useless, Shi. You and every member of my pride mean the world to me. But I can’t do what I need to do if you’re in

danger. If you were to die, or become one of those fucking things..." I trailed off, because I couldn't even fathom losing her like that.

She hugged me. "I know. I have the same fear, Sage. If I'm not there to protect you, and you get hurt... how do you think that will make me feel?"

I sighed and pressed my forehead to hers. "I can't lose you."

"And I can't lose you. We can't lose you," Shi said.

I kissed her forehead, then nodded. I released her face and stepped back. "Fine. I'll bring you with me, if it's allowed. I won't risk your life if it's not. They have one hell of a barrier on that fucking place. You might get instantly incinerated if you enter uninvited."

Her eyes widened and she nodded. "Yeah, make sure they'll take care of that."

I called Kakashi and told him what had happened since last night, then about Shi. "So, can I bring her?" I asked, wanting to get permission.

"If she agrees to not enter the restricted areas, yes," Kakashi said.

"What are the areas?" I asked.

"Where our magic can't be tampered with by having a foreign entity in the vicinity. She will need to stay in the guest lounge only," Kakashi said.

“Not a problem,” Shi said, having heard him through the phone. She did give a roll of her pretty brown eyes. I smiled, but continued my conversation.

“That will work. Hey, won’t the members know that you worked a spell for yourself and Aldéric last night?”

“No, just like we didn’t know you created the Seal of the Bound barrier spell and linked yourselves to it. I can’t sense what you’ve done. In the past, I had used spells in order to spy on you, but you managed to block that,” Kakashi said.

Now, it made sense why he didn’t care if they found out or not, because they’d never know if he didn’t tell them. “So, are you going to tell them?” I asked, just because I wanted to see what he’d say. I doubted he would.

“What do you think?”

“No.”

“Then why did you ask?”

“I just wanted to know what level of bastard I’m dealing with regarding you,” I said.

He snorted. “Come, it is good that you have finally learned to teleport. We’ll be waiting as we have much to discuss.”

“Okay, just one thing, how do I get there?”

“I will send you a thread. Once you locate it, follow it.”

“A thread?” I asked. “Anything specific I should be searching for?”



“Oh, you won’t be able to mistake the sensation. I’ll see you soon.” With that, he ended the call and I turned to Adrian.

“So, he’s going to send you a thread?” Adrian asked, one eyebrow cocked.

“You could hear him?” I asked, because this time Adrian was standing on the other side of the room instead of beside me like before.

He nodded. “All of my senses are stronger now.”

“Interesting,” I said and wondered just how much things had changed for him. Would he be able to drink my blood and be okay?

“Too bad he didn’t tell us what that thread would feel like,” Adrian said and frowned a little with those sexy, pouty lips of his. Damn the Dark God for fucking with my plans to stay in bed all day with my man.

“He said it’s unmistakable. Apart from that, do you need to feed?” I asked.

“Not really. I’m not hungry. I don’t think I need Salino’s blood every day... at least, I hope not.”

“What I really meant to ask was... will you let me feed you? If you can drink my blood and not get sick, that’s a victory in my book,” I said.

Adrian’s brows furrowed. “But your blood doesn’t help me, we tried that.”

“Yeah, that was before we did the spell last night. That may have changed, but we won’t know unless you drink from me,” I pointed out.

Adrian sighed. “I’m not looking forward to puking up the blood, but I guess we should have an answer.”

“Let’s hope that won’t be the case.”

That made me feel a little guilty, because I hated putting him in any undesirable situation. I hated seeing him sick, but to avoid him having to solely rely on Salino... I felt it was important for us to know. I walked over to him and slit my wrist with my sharpened nail. The blood bubbled up from the wound and he fastened his mouth to it.

“This is so crazy seeing you two like this,” Shi said.

I couldn’t really focus on her because the way Adrian’s mouth felt sucking my blood was amazing. My cock was hard in an instant and throbbing to spurt creamy joy at the sensation. We were both panting as he fed. My eyes rolled in my head and I shook from pleasure, but before I could bust my load, he stopped and then pulled my face to his, kissing me deeply. I grabbed his ass and lifted him up, pressing his back against the wall.

“Okay, I see where this is going. Call me when you’re both done,” Shi said, then left the room.

Our mouths were devouring each other and I could taste my own blood as we kissed. I put him down just long enough for him to pull his pants down. I undid mine, pulling my hungry

cock free, then I picked him back up. He wrapped his legs around me and I slicked my cock up with my precum before guiding myself inside of him.

“Ahhh, fuck!” Adrian gasped, then hissed. “Damn, baby... you fill me up,” he said. He kissed me again and bit my bottom lip, pulling it until the skin stretched and I leaned forward, kissing him again. He let my lip go and our tongues caressed as I worked my hips back and forth. Our sex was hot, intense, and left us reeling the moment our orgasms hit. I literally saw stars flashing behind my eyes as I grunted in pleasure. Adrian was loud too, and I loved the way he sounded getting off. Be vocal, baby... that was right.

We shook hard, his cum stained my shirt and his, so we were going to need to wash up and change. I put him on both feet and we continued to kiss, but this time, it was because I knew we were celebrating the fact that my blood didn't make him sick—horny—but not sick. At least, not yet, which was promising.

“How do you feel?” I asked.

“Sooo good, even better after that. I mean... I feel strong, Sage, and energized. I don't feel sick like the last time.” He was beaming from ear-to-ear.

“Good. They said that you'll still need to feed from Salino, that won't change. But maybe now, not as much,” I said.

“I hope so. Man, okay... we need to clean up and go.”

We didn't waste any more time doing that and once we were dressed in more jeans and t-shirts, I contacted Shi.

She entered our bedroom and smirked. "Got that out of your systems? Are you ready?"

I nodded. "Yeah, let's go."

Adrian already had our grimoire and I wrapped my arms around both of them and concentrated on the thread Kakashi said he'd send. I didn't feel anything, so I ended the teleportation magic and released Adrian and Shi.

"What's wrong?" Adrian asked.

"That felt so... odd," Shi said with a shiver.

"Yeah, it's a strange sensation at first," I told Shi, then looked at Adrian. "I don't feel anything that should be standing out like he said."

"Maybe because it was temporary and you two fucking expired the time," Shi pointed out.

I didn't bother to say anything, because she was probably right. I called Kakashi. "Where's the thread?"

"I sent it over thirty minutes ago. It's not something we just leave out there floating around," he said and there was definitely some reprimand included.

"Yeah, something came up. Send it again, we're on our way," I said, not bothering to argue.

"Very well." He hung up and I gathered everyone and tried again.

This time, I did sense something powerful and almost hot. I touched it with my magic and felt a jerk as I was pulled along the thread and when it stopped and I opened my eyes, we were standing inside the headquarters of the Echelon Imperial, the foyer.

“Oh shit, that felt horrible,” Shi said, and I kept my arm around her to steady her. It was her first time teleporting and I knew how rough it was. Adrian and I were fine, which was a nice change. I wondered if that was because it was our magic that was being used and not another mage’s.

“You okay?” I asked Shi.

“Give me a minute. Still trying not to vomit,” she said.

I rubbed her back just as the ambassador, Zendel, approached us. “She needs to sit down,” I told him.

“The Council is waiting in the Grand Chamber. I’ll take her to the guest lounge,” Zendel said.

Shi snarled but followed him. I looked at Adrian. “Let’s go see what they’ve come up with.”

We walked toward the Grand Chamber, which was a new room for us. As soon as we passed the threshold, I felt a charge of magic and I knew Adrian did too. I looked down at my hands because my fingers were tingling. “What just happened?” I asked, then looked up at the other mages who were all sitting around a round table. That table looked like it was magic as well. Two seats were empty and they had both Adrian and my sigils on it. The ones that were sealed in our

necks and our robes. Also, they were all wearing their robes, which we forgot.

“Wow,” I heard Adrian gasped and I looked at him to see him gazing around in awe.

That was when I took a gander at the grandeur. It was breathtaking. The room had dynamic chandeliers overhead, stained glass windows with sigils in the design, and murals on the walls of what looked like mages working spells. It was actually very majestic. Beautiful, really. And when I noticed the drawing of the current mages of the Council on the wall, I knew it was a telling of history. All of the former members of the Council. One day, Adrian and I would be featured on the walls. Interesting. I returned my attention to the table of mages.

“This room is amazing,” I stated.

“Yes, it is,” Kakashi said.

Back to business time. “What was that sensation?” I asked again, since I hadn’t received an answer. I guessed they were letting us take in the room first.

“It’s nothing, a protection barrier. As you can see, you were not killed trying to enter,” Kakashi said. “You’ll need your robes and get them quickly. Our grimoires are changing as we’re here together and now that the Council is complete, we’ll see what we can all discover.”

Before I could speak, Adrian took initiative.

“I’ll go back and get them,” Adrian said and teleported.

“Did you enjoy learning how to do that little trick?” Kakashi asked.

I smirked because I did. “Yeah, it’s a nifty spell to know. Can all mages teleport?” I asked.

“As if something like that is an ability any person wielding a bit of magic could possess,” Kyla said.

“A simple yes or no would have sufficed,” I retorted, and she rolled her eyes.

“While you two were trying to figure out how to do it, more people were dying. The curse of the Dark God is spreading,” she said.

“Yeah? Tell me, did you do anything to stop him in our absence?” I asked, since she had so much to fucking say.

“We need to work together,” Xirsi said, butting in.

“Well, we had shit to take care of last night. But we’re here now.”

“Not yet,” Kyla said.

“He’s getting our fancy robes.”

As soon as I said that, Adrian popped back up carrying our robes. He handed me mine and he put on his own. “They were right, that thread is unmistakable. I don’t like the way it feels.”

I smiled at that because the thread felt almost invasive. Probably because we were teleporting using another mage’s magic. I zipped up the robe and nodded. “Yeah, it sucks.”

“Oh, and when we enter the barrier, we don’t have to take it down. It just lets us in, probably because our blood created it,” Adrian said.

I nodded. “That’s good to know.”

“Well, now that you’re ready, let’s begin,” Kakashi said, and motioned to the two chairs.

Adrian and I sat down. “Okay, so now what?” Adrian asked.

“Now, we look at our books to see what spells come that we can channel as a group,” Kakashi said, then opened his book. All of the other mages did the same.

I looked at Adrian and he didn’t say anything. It was the reason why we came. He just opened the book and we got to reading.

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An hour passed with Adrian and I going over the grimoire before a spell appeared right before our eyes and it was one that was definitely not there before. “You see this, baby?” I asked him to make sure we were looking at the same thing.

“Yeah, and I hate it, but I think it’s what we need,” Adrian said.

“What is it?” Kakashi asked.

All eyes were on us, waiting for us to continue.



“Well, it’s a locator spell, and I think it’s more powerful than any other I’ve tried to use to locate the Dark God,” Adrian said.

“Are you insane? You tried to find him?” Maryanne blurted out.

“I thought that’s what we were supposed to do? What the fuck?” Adrian snapped back.

I agreed with Adrian, finding the Dark God was a priority. “When did you try that?” I asked.

“When you were busy,” Adrian said, and I caught the meaning behind his vague response.

He tried looking for the Dark God while we were working the spell to kill off the other emperors. Made sense that he wouldn’t just be spending that time twiddling his thumbs.

“Why is that a bad thing?” Adrian asked.

“Because the Dark God’s magic is protecting him. Once we breach that, he’ll be forced to attack. We’re not ready to take him on... not yet. Not in a way that doesn’t kill us too,” Kakashi said.

“Or millions of others,” Xirsi added.

Kakashi waved his hand. “Yes, yes, them too. The fact of the matter is, once we locate him, we have to be ready to act. We won’t get a second chance. If we locate him and don’t act, he’ll have a chance to either regroup and find another way to hide, or he’ll challenge us because we’ll also be exposed.”

“But how? I mean, locator spells have never exposed my position?” Adrian asked.

“Not to the humans and low-level supernals you’ve taken on. This is a Dark God we’re dealing with. Nothing you’ve ever done before will compare,” Aldéric said.

I rubbed Adrian’s back when I saw his shoulders slump. “Fine. We’re out of our league, but so is everyone at this table. You have knowledge we don’t, but you better stop talking down to us.”

“Or what? You’re rank amateurs,” Xirsi challenged.

“I’m going to raise hell in this motherfucker and the Dark God will be an afterthought. I won’t tolerate it and neither will Adrian. We both agreed to be on this team for the safety of the planet. Stop fucking with us,” I warned.

“You’re the reason why we’re even in this mess,” Rene stated.

I looked at her. “And? We’ve already apologized for that. I don’t grovel and I don’t give a fuck if you like us, but you will stop disrespecting us,” I snapped.

“I agree,” Kakashi added. “This is counter-productive and means nothing. Tell us more about this locator spell.”

The whole mood of the Council changed once Kakashi put his foot down, and I was grateful that he had because I was seriously very close to putting my hands on people. “Basically, it requires the favor from the Goddess of Fortune.”

Kakashi's eyes widened and others gasped. "Your book contains such a spell?" he asked as he leaned forward, clearly intrigued.

Both Adrian and I nodded. "Yeah. In order to perform the spell, we'll need a link to El-Kazir, so my best guess is one of those things he's been making."

"We have that," Aldéric said.

"You have one... of those things, I mean?" Adrian asked.

"We have six here left, we started with twenty. Two were made from vampires, one from a griezels and one from a human and two from shifters," Maryanne said.

"You killed the others?" Adrian asked.

Xirsi nodded. "We had to discover how they could die. Not all can be killed the same way. Depends on what they once were."

"Decapitation and magical fire worked for all," Aldéric stated.

"But it was extremely difficult to cut off their heads. Regular weapons didn't work. They had to be enchanted," Rene added.

"Magical fire?" I asked to get clarification.

"Fire conjured by dark mages. Regular fire or flame throwers didn't work. Had no effect," Aldéric.

Well, that was good news. I guess everyone was doing their part last night, no one was sitting idle. Fire was my bread and butter, and I expected my power to be even stronger now that I

was. “What about ripping out their hearts?” I asked, thinking about the griezels Damon’s people had killed.

“It worked for the ones that had been turned recently, but not one more than twenty hours old,” Aldéric said. “The older ones could still survive without their hearts.”

“Jesus Christ!” Adrian gasped and gripped his chest as the look of horror plastered across his beautiful face.

“Are you okay, baby?” I asked.

“I... I’m just terrified of these things,” he said.

I kissed his temple. It was all I could do to comfort him at the moment.

“Oh, it gets worse. They even possess some of their old abilities. The wolf shifter turned and when he did...” Rene paused to shiver in revulsion. “It looked like a demon... a dead, rotting hell beast.”

“So, if we have to face them, we go for kill shots by removing their heads,” I said.

Kakashi nodded. “As Aldéric stated, that and our fire are the best ways.”

“Can we use the same spell I used to kill all of those mages?” I asked.

“That spell was impressive. I have one that is similar, but it isn’t what is going to take out those monsters. In order for that to happen, we’d have to destroy the root of their power source.

Their lifeline. Those spells can't take out Dark Gods," Kakashi said. "If you try it, it will backfire and kill you."

"Fuck. I guess it's good that I didn't try that shit," I said, thinking about the consequences of a spell going haywire.

"And why you need training," Xirsi said. "Amateurs like yourselves would make that kind of mistake."

"As you've pointed out ad nauseum, you broken record, dead-horse-beating motherfucker," I snapped.

Aldéric burst into laughter and when we all looked at him, he waved his hand as if asking us to disregard him. I did, returning my attention to Xirsi.

"Before this goes off the rails, I'm glad that you didn't either," Kakashi said. His level-headedness always seemed to get things back on track.

"Getting back to that locator spell you mentioned, how does it work?" Aldéric asked.

"It will break through whatever he's been using to block us. But the only thing is, the tribute... well..." Adrian's voice trailed off and his cheeks started to redden.

"Well?" Aldéric asked.

"The Goddess is a freak. She likes to watch, basically. Of course, she can't be on our plane to see, so she will use your eyes as witness to the 'pleasures of the flesh' between a dark and light mage," I explained.

“Will any dark and light mage work?” Rene asked, then looked at Kyla. Yeah, I caught that.

I shook my head. “Linked. It’s for us. Unless anyone else here has a locator spell?”

They all shook their heads. “Not anything that could find him, no.”

“Are you sure?” Adrian asked.

“Not into voyeurism or public sex?” Aldéric asked with a cocky smirk.

“No, I’m not. But it looks like it can’t be avoided. The book uses all of you to be able to channel the magic to and from us to the goddess. I’m learning more and more about this Council and our grimoire and the spells that only we can all use as a group,” Adrian said and it all made sense.

“We all have our parts to play,” Kakashi reminded us.

“Why do you think he isn’t coming for us now?” I asked.

“Barrier spells. He can’t find us either. Doing the locator spell will expose us both,” Kakashi explained.

“And make no mistake, he knows we’re going to come for him, which is why he’s building this army,” Maryanne said.

That was a chilling thought. I swore I wasn’t fucking looking forward to this showdown. Any advantage we could get on our side was most welcomed.

“About this spell, is it effective the moment you have pleased the goddess, or is there another step?”

I looked at the spell again. “The favor of the goddess will be transferred into Adrian and me and with the blood of one of his creatures, we’ll be able to simply go to him with that power.”

Kakashi nodded thoughtfully. “Good. Okay, we now know how to find him, let’s get back to figuring out how to kill him.”

“Kill him? I know you mentioned that before, but would it be easier to trap him and send him back?” Rene asked.

Kakashi rolled his eyes and straightened. “Easier? Who knows? With this...it will be absolute. And after the chaos he’s called, one less Dark God in existence works for me.”

“Funny, I’d thought you’d be all for sending him back. He’s of your kind,” Xirsi said.

And it was... I guessed, kind of a relief to see that these mages weren’t just looking down on me and Adrian.

“As I’ve said before, I want to try to path not yet walked,” Kakashi said. “Killing him may be the better option.”

“Are you sure it’s not just because that’s your nature? To destroy?” Xirsi asked him.

He was a dark mage. Of course he’d want to kill any threat to his livelihood. I was good with any spell that could rid us of the bastard, too.

“My bloodthirst doesn’t extend past my own survival. I think that by killing the Dark God, our chances at not destroying the

location we fight and ourselves, are high. I've already explained my theory on the matter," Kakashi said.

"I agree with him," Aldéric added.

"You would," Kyla stated.

"I do too," Adrian chimed in.

Others looked at me and I shrugged. "I've been with the idea of killing that bastard." I looked at Kakashi. "I just want to make sure that nothing will happen to vampires when we do. Salino still has his mark." I brought up that point without mentioning what we did last night.

Kakashi nodded. "His mark, yes, not his favor or his burden. The mark remains because vampires are still vampires."

"Griezels and shifters still live too, but that might only be because their Dark God and Goddess wasn't killed," I said. "You don't know what will happen if we kill this asshole."

Kakashi sighed and nodded. "That is true. However, I do know what will happen if we simply use the same spell the other Councils did." He held out one hand, palm up. "Every member on the Council dies, vampires live on." He held up his other hand in the same way as if mimicking a scale. "We take a chance, kill him, we may live. Vampires may keep being vampires, or they may turn human."

"Or die, too?" I stated.

Kakashi shook his head. "They won't die. That link was severed."



“But it was also severed with the griezels’ Dark God, too,” Adrian pointed out.

Kakashi inhaled deeply, his chest puffing out, and the muscles in his jaw tensed. I could tell that he didn’t like being challenged. He released a long sigh. “Think of it this way. One way *guarantees* your death and all of ours. Understand, you’re not the only ones taking a risk. The other way—if possible—may save us all. What does it matter if vampires live or not if you’re no longer around to care?”

Well, I couldn’t argue with that logic. Talk about a damned if you do and maybe damned if you don’t scenario. I nodded.

“I guess,” Adrian relented.

“Are we all on the same page now?” Kakashi asked, one eyebrow cocked as he scanned all of our faces.

There were some nods and verbal responses, but we were in agreement.

“Good. Let us get back to studying,” Kakashi ordered, and we all went back to reading.

I couldn’t help but feel like I wasn’t doing anything, just sitting in a room reading. I was more proactive than this, but this was doing something. I had to keep that in mind. I did wonder how Shi was. I texted her.

*How are you holding up?*

*Losing in Spades and you know that is impossible. I think this motherfucker is cheating,* she texted back.

*Zendel?* I asked to make sure that was her opponent.

*Yeah, you can't tell me he's not using magic even though he swears he's not. By the way, where is this place? I don't hear anything outside.*

*It's on a plane that doesn't exist in the physical world.*

*Creepy and it explains a lot.*

*Listen, hang in there. We're still working on shit in here.*

*Don't mind me, get back to work.*

I smiled down at my phone, then slipped it back into my pocket.

Four more hours passed before Kakashi spoke up. "This is it..." he sighed and slouched back in his seat as if he was exhausted. I knew the feeling, looking through the grimoire was draining. And I finally knew why. The book channeled our magic to even look through it and that was why the spells were always changing.

"Are you giving up?" I asked.

He released another deep breath, but shook his head. "I... I found out how to kill the Dark God."

"Finally! Okay, tell us about the spell," I said, because the sooner we could get this shit over with, the better.

"We'll need the essence of three supernals. All different species, and they can't be one of us. No mages." Kakashi took a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed his forehead. It would seem that his grimoire had really taken a lot out of him

in order to find that spell. He took a sip of water, then continued. “We’ll need a vampire, shifter, and griezels to draw their power and create a weapon that will destroy the Dark God. It can kill him without killing us, as we’ll be channeling our magic into it as well during the creation process. It will take every last mage here.”

“Well, I’m game.” Adrian looked around the room to see if everyone was on board.

“As a light mage, you’d choose death?” Xirsi asked him.

“I would choose his death, yes. Because his death means the life of everyone else. It means the sure end to this nightmare. Yes. I choose his death,” Adrian said with absolute conviction.

“The fact that you’re still pushing for us to save him is what I find suspect,” I said, tossing Xirsi’s sanctimonious ass an annoyed look. I then turned back to Kakashi, because he was speaking my language. “We need to get this shit underway. Hell, I know three supernals we can use right now. My only question is, will this spell kill them?”

Kakashi shook his head. “It doesn’t require a sacrifice on their part. However, it will drain them of their essence. They will need time to recover... perhaps a few days.”

“Will they still be supernals after that?” Kyla asked.

“Yes. They will not be changed, only drained for the time being. We will all be worse for wear after it’s done. We should create a potion for us to take so that we can regain our strength. Because I’m sure he will feel the level of power in

the atmosphere once we create the weapon. We'll need to do the locator spell next and once we have his location, teleport to him and fight," Kakashi said.

"How do we fight him?" I asked.

"With the weapon. We will have to create defenses for ourselves that will give us time for me to activate the weapon," Kakashi said.

"Is there any way to activate the weapon here, then just pop in and evaporate his ass?" I asked.

"That would be ideal, but unfortunately, I have to draw on El-Kazir's lifeforce in order to charge the weapon so I can kill him," Kakashi said. "That means I have to be there. Not only that, I will have to borrow the power from every Council member to use it."

"Man, fuck this Dark God," I grumbled, the son of a bitch. I saw Adrian nod and knew he mirrored my sentiments exactly.

"So, we don't have to physically fight him?" Maryanne asked.

"Not necessarily. We'll have to fight and we may have to fight him physically. But we're mages, our greatest power doesn't lie in our fist," Kakashi said.

"Okay, so we do this spell, then the locator spell... find his ass, then activate the weapon to kill him. That's the plan?" I asked.

"Ideally. Like I said, there will be extreme resistance on his part," Kakashi said.

I scoffed. “Is that your way of telling us we’re about to be in for the fight of our lives?”

“Exactly,” he replied.

“Then we need to get to it. Every second he’s alive, the world spirals into chaos. I can hear everyone screaming in terror. The world knows that this is no hoax,” Xirsi said.

“You can hear like that?” Adrian asked.

“A spell I cast upon myself in order to monitor what is happening around the world, yes,” Xirsi said.

“Wow, I mean, that’s pretty cool,” Adrian said, and I could tell he was impressed. I guessed my baby didn’t have anything like that for him in our book. At least, not yet.

“Speaking of protecting ourselves during the battle. I have a spell,” Maryanne said. “But I’m sure some of you dark mages will hate it. It requires you to drink in the blessing of the Goddess of Purity, Nerek. Her magic will protect us from dark powers. It will most likely burn like hell going down as it purifies your bodies.”

“Pain I can take... will it nullify our magic? That’s what I want to know?” I asked. My bones broke and organs shifted whenever I transformed. I wasn’t afraid of pain.

“No, your magic will be intact,” she replied. “All of the light mages will have to cast the spell with me. It takes the power of four.”

“I wonder would you have been able to have that spell if Adrian and I hadn’t joined?” I asked.

“Probably not. I believe I’m only able to use it because of Adrian. The fact that he’s linked to your dark magic allows the gateway for this light magic to be able to protect you,” Maryanne said.

“Well, I’ll be damned.” I said, mainly to myself.

“Well, you are a dark mage,” Xirsi quipped.

“And your judgmental, petty ass will be right there with me,” I shot back.

“Focus,” Kakashi said.

I refrained from saying anything else, but I did glare at Aldéric, who was chuckling.

“All right, I love it when a plan comes together,” Adrian said, using the famous quote.

I nodded. “I can call Salino and Damon respectively. They owe us a favor. We also have my bodyguard here, Shi. I trust her with my life and she is powerful. The three of them can help us form this weapon. I mean, you can’t get any better than that... unless you need a head of a shifter line.”

Kakashi nodded. “We do, actually, but I have someone in mind. Damon and Salino are perfect, though. An emperor and king will work to make the weapon as powerful as it needs to be.”

“Who’s going to be the shifter?” I asked.

“A wolf alpha, over five hundred years old, who owes me a favor.” Kakashi winked, then rose. “I’ll get her, you gather

Damon and Salino. Let's have everyone here in no less than an hour. In the meantime, we need these ingredients." He rattled off a list of things we were going to need and some of them I knew weren't going to be easy to get.

More discussion was had on where to find certain items. It was no surprise that lives would have to be sacrificed for hearts, apparently. We needed two human hearts. I could tell that it ruffled the feathers of the light mages, but they didn't make a fuss. We all had a list of what to get.

"All right. I'm off to get Josette," Kakashi said.

Aldéric snarled "Not her."

"We don't have time to argue. You have your duty." Kakashi didn't wait to hear anything more from his lover before vanishing from our eyes.

"Why not her?" I asked, because I was nosy.

"None of your business," Aldéric replied, then teleported.

"They were once lovers," Kyla said, spilling the beans.

Ahh, so Kakashi was bisexual and Aldéric was feeling a bit possessive. "I see."

"Why don't you get the ingredients that we need for our spell. I'll get Damon and Salino to join us," Adrian suggested.

"Think I'm not good with negotiations?" I asked with a smirk.

"Not really," Adrian said, not sparing my feelings at all.

I laughed. "I'm going to make you pay for that." I leaned down, kissing him.

"I'm counting on it." He slapped my ass.

We finally had direction and I was ready to kick a Dark God's evil ass.



## Chapter Nine

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I WATCHED SAGE REMOVE his robe, then disappear from my eyes using his teleportation skill. God, I loved that man and honestly, a part of me hated that he was going to have to kill someone to get their heart. At least it was a person who was wicked. Aldéric opted to kill the innocent human, probably to spare Sage. The two did seem to have some level of respect, or maybe admiration for each other after last night. I had my own task and it was time I got to it.

Once we were ready, I'd have to do something I've never done in my life. God, this month took all the cakes for me. Met my fated mate, grew in power, killed off our enemy mage clan, turned my boyfriend into a hybrid—the first of his kind. Saved a child from a demon possession. Had my first threesome, saved a boy from a generation-long curse, ended the vampire link to a Dark God and created a new emperor, unleashed said Dark God onto humanity, and everything in between. And the month was not even over with.

If we survived this... I wanted Sage and I to go on a month-long vacation. I picked up our grimoire.

“You can leave it here,” Rene said.

“I’m not used to just leaving it unprotected,” I said. You didn’t leave such a precious item out where just anyone could try to see it. Sure, no one could open the book but Sage or me, but that was around Xavier and Sage’s pride. No telling what powerful mages could do. I didn’t want to take any chances.

Rene smirked. “Come here, but first, put your book down on the table.”

I humored her and put the book down, then walked over to her. “What?”

She pointed to her grimoire that was sitting on the table along with the others. “Try to take it or read it. Try with all of your might.”

I cocked an eyebrow, but proceeded to do just that. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t lift the book, nor could I open it. “Damn!” I huffed.

“That’s because this room is protected. Why do you think everyone left their grimoires? They are safe here. And you really don’t need to be carrying it around with you on your tasks,” she stated. She walked over to my grimoire and tried to open it or lift it, to prove to me that it was impossible.

“Fine. Thanks for telling me,” I said, convinced that it was going to be safe.

“I’ve been meaning to ask since it’s just us. How is it being in love with someone you know is evil?” she asked.

That pissed me off, because she didn’t know Sage. “He’s not evil. Is he dangerous, ruthless, fearless—yes. But he isn’t cruel for the sake of it. You don’t know him or me. So, please, keep your opinions to yourself.”

She shrugged. “Very well. I see it’s a sensitive subject for you. Dating a mob boss and all.”

I rolled my eyes as I took off my robe. “I have work to do,” I said, then teleported back to Salino’s tower.

I landed in the bedroom that we shared, because it was a safe bet. Again, I noted that didn’t have to lower the barrier here either. That was awesome. As for Salino, I’d been feeling the connection to him since last night after the spell and it was weird. The good thing was, I knew exactly where to find him. I didn’t want or need his blood... at least not yet, and that was more good news. Whatever they’d done had made it so that Sage’s blood was enough to sustain me for now. A blessing.

I made my way to Salino’s office where I’d sensed his aura. “I need to speak to Salino,” I told the guards standing by.

“You have to wait,” said one of the vampire guards.

“It’s important, I need to speak to Salino now,” I said.

The vampire looked me up and down. “He doesn’t want to see any guests now.”

“Salino!” I yelled, because I didn’t have time for this bullshit.

The vampire shoved me back and I shoved him using the force of my magic and it was powerful enough to send him through the door and into the office. The other vampire who was standing guard stumbled back, his mouth agape in surprise and fear. The vampire who laid his hands on me groaned as he dusted the debris from his clothes. It reminded me of when I'd done the same to Salino, sending him crashing into his desk. I looked into the study to see Salino sitting on the sofa with his brothers. At least now, I knew why he didn't want to be disturbed.

“Let him in,” Salino said, as if any vampire could stop me if I wanted to enter. I wasn't sure if I was under Salino's willpower the way Sage was... but something told me that I wasn't. He had no control over me, save the fact that his blood helped keep me alive.

I crossed the threshold and stepped over the wreckage of the door. The vampire guard was on his feet, glaring at me, fangs exposed.

“He attacked me, Sire.” He snarled.

“You shoved me and I shoved you back. Be glad that was all I did. Hell, be glad it's me you're dealing with and not my boyfriend,” I shot back, then turned to Salino. “We need to talk.”

Salino sighed and motioned for the vampire guard to leave. “My door will need to be replaced.”

“I hope you're not expecting me to pay for it,” I said, then walked over and took a seat.

“This is the mage who was there last night?” asked Salino’s maker and older brother. Although he looked like a teenager, there was nothing childish about him. He exuded power and control, even more so than Salino.

“He is. Juliano, I don’t think I’ve had the opportunity to introduce you to Adrian Elias. One of my mages and he is also linked to me, almost like one of my vampires,” Salino said proudly.

“Troublesome twat,” Juliano said with a mean curl to his lips.

“Excuse me? What did you call me?” I asked.

“You heard me. Your meddling put us all in this predicament. I can’t even return to my home because of those monsters running amok,” Juliano said.

“Yeah, well...you can thank your brother for asking for a favor that great. It certainly wasn’t our intention. But from what I’ve heard, you’re all immune to fire now. You can thank my boyfriend for that,” I said, matching his energy.

“And I wouldn’t change a thing. I don’t regret saving our brother and James,” Salino said.

“I can’t say that I’m not happy to be alive either. Although, I wish the circumstances were better,” Sarino said.

I liked him... out of the three brothers, he seemed to be the most human. I hoped he’d have a better influence on the other two, especially Juliano.

Juliano huffed. “Are you any closer to restoring the world to its natural order?”

“We are, as a matter of fact, and that’s why I’m here.” I looked at Salino. “We need you and Damon so we can work a spell to create a weapon to take out El-Kazir.”

Salino cocked a blond eyebrow. “Why me?”

“Because the spell calls for the head of a line of supernals. And... well, that’s you. We need a vampire, griezels, and shifter,” I informed him.

“Is Sage going to be the shifter?” Salino asked.

“Nope. He’s... I guess corrupted by mage blood and vampire. Being a hybrid cancels him out. But don’t worry. We have a wolf alpha who’ll be the third,” I said.

“And have you spoken with Damon?” Salino asked.

“Not yet, he’s next. But we need to hurry.”

“Will this kill me?”

“No. It will drain you, though. You’ll be weak, and probably out of commission for a while,” I said, just being honest.

Salino nodded and looked at Juliano. “Sire—Prince... I leave the command of my empire in your capable hands while I’m away. Can I trust you?”

Juliano sighed. “I’m still angry with you, child. But I am loyal to you. I always have been. I will protect your empire and you with my life.”

Salino smiled. “And once this is over, I want you to stay a while longer. You, Sarino, and I need to bond. We need to catch up when we’re not in the midst of all of this.”

“I’ve had some time to think about what happened that night. I do want to know my brother,” Juliano said while looking at Sarino with a mixture of curiosity and compassion.

“I want that, too,” Sarino said, smiling.

Salino closed his eyes and I heard the message he put out to every vampire in his line. He gave full control to Juliano and it was an interesting experience that I received his message too. I figured Sage did as well. He looked at me. “All right, let’s go.”

“Oh, ummm, one minute. let me call Damon to let him know we’re on our way,” I said.

Salino burst into a fit of laughter then. “Oh, he’s not going to take that well.”

“What? Do you two have a beef?”

“He tried to take over my territory about thirty years ago—failed. Having me in his territory will not be something he’ll want,” Salino said.

“Well, he’s going to have to suck that shit up.” The world was going to hell in a handbasket and the last thing I had time for was petty territory feuds.

“Oooh, you’re sexy when you take control like that,” Salino flirted.

“Save it,” I said, then dialed Damon’s number. To his credit, he answered right away. I told him what we needed and there was a lengthy pause while he mulled it over.

“It is necessary to bring him here?” Damon asked.

I thought about it. “Nope. Don’t worry. I’ll drop him off, then come back for you. Just be ready.”

“That, I can work with. How long will it take?” Damon asked. I did love his Greek accent and the cadence of how he spoke.

“Probably three minutes, tops.”

“Give me five.”

“Okay. See you soon.” I ended the call and looked at Salino, who was grinning.

“I told you.”

I rolled my eyes. “Well, thank god I can teleport now, because if not, I’d have had to insist.” I rose and Salino did the same. “Hey, why aren’t you taking this more seriously?”

He cocked his head at me. “Oh contraire, I am. I’m also very confident that you, Sage, and the Council will resolve this.”

“Why?” I asked.

Salino shrugged. “The two of you have done what other mages couldn’t. Every task you set out to do, you’ve done it. And now, you have the full backing of the Echelon Imperial... it’s only a matter of time. I mean, aren’t you here now because you have a plan?”



Well, that gave me a much-needed boost of confidence. “Yeah, we do. We know how we’re going to defeat him.”

“Can you find him?” Juliano asked.

I nodded. “Yes. We have a spell for that too. Okay, let’s go— oh wait. I need to let the Council know I’m coming.” I said, remembering that I needed them to lower the barrier. I called Kakashi and he answered. “Hey, I’m bringing Salino. Can you lower the barrier?”

“You’ve followed the thread, you can now enter whenever you want and as long as they’re with you, they are protected. You don’t need to call me every time,” Kakashi said in his usual attitude.

“Okay, well, what about the restricted areas. Can I just teleport back into our meeting room, or do I have to go into the lounge, I suppose?” I asked.

“Well, that is a question. Teleport into the Lounge. Zendel will be there to greet you.”

“Okay, thanks.” I just hung up because to be honest, I really didn’t like him. Sage proved to me that not all dark mages are made the same. I was used to the ones like Kakashi. I looked at Salino. “Ready?”

He nodded and I put my arm around him and began the teleportation. I felt the headquarters now, like Kakashi said. It was easy to get back like it was when I’d fetched our robes. We landed in the foyer, and I let Salino go. He shivered a bit and staggered to the wall, bracing himself.

“Yeah, I know it’s rough. No way to avoid it. I’m used to the sensation now,” I said.

“It’s revolting,” Salino said, then swallowed hard. “I’d rather travel as mist.”

“I bet. But you wouldn’t have made it here,” I pointed out. I turned when I saw Zendel approaching.

“Please follow me, I will take you to the lounge,” Zendel said.

Salino looked at him, then me, and I nodded to let him know that it was okay. “So, now you’re going to get Damon?”

I nodded. “And when we’re ready, we’ll come get the both of you. Please, try not to kill each other in the meantime.”

Salino waved his hand. “I can control myself.”

“Okay. For now, you can go with Zendel.”

Salino didn’t say another word and just followed the Council’s Ambassador to the lounge where Shi was. I hoped they could all behave themselves. I concentrated on my teleportation and when I opened my eyes, I was standing in the gym room of Damon’s home. A quick look around let me know that maybe this was a bad idea. Some of the griezel were terrified by the horrified looks on their faces while others crowded around me, waiting to attack. I put my hands up and also a shield.

“Wait, I’m here to see your king, Damon,” I said. “I’m the mage who put up the barrier that is protecting all of you right now. That’s how I was able to breach it.”

“We don’t know that for sure,” said one of the griezels, drawing my attention. “You’ll stay where you are until we get confirmation.” He was an imposing figure, standing at least six foot six and built like a mountain. Oh yeah, it was best that he stayed inside. We didn’t need anyone like him being turned into one of those things.

“I’ll wait, but can you go get Damon... I mean, your king?” I requested.

“He’s on his way,” the griezel said.

A few minutes later, Damon entered with two more griezels. All of the other griezels bowed their heads and parted to let him through. “You teleported, I hear,” he said as he looked at me from head to toe, as if he was expected to see me glitch out or something.

I nodded. “Yeah, we learned how to do it earlier today. Listen, we need to go.”

“Go where, Your Majesty?” the huge griezel asked.

“I need to go to help the Council with a spell. In the meantime, I leave you in control here, Jonas.”

The extra huge griezel nodded. “Yes, your Highness. I understand.”

Damon looked at me. “I take it we’ll be teleporting there?”

I nodded. “There really isn’t any other way to get there at this point. They didn’t make it physical because of the threat.”

“Very well. This will be a first for me,” Damon said.

“I’m actually surprised you’re being so willing.”

“I don’t like being confined to my home while monsters ravage my territory. If you have a way to stop this, it is my duty as king to do my part. I have to protect my land and people,” Damon said, and that answered my question.

I was grateful he was willing to help. When we teleported this time, we landed inside the Lounge and immediately, I felt a calming influence wash over me.

“Woah,” Damon said, and I kept my arm around his slender waist to help him steady himself.

“I know, it’s not pleasant,” Salino said.

“Indeed,” Damon agreed. I released him and he walked over to the chair, taking a seat.

I looked to see that Salino was lounging on the sofa, eating caviar and drinking wine. Well, it would seem our guests were being wined and dined a damn sight better than we were. During the time we studied the grimoire, we ate roasted chicken, veggies, and twice-baked potatoes. Nothing fancy like that. However, it had been delicious. I turned to see Shi and another being, and could tell she was a shifter, wolf. She must have been the one Kakashi brought here. His old lover.

“Hi, ummm, my name is Adrian,” I said, introducing myself.

She nodded. “Don’t take too long getting set up in there. I don’t want to be here any longer than I have to be.”

Okay, so she didn’t introduce herself and she was bossy. Couldn’t say I was surprised. She had dated Kakashi. I looked

at Shi. “How are you hanging in there?”

“I’m fine. Just want this to be over,” she said.

I nodded. “We’ll get you soon.” I left and went to the room I knew we were all gathering in. Not everyone had returned and we couldn’t do anything until we were all present as the spells needed the full Council. “Do you need me to do anything?” I asked.

“Yes, why don’t you set up the spell for you and Sage, because as soon as we’re done with making the weapon, we’ll be doing the locator spell. Also, I think Rene could use some help with the recovery potion,” Maryanne said. She and Xirsi were drawing a huge sigil on the ground.

Her protection spell that would need the power of four light mages. I decided to do what I could until everyone returned.

## Chapter Ten

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“DO YOU TRUST THEM?” I asked Salino, since he knew Adrian and Sage better than I did. I had settled into one of the chairs opposite a female lion shifter. I knew she belonged to Sage’s pride, but I wasn’t sure of her name.

“I trust them,” Salino answered.

“With your life?” I asked.

“I do,” he said.

“It’s not like you have any choice anyway. We’re needed for this spell,” said the female Alpha.

“I just want to make sure I’m not being lied to. Adrian said the spell wouldn’t kill us,” I stated.

“Then it won’t,” Salino said. “Adrian is honest, almost to a fault. Now, had my child been the one to bring you...” He smirked. “He may have lied simply to get you on board. Sage doesn’t care for you much. I doubt if he’d be concerned if you lived.”

Under any other circumstance, it would be impossible for me to be in a room with so many supernals and not want to rip them apart. By nature, we were very territorial. And also, I didn't like Salino and didn't really know the other two. But there was just something about this room that kept me calm and I was pretty certain that there was a spell cast upon this room to make us feel this way. I supposed that was smart. I looked at the ambassador, Zendel. "Is this room under a spell?"

"Yes, a calming one," he replied.

Well, there was my confirmation.

I pulled out my cell phone to look at the YouTube videos that were popping up, especially since all network news channels had been offline for the last twelve hours. The whole world was in a state of emergency. I watched a video of soldiers shooting at monsters that used to be humans and other supernals right before the camera went out as the soldiers were attacked. None of the weapons the humans had were doing much damage. Even from the reports of my hit squad, just facing off with one of those things took everything they had. And even still, I'd lost another griel in the take down. The only good thing was that I still had him locked up in the cell that was strong enough to keep him contained. I hoped they'd be able to reverse this curse upon us. That was why I was so willing to help. I just hoped whatever spell they used didn't take my life.

I looked at Salino and normally, I'd at least growl at him, but I didn't have the animosity. The spell they cast was a strong one to suppress my detest of the vampire. "Do you know why we're in this situation?" I asked him.

"A contract was broken that allowed a Dark God to come through," Salino said.

"What contract?" I asked.

Salino remained silent.

"The one between vampires and the Dark God. That one over there wanted to save his brother and friend, so he had his little mages sever the line between the original vampire emperor and the Dark God, then reconnect the line to him, linking the vampires of that line to him. In doing so, he broke the original contract and the fine print of that was the part where a Dark God gets to come to earth and fuck up everyone's weekend," said the female alpha.

"How do you know?" asked Sage's bodyguard. Shi! That was her name.

"I know because I refused to help until I knew why we were all suffering," she said.

I looked at Salino, just like everyone else did, and he sighed.

"I'm not going to apologize for my actions."

"Why would you? You're selfish," said the alpha.

"Yes, I am. And yet, I'm here, doing my part."

"Only because you won't die," she said.



“And would you be here, sitting on your high horse if the spell called for our lives?” Salino asked.

She growled and considering how calming the spell was, she must have hated Salino more than I did to be able to release such rage. “None of us would be here if not for you and your mages.”

“Yes, me and my powerful mages. I’d watch my mouth if I were you,” Salino shot back. “As I’m sure my hybrid child wouldn’t mind another territory.”

“Don’t you threaten me,” she snarled as her muscled flexed, preparing to attack. “You’re not the only one with a powerful mage as a friend.”

“But mine can’t refuse me,” Salino retorted and his eyes flashed red. “And before you run off at the mouth again, please know... I am the only vampire emperor in the world.”

My eyes were as wide as the alphas at his revelation. “What do you mean?” I asked.

Salino turned to me. “I mean, that as of last night, over a million vampires are at my command. And we are even more powerful. So, yes, my mages and I unleashed a Dark God. That is unfortunate. However, I wouldn’t change a thing. Because now I am the most powerful vampire in the world and my reach is vast. One of my children is also the King of a powerful lion pride as well as a mage on the Echelon Imperial Council along with his lover. I have faith that they will fix this. So, keep your insults to yourself. I care not to hear them.”

Shi smacked her lips and took a sip of her beer. “That was a lot of chest thumping.”

“Just letting everyone know where I stand,” Salino said.

I was quiet as I digested the words Salino had spoken. Over a million vampires were now at his command. I had only a little over a thousand griezels at mine. He was the only vampire emperor, and more powerful? How powerful... what else had changed?

“You said that you’re more powerful now... how?” I asked.

“As if I’d give that away. Don’t concern yourself, Damon. I will not seek to take over your territory. I have more than enough,” Salino said.

I rolled my eyes at that, the bastard. I looked at the alpha and she glared at Salino with enough venom to kill instantly. But even she remained silent. Shi laughed and ate an egg roll from the appetizer platter.

“Why are you laughing?” asked the alpha, her gaze panning to Shi.

“Well, because that was a lot of postering between rulers. It was quite the show. Entertaining, if you will,” Shi said, then took another bite of her egg roll.

“And who are you and why are you here?” the alpha asked, an annoyed look on her face.

“Because I never leave my King’s side, bitch,” Shi replied. “And yes, I meant that as an insult, with you being a female dog and all.”

The alpha growled and her muscles tensed and Shi laughed again, which angered the alpha even more. So much so, her eyes glowed blue.

“You can calm down, the spell they put in this room squashed all of that aggression,” Shi said. “And trust me, you don’t want this smoke.”

“You’re a fraction of my age, little pussy. I can sense it. I will fuck you up,” the alpha said.

“Bring it, bitch,” Shi shot back.

There was a cough and it was enough to get everyone’s attention.

“I would like to remind everyone to please keep cool heads. If you cannot do so on your own, I will intervene,” Zendel said, and he released something that rushed over us so powerful, it pinned me to my chair. “Have I made myself clear?”

We all agreed.

“Good,” he said, then released whatever it was that kept us in place.

I was finally able to breathe fully, now that my chest wasn’t constricted. I guessed we needed to find something else besides violence to distract us. Another two hours passed and I had stopped looking at videos of people dying. I wondered how many humans and supernal had been killed or turned. Most likely, more humans than supernals as we were all ordered to lockdown and mages placed barriers over our safe

houses. I knew this because I'd gotten in contact with other griezels kings and queens and they were all in lockdown. None of us liked it, but it was necessary. The door to the lounge opened and Sage was standing in the doorway.

“We're ready, come on,” he said.

We followed him to a room that crackled with energy when I passed through. I was sure the others felt it by the shivering that mirrored my own. I looked around the room to see a large symbol that had been painted on the floor in what looked like black ink. It had a design on the inside that had three circles that interlocked in the middle. Each circle also had sigils in them. On the outside was a design that was a star with eight points that had circles on the tip of each point. It was very intricate. I turned my gaze from the symbol to look at the eight mages that were gathered. They were all wearing black robes with gold symbols on them. When I looked back at the symbol on the floor, I noticed that each of the eight circles had different symbols in them. I knew those designs represented each mage.

There was a table as well, loaded with swords. It would seem these mages were prepared for one hell of a fight, and on our behalf. Well, on behalf of the entire world. Just these eight mages. If nothing else, I was grateful for them. I also acknowledged just how powerful they all were as a group. It was a reason why no one fucked with the Echelon Imperial Council. When they gave an order, laid down a rule, you obeyed, no matter who you were. And now, Adrian and Sage

were a part of them with Salino in control of them. Jesus. I hoped he kept his word and left my territory alone.

“Please remove your clothes and wear these.” A female mage with red hair walked up to us, handing us red velvet robes.

I took it and began to undress.

“Nice,” I heard Salino say as he eyed my nakedness.

“Not in a million years,” I replied. Of course, I couldn’t help but check him out... he was stunning, and the cock ring was a surprise, to say the least. But I’d never fuck him. Never.

He chuckled softly as he put on the red robe. Once we were all prepared, the red-headed mage gave us blood to drink, and as soon as I swallowed, I could feel the magic race through me and I swooned, but managed to catch my balance. I didn’t ask what any of it was. I didn’t ask if there was a price to pay. As far as I was concerned, as long as it didn’t kill me, no price was too high, because we were already paying it.

“All right, please stand in the middle of the sigil, each one of you in a circle,” said a stunningly beautiful Japanese mage. I held my hand up. “Can we at least know your names, and is this spell going to kill us?” I asked, because I needed to put my mind at ease a bit. Adrian said it wouldn’t kill us, but I wanted to hear it from them as well.

“Forgive me, my name is Kakashi Okumura, Magi-Grande of the Echelon Imperial,” the Japanese Mage said. Next, the other mages introduced themselves, then Kakashi continued.

“This spell will not kill you, but it will leave you drained of your essence. It will take you a while to recover. Perhaps several days, but you will survive this and you will not lose your power as a supernal. The spell requires the very power you have in order to make the weapon we need.”

Okay, that was what I wanted to know. I joined Salino and the female alpha inside of the sigil where I had been directed to stand. Apparently, each circle was designated by the design inside of them. I watched with trepidation as the other eight mages all took their places on the sigil and began to pass a chalice around. Each one took a sip and seemed to sway, but stay upright. To say that I wasn't nervous would have been a lie. I didn't hang around mages, never needed to. Not only that, but mages tended to keep to themselves or hang out with humans. There really was a general distrust between supernals, and mages were a tricky breed. The next thing they did was cut themselves and bled onto the sigil that began to smoke and glow a bright blue. That was when I felt something inside of me snap and my body went ridged as a board. I couldn't move, not even to look around. I could only assume the same thing had happened to the alpha and Salino.

I began to hear chanting and the sound of the mages voice grew louder and louder in my ears until I could feel the vibration of their voices inside my very being. It was followed by pain, god... so much pain, and I was unable to scream. My vision blurred as it felt like my soul was being drawn from my body through my feet and sucked into the sigil. The chanting was blaring in my ears now, so deafening, and the pain felt

like fire. Tears flowed from my eyes; it was all I could do to get some relief from the agony. The spell seemed to go forever as I grew weaker and still couldn't move. I heard a loud collective clap and everything went black.

## Chapter Eleven

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I WATCHED AS DAMON, Salino, and Josette fell to the floor. With the spell completed, their energy and essence had been successfully drawn to create our weapon. My own body had been wiped out as well, and I lay on the floor far too weak to move. We all were. In fact, the only two among us who could still sit up were Sage and Kakashi. Probably because Sage was a hybrid and Kakashi was just the oldest mage here. Kakashi murmured something and the spell Maryanne crafted that was in eight vials began to float to each of us, landing on the floor by our hands.

“Drink... drink,” Kakashi panted. His hand trembled as he reached out for the vial. It seemed to take every bit of energy he had left to lift it to his lips. He swallowed, then collapsed, lying unconscious. Sage was next and he also passed out afterward. Eventually, we all took the potion, and I didn’t think I had ever had the hardest time trying to drink anything. But once I swallowed the last of it, the room went cloudy, then disappeared.



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I felt a gentle stroking of my jaw and smelled a familiar scent. Sage. Slowly, my eyes opened and he was looking down at me. He was so beautiful and those gray/golden eyes—wow—dynamite. I smiled up at him. “Please tell me it’s over already?”

He chuckled. “Not yet. Now, we have to do the spell to be able to locate him.”

I wasn’t looking forward to that. Not. At. All. I’d never had sex publicly, not even to jerk off, and I was expected to share something so intimate with the man I loved with six other people, pretty much strangers. I didn’t like it, but there really wasn’t any other way around it. We didn’t have time to hope a spell would pop up that would be different. This might be the only spell for the job. So, I nodded and Sage helped me to my feet.

I looked toward the middle of the sigil where Salino, Damon, and Josette had been, but they were gone. “Are they okay?” I asked, motioning to the empty space.

Sage nodded. “Yeah, they’re knocked the fuck out in their homes. I took Damon and Salino back and Kakashi returned Josette home.”

“Ahh, okay, good.”

“Do we need to do anything else for the spell?” Sage asked.

“I had already set everything up before you returned. Then we did the Goddess Blessing potion. Now, we just have to do it,” I said. We’d done all the prep, because I knew once we had his location, we had to act. The way the spell worked, if the goddess was pleased with our offering, she would reveal the location to Sage and me. I just hoped we would give her the best sex ever, because she might not be so willing to see us again any time soon. The spell and Goddess were that fickle, I’d say.

I looked around and saw that Kakashi held the weapon in his hands, no doubt, for him to wield, since it was his spell that helped create it. It was beautiful and didn’t look like a weapon at all. It looked more like some kind of precious mineral. It was a silver orb surrounded by a glowing gold material. Not sure what it was made of, like if any of that could be found on the periodic table. I doubted it. “What will that do to him?” I asked.

“It will trap his soul and destroy it. But that will take time. You will all need to fight him to keep him distracted while I activate it,” Kakashi reminded us.

Oh man, why couldn’t we just toss it at his ass and boom, Dark God killed? I had never even met the asshole and I hated him so much. “So, that means some of us might not survive this encounter?” I asked, getting to the point Kakashi didn’t make.

“It’s a possibility,” Kakashi said.

Then I understood why he was so willing to help Salino become Sole Emperor. Whatever spell he cast on himself and Aldéric would give them a fighting chance the other mages probably didn't have. Sage had told me that much over breakfast. Kakashi knew beforehand that whatever plan we came up with, that some of us wouldn't survive. I looked at the other mages, and they were quiet. It would seem that they had hoped that they would live, but had resolved themselves to their doom if they didn't. Hell, maybe I had too. I was still here and I wasn't going to run away. We had a job to do.

"All right, we need to discuss the plan now that we have the weapon," Xirsi said as he wrapped some sort of beaded band around his wrist.

"He won't be alone, so we need to prepare to fight his army as well as him," Kyla said.

"So, that means we'll be fighting as one but in two teams," I stated. "One against those creatures and one against the Dark God."

"Exactly," Kyla said.

I'd never worked with these other mages. Didn't know how they fought, and we didn't have time to practice. "So, what's the best defense we can use, then?" I asked.

"Hit him with everything we have," Xirsi said. "Use your offensive magic while using your defensive to protect yourself and each other."

“More importantly, how do we make sure that son of a bitch doesn’t teleport out as soon as we teleport in?” Sage asked. “I ain’t trying to chase this motherfucker around the globe and we may not be able to do the location spell more than this once.”

“I’m already ahead of you,” Aldéric said, then held up a crystal that shined and sparkled in his hand. I didn’t know what magic it held, but even I could sense it was powerful. Inside of the crystal was a something red.

“What is that?” I asked.

“What was used back then when the Council took down the god they fought. What it does it seals the area within a half mile radius. Nothing can get out and nothing can get in,” Aldéric explained. “As soon as we arrive, I will activate it with my blood.”

“Can we shrink that distance?” I asked. Half a mile was a lot of ground to cover.

Aldéric shook his head. “Unfortunately, no. The power of the blood inside determined the distance.”

“Must be some powerful blood inside. Whose it is?” Sage asked.

“The blood of the Dark Goddess all those years ago,” Maryanne stated. “That’s why it’s powerful enough to keep him from leaving the battle. It was recovered from the site of the ancient battle at that time and kept in our vault for events like this.”

“Perfect, because we’ll need it,” I said, willing to take whatever advantage we could get.

“Adrian, I’ll need you to help me protect Kakashi. You hold up defense while I do offensive strikes to keep him at bay. Make no mistake, Kakashi will be his main target,” Aldéric said.

“I understand. Okay, so we’re set, right?”

“As set as we can be,” Rene said.

“Wait.” I turned to Sage. “What about Shi? She’s going to want to fight by your side.”

“I’m leaving her here,” he said.

I frowned and shook my head. “Sage, she’s going to hate that. You know how she takes her job seriously.”

“She’s going to have to accept her place in this,” Kakashi interjected.

I looked at him. “Meaning?”

“The magic that we’ll be focusing on will be to protect us. Magic users. None of us can afford to be focusing on a shifter simply to pacify her pride,” he said.

Sage growled, but remained silent.

I protested. “She can help. I would think having the most help we can get would benefit us. Besides, I can give her a protection amulet that can—”

“And do you think your amulet can protect her?” Kakashi shot back.

“She’ll be...,” I started to reply, because I thought I had the answer, but I really didn’t.

Aldéric snorted. “Do you know that all it takes is a scratch from one of these things in order for us to turn? If she gets attacked, she will turn and you will have to kill her. The best defense we have is to not let these things near us.”

“If we were to cast a barrier spell around her that will keep them from getting near her—”

“Then what would be the point of her even coming if she’d be unable to fight?” Xirsi asked. “Will be using magic... see the difference?”

“Furthermore, do you even have such a spell?” Rene asked. “Because that sounds like something we could use.”

“To keep the monsters at bay? Like a wall that will surround us and block them?” Aldéric asked.

“What about the one Kakashi used back at Salino’s home?” Sage asked. “That kept them back.”

“That took preparation and a lot of concentration, we won’t have that option. Once we’re face to face with the Dark God, it’s go time. Whatever we’ll be able to conjure in the middle of battle will be it,” Aldéric said.

“When did Kakashi go to Salino’s home?” Kyla asked.

“Hardly what’s important right now,” Aldéric replied, with a dismissive wave.

Rene looked back at me. “Well, do you have a barrier spell like that?”

I had to confess, in all of the time I’d spent reading our grimoire, I didn’t. At least, not one that could be cast on the fly or channeled into an amulet a person could wear. And If I did have one that could protect us from the magic the Dark God may use, Kakashi wouldn’t be able to draw from us, making us useless in the battle as well. That couldn’t happen. As much as I hated to admit it, they were right.

“No, I don’t,” I admitted. “But what about the protection spell Maryanne will cast on all of us?”

“That spell will only protect the mages of this council. I’m sorry, Adrian... Sage,” Maryanne said. “And even that spell won’t make us invincible.”

Kakashi huffed. “Are you willing to risk her life for her ego, Adrian? We’re wasting time at this moment discussing something so inconsequential.”

I looked at Sage and by his expression, I knew he’d already agreed with them. He’d just deal with her wrath later.

“I get it,” I said, dropping the subject. It was best to keep Shi safe even if she’d hate missing the battle. I squared my shoulders and sighed. “All right.” I looked at Sage. “Are you ready?”

“To share you with them? Fuck no. But to kick this El-Kazir’s ass, hell yeah,” Sage said.

I gathered what we needed on hand, then walked back to Sage who was already standing in the middle of the sigil where we'd have to perform the act to please the Goddess of Fortune. I kissed him, then painted the symbol of the Goddess onto his forehead and did the same to myself using the blood of the Dark God's monster and other magical herbs. The other mages all took their places around the sigil to be the witnesses. The eyes of the Goddess. I made sure everyone spread the anointing oil on their closed eyelids. Sage and I didn't need to do that part, but we had to drink the blessing of the Goddess that had to be made with the Waters of the Mystic. Rene was able to get that for me because only a light mage could get the water from the right waterfall. And Sage... well, he had his part, which required the life of someone who lusts in secret. I didn't bother to ask him what that meant, didn't want to know.

I walked over to the table, grabbing the ornate chalice with the Goddess design and name engraved into the gold. I returned to Sage and drank the potion in the chalice. It was actually tasty, like fruit puree. Next, Sage did and as he drank, I began to feel heat flowing through my body to my groin and I shuddered from the intense need to have my man deep inside of me, driving his hard cock in and out over and over until we came. Sage must have been feeling it too, because he pushed me to the floor, placing the chalice aside and lifted my robe. I was already naked underneath, as was he, and his robe was lifted just enough to free his cock from the cloth. He spit into his palm and slicked his cock up. Of course, I had already lubed up my hole, because I knew we had to have sex. It was



just more pleasant that way. But at this point, with the way I was feeling, I didn't give a shit that it was in front of everyone. All I could see was Sage. He was all I cared about. I spread my legs wide and grabbed both of his meaty ass cheeks as he pushed himself inside of me.

“Ahhhhh!” I gasped, my back arching, because he was so fucking big. and his cock ring rubbed my prostate extra nice.

He shuddered and groaned as he buried his dick deep inside and I pulled him down to kiss those lips that I dreamed about even when I was awake. Sage began to rock back and forth, his hips pumping, and I gripped his ass even more. God, I couldn't get enough of him! Our tongues explored each other's mouths in sloppy, passionate kisses. I let go of his ass to run my hands up his back to feel just how strong his muscles were there as they flexed with his movement. He broke away and lifted my robe more, his mouth finding my nipples and sucking on them, which he knew I loved.

“Fuck, Sage,” I panted. My entire body felt hot like a furnace and I felt like I'd explode if he didn't fuck me harder and faster. My nails bit into his skin as his thrusts slammed into me. My toes curled from the intense pleasure and when his mouth locked onto mine again... I came. My own orgasm triggered Sage's and he pumped hard and then froze before quaking uncontrollably. I felt his cock release, the hotness of his climax filling me and oozing out as his cock pumped. Our kisses became soft pecks as his strokes slowed to a stop. He kissed my forehead, then sighed before collapsing on top of

me. We were both breathless but at the same time, something began to happen.

I was no longer laying on the floor with Sage on top of me. Now, I was standing with Sage at my side and we were looking at the Dark God, El-Kazir Del'Avante. Oh my god, he was magnificent. Gorgeous, to be exact. Dressed in a grey suit with shiny patent leather shoes. His thick, black hair was short and slicked back and his dark eyes stared at us. He smiled.

“I... see... you,” he said. “Busy little mages, do you think you can challenge me?”

I swallowed, because I couldn't speak.

“You're the one who's been busy,” Sage said.

El-Kazir nodded. “And soon, even those supernals you think you're protecting will fall to me, too.”

All of a sudden, I was back in the room on the floor and Sage was climbing off me. I panted and I gripped my chest because I could feel my heart beating like a piston behind my ribcage.

“Did you see him?” Kakashi asked us.

“Y—yes,” Sage said as he struggled to climb to his feet. “He said... we... can't stop him.”

“We will. Drink this, we need to go.” Kakashi handed Sage a glass and I could smell that it was blood.

Aldéric helped me to my feet and also handed me a glass of blood. It was Salino's blood. “Drink it. We need you both in

top shape.”

“This will just make me horny,” I stated.

“Not with the mixture we put in it. It will simply restore you and protect you as it has the anointment from Maryanne’s spell. Drink,” Kakashi urged.

It was game time and I quickly swallowed the delicious elixir that was Salino’s blood.

“How long were we out?” Sage asked then swallowed the blood. “Uhn,” he grunted, then held his stomach in what I knew had to be serious discomfort. “God, that hurts,” he groaned.

I rubbed his back, because it was all I could do until he nodded, letting me know he was fine. Thank goodness it didn’t take long. Maryanne had warned all of the dark mages that it would be painful. I did note that I still needed Salino’s blood, but at least now, Sage’s blood would be good enough until the time came when I did. I felt my strength return full force and I got into the circle with the other mages. Now that I could teleport, Sage too, we knew exactly where to go.

Thank you, Goddess of Fortune... with your kinky ass.

“Less than three minutes,” Rene answered Sage, then she walked over to the table and snatched up a sword—which was the second-best weapon we had at this point, the first being our magic—then gathered around the sigil where Sage and I had sex. Some of the others did the same, I didn’t though. I’d be using my magic.

“So, the way it works is no matter where he’s at, you’ll be able to teleport us to him?” Maryanne asked.

I nodded. “Yes.”

“Good, because now that he knows we know where to find him, he’ll be prepared and I doubt he’ll be where you two saw him,” Aldéric said.

I agreed with that.

“Let’s get his ass. Are we ready?” Maryanne asked.

I swallowed hard, because I certainly wasn’t ready, but I knew the time was right then. Sage grabbed the back of my head and kissed me with everything he had.

“I love you,” he said.

“I love you too.” I kissed him and he released me. We turned to face the other mages who were all prepared for a battle that none of us ever had to have before. Thousands of years ago, the Council faced off with a Dark God and none survived and two whole cities were destroyed. so many lives lost. And that tale was only known to us. I hoped that we would not share their fate. I wanted to live!

“It’s time,” Kakashi said as he held the weapon that controlled our fates.

“Let’s do this,” I said.

We joined hands and Sage and I controlled the destination as we teleported to what might be our last stand.



## Chapter Twelve

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**W**E LANDED IN THE middle of an ambush. We only had the span of a blink of an eye to mount a defense before thousands of those monsters came charging at us. I held my hands up, sending flames out, burning all who came toward us. At the same time, I could feel Aldéric syphoning my magic as he put up a spell around El-Kazir, keep the Dark God from charging at him, Adrian, and Kakashi. The spell he used would have knocked me on my ass if I'd been the only mage he was drawing from. But I knew he was taking magic from everyone. Everything was happening so fast all around us. I didn't really have time to process all that was going on. I blasted fire at the horrible fucking creatures as they kept coming. Some recovered from my first fire attack, which was impressive. I guessed I needed to really burn their asses to a crisp in order for it to work. Other mages were keeping up barriers while some like Kyla and Xirsi used their offensive magic and sword skills to destroy the monsters.

I didn't have a sword because I wanted to use both hands to send out my flames. I was a better fighter that way. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the Dark God send a beam of black fire toward my lover and the other mages. The god's face was bloody from the attacks he'd been dealt and his expression was one of sheer rage. Both Aldéric and Adrian held their hands up, fighting back the black fire that was so powerful it pushed them backward. I punched at a creature that came snapping at me with fangs dripping with venomous saliva. My powerful blow sent him flying backward into the crowd of more of them. Even then, they kept coming at us. It was a struggle to keep them at bay, especially with El-Kazir actively working against us. We had a hard time keeping barriers up when he could knock them down by breaking our concentration. It would be easier for us if we could set up permanent barriers, but that required time and items we didn't have and proper spells. These were defensive barriers and not as powerful.

It was pure chaos. I heard someone screaming and turned in time to see Xirsi get overtaken by dozens of monsters as they descended upon him, biting and ripping into him. It was also at that moment when I sensed his link break from us. And I knew he was dead. Fuck! We were down a mage. Just how long was it going to take to activate that fucking weapon? I could feel Kakashi drawing on my power, weakening me a bit. We needed another plan. I could see glimpses of the other mages using energy force fields, rays, blasting huge fireballs, and even a blade or light that sliced through hundreds of monsters

with one sweep. That came from Maryanne. And still, they kept coming, crawling over the corpses, their grotesque severed bodies leaving a trail of blood as they did. Others ran full speed ahead; thank God they weren't as fast as other supernals. I sent my flames in all directions, using my most intense heat, which turned hundreds of them into ash. Yet, it wasn't enough as more converged on us. Sweat poured from me, running down my face like water, and my heart raced. I'd never felt so much adrenaline or fear. God, I was terrified. I had to think of something. I didn't want to die. Quickly, I scanned my mind, trying to remember magic I'd learned from the grimoire.

Fire was one of my most powerful weapons, but it wasn't my only one.

Yes! More spells were coming back to me. I drew in the elements of earth all around me and used the spell I had learned that night that almost destroyed Adrian and Xavier's home and business. Only now, I knew I didn't have to hold back. I was thankful we were in an open park. I supposed this was the best place the Dark God wanted to face off. Someplace where he could gather his minions to attack us. Beneath the feet of the monsters, the ground began to shake, knocking some of them off balance. The soil started to crack and then it collapsed, taking thousands of them with it.

"No!!!" I heard the roar of the Dark God behind me and turned in time to see him rising to his feet. But laying on the ground next to him was Kyla. I knew the moment she died, because I didn't feel our link anymore, same with Xirsi.



The crevice I'd made separated the monsters from us, which gave us enough time to put our focus on El-Kazir, who was still going strong. I turned to see Adrian, blood on his shirt and pants from wounds he'd been inflicted with. Now that we were down two mages, Kakashi had to draw even more magic from us. It felt like the battle had gone on forever, but in reality, it had been only minutes. That was just how fast everything was moving.

I watched as Aldéric sent another blast of white light with a deep red coursing through it toward El-Kazir, but the Dark God blocked it and at the same time, sent a blast of his own power in my direction. I put up my defensive barrier, but still got hit by some of it. It hurt like a son of a bitch and felt like my body had just been struck by a bullet train. It sent me over the edge of the crevice I'd created and I managed to grab onto the edge before I fell down. I was fucking grateful for my cat reflexes. My body ached as bones mended quickly thanks to me being a hybrid. I looked below because the chorus of snarls caught my attention, and could see a deep cavern and at the bottom were the monsters. They were climbing back up, fast too. Shit!

I pushed through the pain and pulled myself back onto the ground and turned to see the other monsters on the opposite side of the cavern climbing down to join the ones who were scaling up. Time to work that spell again. I knew the same thing was happening on the other side, because we stood on what was left of the ground and couldn't go anywhere either. Channeling my magic again while El-Kazir was being

occupied by the other mages fighting him, I used my power to bring down more of the earth, trees, benches, statues, and street lights into the crevice I'd created earlier, sending more monsters to the bottom along with the earth on top of them. I looked around, seeing more fall into the gap. When I heard a deep, guttural scream, I turned in the direction of the Dark God. He was on his knees, and before him was Kakashi, who had blood covering his face from healed cuts. Kakashi was chanting and holding the weapon out before him. It glowed red as it sucked in the life force of the Dark God.

I walked closer to get a better look and saw El-Kazir reaching out as if he were trying to destroy the weapon. Kakashi's chanting grew louder, and his nose began to bleed as he poured more power into the weapon. His pull on my magic grew more forceful as he fought to keep the weapon activated while it did its job. I dropped to one knee, panting hard, as did the other mages. I could feel my strength seeping out of me, leaving me breathless and dizzy. I watched as El-Kazir's body began to shrink into itself as if all of the moisture was being evaporated from him. All around us, I could hear the cries from his creatures and the sound of their combines wails hurt my sensitive ears. So much so, I felt blood seeping down my lobes. As El-Kazir's screams grew hallow and frail, just like him, theirs began to die down too. His skin became ashen and brittle, and his eyes dried up instantly as he mummified before us. Finally, his corpse fell forward and burst into ash that floated away in the light breeze.

Kakashi's legs gave out and he fell to the ground, the weapon still clutched tightly in his fingers as his chest heaved. God, I felt like death warmed over and I barely had enough strength left in me to crawl over to Adrian. But I did, one inch at a time, until I reached my baby. I took him into my arms and kissed him again.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

He nodded. “I'm healed... I'm okay.” Adrian kissed me again, then leaned against my chest.

Not one among us had the strength to stand yet, but I watched Aldéric kissing Kakashi. When I saw how much blood was on their clothes and imagined the injuries they had suffered during the battle, I understood why Kakashi and Aldéric wanted to link themselves to Salino even more. Had they not, they would have died and well, we all would have died, because without Kakashi, none of this would have been possible. As much as I hated to admit it, I did owe the bastard my appreciation. Not a debt, because he got something out of the deal too: immortality. But I made a mental note to thank the asshole later.

Maryanne crawled to the edge of the crevice to look into it. “They're all dead,” she announced.

“All... all of them?” Kakashi asked, still out of breath and recovering.

She nodded, a wide smile on her face. She was bleeding and her wounds were still healing. Which meant the protection

spell she made was working, but none of her wounds were fatal ones. Not like Adrian and Aldéric's were.

“Were you bitten or scratched?” I asked her.

She shook her head. “This came from the Dark God's power. I'd be dead if I hadn't put up two barriers.”

I nodded, satisfied.

“So, it's finally over?” Adrian asked.

Kakashi nodded and held up the weapon. “He's dead, and everything he created is dead with him.”

“Not vampires, though. Right?” Adrian asked. “I mean, I don't feel any different, I just want to make sure.”

Kakashi shook his head. “I did tell you. You broke that link. In doing so, you freed yourselves from his fate.”

I snorted. “Yeah, but you weren't sure though. You were hoping that would happen.”

He laughed and nodded. “I wouldn't have wanted vampires to die.”

Yeah, I bet. If Salino and all vampires died, there goes his and Aldéric special powers.

“Well, you won't find me complaining.” I sighed. “What next?”

Kakashi huffed and with Aldéric's help, he was able to rise to his feet. One by one, we all did as our strength slowly returned to us. “Now, we must erase this blight in our history. Humans knowing about our world will only cause more chaos.

More deaths. They will try to attack supernals and they will fight back. Can you imagine what Salino will do if his vampires are threatened? Or what about you, Sage? If someone comes after your pride?”

“I’ll kill them without thinking twice about it,” I said, and meant every word. Adrian slipped his hand into mine and I knew it was his way of showing me support. If anyone attacked me or my pride, he’d side with us, not the humans. That much he was telling me.

Kakashi nodded. “Of course, you will, as will every supernal. Our duty is to protect our secrecy, protect the world we live in. We need to return to the Chamber and do one more spell.”

“Can we at least acknowledge the loss of two of our members?” Rene said. “They sacrificed their lives.”

“We will hold a ceremony. We all knew going in that we may not all survive this. If you’re expecting me to pretend that their sacrifice was greater than the risk we all took, I have no words for you,” Kakashi said.

“Interesting how you and Aldéric managed to survive your own injuries,” Maryanne said, motioning to the blood on their clothes.

I was wondering if the other mages would get pissed seeing that Kakashi and Aldéric made themselves damn near invincible before the battle and did not include them.

Kakashi smirked and in that response, I understood why his dark magic was even more powerful than mine. He wasn't just wicked, or selfish, or cruel... he was evil. But also necessary.

“Be glad that I survived, or you wouldn't have. I do not owe you an apology or explanation. Now, let us finish this,” Kakashi said, then teleported.

“Aldéric, you know that wasn't right,” Maryanne said.

Aldéric shrugged. “His magic is the level it is because he does things many some feel isn't right. Even me. But I love him, Maryanne, and he's not wrong. We're all alive because he did what he did. Let it go.” He turned to Adrian and me and smiled with a wink. “You two were so hot fucking earlier.”

“Oh my god!” Adrian gasped, then blushed. I chuckled, because it certainly wasn't my first time fucking in public.

“So hot,” Aldéric teased once more. With that, he teleported, leaving Adrian and me alone with the angry ass mages who got shafted.

Their gazes fell on us.

“I'm sorry they hurt you,” Adrian said, because that was his nature. His kind heart. I thought that was what made him even more powerful than some of those light mages. That was why Aldéric picked him to work with him to protect Kakashi while the mage worked his spell.

Me? I didn't give a shit if they were mad. Knowing this lot, they probably would have tried to talk him out of it.

“And what about you, Sage. Did you know about it?” Rene asked me.

I shrugged. “Shit, I was there when he did it. Helped him with the spell. I did it to protect Adrian and me. My baby is alive now because of it, so you won’t see me regretting or feeling ashamed of his actions or mine.”

“Fucking dark mages,” Maryanne snarled under her breath, then teleported. She took the two corpses of Xirsi and Kyla with her. Rene left too, leaving only Adrian and me standing in the aftermath of one hell of a fight.

“I never want to have to fight another Dark God ever again,” Adrian said.

“At least we know how to handle their asses if we ever do,” I said.

He nodded. “That’s true. We can get the jump on them.” He looked around at the carnage we left behind. “Shi is going to be so pissed at you for making her miss this.”

“After what we had to go through, I’ll take her anger. At least she’s alive to be angry.”

“Maybe you won’t have to if we’re going to erase everyone’s memory of this bullshit. I’m all for that,” Adrian said with a sigh.

Hell, count me in. “Let’s finish this and get home.” I kissed him, then wrapped my arms around him, taking him back to the Chamber.





## Chapter Thirteen

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**I**NSIDE THE CAULDRON, WHICH was what I decided to call it, because it was where all the spells were crafted. Of course, the official name was The Grand Chamber. Sage and I joined the other mages in the circle that Kakashi had prepared. Like with most spells, we had to shed blood over the sigil to empower it. I wondered what Kakashi used to make the sigil? Whatever it was, it was overflowing with magical energy. Had my body buzzing with it!

“We must chant this incantation together, twelve times. Once completed, the spell will have taken effect. At that point, we are done and you can leave,” Kakashi said, then he told us what it was.

“Let’s get this shit over with,” Sage said.

“Indeed. Join hands,” Kakashi said and we did.

We closed our eyes and began to chant and at the same time, I could feel my magical essence being drawn from me into Kakashi as he powered the spell. Twelve times, we repeated it

and on the last time, I felt a spark inside my chest as the sigil lit up with black and blue flames. It hurt and I doubled over, groaning from the pain. I opened my eyes to see that Sage, Aldéric, and Kakashi seemed to be unaffected. Was it because it was a dark spell? Probably. It made me understand even more why it was important for dark and light mages to work together on the Council.

Kakashi released the hands of the mages he'd been holding. "It is done."

"How do we even explain all of the dead bodies and those creatures?" I asked.

"What dead bodies?" Kakashi smiled. "They have all been incinerated with the spell. Any evidence of the event was also destroyed including video footage, photos, and audio from every device and the internet."

"Well, that explains why you weren't at all concerned about trying to stop the spread of the Dark God's mayhem," Sage said.

Kakashi nodded. "That wasn't where our efforts needed to be focused. Yes, people died. To those left behind to mourn them, they'll just be missing. Unfortunately, they won't have closure, but it is what it is."

"What do we tell anyone who asks us about where we've been?" I asked, thinking about Xavier, Shi, and the rest of Sage's pride. "I mean, if we've erased everything from the moment of the Dark God rising... then people have lost time."

“The truth of what happened is our burden to bear. Simply tell your friends that you’ve been here, training as the newest members of the Echelon Imperial. We remember what happened because the spell does not spare us. For everyone else, they will not feel any confusion as to the leap in time. They will not have any lost memories. It will be as it was when we did it before.” Kakashi turned to Sage. “Your lover was yet to be born, but did you notice any change in your life back then?”

“You mean when the vampire killed the person on TV?” Sage asked.

Kakashi nodded. “Yes. Twenty-seven years ago.”

Sage shook his head, “I admit, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. But now I’m curious about just how bad things had gotten back then for Council to do the spell.”

“Oh, it was bad,” Aldéric said. “I saw the memory. Eventually, you’ll see it too once you’ve gain all of the knowledge of the Echelon Imperial.”

I nodded and looked at Kakashi. “So, we just keep it secret.”

Kakashi nodded. “I think now, you understand the power that we have as well as the responsibility that we shoulder. We are the guardians of this strained peace that we share with humans.”

Yes, I did understand. The world might not remember what happened, but I couldn’t stop thinking about it. Thousands upon thousands of grotesque monsters charging toward us as

we battled El-Kazir. A dozen times, I thought I was as good as dead. With the wounds I'd suffered, I certainly would have been if not for my link to Salino. And then there was my worry for Sage. Seeing him fighting for his life, knowing I couldn't help him because I was in the middle of my own battle, I just prayed that he survived, that we all did. One lesson this whole experience taught me was to be more cautious about the spells we do and to live every day to its fullest.

"I just want to go home," I said. If it was all over, then I needed a nice long nap.

Sage took my hand into his. "Yeah, me too, baby. What about Xirsi and Kyla?"

"Their bodies will be cremated at the memorial service we'll hold for them tomorrow," Kakashi said.

I felt that was good enough. At least we were going to honor them in some way. I did agree with Rene and Maryanne that we should. Sage and I stripped out of our bloody robes, then showered in the area Kakashi lead us to. Once finished, we dressed in our clothes and made our way to the Lounge where Shi was sleeping on the sofa. He released my hand and walked over to her, nudging her awake. She stirred, then opened her eyes. "Let's go home."

"Finally. Took you forever... I think. How long have I've been sleeping?" Shi asked as she wiped her eyes.

"Not too long," Sage said.

I wondered what did she remember. I guessed we would find out.

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“Holy shit, you two learned how to teleport?!” Xavier exclaimed after he’d gathered his wits about himself when we landed in the living room.

“Yeah, and I see you two have gotten closer,” I stated as Sage, Shi, and I watched him and Jewel scramble into their clothes.

“Umm, yeah... shit,” Xavier stammered as he looked around for his jeans. Locating them bunched in a pile on the floor by the cocktail table, he scrambled into them.

“There better not be any cum stains on my fucking sofa,” Sage said.

Jewel blushed as she pulled on her top. “Sorry about that, my king.”

“Where’s everyone else?” Sage asked.

I then remembered that he’d gathered all of his pride to his tower.

“Most are around waiting for the meeting you called. Some had to leave to get back to work. When’s the meeting anyway? Is it to announce that you’re on the Council?” Jewel updated.

Sage nodded and I knew that was the best excuse for a cover story. “Yes, but it can wait until tomorrow. Have those who

can meet me be here and we'll just get the word out for everyone who can't make it due to obligations.”

“Sure thing, my king,” Jewel said.

“Where's Nadia?” Shi asked.

“She went home,” Jewel said.

Shi nodded. “If you don't need me anymore, Sage, I'm going to head home.”

Sage reached out, caressing her jaw lovingly. She may not remember that she wanted to be with Sage every step of the way, but we did. She only remembered that she was there while Sage and I trained. But I knew how much her devotion meant to Sage. “Go, get some rest.”

She nodded, then left.

Sage turned to Xavier and Jewel. “You two, out.”

“Yeah,” Xavier said, then looked at me. “Before I leave, how did it go at the Council meeting? It's been like what? Two days?”

“We had a lot to go over. Rules, rituals for initiation and as you saw, we learned how to teleport, which is both awesome as hell and necessary in order to reach the headquarters,” I said. It was the truth, just not all of it. Not knowing everything that had happened was a blessing. Right then, Xavier and Jewel were in a good place. I didn't want to ruin their happiness, especially not with something they couldn't do anything about. It was going to be a challenge for me to

pretend like everything we went through never happened. A burden, indeed, but one that I would bear.

“Yeah, I saw and that is cool,” Xavier said, then he hugged me. “I’m glad it wasn’t anything too serious, mi amigo.”

I looked over his shoulder to see Sage smiling knowingly. “Yeah, just standard stuff, but it was time consuming. Listen, Xavier, I’m so tired, I can barely stand—”

“Say no more. We’ll talk later.”

Sage and I watched as Xavier and Jewel left, leaving us alone.

“I almost envy their ignorance,” Sage said. “But I’m glad that I know the truth.”

I nodded then sighed. “I want a nice long bath,” I said.

“I’ll put this up, then join you.” Sage raised the grimoire.

“Okay.” I entered the bathroom and got the tub ready, then stripped down. Once it was full of bubbles and hot water, I sank my body into the liquid bliss. I sighed as the warmth of the water caressed my skin.

“That’s what I’m talking about,” Sage said once he entered.

He stripped and I enjoyed the show before he climbed in beside me. We’d washed the blood away before at the headquarters. Now, we just needed to relax. I snuggled against Sage, reveling in the scent of him and the feel of his powerful body holding me. I closed my eyes and let my head rest on his

strong chest. Listening to his heart beating gave me so much comfort.

“Adrian?”

“Yes, Sage?”

“Marry me.”

My eyes shot open and I looked up at him. “What?”

His gorgeous gray/golden eyes peered into mine and he caressed my jaw before kissing me with all of the love I knew he had for me. There was no doubt in my mind that we belonged together. Once our kiss broke, he spoke. “You’re who I’ve been waiting for my entire life. You’re destiny’s gift to me. I want to share everything I have and everything I am with you, Adrian. Marry me.”

My voice deserted me for about fifteen seconds while my brain tried to catch up and process what he said. “You want to marry me?”

“Yes,” he said simply.

“Oh my God, Sage... I don’t know what to say!”

“You don’t?”

I laughed, because I realized now how silly that response was, because I knew exactly what to say. “Yes! Yes, yes, hell, fucking yes, I’ll marry you!” I climbed onto his lap, kissing him with the second burst of energy I had. Sage laughed between our passionate kisses and when he slid into me, I’d never wanted him to claim me more than at that moment.



Water splashed all around us as I rode him at a pace we both loved. Not too hard, not too fast. My hips swirled as I bottomed out every time and I smiled when Sage's eyes rolled in ecstasy. This beautiful man was mine. Yes, he was wicked, but he was also loving, kind, generous, and he loved me more than life itself. I knew that. I wouldn't change anything about him and I knew he wouldn't try to change anything about me.

When we came, my back stiffened as he held me close, and our bodies shook from the explosive sensation of our combined orgasms. This was what heaven was to me. Peace and happiness. My body was now fully drained of every ounce I had to give and Sage carried me to our bed and climbed in beside me. Finally, I could sleep knowing I had so much to live for.

## Chapter Fourteen

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“**Y**OU PROPOSED?” SHI ASKED, her eyes wide with shock.

I smiled and nodded as I mixed the eggs. I wanted to surprise Adrian with breakfast. My baby was still sleeping. “And he said yes.”

“Wow, I’m not going to rain on your parade with stupid questions like, ‘are you sure you’re not moving too quickly’,” she said, but I caught the slyness of her response.

“Good, because you should know me by now to know that I’m not a man who makes rash decisions,” I said, then poured the egg mixture into the skillet.

She nodded. “True. Well, congratulations. So, when is the date?”

“We haven’t discussed it yet, but soon. I don’t want to wait longer than I have to. I want Adrian completely,” I said. I had enough money to put a rush on things and location was never

an issue. I owned enough venues to make it happen and give Adrian his dream wedding.

“Do you want me to contact Eliza to get the ball rolling?” Shi asked. She knew me well.

“Yeah, also have her add Adrian’s name to all of my properties and give him an account with the bank,” I said as I scrambled the eggs to perfection.

“I’m on it,” she said, then rose and left to take care of business.

About ten minutes later, my baby entered, wiping his eyes and stretching. “Something smells delicious.”

“My dick,” I said with a mischievous grin.

He laughed. “Last I checked, your dick didn’t smell like bacon and eggs, but okay.”

“Hey, you said delicious.”

He smiled. “I stand corrected then. You made us breakfast?” He climbed onto the barstool at the island and I made him a plate.

“Yes.” It’d been a while since I had cooked for myself, probably close to two years, but I really wanted to spoil Adrian. I watched as he dug into the food, waiting for his verdict.

“Oh, wow,” he said and had to swallow.

“Oh, wow in a good way?” I asked, an eyebrow arched.

He nodded. “It’s sooo good.” He ate more.

“I’m glad you like it.” I began to eat my own helping. “So, I was thinking, maybe we can get married by the end of the month.”

“That soon?” Adrian asked, eyebrows raised.

I nodded. “Yeah, why wait?”

“Don’t we have to make preparations. What if places are booked?” he asked.

“Baby, you’re marrying a man with money. Lots of money... and connections. I have venues, so that won’t be a problem. Hell, we can get married on the rooftop of this tower, it would give us an amazing view of the city as we make our vows.”

He chewed as he thought about it and I could see the gears turning in his pretty head. “Yeah, I really love that idea. The weather is perfect, too.” He smiled. “I want to pick the menu.”

“Whatever you want, you can have. I’m arranging it so that once we’re married, your name will be on all of my properties. You’ll own half of everything I have. No need for any prenups. I don’t see our love ever dying,” I said.

Adrian’s mouth dropped open as his fork clattered to the plate. “Oh, Sage... I... I don’t have—”

I leaned over the island, kissing him and stopping him from whatever he was going to say. “You have yourself, Adrian. That’s all I could ever want.” He didn’t need any kind of tradeoff to match me. I loved that I could provide for him. He gave me everything money and power could never give me.

“I think I want your delicious dick now,” He said, then climbed off the barstool. He began walking backward toward our bedroom, his finger beckoning.

Well, I guess that was it for breakfast.

\*\*\*

“Married?” Salino said over the phone, his French accent a purr that still made my skin tingle, the bastard.

“Yeah, Adrian and I, last day of this month. You’re invited as long as you don’t act up,” I said and I could literally hear his eyes roll.

“I’ll be there. The least I could do for you both. Thanks to you, I’m the only vampire Emperor, my family has been reunited, my best friend saved, and my tormentor is dead. I am in your debt.”

“Care to—”

“No, Sage. I will not cut back on the percentage you will owe me,” Salino said.

Fuck, he knew I was going to ask. “Fine, you asshole. You still owe a debt, though,” I said. “Not showing your ass at our wedding hardly seems like a fair payback.”

He laughed and I couldn’t help but smile. In spite of everything, I found myself liking that son of a bitch.

“I’ll be there to see you two finally declare your love with vows,” he said. “Now, if that is all, I have to get back to being emperor.”

“Yeah, that was it.”

We ended the call and it was one of the weirdest conversations I’d ever had. Salino had been an integral part of everything that had gone down. From being the cause to being the solution and yet, he remembered none of it. Only that he was now the sole Emperor. Lucky bastard. He didn’t even have to shoulder any blame or guilt, not to say that he even had any. According to him, he’d still do everything all over again, even knowing the consequences. Not only did he feel the rewards outweighed any problems, but that he also had faith in Adrian and me that we could fix it. Shit, I didn’t know whether to be flattered or pissed off. I decided to be both.

I’d called Damon next, just to check in on him. He answered with a bit of attitude. “Yes, Sage, you’re interrupting me.”

“Well, good day to you too, Damon. I’m just checking to make sure your barrier was working properly?” I asked, but I needed to know what he remembered.

“It is, but I’m missing four of my griezels. You wouldn’t have anything to do with that, would you?” he asked.

So, two more of his had died before he could put them in lockdown. Too bad.

“Not at all. But I hope you can locate them. I promise you, I didn’t do anything to your flock,” I said. “The barrier was my

peace offering.”

“Or a way to cover your tracks?” Damon speculated.

“Listen very carefully, Damon. I didn’t do anything to your fucking griezels. I know we had an issue in the past, but that was it. I just wanted to let you know that the paperwork for Fantasy is coming to you today. Don’t make problems now where there aren’t any,” I warned.

“Your pride—”

“Is off fucking limits, Damon. And you should know that an attack on me is also an attack on Salino. And he is the sole emperor of all vampires. Also, Adrian and I are members of the Echelon Imperial. So, think wisely about throwing around false accusations or making any threats.” I made sure that my tone was as menacing as it needed to be to get my point across.

There was silence for a few seconds, then he spoke. “I trust you, then. But I will get to the bottom of my missing griezels.”

“I hope that you do,” I said. “Goodbye, Damon.”

I ended the call and sighed. That was one annoying ass supernal. Of course, I had to admit, he was pretty helpful during all of this. I still didn’t like him, though.

“Is everything okay?” Adrian asked me.

He’d entered the room just as I ended the call. I rose and walked over to him, taking him into my arms. “Yeah, everything is fine.”

“Damon isn’t trying to start anything with you, is he?”

“He knows that would be the end of him,” I said, because it would be.

Adrian nodded and kissed me. “Okay, good. Now, for our wedding, I wanted to go over this menu.”

We talked about our wedding for the next two hours and then I put our plans into motion, getting everything arranged. Later, we did attend the memorial for Xirsi and Kyla and it was actually quite a beautiful send off. Just us, as only we knew that they were dead. Their loved ones knew nothing. Which was unfortunate. I did ask Kakashi if there was anything the Council members needed to do before they could have a wedding.

He smirked. “You’re getting married?” Then he nodded. “That is good.”

“Why is it good?” I asked. I mean, I knew why I wanted to get married, but his ass always had something sly on the side where knowledge was concerned.

“There is magic in that kind of bond between mages. Vows given, it will strengthen the power you share.”

“And make the Council even stronger?”

He nodded. “It is something Aldéric and I will do one day.”

“I didn’t know you were the marrying type,” I said.

“For him, yes. Congratulations on your own,” he said.



“Do we need to do anything, like get some blessing or anointment?” I asked.

He chuckled and shook his head. “No.”

Okay, that was good to know. “Thanks, for everything. Adrian and I are alive because of you.”

Kakashi stared at me for a few seconds, as if he wasn't expecting me to say that, then he smiled. “You're welcome.”

I nodded, then gathered Adrian to leave.

\*\*\*

I stood at the vine covered archway with the pastor and Shi as my Best Woman. Across from me was Xavier, who was Adrian's Best Man. From what Adrian told me, Xavier was not a hundred percent on board with us getting married, but he also wouldn't stand in the way of his friend's happiness. Still, he was giving me looks that held whatever warning his human ass thought he could give me. I smiled and winked and his lips flattened, but he loosened up as the music started playing and Adrian began to make his descent down the aisle.

My mouth nearly dropped because he looked so perfect. Dressed in an Armani tux, hair styled, shoes shining. Damn... damn... damn! I was one lucky fucking man. Adrian was grinning from ear-to-ear as he came closer and when he finally stood before me, I had to use all of my reserve not to kiss and claim him in front of everyone present. And by everyone, I meant my entire pride and some of my mafia who could make

it. Adrian's acquaintances, people he did favors for who wanted to see his special day were also there. Salino and Nakago were in the audience and Salino was looking like the garish, fashionable frilly fop that he was. In other words, fucking beautiful. God, he annoyed me!

He smiled and I knew the bastard had sensed my emotions in some way. He was far more powerful now. I turned from him and put all of my focus back on Adrian, as I'd only taken it off him for a split second to consider giving in to my carnal thoughts.

"You're gorgeous," I told him.

"You too," Adrian said.

The ceremony began and we gave our vows.

"Adrian, we've literally done the impossible together. I can't imagine anyone else I would want to spend all of time with," I said. "You are my heart, my soul, my destiny, my everything... I love you." I slipped the platinum and diamond-engraved ring on his finger.

He was blushing hard, cheeks cherry red as he cried. He cleared his throat to give his own vows. He took my hand into his. "Sage, I give you my heart, my love, my life, my soul because I know you will cherish it for all time as I cherish you. You've given me more happiness than I've ever had since the day you walked into my office. I love you with everything that I am." He slipped the ring on my finger and it was my turn to get a bit choked up because his words touched me so deeply. My heart ached by how much I loved him.

As soon as the pastor announced us husbands, I lifted Adrian in my arms and kissed him hard. Some guest whistled, while others cheered or clapped or even howled. My heart swelled in my chest knowing this was the moment I didn't ever think I'd experience.

I had married the man of my dreams.

I broke the kiss and put Adrian on his feet.

“You know I'm going to fuck you in the limo, right?” Adrian said.

The pastor coughed, drawing our attention.

“Oh, come on, Pastor Wilson, you know the game,” I said.

He smirked and lowered his head.

I turned back to Adrian. “I wouldn't have it any other way.”

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## ABOUT NICK

Author of deliciously dark, sexy, and thrilling MM fiction. I've written paranormal, erotic urban fantasy, dark romance, and contemporary stories with characters who are rude, sassy, charming, arrogant, and hotter than sinners in hell. They tell me what they want and I just follow orders.

When I'm not hunched over my keyboard typing away, I love to watch movies and TV shows (even have my own review blog!) I'm a bad influence on other authors because I'm always telling them about great shows to watch that take them away from writing. I corrupt readers with salacious tales of possessive men staking their claims on the men who make their blood rise in certain places. I know... I should be ashamed, but I'm shameless.

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## A TASTE OF THE VIP TREATS

This is an (unedited) deleted scene from the New Haven series. There are many more scenes from various series I've written. You won't find them published anywhere else.

### **Titled: Theoden Gets His Piercing**

“You want to what?” Tylendel asked me with a chuckle.

“You heard me. Why does it seem so odd to you that I would ask for one?” I asked him.

He shrugged a shoulder and crossed his arms over his chest. “I suppose I should not be so surprised. You enjoy my own so much, it was only a matter of time before you wanted one for yourself.”

“So, will you do it?” I asked him.

He nodded. “Any time I get to put my hands on that beautiful cock of yours is always a pleasure.”



I smiled because he had agreed to my request. I wasn't so sure that he would do something this permanent after the last time he angered Ara. Also, I had not discussed getting a cock piercing with my Sire. He had long since released me to take control of my own House. I was a free man in that regard. Still, some things did require his permission. I wasn't so sure if this was one of those instances, but I chose not to ask. Hopefully, the next time Ara saw my cock, he would approve.

Tylendel pushed himself off the wall that he'd been leaning against and walked over toward me. He reached up, caressing the side of my face. "So beautiful," he said. "Young dragons should always want to find ways to increase the pleasure the body can give and receive. I am proud of you for making this decision."

"Is it really this serious, my friend?" I asked Ty.

He smirked. "To do anything to a cock is always a serious affair for a dragon, Theoden. You do realize this will be quite painful. I will have to use silver tools to create the hole, and a silver ring that must stay inside the piercing until the wound has properly cauterized. Then you can replace it with a gold or steel ring." He shrugged. "I prefer gold."

I knew as much. The one he had on his cock was gold with a round ruby gem on it. That beauty added just the right amount of pressure and sensation when his cock was inside me or any other dragon. It drove me wild.

I nodded. "I am aware that it will hurt."

Tylendel gestured to the chair closest to his fireplace. "Sit."

I did as he instructed. To say that I wasn't nervous would be a lie because I was, but also excited. I couldn't wait to fuck my four sons once it was all said and done. Tylendel left the room and was gone for about five minutes, and when he finally returned, he was carrying two boxes. He pulled a small table over and placed both boxes on it.

“Well?” He looked at me and gestured toward my crotch. “Are you going to take it out, or do you want me to do it?”

“Seems like that is an invitation, especially coming from you. Why don't you do the honors?” I winked.

Tylendel smiled, then stepped closer to me. God, this dragon was one of the most beautiful dragons in the entire kingdom. I had no idea what the queen looked like, his mother, but I heard stories that her beauty rivaled all others. If Tylendel was any indication to go on, the rumors would hold true. He was simply bewitching and the fact that he could fuck like a god only made him even more desirable.

Tylendel knelt before me, between my legs, and just seeing him in that position began to arouse me. My cock filled with blood, hardening within my trousers. He reached over, caressing my cock through the fabric, and I moaned.

“As lovely as it is to see you fully erect, my friend. It is best that you calm your libido. The harder you are, the more painful it will be when you are pierced,” he warned.

I scoffed. “Well, you caressing me so, doesn't help, now does it?” I fussed.

He laughed, then flicked my cock with a pop of his fingers and the pain was so intense, I literally saw stars. My breath caught in my throat and I doubled over, grabbing my cock as it throbbed from the force of his very simple blow. He was powerful enough that he did damage without putting forth much effort. It made me curious as to just how old he really was. He'd never told me, even when I'd asked him.

I groaned in agony now that I was able to breathe again.

“There, that ought to take care of that erection. Do you still want me to take your cock out?”

I looked up at him, glowering.

He chuckled. “I suppose not.” He rose then and went to the box, opening it and pulled out a long needle with a very sharp point. He examined it, then looked at me from the corner of his eye. “I really do hate to cause pain to a cock as pretty as yours, but at least it won't be in vain.”

“Then why did you injure me?” I asked. The throbbing in my cock was starting to subside, thank goodness.

“I did you a favor. Had I pierced you with this needle as hard as you were...” He shook his head. “Trust me. Now, remove your cock.”

I huffed, then leaned back and undid the lacing of my trousers. I had taken to the style of the more modern fashions. Tylandel was wearing pantaloons, silk, native to the Indian culture for this modern time and he looked amazing. He was shirtless and his body was a work of art, muscles perfectly

formed. He was forever the age he was when he took his Rite of Passage.

“Stop looking at me like that, you will only get hard again,” he warned.

“You’re right, perhaps you should put on a shirt,” I suggested.

“No. Not my fault if you can’t control your urges. One of the reasons you need more training,” Tyrendel said, which stung a bit. I felt that I was well in control of my nature. I was nine centuries old, after all.

“Sometimes, Tyrendel, you can be an ass,” I said as I reached in, grabbing my cock, then pulling it free.

“There is the precious flesh,” Tyrendel said, admiring my uncut member.

“Will it take a long time?”

He shook his head. “Mere seconds. I’ve pierced quite a few dragons, you are aware.” He pulled a pair of brown leather gloves from one of the boxes and slipped them on.

Again, my level of anxiety did rise as he came closer, kneeling down before me once again. He took my cock between his fingers, it was a challenge for me to keep my flesh flaccid in his hands. Even his touch could create pleasure. I wanted to prove to him that I did have control. He pulled back my foreskin, revealing the mushroom tip of my cock.

“I can’t wait to have this in my mouth once we’re done properly piercing it,” he said.

“Now, you’re just teasing me, hoping I’ll lose my composure.”

He smirked, like the devil he was. “Maybe.” Then fast as lightning, he struck me with the needle and I cried out. My eyes bucked, and I growled as the searing pain of the silver needle stung and wounded me.

“Fuck!” I gasped.

“Yes, I know.” Tylenel pulled the needle free, then placed it down. He reached over, into the open box and pulled out several silver alloy rings. He fingered through them, over the gauges. “This would be perfect.”

I was still breathing hard, because my cock was in pain, the skin struggling to heal from the damage the silver caused. Tylenel was quick now, slipping the silver alloy ring into the hole that was at the tip of my cock, through my slit. If I thought the silver needle was painful, the ring was far worse. Again, I doubled over, gasping.

“Yes, yes, I know. It is dreadful,” Tylenel said as he rubbed my back. “If it’s any consolation, you are handling it well.”

I wanted to vomit, that was how much pain I was in. But Tylenel’s compliment gave me some comfort. “Is there anything for the pain?” I asked.

He shook his head. “Nothing, I’m afraid. You must simply endure. Perhaps it is best that you remain here tonight. You are in no shape to travel back to your home. Come now,” Tylenel said, then he reached down, scooping me up and lifting me out

of the chair. He took me to his bedroom and placed me gently on the bed. He stripped me naked, then himself, before climbing in beside me.

It was the first time in nine hundred years that I shared his bed and we didn't have sex. Instead, he pulled me into his embrace and kissed my temple as I panted in agony and tried not to cry.

“Try to disconnect from the pain, my friend.”

“Easier said than... than done, Tyrendel.”

“It is only temporary.” Again, he kissed me, this time on my cheek before closing his eyes.

I didn't know when my body finally allowed me to sleep, but I was grateful for the reprieve.

~\*~

“Hold still, Theoden,” Tyrendel said as he leaned over me.

I was still lying in the bed and sweating from the pain of the silver alloy in my cock. I knew that my flesh had been seared permanently from it. The wound would never close, and that is what I desired. Tyrendel, with his leather-clad fingers, removed the ring from my cock to my utter relief.

“Oh, thank the gods!” I belted out.

Tyrendel chuckled. “It is done. Now, pick your ring.” He held a box out before me filled with rings of all sizes, gold, bronze, and steel.

I fingered through them, and the gold was tempting, but I settled on a steel one. “This is it.” I held it up.

Tylendel took it from me, examined the ring, and nodded his approval. “Fine choice.”

The ring was round with a steel ball in the middle, in the same place as the ruby was on Tylendel’s cock piercing. He leaned over me now and slipped it through the hole and we both admired it.

“A beautiful cock made even prettier. Some of my finest work,” Tylendel said.

“Now... you may suck it,” I said.

With a wide grin... Tylendel climbed back into the bed, and took hold of my cock. When his mouth engulfed my cock, his tongue flicked over my new ring. I arched in ecstasy, feeling a new level of pleasure from the oral sensation. My nerves were sensitive to the ring and a blowjob from Tylendel was even more vigorous than usual. Ahhhh yes... this... was worth the pain.

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