

*Immortal Iron Brothers Series*

K I N G  
O F  
K N I G H T S

*From the Bestselling Author*

BLUE SAFFIRE

# KING OF KNIGHTS

IMMORTAL IRON BROTHERS SERIES

BOOK ONE



# BLUE SAFFIRE



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Perceptive Illusions Publishing, Inc.

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## WORDS FROM BLUE

*All things happen in divine timing. If it isn't time, it isn't time.  
Don't force what could be a blessing.*

—BLUE SAFFIRE





### *The Forgotten*

I stand with my arms folded across my chest in the throne room of the heavens we've created. The humans below have long forgotten us and our names. Our children no longer look to us.

My sons believe I've abandoned them. I have not. A war older than time has been brewing. I've been waiting for the right time to reveal myself.

When dealing with siblings who are gods, one has to bide their time. Patience is something I have plenty of. Time doesn't pass here the same as it does for humans.

We, as immortals, experience existence differently. Time is never ending and immeasurable for us. If we cease to exist, it's a choice.

I close my eyes as I feel one of my siblings make that very choice. The time has come. The war has begun. So be it.

"Thank you, my sister," I breathe in her honor.

"Tanrı, brother, did you feel that?" my sister Hamsa rushes in and asks.

I open my eyes and turn to look at her. She's the epitome of soft beauty, even in her ethereal form. I am the one and only who enjoys remaining in the form and image I made my children in.

My siblings resent the fact that I've given them the form we all enjoyed most. To this moment, I still believe the kings and queens of my creation to be perfection. They weren't flawed until my siblings decided to tamper with them out of jealousy.

"I felt it," I reply.

"But why? Why has she done this?"

"She has given her essence for the good of the future."

"What? What are you talking about, brother?"

"My sons were never meant to be enslaved. You did not think I would sit back and allow this?"

"But... but the curse wasn't meant for them. We had no idea you would fall for one of their kind and have offspring—"

"That's a lie. My sons were born before the cursing. You all were led to believe differently. Have you not asked yourself why I brought Habun here? Why she is the only god not of the original breath? You all were lied to." My voice rises with my anger.

"We didn't know."

"Most of you didn't care to know. The truth has sat before you and it was a choice to ignore it blissfully."

"Tanrı, please. We've lost enough. Don't do this. Haven't things been peaceful?"

"No, they have not. Our brother has forgotten himself. He seeks to destroy and gain power he'll never possess."

"Yes, Harb can be misguided at times, but he's been peaceful for such a long time."

"My sister, my child. I know you are not this naive. My own brother Harb has spent his existence having my children

hunted. Güç has done all she could to help me keep him at bay since I am forbidden from lifting a finger.

“*Me*, you all forbade *me*.” I pause to calm as my temper has caused a thunderstorm. My anger with my siblings has white-hot fire coursing through me.

I continue as the rumbling and lightning stop. “Güç left her home, guarding the balance that has kept me out of things and held Harb’s minions just out of reach of what’s mine. There has been no such thing as peace.”

“So you chose to start a war. To divide us all once again. You know you can’t interfere in their lives. The others—”

I grin. “Oh, but sister, I am not. The others are about to learn why I’m the alpha god. These checks and balances they have tried to impose upon me were a weak attempt at best.

“I allowed this. At first, I was entertained. However, once my children were made to be slaves, the line was drawn. I am no longer interested in these shackles you all thought you could place me in.”

“But Tanrı—”

“Silence,” I bark as my fury rises. I’m done with these games. How dare they believe I have not created a loophole when I see all? I’ve created all.

“I am the one true god. You were all formed from my essence. I chose to call each of you my brothers and sisters.

“I am the beginning of it all. The author and creator, the one true god among gods. And my children are kings of this throne as much as they are of that pathetic realm I’ve left them to hide in. Enough, this ends and Güç has given her essence so this can happen.”

She gasps with a look of surprise on her face. “What have you two done?”

“We all have done what we must. The war begins and I will not be stopped.”



# Kendrick

## *The Kings*

“**S**omething has changed,” my brother Reilly says as he rushes into the room.

I look up as he and my other brothers enter into the study, where I’m looking over reports from the others of this realm. Our motorcycle club is more than a brotherhood for human bikers looking to get lost in the ride.

Are there humans? Yes. However, if you are a supernatural being, we provide a safe haven and resources for you to coexist with humans. The Immortal Iron Brothers MC has kept the peace and balance between the two worlds.

We have humans who have joined us and they help to keep our identities a secret. However, most of the brothers are werewolves, warlocks, fae, vampires, incubus, gargoyles, demigods, or something we’ve never allowed the human world to gain a whisper of.

“What do you mean?” I ask calmly, now that they have my attention.

I'm not frazzled, although I can see the worry etched in their faces. I've seen too much. Things that can never be unseen, things that would taint my soul if it wasn't already black.

I've lived in this world, handling power one could only wish to access. Power so enormous it has to be harnessed and locked away.

Only fools cross the paths of my kind. They think they want ties to us, but being tied to one like me comes with consequences. Consequences that only bring darkness, but it's those who seek darkness who seek us.

"There has been a shift. Like a barrier has been removed," Reilly says.

"Come sit. Tell me what you feel," I say to all three of my brothers.

"That's just it. It's not what I feel. It's what I see. Something has happened. Their time is running out," he says as he sits.

I lift a brow. "How so?"

"I don't know yet. I'm still trying to make sense of it."

I sit back in my chair and get lost in thought. We knew this time was coming. It's the natural order of the curse.

It seems the Ricci family will soon learn the consequences of looking for me and my brothers. They've bound themselves to us for decades. They've gained our loyalty, but at what cost?

You can never hold a king forever. Time burns out that bond one way or another. Finally, the Ricci family's luck has burned out. It's been four generations. The longest we've served any one family. I've watched this all come to be. I've been waiting for our time of freedom.

"It is that time?" Ardan breaks through my thoughts as I hold up a flame in my palm, staring into its depths, watching the lightning bolts that surround it as I get lost in my musings.

I release an amused breath. “So it seems. Although I have been interested to learn what they’ve been up to,” I reply.

“You believe they had another play to keep us?” Ardan asks.

“They think they’re hiding something from us. They know not that this is a result of the bond,” I reply.

“It is quite amusing. Humans will always think they can outsmart us. It has never worked well for them.” My other brother, Bradan, chuckles.

I look from the flame and lightning to my two younger brothers. They are twins, one light and one dark. Ardan is fair, with blond locks and blue eyes. Bradan has bright-red hair, amber eyes and tanned skin. Their temperaments are just the same. Ardan is slow to anger with a light heart. Bradan burns hot and is rough around the edges.

Other than that, the two look the same. My middle brothers play off each other. They’re fire and ice, literally.

“The Ricci family has been the most just we have served. Although, I don’t believe any of that matters now,” my youngest brother, Reilly, says.

He’s the most calm of us all. He has the ability to stay rational in all things. However, if you get on Rye’s bad side, you are likely to get consumed in his fury like a man in quicksand.

Reilly has dark hair like I used to and tanned skin like Bradan and I. His golden eyes tell stories as they dance with hidden secrets beyond what they initially reveal.

I’m amused by Rye’s ability to see the silver lining in just about anything. I snuff out the flame in my palm and lift to my feet.

My study has an old-world feel that I love. There was a time when life was so simple for me and my kind. My brothers and I built this place with a fraction of our own power.

Knowing someday we’d need to stick to the shadows, away from the humans who live above. If time has taught us

nothing else, it's shown us to always be prepared.

If only the world of Manhattan knew the power that rests beneath it. We glamoured the old buildings on the street level ages ago. Just as we have done with the bar we've owned and run for more decades than I care to count.

Humans tend to stay away from outlaws. Over the centuries, we've stuck to this, adapting to the image of each era. Not once has the theory wavered. The more dangerous we appear. The more they stay away.

Only a few venture close enough to learn the truth behind our veiled persona. Those we can trust remain among us. Those whose intentions are of a dark nature are disposed of.

After all, we are cultivating a fortress system for ourselves and others—the beings humans fear and call supernatural. They fear us, but we have reasons to be wary of them and their world as well.

Immortality comes with loopholes for every kind, some more than others. As original beings, we've taken it upon ourselves to give other immortals a place to hide in plain sight. The Immortal Iron Brothers MC is a motorcycle club to the human world, but our brotherhood is so much more than meets the natural eye.

“They have been just? They have enslaved us all. Four generations we have served. How is that just?” Bradan bites out.

Rounding my desk, I move to stand before it and lean back against its front. I handcrafted this desk in one of my darkest times. It alone holds so much of my power. No one has been able to come close to it since its completion.

Not even my three brothers. Each has only ever made it a foot near before my power rolls off the cherrywood and starts to oppress their own energy and powers. It is one of the reasons I hide our deepest, darkest secret within it.

A secret I won't share with anyone as it could ruin us all. I love my brothers dearly. I would give my life for them and

have once come very close to doing so. Our life has not been an easy one. Long, very long, but never easy.

I fold my arms across my chest. My T-shirt stretches across my muscles and the leather of my cut whines under the movement. The Immortal Iron Brothers cut. It has been on my back for centuries now. One of the things I've learned to see as a constant.

I tilt my head. "Hold on, I want to hear him out. Rye, what makes you think this?" I question with a smirk. "How has the biggest mob family in New York and New Jersey since the nineteen twenties been any form of just?"

"Yeah, yeah, Kendrick. I get both your points, but as I said, none of that really matters now," Reilly grumbles.

"This change, does that mean they will escape their fate? To never have sons again. Without a son, it would be nearly impossible to keep their bond with us," Ardan says with wrinkled brows.

"I wonder, how do you suppose they were trying to keep the bond if they truly feel they're hiding this fact from us?" Bradan finishes Ardan's thought.

"I don't think that has anything to do with the change," Reilly says, his eyes distant as if he's still trying to piece it all together.

"Purpose or not, this is the question I've asked myself. One or both of them have a child, and each has kept their children hidden from us. The gods will not allow me to see these children, but I'm absolutely sure they're not male," I say in frustration.

"Reilly, can you see them now?" Ardan asks.

"No, that's the one thing I'm confused about. I see a change. A loss. However, there's a new beginning I cannot reach. As if it hasn't been pulled together yet."

"Um," I hum in thought.

I go to see if I can channel a vision of our future. However, Bradan speaks, grabbing my attention. I turn my gaze to him



instead of within.

“You mentioned names. The fates have given us names but no faces. They are all male names. Yet you don’t see males in the bloodline of this generation,” Bradan muses.

“How is it you can’t see past the last generation? It’s odd that you, of all of us, cannot see them,” Ardan murmurs. “Have you thought of removing your iron?”

“No,” I say emphatically.

Ardan holds his hands up. “It was only a suggestion.”

“A foolish one. We’re not mated, nor have we broken our bond of duty. You, as well as I, know that if any of us removes our iron, it will cause mass destruction and call those we’ve remained hidden from.”

“This we know, but we remain vulnerable as long as we are unmated and in servitude,” Ardan challenges. “We don’t know what this change means, and that doesn’t sit well with me. You feel me? I’d like to know all we can. I think you forget the room of revelation. It was designed for times like this. The mirrors will—”

“No,” I bite out. “Our powers have been locked away for too long. We don’t know if that room can contain us once we release.”

“Then we need to find our mates or break this bond once and for all,” my brother grumbles.

“Well, it seems one of those problems is about to be resolved. The other...” Reilly trails off.

I heave a sigh. “I don’t believe the other will ever happen. No female can handle the warlock within us, and there isn’t a witch worth her sanity who will come near our demi blood.”

“This is our truth,” Bradan says gruffly.

“Or is it?” Reilly asks as his eyes begin to glow.

I straighten and watch my brother’s face for clues of what he may be channeling. His gifts allow him to feel the emotions of others. Especially the feelings of our bonded family.

Reilly's mouth opens and closes a few times. His brows knit, and the energy that pulses off him is like nothing I've ever felt before. I go to step toward him, but he lifts his hand to halt me.

"You are needed, Kendrick. You will know her once you find her. Go," he commands.

I go to correct him for ordering me around, but I feel like I'm hit in the gut with a boulder. The room begins to pulse around me as it comes in and out of focus. I can feel my powers humming against the iron that harnesses them within me.

"What the fuck?" I grunt against the pain.

The room disappears again, and I'm on a street. I continue to phase in and out of the study and the darkened street. It is on the fourth time that I see the figure running toward me. The closer the figure gets, the more my powers rage against their constraints.

My veins feel alive. It's as if my heart is beating double time. I reach out for the figure, not knowing why. Just as I stumble forward, I flash back into the study.

I whip my head around, waiting to be returned to the street. All I find are my brothers standing before me—each one with his eyes alight.

"Go," Bradan commands this time.

He doesn't have to tell me twice. Instinctively, I know just where I'm going. I just don't know what I will find.



# Ray

## *Help*

I have to keep running. I can't stop now. I don't know who these men are, but they mean me harm. I can't die out here tonight on this dark and eerie street. My father would kill me a second time.

Grown woman or not, I should have listened when he told me not to leave the house. I always need to be the rebel. Now look at me. My lungs are burning, and my legs feel like jelly. Yet I push harder, faster.

Turning up another alley, I dart to the other end. When I clear the funky, dank pathway, I turn left and keep running. My eyes are burning along with my lungs.

*Oh great. I'm hallucinating.*

I swear, I see a figure looming before me. It's blurred up ahead in the center of the street. The closer I get, the larger it seems.

*This must be the end.*

My first instinct is to turn and run away from the blurring image. Yet my legs have a mind of their own. They draw me closer to the form that seems to flicker and flash in my vision. I squeeze my eyes shut and shake my head.

My heart begins to pound harder than it had been with the exertion of my dead run. It's thumping in my ears, ten times louder than just a moment ago. It's the craziest thing.

My veins feel like they're on fire. My skin feels like it's going to filet itself from my body. My mind races with thoughts of dying from running to death.

Shit, I work out. What the hell is wrong with me? The figure I imagined running toward disappears, and my heart slows. I'm light-headed, but I can't stop. Tires squeal somewhere in the distance. They're still after me.

I make it to the location the figure I surely imagined stood in just as the sound of the car gets closer. I don't dare turn around. I won't be like those chicks in the movies—turn and fall right on my face. Falling prey to my captor. Nope, that won't be me.

Out of nowhere, my vision is blinded by a flash of light. I slam right into something hard and almost fall on my butt anyway. Bands of steel prevent me from crashing to my behind. It's only as I lift my head and squint that I see it's a man. A very handsome man.

I'm not sure of his age. His hair and beard are salt and pepper, but his face is youthful as if he has started to gray prematurely. His eyes are the color of pure gold, almost like staring into the depths of twin flames.

I'm five-seven, and he still towers way over me. A chilling shiver runs through me. Yet the word *safe* plays in my head.

“Do not move,” he commands.

Each word feels like fingers grasping my chin to arrest my attention, locking my eyes on his. The sound of his voice vibrates through me—like a force all of its own. I don't move.

I can't. I'm in complete shock. I'm one step from peeing my pants.

One moment, we're standing in the middle of the street, my heart pounding uncontrollably, those eyes gripping mine. The next moment, we're in a room filled with mirrors. They're everywhere.

On the walls, suspended in air, hanging from the ceiling. It's a large circular room, making the mirrors appear more vast, or maybe the mirrors are causing the room to seem larger than it is. The ones hanging from the ceiling look as if they are floating on their own, almost like suspended art. Different shapes and sizes make up the whole. It's enchanting.

So much so that I forget we've just arrived here from the dark, secluded streets I've been running on. When it all comes back to me, I gasp and turn back to the one who brought me here. My heart is thundering again, and it has nothing to do with how beautiful the man before me is.

His eyes are no longer gold. They're a dark-chocolate brown, almost black. However, as I look more closely, it seems like a flame still flickers in their depths. I'm drawn to him. That small flicker is tugging me in. My heart feels like it's trying to jump from my body into his.

"You feel it?" he says, his brows drawing into a tight crease.

It is then I note the two piercings side by side in his right brow. They don't take away from his handsome face. They're more like enhancements to beautiful art.

"Yes," I reply, licking my lips.

"How is this?" he murmurs, lifting a hand to run his finger down the side of my cheek in a slow caress. My skin feels like someone has placed a torch next to it. "What is your name?"

"Ray," I reply without thinking.

He stumbles back. The gold flames in his eyes return. I should be startled, but I'm in complete awe. This man...*being*, seems to have power rolling off him. I've never seen anything like it, and I've seen some weird stuff in my life.

His face becomes angry as he trembles with rage. Seeing this, I do take a step back. I look around quickly for an escape,

but there is none.

“Ray Ricci? You are Ray Ricci?”

His voice thunders through the room, shaking the mirrors and perhaps even the floors. I’m too terrified to know if the shaking beneath me is from my knees knocking or the vibration of his rumbling roar. I clench my fists at my sides; I’m determined not to faint.

“Ye... yes. It’s Ray Ann, actually.” I nod jerkily.

“How?” He bellows.

“Well, my birth mom and my dad got together one night about thirty years ago and—”

“Enough. I do not have time for these games,” he snaps, oddly causing my belly to flip.

I’m so not into older guys, but something about this guy has me leaning toward him even when I should be running away. It’s more than the good looks and power oozing from him. It’s the sheer mystery that his presence paints.

My mind tries to catch what it is about him that’s familiar as well as intriguing. It’s as if I know him. Yet I’ve never met a man who displays such elegance, culture, refinement, wisdom, and so much more—all within a glance.

Mind you, he’s wearing a T-shirt and a cut. Not distinguished attire at all. Jeans, bike chains and heavy black boots complete the look. Yet he gives off a regal air.

“We’ve always called your family the dark Italians. Yes, but you are the color of umber, warm like the purest earth. I’ve walked sand and land that could never compare to the richness of your skin or the glow that comes from it.” He shakes his head as if to clear it.

“You have your father’s face, his blood. I can see him within you. I can feel it, but this should not be. What have they done?”

His last words come out as if he’s lost. Slowly, he begins to move back toward me. When my brain kicks in, I tell my

feet to move me back. He shoots his hand out and clasps the back of my neck, drawing me into him.

He fists his fingers into my hair, tilting my head back. My nostrils flare and I ready myself for a fight. I glare at him. He turns his lips up into a smile.

“You have fire in you, but your heart is not wicked.” He closes his eyes and sniffs the air around me. “How is this? It can’t be.”

He opens his eyes again and they’re consumed by flames. I inhale sharply when our feet begin to leave the ground. I’m not sure if I see anger or desire in his gaze.

“Wha... what’s happening?” I swallow hard.

We’re floating high above the room, just inches from the mirrored ceiling. I chant in my head to not look down. I shouldn’t look up either, for that matter. The reflection will only amplify how high we are.

“You have the blood of a burning witch. A witch I watched burn. You should not exist. Her kind is gone.” He pauses, his face tightening. “Your family has some answering to do. You reek of me. How is this even possible?”

“I... I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I say.

“We shall see,” he says dryly, just before releasing me.

I start to scream as the air whooshes past me. It’s as if I’m falling through time. My heart stops as I get closer to kissing the floor. I would have taken my chances on that street if I knew I was going to be dropped to my death.

My life flashes before my eyes. Images of when I was a little girl, high school, my first day at work. Those were all interesting times for me.

Suddenly, what seems like flashes of a past life begin. It’s all overwhelming. Flashes of mystical-looking beings—power, so much power—fighting, lightning, flames, sisters, and *him*. I don’t know where the memories come from, but I know they belong to me. Not only can I see them, I feel them, but I also taste them. I can hear them calling out to me.

And then darkness overtakes me.



### ***Kendrick***

JUST AS I THOUGHT. She doesn't hit the floor. One with her strength, her power, her blood would never have hit the ground. She has, however, fainted. As I look down upon her, her body is now suspended just a few feet above the cement.

I narrow my eyes as I watch the power that emits from her being. This is not the daughter of Ricci. Yes, his blood runs through her veins, but it is faint amid the essence of who she is.

I believe she's telling the truth; the mirrors of revelation show just that. She has no idea who or what she is. I have yet to fully determine the answer to this mystery for myself.

I have recognized her as if she were my love. Not my true mate, but the only woman I've ever given my heart to. The woman who my soul aches and burns for. The woman I watched burn before my eyes.

*Venus.*

Just thinking her name brings pain that rocks through me to my core. I was so blinded by love I allowed her to convince me that her precious humans were trustworthy. We both learned the hard way they were not.

I guess her fate was just as they betrayed her, the same as she betrayed me. I still don't understand what she was after or why. I have held these questions within for so long I've forgotten as much as I can.

"Focus, Kendrick," I mutter to myself before I get sucked into that dark place.



I still don't understand how this is possible, but I plan to find out. I lower to hover beside her. The scent of Venus, mixed with my own, permeates her skin all the more.

*I don't understand this.*

My eyes roll over her. She is a stunning woman. Her beauty is such that it can't be ignored. My love was the same. Gorgeous enough to blind the brightest stars.

I won't allow such things to blind me. I need to understand what lies before me. I need to understand why Ray Ricci feels like both my love and my true mate.

The fever, my pounding heart, my power pulsing against my iron—pleading to be released—all signs of being in the presence of my bond mate. This shouldn't be possible. The only love of my existence hadn't even possessed enough power to be my match.

Yet I stand here feeling the bond pulse between us. Power circles her while reaching out for me. I roll my tongue in my mouth, tasting my mixed emotions—anger, confusion, the fierce need to protect.

I have not forgotten the fact that she was chased. Her blood summoned me to save her. I intend to destroy those who were after her.

*First, I need to understand.*

I raise a hand and wave it over her head. Instantly, I'm pulled into this woman's mind. However, I'm not placed into her current thoughts. I'm thrown back in time to the one lifetime I've never wanted to return to.

*No.*



# Kendrick

## *Immortal Bliss*

*Kingdom of Nar ...*

Placing a hand on her thigh as her long limbs dangle from my sides, I look into my love's eyes. The feel of her skin beneath my palm is warm but soft. I can also feel the pulsing of her power that lies locked away deep within.

“What?” she pants as she rides my length.

“You're beautiful.”

“Um.” She makes the sound in the back of her throat.

I've held our bodies levitating high above the ground inside her small quarters for hours as we've made love. I prefer it up here when in the confines of her home. This modest living is beneath her, but Venus insists on remaining in this village with the people she's come to call her own.

I can see the greed and hatred the villagers can harbor in their hearts. They blame the gods for everything when they abuse the offerings they've been given. Taking, always taking,

not many multiplying of their own will or kindness, not like Venus and her sisters.

They remain here to give to the people, to offer them hope. That is what draws me to her. Her kindness and care—the pureness of her heart.

“You do not believe in your beauty?” I say, lifting a brow.

My eyes drop to her sweat-soaked breasts, tugging a smile from my lips. Venus has the curves of a goddess. I’ve loved on them enough to know they feel as wonderful as they look. At times, I can’t believe she thinks she’s a mere mortal.

I’ve long ago observed the truth about my love. Is she more mortal than not? Yes.

However, I have no doubt that she’s an enchantress with the spell she has me under. I don’t complain. I’d spend eternity under her whim.

I have grown to love this beautiful creature. If I feel this way for her. I cannot imagine how I would feel for my true mate.

“I may not be your mate to hear your thoughts, Kendrick, but they color your face.” Her breathless voice breaks into my thoughts.

She rolls her whiskey-colored eyes and purses her lush lips. Planting her small palms on my bare chest, she unseats herself from my length. The action causes a groan to push from my lips as I slip free of her warm body.

She lifts her bottom half and straightens gracefully until her long brown legs point up toward the gods. My lips lift higher in the corners as she dismounts from my body, landing like a cat on the balls of her feet on the dirt-packed floor.

“Have you ever thought that maybe your father didn’t want you to have a bond mate?” she asks bitterly.

I sit up at the waist to look down at her as her naked hips sway. The smooth skin of her body calls to me. I have yet to have my fill. I go to beckon her return, but she confirms this is done.

She lifts her hand and a fiery staircase appears. I drop my head back as laughter spills from my lips. Standing, I slowly descend the stairs. With each step I take, the flames extinguish beneath the soles of my feet. My own magic frosting each step effortlessly.

I reach the ground and fold my arms over my chest, grinning at her stubbornness. Her back is still to me as I sweep my gaze over her. Devouring every curve with my vision, I wonder how I've lived this long without her.

“You and I know my father has not been that gracious. He allows me the immortality of a god but leaves me to forever be bound to the blood of my warlock ancestors. I will fall to the curses of my mother's bloodline, just as every king has. It is just a matter of when,” I grumble, the humor leaving my voice as I think of the vulnerabilities I've been cursed with for life.

“My poor king,” she purrs.

Sauntering forward, I wrap my arms around her waist from behind. Burying my face in her woven locks, I'm tempted to release the intricate hairstyle with the wave of my hand just to see it wild and free. Yet my love tossed flames at me the last time I did.

Instead, I shift my head to nuzzle her sweaty neck. I flick my tongue out to taste the salt of her skin. She begins to wiggle in my hold.

“You mock me,” I say. It's not a question.

“I do not. You speak of your bloodline as if it is a curse. I see something different. Something invaluable,” she replies, her voice softening.

“Tell me, little one. What is it you see that is so invaluable about my fate?”

“You see? You call it your fate with such disdain. You come from a people of power. Every man is born a king, every woman a queen. I am a mere witch of study and conjuring. You have true power—”

I cut her off.

“We have power until humans figure out how to use us for this same power you envy. I am not a man to be controlled. Yet it is my fate to someday fall into enslavement. I do not see the glory or honor in this. We are kings and queens in name and name alone.”

I don't tell her that she's no simple witch of conjuring. I have held this fact to myself. I fear the consequence of others knowing what I know.

“You and your brothers have avoided enslavement thus far. Perhaps you will continue to,” she says, hope ringing clearly in her voice.

“My brothers avoid it by going into slumber. What life is that? To live but not live. I want to live, to taste, to feel the energy of the earth,” I reply.

She releases a breath. I take notice of the sag in her body. We've spoken of my brothers' choice before. I cannot, will not, lie in rest for centuries in hopes of never becoming a slave.

“Again, it could be against your father's will.”

Turning in my arms, she looks up at me. I can see how much she wants this to be true. We both know she is not my mate. If my mate were to appear, it would be the ruining of what we have.

“Perhaps,” I say to appease her.

A smile brightens her face, taking over her features. It is too beautiful for me not to capture her lips. I begin to ascend to return to our lovemaking, but she breaks the kiss.

“No, Kendrick,” she giggles, shaking her head at me. “I have to tend to the people.”

“Your sister is a healer. The other two give wise counsel, just as you do. You can take a day off.”

“My sister Yanique is still learning to heal. Annaniah and Zandra will have the village in tatters with their antics. You want me to leave the people to them?” she says, lifting a questioning brow.

Lowering us back to our feet, I then release her. I exhale deeply. Her younger sisters are too mischievous for their own good. They also aren't half as powerful as their older sister. The girls have power, but Venus is unmatched.

I believe she could stand her ground against one of my cousins' strength and she would survive. Her cunning mind would be her advantage. Venus wields her magic with the wisdom of old. It is stunning to watch.

Venus summons both of our robes, the silk fabrics draping each of us, proving me right about her graceful skills. Mortal witch or not, she has mastered her gifts and talent. I reach to run the backs of my fingers down her cheek.

"I will walk with you to the sanctuary."

"You scare them," she says. "They can sense your power. They know you're not like us."

"They have nothing to fear. I have always been a peaceful being."

"Are we lying now?"

I love the sparkle in her eyes. It reminds me of the day I met her. She intrigued me then and continues to do so now.

"No lies have been told."

"Surely, my love. They have not," she purrs with a wink. "Perhaps you should return this evening. My duties will be done, and I'll be able to give you all my attention."

"Ah, yes, you are speaking a language I love to hear," I reply, tugging her into my arms.

"*Kendrick*," she says in warning.

"I only intend to embrace you for a moment."

I knit my brows. I felt it earlier, but I thought I could be mistaken. There is a current of power coming from her. It's as if it's not her own. It's faint, but it's there.

Just as quickly as it comes, it's gone. I look into her eyes, searching. Venus has never dealt in black magic. Her soul

doesn't bear its marks. Yet, for her to harness another's magic, that would be exactly what she would have to be involved in.

"What?" she asks warily.

"It's nothing," I reply.

I've been training more lately. It's possible that I'm emitting power into her. That would explain a lot. I'll have to be more careful.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." I peck her lips. "Get ready. I will walk you."

"So stubborn," she mumbles, shaking her head.



## *VENUS*

HE KNOWS. I've tried to use a spell to hide it. I still don't know what to do about all of this.

I know I'm not his mate. It tears me apart every time I think about it. To love a man as much as I love Kendrick, yet know he has a fated mate... it drives me insane.

Now this. He will figure it out. It takes too much from me to try to keep up this spell. If I use just a bit of black magic, I could completely hide the truth, but there are repercussions and consequences. I could make this so much worse.

"Do you need help?" Annaniah asks. "You've been staring at the same page for hours."

"No, no. I'm fine. I will finish this up and then we can tend to those remedies."

"You were thinking about him, weren't you?" she says with a mischievous smile.

“Don’t,” I warn.

“You’re always keeping secrets,” she teases.

I flinch. Her words hit too close to home. There was a time when I wouldn’t keep anything from my sisters or Kendrick. I’ve been hiding things from everyone in the last few weeks.

“Some things aren’t meant to be discussed out in the open.”

“You do know I’m just teasing. I like him. He is kind to you.”

She isn’t making me feel any better. Kendrick is going to be furious with me. I hadn’t planned for any of this. I didn’t know it was possible.

It’s just...after reading those scrolls about his bloodline and how they find their bond mates, I haven’t known what to do. I look at every woman as a potential thief of my love.

Once I determine that they are also human, it’s the only way I can relax. A human will never be strong enough to be Kendrick’s match.

*If I were a true witch. If I were born of the right bloodline...*

I’ve had those thoughts so often, wishing I were born into this and not taught. There once were whispers of one of my ancestors possessing a drop of blood from one of the kings Kendrick comes from.

Supposedly, my great-great-great-great-grandmother stole a drop and drank it. I’ve been going through the scrolls to see if such a thing is possible and if there’s a way for me to find out if their blood still runs through me.

There has to be a way for me to force this bond to happen between us. He loves me, and I love him. I know there’s a way. I know there is because I’ve found one. It’s just too dark for me to try.

*But every spell has a counter spell. A light spell that’s the mirror of the dark one. I just need to find it.*



“I need time,” I whisper to myself.

“What was that?” my sister asks.

“Nothing, I am thinking. Yes, I know you are only teasing. Let me finish up here. Okay?”

“Okay,” she says, shrugging her shoulders.

I watch her leave the room before I turn my attention back to the parchment before me. The writings are beginning to all look the same and bleed together. I’m starting to feel hopeless.

Yet I can’t give up. I have to find an answer. There has to be a way. I just need to keep digging.

“Forgive me, my love. I do this for us.”



# Venus

## *I Can't*

“*Y*ou will be fine. Annaniah will give you an ointment for this wound. It will heal in a few days,” I tell the young man sitting before me.

He nods and stands, bowing his head. “Thank you, Mistress Venus. May the gods grace you with favor,” he says, his cheeks turning red as his voice cracks.

“May they also be with you,” I reply. “You are welcome, young Jacob. Tell your mother thank you for the bread and jam.”

“I will.” He nods and rushes off.

It’s a busy day at the sanctuary. The villagers are gathered for answers and healing, but I’m exhausted. I’m not as able as I used to be. Keeping up with Kendrick’s insatiable appetite is a task in itself.

I fear he will notice soon. It has been a few weeks since I first noted him sensing something had changed within me. I was certain that evening he was going to speak on it.

I've doubled my efforts to find an answer. I'm so much closer to the one I seek. My gut is telling me so. I refuse to give up.

"Why do the days seem longer?" I mutter to myself.

Looking around me, I begin to feel a little light-headed. I hold my hand up, signaling to Yanique that I need a break. She steps out to inform the waiting people.

I am sure the line has only grown with the passing of the day. Many shy away from us—not trusting our methods or fearing the repercussions. The church has been established, denouncing the gods of old.

Soldiers have driven others like myself out of the inner city with threats of burning us. They have yet to come this far with the same threats and beliefs, but that doesn't mean they haven't scared the people away from our work.

However, you have those who have known nothing but the love of the gods. They have seen the days when magic heals and the gods replenish. Those are the villagers who come to us for every little thing.

I fear for the days when this will no longer be. Kendrick has warned me repeatedly that the time is drawing near for me to make a choice. My safety or the villagers.

"When did so much change?" I huff, flipping my wrist to open the medicine book on my desk.

Not everything we perform is magic. Most of our methods come from the earth. We are not born witches, so we rely more on what nature provides.

I lift my eyes from the pages to look at the shelves that line the walls. They are filled with books, herbs, and potions. The ones that are safe to display.

The real magic is beneath the sanctuary in the hidden caves. The caves that follow my family. When we move, they move. It is old magic. I've always found it so profound for nonblood witches.

"Yes, yes, I was right," I murmur to myself.

My thoughts have been so scattered. I was supposed to confirm the prognosis I gave during an earlier visit. I needed to reassure myself for the fourth time. Today, I have needed that more than once.

I stumble over to the washing station, placing my hands on the edges of the table. Inhaling deeply, I try to breathe through the fatigue.

I wave a hand over the water to cool it before reaching in to take out the wet cloth. The coolness against my flesh is more than welcome as I press it to my forehead, cheeks, then across my collarbone. A sigh leaves my lips and I close my lids.

“You cannot continue like this.”

I jump a little. Opening my eyes, I turn toward my sister’s voice. Yanique stands beside me with her watchful gaze. Concern fills her orbs as they bounce across my face.

I groan internally. I call her the pest. She will badger me for answers if she gets it into her head she must.

“What are you talking about?” I ask innocently.

“This is dangerous for you and the baby,” she hisses out in a whisper.

My eyes widen, and I take a step back. Quickly, I turn within to reach for the barrier I’ve so carefully built. My brain races, wondering if I’ve allowed it to slip.

*How often have I lost control? Have I done so around Kendrick? Is that how he sensed the change in me?*

That would certainly explain the look in his eyes. So many questions and I don’t want to know the answers. I’m too tired and drained to handle the fallout of what this could mean.

“How do you know?”

“I am your sister,” she says softly, running a hand over my braids. “I think I know you best, but what I don’t understand is why you are keeping this from him.”

“I must,” I reply.

“Why? He is so in love with you. This would please him greatly,” she says with an encouraging smile.

“His love has no guarantees.”

“Why would you say that? He literally moves the earth for you. I’ve watched him stop storms from raining down until you are inside the warmth and safety of your home.”

“It is more complicated than that,” I huff.

“Then uncomplicate it for me, sister. I’d like to understand. You cannot keep doing this. That child may be part god and from a bloodline of the original warlocks, but it is too small for the strain you are placing on it,” she says pleadingly.

I close my eyes and exhale, feeling the weight of my own secrets. She’s right. I can’t keep going like this, but she doesn’t understand.

“When he told me of the bond mates, I thought I could accept it. I was ready to. We were never supposed to become what we have,” I explain.

“But things are so amazing between the two of you, sister. He has remained with you out of love,” she says with bright eyes.

I shake my head, moving to the hidden entrance of the caves below. This is not a conversation we should be having up here in the open. The bookshelf slides back, revealing the stairwell. The sconces on the stone walls flame to life as we begin to descend the winding stairs.

I wait until we clear the descending cool stone passage, entering the first portion of the caves where the *Book of Paths* rests. *The Book of Paths* is said to be where our family’s power resides and the source behind the caves’ power.

I spin on my sister, looking her in the eyes in the dim lighting surrounding us. She’s watching me through a gaze filled with the desire to understand. Closing my own eyes, I release a long breath.

“You don’t know how hard it is to love someone who you will end up losing. Never knowing when or how. Just knowing

that you will.” I pause, opening my eyes to focus on hers again.

She nods for me to continue.

“I needed to know if it was true. I hoped it was just another tale, but I summoned the scrolls. The ones of the ancients—”

“*Venus*,” my sister groans.

“I did not use dark magic for this. It was a pure heart’s desire for knowledge. They came to me willingly. There are just so many. I’ve been reading through them for months.”

“But you have not been with child that long,” Yanique says, her brow creasing.

“No, I read his tea leaves one morning after he left to train with his soldiers. They said his love would change,” I say to the ground.

“Oh, Venus,” her voice softens. “You shouldn’t have. First, my sister, he is a demigod. You cannot trust a thing the leaves say about him. His life spans centuries you and I will never see or know. Misinterpretations are inevitable. You know this.”

“Yes, I do, but I couldn’t get the bond out of my mind. I had to know more about it,” I reply.

Her brows draw deeper. Her thoughts playing across her face. Though our training was interrupted, our quick minds for learning and absorbing information have remained with us.

Yanique just needs discipline. She has the potential to wield power as great as mine. She and I were marked at birth, unlike my other sisters. To be marked at birth by the enchantresses before us is a great honor. Our training started earlier than most.

Yanique nods at me.

“Okay, but what would make you hide this from Kendrick?” she finally asks. “You just wanted to know more about his bloodline. That’s not a big deal.”

“Yes, at first. Before...” I clasp my hands over my belly.

“*Venus*,” she draws out.

“I have a plan. I have to try this for my child,” I say with desperation.

“Try what?”

“Do you remember the stories of the ancients?”

She purses her lips, taking a moment to think. We’ve been told the legends since we were young girls. Way before I met Kendrick in the flesh.

“The original warlocks and witches were created by the gods. They made them to be in their own image. They mirrored them in every way,” Yanique replies. “Tanrı, the alpha god, was pleased. They were his kings and queens, as he so fondly called them. Some of the gods were not happy with this.”

“Yes, but there is more,” I tell her. “Reading the scrolls, I learned so much more.”

My sister spins away from me and starts to pace. Her face is covered in worry. She runs a hand through her wild hair.

“Should you be going through these things?”

Her words are laced with apprehension. I understand her concern. As young girls, we were warned against digging into places we don’t belong.

“The scrolls came to me.” I plead with my eyes for her to listen.

“Okay, okay, I’m listening. Go on.”

She stops pacing, pursing her lips. She tilts her head to the side, arms folded over her chest. From the drop of her right hip, it’s clear she’s annoyed with me. The stance is all too familiar.

“The other gods didn’t like that the kings and queens held as much power as they did. A few of the gods got together and decided to do something about it. They decided to curse them. Not just any curse, they cursed them three times over.”

“Curses, *curses*! You’ve been reading about curses! I don’t know, Venus.” She begins to pace again.

“Sister, let me finish.”

My own annoyance rises. I need to explain this so she will understand why it’s important for me to do this. Why Kendrick can’t know just yet.

Sweat starts to bead on my forehead. The underground alcoves may be cool, with their light breezes, but so much is at stake for me and this child—for my love. My nerves are starting to overheat me.

“You know you are walking a thin line.”

“I hear your warning, but let me explain.”

“Fine.” She releases a breath and pouts.

“The gods made the ancients mortal. They also made it so any human could force a warlock and his family into servitude.” A shaky breath passes my lips. “Then there was the mate bond. One of the gods fell in love with one of the warlocks. However, his sentiments were not returned.

“In his anger, he made it so the warlocks would be bound to fated mates. Never the love of their choosing. At any time, this mate could appear, and they would be bound to love them forever.” Pausing, I fan my heated face.

“Are you sure you’re not Kendrick’s mate?” My sister asks, her voice filled with hope.

Tears well up in my eyes. I shake my head from side to side. As much as I wish, I know for a fact I’m not Kendrick’s mate.

“The scrolls say Tanrı was furious when he found out what the others had done behind his back. He did what he could to reverse the misdeeds of the others. Though they would never be immortal again, Tanrı extended their lives.

“While they were still vulnerable to being enslaved, he made the fact hidden. Any human who found out and tried to enforce the bond of servitude would also take on a curse as a repercussion for the binding, causing the bond to run out with time.”



“And the mates?” she asks as if holding on with bated breath.

“The scrolls do not reveal what was done. I’ve read and read. There is nothing. I’ve read of mate after mate after mate,” I reply.

“Then, I don’t understand. What—”

“There has to be a way,” I cut her off. I lick my lips. “Everything I’ve read points to the bloodlines. Their mates have never been human. I don’t think our blood is strong enough. If there was just a way to find what in their blood triggers the bond. Maybe I can—”

“Oh, gods. Have you lost it?” Yanique’s voice rises.

The soft winds in the cave pick up. My eyes widen. I knew my sisters would be upset with me if I told them what I’d been up to. The rising of Yanique’s power proves me right.

I look up at her pleadingly. She’s looking back at me like I’ve lost my mind. Her annoyance with me is clear in the tightening of her lips.

“Yan—”

She holds her hand up to halt me.

“You cannot be serious. You are talking about playing with fate. This is not some simple spell or fix. You want to trick fate into thinking you are his mate.” She covers her face with her hands and groans.

I have to make her understand. I’ve thought this through. I know I can figure it out.

“If the rumors are true that our ancestor once drank their blood and lived to be two hundred. Maybe I—”

“Stop this...this is crazy talk. I know for a fact that if you can do this, it’s going to lead you down a path of darkness. You have that baby to think about. Don’t do this,” she hisses.

“It’s this baby who I’m doing it for. Having his child inside me is what makes me think I can do this. His blood is already a part of me,” I snap back.

“Venu—”

The torches flicker around us, silencing us both. We look at each other with alarm. It happens again, causing us to whip our heads toward the staircase.

“Someone is in the sanctuary,” she whispers.

“Let’s go,” I rush out, heading for the stairs.

“They will see us coming out of the hidden place,” Yanique calls from behind me as I rush up to the top.

“I will use an illusion spell.”

“No, no, you mustn’t. It’s too much for you in this condition. I’ll do it,” she says, rushing around me.

We pause at the top of the stairs. My heart races with thoughts of who can be on the other side of the wall. The people know not to enter without one of my sisters telling them it’s their turn.

However, the soldiers do as they please. Our parents were slaughtered by the soldiers of the church, changing our lives forever. All because they were deemed as evil.

“Careful, sister. Concentrate. We need to look natural when we appear, nothing extravagant to show off,” I warn.

We know the risks of practicing magic, but these people of the village have not forgotten the gods. They still believe in the ways of old and we can help them. We stay because the gods have gone silent, but the people are still in need of hope.

Beings like Kendrick still roam the earth, but they grow wary of the humans and have stopped revealing themselves. It would be easy to do the same, but we can’t. We may have lost everything, but we refuse to hide, leaving these people behind.

“Easy,” I warn as she begins to open our exit.

We can’t allow the soldiers to find our caves or to see our power. These passageways are all we have left. The only way we’ve been able to continue our training. Many of our family’s secrets that were not safely hidden in these caverns were

burned to the ground. What's down here only holds just a third of what was lost.

"Easy," I whisper again as I watch my sister's hands shake.

"I have it," she hisses back.

I purse my lips, praying to the gods that soldiers are not on the other side. The few times we've been summoned to the inner walls of the city, we've proven we are simple healers. I know that's because Kendrick scrambled their thoughts.

My sister opens a wooden door in the corner of the room, leading us into the sanctuary. To those outside, it should look as if it has always been there. We step out of the door as if coming from a back room.

When we step through, I nearly sag in relief. Standing before us is my handmaid and her husband. I hear a moan and look to the cot where I examine the sick. Their small daughter is lying upon it, curled in a ball.

I rush over to the child. Placing a hand upon her forehead, I quickly assess what ails her. My lips part and tremble. She is very ill.

"You have to heal her," Benjamin demands. "Heal them both."

I turn my head to Annabeth. She looks pale and much thinner than usual. She's been sending her eldest daughter to cover for her.

I thought nothing of it. It's not the first time her eldest daughter has come to work in her stead while she tends to her husband or their two youngest children.

I tighten my fists at my side. It pains me to say my next words, but I have no choice. I close my eyes as I speak.

"I cannot," I whisper.

Healing this child or Annabeth will harm my own. I don't have the strength to take away what plagues them.

"You must. You think I don't know you are a witch? You're no simple healer. You have power. Heal her," his voice

rises with each word.

“Benjamin, please,” his wife whispers in a plea.

“No, you have waited long enough to come to them. They will heal you. She is the most powerful of them all. She parades around with that...that...he is not a human,” he bites out.

“I must ask you to leave,” Yanique says firmly.

“Not until she heals them,” he says brokenly.

My heartstrings tug. This is not an easy thing for me to do. To send them away.

My sister has not mastered the type of power needed to heal them both. If I were not with child, I would still need a few days rest after doing what needs to be done.

They have waited too long to come to me. Death has already claimed them. I would be snatching them from the reaper’s door. It is a fight I cannot win in my condition.

“You will leave,” Yanique says with more force. “We cannot help them. The most we can do is ease their pain for a little while.”

“You’re all spawns of the devil. You pray to gods who have not shown themselves in centuries. I’ve never seen them. I’ve only heard stories since I was a boy.

“We are left with nothing, and they have no care for us. Where are your gods? Where is your power? They are right. You should all be burned,” he rages.

“Leave,” I say, shaking the room.

He wants to see power? There he has it. I will not be spoken to like this, not inside the place we have built to help.

His eyes widen and he takes a few steps back. His wife rushes over to grab him by the arm, but he pulls free from her hold. He narrows his eyes on me.

“I told you we shouldn’t have come here. Let us just go,” she pleads with her husband.

“All you have done for them,” he almost sobs.

“She would if she could, my love. Please, let’s go,” she replies.

“I am sorry, Annabeth,” I say softly.

“It is okay, mistress. I understand,” she says, her eyes dropping to my belly as a smile graces her lips. “May the gods grace you with favor.”

“May they also be with you,” I say sadly, my hands going to my belly.

“Curse you and the gods,” her husband says bitterly as he scoops his daughter into his arms.



### *Ask For Help*

*Y*anique sighs for the millionth time as we read through scrolls in the caves. It's been a few days since I first shared my plans with her. With some reluctance, she decided to help me.

"You know you don't have to do this. I can manage on my own," I say tiredly.

"And leave you to spend hours exhausting yourself and that baby? I don't see why you won't tell Zandra and Annaniah. We'd make it through all of this so much faster," she groans.

"I don't think that's wise for now. They are young and talk too much."

"Gods forbid the father of that child finds out," she says and rolls her eyes, her words dripping with sarcasm.

"I will tell him when the time is right," I bite out in frustration.

“Have you thought for once that he may know the answer or someone who could provide one?”

“No, I have not because erasing his true mate may not be something he desires.”

“Which is why we shouldn’t be doing this.”

I look at my sister with wide eyes. Her skin is glowing, and her eyes are changing color—almost as if flashing between her natural warm brown and a fiery bright orange. My mouth falls open. This has never happened before.

However, I’ve been sensing a change in her power in the last few days. At first, I thought it was a result of the spell I’ve been casting, but something else is going on here.

“Yanique,” I gasp.

She closes her eyes and takes a calming breath. I watch as the glow slowly dies down. The scrolls before me are forgotten.

“Forgive me,” she whispers. “I didn’t mean to lose my temper. This is just so dangerous and doesn’t feel right. I beg of you, reconsider and speak with Kendrick.”

I swallow hard and shake my head. “And if I lose him... Maybe not once I tell him, but how about a year after the baby is born or ten years or fifteen? His true mate could appear and then what will me and my child do? You do understand there’s no rejecting his true mate. It will be her over me.”

“Yes, I understand. I know better than you can imagine. This is wrong. Nothing good can come of it. You are playing in things that aren’t meant for us to touch.”

Her eyes are glowing again. I place my hands over my belly as I get this overwhelming, strange feeling. Yanique closes her eyes again and places a hand to her head.

“I’m sorry, I’m not feeling well.”

“Let us continue this another time. I think I’ve reached my limit for the day as well.”

“I will walk home with you.”

“Thank you.”

I stand and move to the wall next to the bookshelves in this area. I wave my hand before the hidden place I’ve created for the scrolls. The wall vanishes and reveals an opening. I place the scrolls inside with the others and quickly hide them away once again.

I furrow my brows as I gather my notes and my satchel. I’ve been so consumed with my quest I haven’t been checking in with my sisters as much as I should.

I make a mental note to sit with them all and see if I sense changes in the others. From now on, I plan to keep a closer eye on Yanique as well. Moving our powers along too fast or in an unnatural manner could cause us to go mad and lose control.

I’m not saying she’s unstable, but that wasn’t normal. In fact, it looked more like the powers of...

No.

I also need rest. Maybe I’m seeing things in my exhaustion. It could be the spell. Yes, I’m seeing things. I need some rest.



### ***Kendrick***

“WHAT AILS YOU, my love? You look exhausted,” I murmur against Venus’s temple.

I’ve been watching her since I arrived. She’s not her usual self. Her smiles haven’t met her eyes the same and she’s been distracted.

“I am fine. A bit tired, but it’s nothing a bit of rest won’t fix.”



I narrow my eyes at her. Reaching out with my powers, I go to confirm my feelings for myself. I'm met with a barrier, which raises my hackles.

I've never been met with resistance when it comes to her. I didn't even know she knew how to block me out. I still my anger.

She has been training and learning. Perhaps she forgot to put her guard back down. We have no secrets.

I refuse to believe she's done this to hide something from me. What could she possibly need to hide? I shake the thought off as she comes to sit on my lap.

I palm her face and run my thumb across her bottom lip. "Then I shall leave and allow you to rest."

"Please, no. Stay and lie with me."

I calm as she places her forehead against my chin and releases a heavy breath. Rubbing a hand up and down her back, I think to reach for her aura and feelings once again.

"Your arms are all I need. Will you stay?"

I grunt and nod. We will talk once she has rested. I lift my gaze and a bed appears above us. Lifting her in my arms, I then ascend to lie in the bed of my creation.

She laughs. "Why do you hate my bed so much?"

"It is too small and low. Besides, no one would expect us up here and they wouldn't be able to reach us before I could become aware."

"Always the alert warrior," she says with a smile in her voice.

"Is there any other kind of warrior?"

"I guess not," she yawns.

I turn her to spoon her from behind. Her lush curves fit right into me. She sighs contentedly. With a smile, I bury my nose in her neck and inhale.

I freeze as a small hint of my scent comes from her being. However, as fast as it comes, it goes. I inhale, trying to catch the scent again.

I shake my head clear and close my eyes to rest as well. I have been training harder in the valley. Maybe I've overdone it. Yes, that has to be it.

I also thought I felt someone watching me while training today. I didn't catch a scent or aura, but I still felt like I was being watched.

"We both need rest," I murmur.

"Um?"

"Nothing. Go to sleep, my love."



# *Benjamin*

## *Betrayal*

“*B*enjamin, promise me you won’t do anything rash. There’s a reason they could not help us. I understand. It is our time. It is not for you to look for vengeance. Promise me,” Annabeth says breathlessly.

“I can make you no such promise,” I say tightly as I hold our dead daughter in my embrace.

She is gone and her mother is on the verge of her last breath. I’m losing everything. Those women refused to help us.

Always preaching how they are here to help, to heal and the one time they were needed—truly needed—they refused to help. I don’t care if this plague takes me. All I wanted was for Annabeth and our daughter to get well.

However, while I’ve gotten better and the cough and aches have left my body, Lily is gone and I’m losing Annabeth. I sob into my daughter’s hair. To hear her laugh once more would ease the pain.

Yet that will never happen again. I've lost that sweet giggle forever. Annabeth weakly places her hand on my head.

"Benjamin, please. I need to hear you say it. Give me that peace. Venus has been my friend."

"Some friend," I cry.

She falls into a fit of coughing. I lift my head to look at her as I wait for it to pass. However, it doesn't.

Pain sears through me as I watch my wife take her last breath. I can't breathe. This can't be happening.

"*Annabeth, no,*" I cry out brokenly.

Anger washes over me. This wasn't supposed to end like this. She was the handmaid to a powerful healer. My mother believed in their gifts. My grandmother shared stories of healers with powers like theirs when I was a young boy.

How can this be happening? I cling to my child and climb into the bed next to my wife. I kiss both of their heads and break down sobbing.

How am I to tell my son and other daughter they are gone? I sent them away to keep them healthy. They didn't get to say goodbye.

It feels like I have a hole in my chest. Someone needs to pay for this. This could have been prevented and now someone needs to pay for my loss.

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"STOP. No one is allowed into the city at this hour," the guard barks as I approach the gates.

"I have information of a coven and a superbeing. Allow me passage to speak with the bishop," I say firmly, refusing to turn away.

"Go away. No one is allowed in."

"I need to see the bishop," I growl and charge forward.

One guard restrains me, pinning my arms over my head. The one refusing to allow me passage throws a punch at my ribs. I cough and groan, but the pain is welcome. It's better than the ache of my loss.

"I. Need. To. See. The. Bishop," I say through my teeth.

The guard goes to hit me again. I close my eyes, but the blow never comes. I crack one eye open and find a man holding his staff across my body, blocking the guard from hitting me again.

"Stop this. Release him," he says sternly.

The man then turns cold blue eyes on me. A shiver runs through me. I don't know who this man is, but he emits a power and presence that pulses from him, causing my knees to weaken.

"You say you've come across a superbeing?" he says and lifts a brow at me.

"Yes, he fraternizes with a coven of witches in my village. My wife was the leader's handmaid."

"Was?"

I drop my gaze to the ground, feeling as if I'm betraying Annabeth. Then I see her and Lily's faces and my heart breaks. This shouldn't be. My regrets are forgotten as my anger rises.

"She and my daughter have succumbed to illness. I've lost them."

"Let me guess, this coven wouldn't heal your family. Now you're looking for revenge," he says dryly.

"It's not right. She walks around with that demigod as if we don't know he's different. I've watched him change the weather. I know it was his doing. She could have healed them. She should have healed them," I sob.

The man grabs my arm and yanks me into him, away from the guards. Fear fills me as he growls into my face. "Silence."

"Open the gate," he barks at the guards.

My heart pounds as he drags me into the city beside him. What have I done? This feels wrong. Fear overtakes my anger.

“Where are you taking me?” I ask, trying and failing to keep the fear out of my voice.

“This superbeing you speak of. You say he controlled the weather. Are you sure of this?” he hisses.

“Yes. He stopped the rain and held off the thunder and lightning. I saw it with my own eyes. It didn’t roll in as a full storm until my wife and his lover were undercover.”

“He has a lover? One of the witches?”

“Y...yes. The leader. She is more powerful than the others. I believe they are younger than she,” I reply.

“Tell me more about him.”

“He is large. Too large to be a mere human. He goes out into the valley by himself for days.

“The villagers have all been wary of entering the woods since he started to venture to them. The weather changes when he’s out there as well.”

“How so?”

“There’s always lightning over the valley while he’s out there.”

“Are there others? Superbeings, have you seen others? Three others?” he asks anxiously.

His eyes are bright with excitement. His voice is filled with anticipation, as if he’s found something he’s been looking for. I get the feeling that I’ve said too much.

“Answer me,” he seethes in my face.

I jump as he barks at me. The anger now filling his eyes is palpable. This was a mistake.

“Have. You. Seen. The. Others?” he growls at me, tightening his hold on my arm.

“N... no. There is only the one. I have never seen others.”

He releases me with a shove. I stumble back but straighten quickly. He glares down at me. It registers how much taller he is. As if he's gotten taller since he first appeared.

"I should get to the bishop," I say.

"Who do you think I am?" He gives me a grin that sends a shiver through me.

I have never been to the church within the city walls. All I know is that the bishop here has the king's ear. I was hoping to have the soldiers sent to the village to burn those witches out.

"Come, we have much to speak of. I want to know where you are from and all you know about this coven. I can get you what you seek if you can get me to this superbeing.

"Show me this valley you speak of and I will grant you your heart's desire. Can you do this?"

I search his blue gaze. It's cold and unyielding. I get the feeling refusing his request is not an option.

"Y... yes. I can do this."



# *Kendrick*

## *Fury of A King*

I have been out here in my training grounds for two days—two long days of missing my love. However, I needed to release my powers and stretch in my true form.

I look up at the sky and stare. Once again, I get the feeling I'm being watched. However, it's not the same as before.

There are scents in the air that belong to the fools who dare to watch me. I know for sure there are humans in the woods. I can almost taste their fear.

Someone has sent them to their deaths. I can smell their fear and aggression. They have not come in peace.

I open my palms and the sky darkens. Clouds roll in and thunder begins to rumble through the field, pulsating with my power.

“Fly,” I murmur to the raven I've taken possession of.

Through his eyes, I scout those lurking after me. They are beginning to close in. I narrow my eyes as I note they have weapons drawn.



From their armor, they look to be the king's men. My thoughts begin to race. It's in times like this I wish that Venus were my mate so that I could check to see if she's safe.

I will just have to make this quick so I can get to her in the flesh. I don't have a good feeling about this. The king's men never come out this far.

The humans in the village stay away when I'm out here. I make sure of that. For these soldiers to be out here, another has sent them and aided them beyond my barriers. Some being has chosen to pick a fight these humans will lose.

"You. Will. All. Die," I bellow, my voice rumbling through the air as they come into view.

My power rises through me and I release my knights to battle. Not a single man is spared. It only takes seconds for the field to be filled with smoke and ash.

As the smoke settles around me and the clouds billow out, it dawns on me I've been targeted. Someone has dared to test me. Unable to hold in the rage, I throw my head back and release a roar.

The ground shakes beneath me and lightning fills the sky, striking randomly like bolts, confirming my fury. I reel in my temper and power and rush for the village. I need to get to Venus.

Somehow, this connects to her and those villagers. I feel it in my bones.



## *Benjamin*

"YOU HAVE DONE WELL," the bishop says as he holds his hand on my shoulder to keep me from running.

“Wh...what just happened? Did he just—”

“Indeed, he did. Wasn’t that magnificent? And to think he’s only a half-blood. So insignificant as opposed to his kind and the creator thereof.”

“His kind? What is he?”

“I wouldn’t defile my presence by naming what he is. He and his brothers are an abomination. Unworthy of the blood and essence they carry.”

“Brothers? More like him? Can they do that as well?”

He shrugs and frowns. “I do not know. I have never seen them all in action. However, they are just as powerful as he is.”

“That...that thing just decimated the king’s army. With... with, what would you even call that? That is beyond magic.

“He’s no creature of the night. A shifter could never do something like that. Gods knows what else I’ve heard tales of that wouldn’t even begin to come close to what I’ve just witnessed.

“This is wrong. We must hurry away before he sees us and those... those. He will turn us into dust like the others.”

I go to turn and run, but the bishop slaps me across the face, whipping my head to the side. I grab my cheek and look up at him. He gives me a cold glare as he narrows his eyes.

“Calm down and shut up. That was not the king’s army. It was a unit of soldiers. I have many more at my disposal.

“If you run, you will reveal yourself. He will not see us if I don’t want him to see us. Do not move from my covering.

“I cannot afford to lose you yet. Somehow, you have made yourself valuable to me,” he snarls down at me.

“Me?”

He rolls his eyes. Impatience seeps off him. This is the bishop of the church. Yet something is off about him.

We've been led to believe the king's church is against magic, but I won't lie to myself and believe this man is a normal human.

"Yes, you. Do you see anyone else left alive out here?"

"Ho... how. What am I to do?"

"You will find me the others."

"How can I—"

He points out to the smoking field. "He will lead you to them."

Reaching into his pocket, he pulls out an amulet. It flashes with a green light.

"Take this. It will help you travel quickly and keep you hidden from him. When you find the others, it will bring me to you.

"If you try to run, I will know. If you try to get rid of it, I will know. You are bound to me and this work. Nod if you understand." I nod slowly. "Good, I will send soldiers to collect your son. He remains with me until the deed is done."

"Ho...how do you know—"

"You are the only one flying blindly here. The price has been set. You missed the negotiations. Now take this. Go on, be quick."

I take the amulet with a shaky hand. Before it can settle into place, he is gone. I turn in a circle, looking around the field.

The bishop is gone, as is that superbeing. All that's left are piles of ash that were once living men. I stumble back and fall onto my behind.

*Not my son.*

How did I get here? What have I done? This isn't right. I know it isn't.

"Annabeth, please forgive me."



# Venus

## *You Must Stop*

I rub my temples and groan. I'm hungry, but I haven't been able to pull myself away from reading these scrolls. The crackers in my satchel have been holding me over.

I can't move because I think I'm onto something. Since Kendrick left to train in his favorite place, new scrolls have come to me. I am taking this time to read through them. These are older, more ancient ones.

At first, I didn't think I would find what I was looking for, but I had to look closer. The answers are scattered, but I've been reading for so long the words have started to bleed together. That's when the answers begin to jump out at me.

"Yes, yes, this is it," I mutter to myself.

I look at my notes and then back at the scrolls. There is a way. A spell that doesn't use dark magic.

"No, no, no," I whimper as I keep reading.

The resources I need to do this are not within my reach. I would need to be on sacred, immortal ground. This would also

require five others in my bloodline.

I cannot ask my sisters to do this. Zandra and Annaniah aren't ready. This spell would risk too much, and I would still be short two others. There aren't any more of us.

Suddenly, a breeze fills the cave, blowing out the sconces and the oil lamp before me. I look around. This is not the warning system that lets us know when someone is above. I shiver and stand.

A pulsing begins within my womb. I cover my stomach with my hands and pray to the gods that all is well. I'm going to have to tell Kendrick the truth soon. I don't think I can keep this up much longer.

"Venus."

My name is called as if a whisper in the wind. I startle and look around wildly. My power isn't at full strength, but I'm prepared to fight. I will protect my child at all costs.

I weave my hands before me and a bow and arrow forms within my palms. I pull the bow taut and try to find the intruder with the illuminated tip of the arrow.

"You cannot continue on this path, my child. You are affecting the baby."

"What? Who's there?"

A beam of light appears before me. Then, a woman seems to step from it. The light disappears, but the woman has a glow of her own.

Her dark-brown skin has a gold tone to it, as if she bathes in a sea of gold each day. Her hair is in big wavy curls that look like finely spun silk.

"Put the weapon down, my child. I mean you no harm. I am here to help. You will learn to trust me in time."

She pauses and her brows furrow. I lower the bow, still watching her closely. Her mouth hasn't moved once, although I can hear her speak to me clearly.

There's something about her voice. It's melodic and soothing. Almost as if she could lull you to sleep.

She tilts her head to the side. A smile comes to her lips. Suddenly, the feeling of warmth falls over me.

It's as if the weight of the burden I've been carrying has been lifted. Then, in the blink of an eye, the woman is standing right before me. It feels like she's reaching into my womb. My bow and arrow vanish as I lose my hold on my powers. I look down and gasp.

"I am not hurting you. The child needs my help. Your spell is changing his essence. Ah, yes, there, that's better."

She pulls her arm back and takes a step away from me. I palm my belly with trembling hands. Tears slip down my cheeks.

"What have you done?"

"He will be well. I had to stop what you have set in motion. He will not survive this suppression you are creating. Yes, he carries his father's blood, but a special child like yours absorbs and reflects.

"Your spell is only allowing him to absorb. This cannot be. In magic, you need to—"

"Reflect as a way to release and restore," I cut her off and finish. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"You are still learning. We intended to help you learn. We weren't expecting you to start this spell."

"He," I croak. "It's a boy?"

"Yes, my child. You are carrying a king."

"Have I... will he be okay? I haven't hurt him, have I?"

"He will live. Only time will tell what damage, if any, has been done. I've done all I can to reverse the change to his essence."

"Thank you. Thank you so much."

“Don’t thank me. You have the favor of the gods. It is the only way you could conceive and carry such a child.”

“What do you mean?”

She lifts her hand and one of the scrolls I had on the table floats into it. She unrolls it and seems to scan it with her eyes. I watch her nervously.

“Here. This is the one,” she says and hands the scroll over to me.

I take it from her and begin to read it for myself. My eyes widen as I murmur the passages before me. I stumble back a little.

“What does this mean? Am I his true mate?”

“No, my child, you are not. However, only his true mate can bear his child.”

“I do not understand,” I say and shake my head.

“This child has a purpose. He was given to you to fulfill that purpose. I have been leading you to the scrolls in hopes of connecting you with the desired path.

“I did not foresee your actions, and for that, I am sorry. This cannot continue as planned. Your body will not hold him to term, or you will not survive his birth. It will be one or the other.”

“What? But you just said he will be fine.”

“He will, just not with you as the host. I want you to read those scrolls more carefully. Have you found the key to becoming Kendrick’s mate, or have you found a way to find his true mate?”

I frown and think over her words. The scrolls are in an ancient language. One of the reasons it’s taking me so long to get through them. I could be misinterpreting them.

I turn and rush to read them again. It’s as if the writing has changed before my eyes, forming my native language and not the ancient words that had been printed upon them.

As I read them over this time and piece it all together, I realize this is not a way to become Kendrick's mate. This is to find his true mate in time.

Actually, one scroll speaks of finding his mate, the other helps me to cross her path once she's found. Then, there's a passage to instruct on how to make the future and present become one.

"Do you understand now, my child?"

I turn to the woman as she runs a hand over my hair. I'm still a bit confused. I shake my head at her as I look into her eyes. They remind me of flowing water.

"There is only one way for you to become his true mate. You have to find her in time and then join her. This will keep him safe," she says and places a hand on my womb.

"But... I will need my sisters and two others from my bloodline. My sisters aren't strong enough for this."

"Since the beginning of time, we have had the choice of sacrifice. You haven't given your sisters a choice of what they are willing to sacrifice for the legacy of your bloodline.

"He is your legacy. What you have done has taken away the option for you to be his host. Your gift from the gods has been altered.

"Other dangers now pursue you and your sisters. You may find they are more willing to follow through with this course than to face their fates in this time."

"But the four of us aren't enough and where would I find sacred immortal ground? I know not of such a place."

"Ah, but you do, my child. We will lead you there. Do not worry about the others. They will be with you, but now you must go before they capture you."

I shake my head to clear it. This is all so much at once. My thoughts are racing with each word she speaks.

"How can I know my sisters will be safe if we do this? I don't want to lose them."



“Your bond will never be broken, but as I’d know my own siblings in any form, so shall you,” she replies and begins to back away.

“Wait,” I call out and reach for her.

“It is for you to decide. How will you save the child?”

“I need to know more,” I plea.

The light appears once again and she steps into it. I shiver and ball my fists at my sides. Then, a voice fills my head.

“Take the course the gods send you on. One will make the wrong decision, but a second chance will be given. The others will walk the path given and time will bring favor.

“Now run, child. They are coming.”

My heart fills with fear. Her words sink in. *Other dangers now pursue you and your sisters.*

Who could be coming? What’s going on in the city? Swiftly, I turn and gather the scrolls, shoving them into my satchel. The sconces relight, causing me to look around.

“Yanique, I’ve found her,” Annaniah calls, then she turns to me. “Venus, we must go. The soldiers are coming for us. They are riding for the village. We need to flee.”

I throw my bag across my body and rush toward my sister. Annaniah takes my hand in a tight squeeze when I reach her. I tighten my fingers around hers and pull her with me.

“Wait,” I say to my sisters as Yanique and Zandra meet up with us at the base of the stairs leading up to the sanctuary.

“What is it?” Yanique says in impatience.

“The book, we should take it if we need to flee.”

Zandra turns for *The Book of Paths*. A gasp leaves her and she turns to look back at me. Her eyes are wide and filled with fear.

“It is gone. How is it gone? Will we be able to exit?”

“It is not gone. I can feel its presence,” Yanique says.

“But sister, look. It is not upon the podium. Have one of you moved it for study?”

“No, I haven’t,” Annaniah says.

“Neither have I,” Yanique interjects.

I go with my instincts as I, too, can feel the book’s presence. I turn for the stairs and lead the way up.

“Forget it. It will find us in the right time. We must go,” I say firmly.

I move as fast as I can to get away from this place before we’re trapped. My mind goes to Kendrick. He has taken to the valley to train.

He isn’t expected to be back for another few days. He is out too far for me to send someone to get him. We are on our own.

We burst through on the upper level. The sanctuary is silent, but that doesn’t fool me into a sense of security. In fact, while the sanctuary is still, the sound of chaos comes from outside.

The villagers are panicked. Fear of the king’s soldiers is something they live with daily. To have them riding into the village has to be terrifying.

“Let’s go. I will lead us out. Arm yourselves,” I say.

“No, I will lead. You get behind me,” Yanique says.

“It is fine. I will be fine.”

“Sister, no,” Yanique growls.

“What’s going on? What haven’t you two told us? Something has been going on,” Annaniah says.

“Once we get out of here, I will tell you everything. Remember everything Kendrick and I have taught you. We mustn’t be captured and taken to the city.”

Yanique closes her eyes and murmurs an incantation. Twin swords appear on her back, and a whip in her hand. Looking to

my other two sisters, I see they also have called upon their gifts to form weapons.

Zandra has her shield and axe, while Annaniah has her two chakrams. Unlike my sisters, I don't need incantations to conjure my weapons like I once did as a young girl. With the wave of my hands before me, I have my bow ready.

We rush out of the sanctuary, and Henry, one of our loyal servants, is waiting for us with his wagon and horse. I hate to have him in the middle of this, but we will get further with his help. Henry helps us all into the wagon like a gentleman.

"Thank you," I say.

He winks at me. "Anytime, mistress."

Once all are settled in, Henry takes off toward the woods that lead to the forbidden valley, as the villagers call it. Wise idea, Kendrick has enchanted the woods and valley to keep the humans away. The soldiers should fear following after us.

"Night has fallen. They should have a harder time tracking us," Yanique whispers.

"Will you tell us what's going on now?" Annaniah whines.

I go to open my mouth, but the sound of horses following after us catches my ear. I shake my head at my sister. Lifting my bow, I use the light from the tip of my arrow to find my target as the sound grows nearer.

An arrow whizzes by my ear. My sisters cry out, but I have no time to turn to see why. I release the arrow and send a rider from his mount.

The force of the magic in my arrow carries him back effortlessly. I grin and form another arrow, ready to take out my next target.

"Get down," Yanique orders. "He is gone. I will take over the reins."

*Henry.* My heart clenches. My first instinct is to turn and save him, but if Yanique says he's gone, there's nothing I can do. I have to keep the rest of us safe.

I take out another rider, but their numbers are growing. I start with my split arrows, but they give me less precision as I have to split my focus to guide them to their targets.

I haven't mastered that yet. A soldier slips by me and rides up alongside the front of the wagon. We hit a bump and I fall back onto my behind.

As I scramble to get back up, I note that the soldier has taken hold of Yanique's long braid and is trying to use it to pull her down.

I aim and fire an arrow between his eyes, but not before my sister pulls one of her blades and chops her hair off to free herself. I gasp as her long, wavy locks fall away and float through the air.

"Yah," she bellows at the horse and keeps going as if it's nothing.

My attention is grabbed by the distinct sound of one of Annaniah's chakrams returning to her palm. Blood drips from it as she grasps it and sends the other one flying.

Snapping out of it, I reposition myself and lift my bow. This time, I home in and guide my arrows to their mark. I take out the last few soldiers that Annaniah doesn't get a chance to.

"Is everyone okay?" Yanique calls back as we ride a few yards without any further resistance.

"Your hair," Annaniah cries out.

"A man has lost his life for ours. My hair will grow back," Yanique snaps.

"I'm sorry. I know. I was just shocked."

I place my fist over my heart. "May the gods grace you with favor, our dear Henry."

"May the gods grace you with favor," my sisters repeat.

"And also us. Where are we going?" Zandra asks.

"I don't know. I'm following my heart," Yanique murmurs.

I look at her and furrow my brows. I get the sense she knows something more. However, we don't have time for me to inquire what? It is best to stay vigilant until we reach our destination.



# *Kendrick*

## *Destroy*

*H*ero flaps his midnight-black wings, propelling us forward through the night sky. The trip would have taken me twice as long by ground. I would have gone insane if it took me a day and a half to get back.

My heart is thundering in my ears. I can't shake this feeling that something is wrong. My love needs me. I guide my horse to land in the woods outside the village.

The villagers would freak out if they saw me fly in on my horse. Stroking Hero's neck, I coax him to retract his wings. They disappear, leaving a dusting of magic in their wake.

"Easy, boy," I croon as he kicks up on his hind legs and whines.

When he returns to all fours, I take off, needing to get to the village as fast as possible. My heart tugs with the need to get to Venus. I must get to her as soon as I can. I have taught her and her sisters plenty of combat skills, but anything can happen in battle.

I smell the smoke before I break through the trees. A lump forms in my throat and my heart stops as the sanctuary comes into view. Bright orange and red flames consume the structure as thick, dark smoke billows out.

They have burned the sanctuary and the sisters' homes to the ground. There are villagers still rushing about, trying to put out the fires to no avail.

I dismount my horse before he can come to a stop. Reaching out with my power, I pick up the faint essence of Venus and her sisters at the burning sanctuary. I rush closer, but I don't feel them there.

My mind goes wild. Do I not feel them because they are gone? Or were they able to flee? My knees are ready to give as agony and anguish fill me.

"My father helped them escape," a small girl comes to my side and says. She places her small hand in mine and squeezes my fingers. "I don't think he's coming back. Those men chased after them."

"Alice, come," a woman comes to tug the child away.

"What happened here?" I demand, stopping her in her tracks before she and the child can get away.

"The king's soldiers came for them. Henry helped them escape through the woods. Then, they set fire to the sanctuary and their homes. I believe someone told the king about the healings they have performed.

"I am sure you will find them safe. My Henry will give his life for them. They have been a gift from the gods to us," she says.

I swallow down the lump in my throat. "Thank you. Go to your home and take shelter."

"Yes, my lord. May the gods grace you with favor."

"May they also be with you and your husband."

She gives me a slight nod and turns to rush away with her young child in tow. Anger simmers within me. As it does, rain

begins to fall. The angrier I get, the more it pours, putting out the fires.

I walk away in the direction of the woods. Hero follows behind me. It doesn't take long for me to come across fallen soldiers in the woods with Venus's arrows impaling their lifeless bodies. Once their essence begins to fade, I mount Hero and take to the skies. It's as if they've begun to cover their tracks.

It is a smart move but hinders me from finding them quickly. While I can follow their essence on foot, I will be able to see from above. It's taking everything within me not to roar and flatten these woods so I have a clear view.

Another part of me wants to go to the city and flatten and burn it, erasing the king and his soldiers from existence. I do not know what has prompted this, but they will regret it once I find my love and her sisters and make sure they are safe.

“Where are you, my love? I am coming for you.”

The flap of Hero's wings is the only thing to bring me some sort of calm. However, the sky fills with lightning, proving I am just barely holding my rage in.





### *What's Happening?*

*W*e've been out here for hours. I don't even know where here is anymore. We are well beyond the forbidden woods. We have been on this trail leading up the side of a cliff for some time now.

I rub my temples and groan. My head is starting to hurt and I'm really hungry now. We will need to find food and shelter soon.

Suddenly, the wagon comes to a stop. I look up. Yanique jumps down to secure the horse. There is the opening to a cave ahead.

"We should stop here. We can go inside this cave and start a fire," she says.

"What will we eat?" Zandra asks, wrinkling her nose.

"Look, Henry left us some supplies," Annaniah says as she pulls back a blanket covering a crate of food and other odds and ends.

“Good, help me get it inside,” Yanique says as she comes around the back of the wagon.

“Are we sure it’s safe to go in there? I don’t know,” Zandra says as she eyes the opening of the cave warily.

“This is the place,” Yanique says.

“How do you know this?”

“I can’t explain. It’s like I felt a pull to come here. I was led here. I just know we’ll be safe.”

“Are you sure?” Annaniah whispers.

“Yes,” Yanique bites out and rolls her eyes. “Now, will someone help me get these supplies inside?”

I go to grab the other end of the crate and she narrows her eyes at me. “Anyone but you,” she says.

“About that. What’s happening with you two?” Annaniah says.

“Do you want to tell them, or should I?”

I sigh and run a hand over my braids. Looking to my other two sisters, I draw in a deep breath. I guess now is as good a time as any.

“I am with child,” I blurt out.

Zandra gasps and Annaniah squeals. “This is amazing. Does Kendrick know? Is he excited? How do you feel?”

“I am tired and I could stand to eat something soon. Kendrick does not know. There is a lot I have learned and some things I am still processing. I’m not sure if he should know,” I say.

“Wait, what are you talking about? You have to tell him,” Yanique says.

“Let’s get inside and get a fire going and maybe some food in my belly. I will explain everything and why I don’t think I should tell him.”

Yanique continues to frown at me. I sigh. This is becoming tiring.

“Please. You need to hear it all.”

She gives me a curt nod. I can't help but notice something has changed with her. I'm still not sure what has drawn her here. I haven't sensed anything that would lead us to this cave.

However, I do not get the sense she is wrong in her instincts. After that woman who appeared to me earlier, I'm not trusting much of what I feel or think at the moment.

Zandra helps her get the supplies inside as Annaniah and I collect the blankets and make a few places before the fire I've started. Once Annaniah begins to work on making us something to eat, I begin to tell them everything from the beginning.

“You have no idea who she is? How did she get in?” Annaniah says once I get to the end.

“I told you, she stepped through a beam of light.”

“She sounds like one of the gods or their pets,” Yanique says.

“Their pets?” I question.

“Yes, the sirens. It is said that they kept sirens to do their bidding,” Yanique replies.

My brain tickles as I remember reading something of the sort. I believe the scrolls that came to me mentioned sirens once or twice. I'm just too tired to think of what was said right now.

Zandra snorts. “The gods who haven't shown themselves in centuries. No offense, sister, but why would they show themselves to Venus now?”

“She's carrying a demigod. One of their own. Kendrick is a direct descendant of the alpha god. That baby is his grandchild. You heard her. He's a gift from the gods,” Yanique says.

“What will you do?” Annaniah asks.

“I don't know. I would need to find immortal sacred ground and then...”

“You will need us,” Yanique finishes. “The woman was right about one thing. We might be safer in another time.”

“I will do it. If it means saving your life and my nephew’s, I am here for whatever you need,” Annaniah whispers.

“I am in as well,” Zandra says, lifting her head.

Yanique sighs and rolls her eyes. “Let me see the scrolls you have. Maybe I can find out where to find sacred grounds.”

“First, let’s get a good night’s sleep. We can look together in the morning.”

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I WAKE to someone brushing a hand over my hair. Opening my eyes, I find Yanique on her knees beside me. However, her eyes are glowing again like that day in the caves and her skin is alight as well.

“Did you know that their true mates can sense them? Even as they slumber, something can awaken within them and their true mates will know how to find them,” she says, but her voice seems off.

It’s almost as if someone else is talking to me through her. She continues to stroke my hair. I remain silent, not sure what’s happening or if I should disturb this trance she seems to be in.

“Kings also awaken the powers within their true mates. What once lies dormant and is as small as a mustard seed will awaken and surpass all others. It was the alpha god’s gift to protect the mates of the kings after true mates were imposed on his beloved creatures.”

“Do not fear the change. It is by her connection you will succeed. Trust your sister’s intuition. She is being guided. She knows the sacred place of the sleeping kings. Allow her to guide you.”

With that, she closes her eyes and slumps. I sit up quickly, catching her against my chest and laying her beside me. I’m growing more confused by the minute.

“What does this mean? Gods help me,” I murmur to myself.



# Kendrick

## *Visions*

I've flown the skies looking for Venus and her sisters to no avail. I'm being led by my anger when I should be focused on the task. Once I find Venus, then I can find out what this is about and make them pay for what they have done back in that village.

I need to land and gather my thoughts. If she were my true mate, my knights would know how to find her. They would protect her over me.

I would also be able to sense her power as it would be a part of mine. Once we are mated to our fated, our power is no longer our own. I sigh in frustration as I strip my clothes from my body.

I set them aside and dig in my saddlebag for the bar of soap Venus made for me. It's something to make me feel closer to her. Bringing the bar of soap to my nose, I close my eyes and inhale.

The scent of pear and mint fills my lungs. It goes a long way to calm me. Opening my eyes, I then turn to walk into the

still water.

I will bathe here in this lake and take a moment to think. It hasn't been lost on me that I'm in the vicinity of my brothers' resting grounds. I and I alone, am the sole being who knows of this place and its location.

"I hope you are resting well, my brothers," I murmur to the open air.

The cool water is a shock as I step in, but I quickly warm it with my palm above the surface. I move farther in until I am chest-deep.

Using the bar of soap, I bathe and wash away the stench of the day past. Usually, when I return from a trip to the valley, Venus has a warm bath waiting for me. She always holds my attention captive as she steps into the water with all those lush curves.

What I would give to see her saunter toward me as her robe slips to the floor. My muscles relax as I think of the last time we bathed together. I can feel and see it in my mind's eye as if it were yesterday.

*"Welcome home, my love," Venus purred as her white cotton nightgown slipped from her shoulders.*

*I watched as the fabric slid slowly down her body, inch by inch, revealing her silky brown skin. I sat back in the steaming water and groaned in relief. My muscles finally settled into the smaller form I walk the earth in.*

*"Come to me," I murmured.*

*She stepped from the garment at her feet and walked up the side of the bath. Her breasts called for my attention. I couldn't wait to get my hands on her.*

*Every other muscle had softened in the warmth of the water, but my cock rose, seeking the heat of her body. She continued to move toward me torturously slow.*

*A grin came to my lips as she stopped before me. Reaching for her waist, I tugged her forward roughly and reached for her thighs to guide her onto my length. She cupped my face as*

*I kissed her passionately. She pushed her fingers into my long, dark locks.*

*I released a groan as she started to rock her hips on me. I could never get enough of her and her tight heat. I knew Venus was different when she was as drawn to me as I was to her.*

*Women tend to shy away from me, sensing I'm not human or fearing my kind. Venus, however, had no such fear. Instead, she'd always shown me passion like this.*

*I grabbed the full globes of her ass beneath the water and guided her against my rough thrusts. Breaking the kiss, she threw her head back and called my name.*

*"Kendrick," she gasped loudly.*

*"Look at me, my love," I demanded.*

*She dropped her head and locked her gaze with mine. I reached for one of her breasts and squeezed the large mound in my palm. She tightened her hands in my hair and reconnected our lips.*

*Lifting to my feet, I moved her to the edge of the bath and placed her upon it. She locked her legs around my waist, sucking at my tongue as I took us both to ecstasy.*

*I moved my lips to her ear. "Do you see what you do to me? You have so much power over me. I despise the day when time will take you from me. I know I will go mad."*

*"Oh gods. Kendrick, I love you so much. If I could stop time for us, I would," she whimpered.*

Suddenly, I'm pulled from the memory, but not into the present. I know not this place of the time in which I stand. Everything is moving so fast. I can't focus on one thing.

My brothers are awake and surround me. There are other men before us. I can't see their faces, but they all have on black leather vests. I continue to observe as the scene before me changes.

My brothers all straddle what look to be metal horses. I glance down and one is beneath me. My name is called, causing me to look up.



A woman is running toward me. It's not Venus, but she, too, has brown skin. Her eyes are glowing and her lips are moving, but I can't hear what she's saying.

She runs into my arms and wraps around my waist. She is so small, smaller than Venus. A protectiveness grows within me. I look beyond her and there's a hooded figure standing watching us. An amulet rests on their chest, giving off a green glow.

The figure seems to vanish, causing me to glance around and knit my brows. There are large structures everywhere. Not castles or churches, but structures that reach for the skies.

“Brother, come to us. Someone is in our temple.”

Those words snap me from the vision, bringing me back to the present. I look around and spin about in the water. I'm still alone. My horse stands in wait for me.

“What was that?” I mutter.

“Kendrick, we are awakened.”

This time, I recognize the voice in my head as Reilly's. I'm torn between finding my love and going to see what has awakened my brothers. My brothers are left vulnerable when they are in slumber and also as they awake. It takes time for them to fully recharge.

Venus and her sisters can at least defend themselves. I have no choice but to abandon this search and head to the sacred resting place of my brothers.

“Forgive me, my love. I will find you once I protect my brothers.”



### *Sacred Ground*

“Isn’t the exit in the other direction?” Zandra asks as we move through the cave.

I know for sure we’re moving away from the exit as the walls of the cave begin to show signs of condensation. There’s water somewhere close by as I can hear it flowing.

I can’t shake what happened last night, so I haven’t said a word as Yanique leads the way with an orb of light in her palm to guide us. Annaniah has a tight hold of my hand beside me.

“We are not leaving,” Yanique says.

We’ve moved from corridor to corridor so far. The last one we went through seemed so much more still than this one. A stone bridge-like overpass led us to this passageway.

“Then where are you leading us to?”

“Shh,” Yanique says and waves her off.

We continue to walk the narrow cave route as it leads to another stone overpass. It’s warmer in this area. I look over the

edge and see flowing lava below.

“Gods, it’s hot,” Annaniah says.

I gently squeeze her hand. We make it across the bridge, and I take a deep, relieved breath. As we go, the air becomes thicker.

The temperature changes again as we pass into another area. It’s almost stifling. As if the warm air and icy temperature are fighting against each other.

It’s icy cold as we continue. Annaniah takes off the blanket she has around her shoulders and places it over mine. I tighten it around me and give her a smile. She reaches to pat my still-flat belly.

“Where are you taking us?” Zandra hisses.

“Allow her to lead,” I say as my teeth chatter.

“But where in the heavens is she leading us to? Our deaths? I’m freezing. I don’t have a good feeling about this place. It doesn’t feel like we should be here,” she says as she looks back at me nervously while wrapping her arms around her middle.

“Would I ever lead you into danger?” Yanique mutters.

“No.” Zandra pouts.

“Then be quiet and keep up. We’re almost there.”

We step through another passageway onto another bridge-like path. This time, when I look over, there is water rushing below. I knew I heard water somewhere.

This time, when we step from the bridge-like structure, we step down into a circular room. There’s a symbol carved in the center of the floor.

Yanique steps into the center of it and it lights up. It’s a sword and crown. Sconces on the walls begin to light up as well. It is once they are lit that I can see the surroundings clearly.

The walls have engravings on them as well. Moss and foliage seem to be growing and bursting through the cracks.

The ceiling is covered in vegetation. The surfaces in this room not covered in greenery look more like they were created and not formed by nature. There is a power here that seems to be at rest.

“Where are we?” I whisper.

“We needed sacred, immortal ground. I have led us to the Den of Kings.”

“Their resting place?” I gasp and spin in a circle as I look around with wide eyes.

Kendrick has never shared this location with me. I didn’t think anyone knew how to find it. I stop and stare at Yanique.

Confusion fills me. I can’t help but voice my questions.

“How did you know where to find this place? How do you know this is their temple?”

“I can feel him. He knows we are here. If we’re going to do this, we have to move fast.”

“He who?” I ask.

“You are both starting to give me crazy vibes. Have you two been rushing your magic?” Zandra says.

“No, and I don’t have time to explain. Give me the scrolls,” Yanique says in impatience.

I take the scrolls from my satchel and hand them over. Chewing on my lip, I begin to second-guess going through with this. Yanique takes the scrolls from me while she murmurs to herself as she looks between the three of them. Placing two under her arm, she then begins to mutter an incantation.

“Did you just...” Annaniah gasps. “I can hear your voice in my head.

“Me too,” Zandra says with a frown. “What did you just do?”

“Those are the words you two will need to cross time. Venus and I will cast to find Kendrick’s mate. When we give the signal, you will repeat the words I’ve given you.

“Once we succeed in placing her in that time, she will have to do the rest,” Yanique instructs.

She then takes another scroll and murmurs again. I watch as the scroll in her hands becomes four pieces of parchment. She hands one to each of us.

“This will bind you to your future lives. Once I get Venus to hers, I will guide everyone else. Remember, we will always be sisters. No matter what, we will find our way back to each other.”

“I love you all,” I say.

“As we do you,” Yanique says.

I reach for the parchment and place it in my satchel. Pain slices through my abdomen. I double over and whimper.

“Venus, are you okay?” Annaniah says as she places a hand on my back.

“I am fine,” I say through my teeth.

“Come, we need to begin. Zandra, you and Annaniah take the north and west positions on the outside of the crest. Wait for the signal. We cannot transfer spirits until we find the right point in time.”

“What’s the signal?” Zandra asks.

“You will know when you see it.”

“Would it not work better if one of us works with a marked sister each?” Annaniah asks.

“No, finding his mate will require Venus and me to work together. Don’t worry. Once we find her, I will help you. I will hold the time in space open for all of you,” Yanique replies.

“I am nervous,” Annaniah whispers.

“If you don’t want to do this, I will understand,” I say.

“There is no need to be nervous. We will all come out of this as we should,” says Yanique.

“How do you know this?” Zandra asks, eyeing our sister.

“As I said. I don’t have time to explain. Come quickly.”

“It must be now. Our nephew grows stronger in this place. Venus will not be able to hold him for long while we are here. We need to act before he drains her power and we can’t do this.”

Yanique rushes to grab my hand as she moves us to the center of the room. I push through the pain and join hands with her.

“Follow my lead. Repeat after me,” she coaxes as she squeezes my hands in hers.

I nod and follow her words. Wind begins to pick up around us as we chant. Light beams up from the floor and surrounds the two of us.

Suddenly, it’s like we leave our bodies. Wind whips by my face as we seem to rush through time. We stop abruptly in a room. It’s not like those in our village. It’s warm and the walls are a soft-pink color.

There are cries coming from a wood-crafted vessel. This is a nursery. A pale woman is looking down at the child, cooing.

“What is this?” I say to Yanique.

“It’s the beginning of her life.”

“His mate?” I ask sadly.

“Yes, my sister. He will walk the earth alone for many centuries before he finds her.”

“Is this woman her mother?”

“Yes, and no. This child is not of her womb.”

An olive-skinned man with dark hair enters the room. He’s dressed oddly and his hair is in short waves. Nothing like Kendrick’s long, curly, dark locks.

He’s wearing a black overcoat with a white shirt underneath and black trousers. It sort of looks like the formal attire they wear in the city to the balls, but not.

He moves to lift the child into his arms. He looks down at her with such pride and joy on his face. He kisses the top of her head and begins to sing in a language I do not understand.

“But this is her father. She is from his loins,” I say knowingly.

“Yes, she is his child. He has tried to fool the gods, but they will have the last laugh.”

I look closer at the child’s ears and gasp. She will not be pale. She will be quite brown, in fact.

“Come, we have to find your entry point in time. That is where Zandra and Annaniah must help me loop time.”

“And you? The others?”

“We will all go where we are needed. The gods have chosen.”

We begin to chant anew. At once, we’re whipped through time again. My hair blows at my back and my face feels cool. I feel like I’m racing against the clock.

We stop again, finding a young girl in the same pink room. Only this time, the room has a bed and desk. A young girl sits on the side of the bed with her head down.

“Is she in tears?”

“Yes,” Yanique bites out. “They force her to stay hidden. She has no friends and she’s not being trained to understand her powers. Life is quite confusing for her.”

“Does Kendrick know of this?”

“No, as the gods wish it to be, he still does not know of her.”

The same man walks into her room. He looks older and is dressed in the same odd garments. This time in gray and white.

He has a frustrated expression on his face as he moves to sit beside the girl and places a hand on her back. She looks to him, but I still can’t see her face.

“One of these days, you’re going to understand that I’m doing this for your safety,” he says to the girl. “This is my fault. I should never have allowed you to go to that school. Even six months was too much.”

“But Daddy, I just want to go to prom. I didn’t think anyone would ask me, but someone did. I really want to go with him. Please?”

“Ray, I can’t allow that.

“Why not? Because of your Mob friends?”

“Ray, don’t.”

“Or is it because of those bikers? The ones who snuck in that night to see you.”

“You know nothing about those things. I don’t want to hear those words from your mouth ever again.”

“I don’t care about your business or your friends. I just want to go to prom. This isn’t fair.”

“Life isn’t fair, Ray. After all your mother and I had to go through to have you, the last thing I’m going to do is sit here and argue with you.”

“A mother who resented me until the day she left. Forget about it. I should have known you wouldn’t let me go,” she murmurs sadly.

Yanique takes my hand and tugs at it. I look to her and she tilts her head, letting me know it’s time to move on.

“This is not the time.”

I nod and begin to chant with her. I can’t help but feel a little bad for this girl. Her life looks to be so sad.

However, I shake the feeling off as we move forward. I’m starting to feel a bit light-headed. This is taking a lot out of me.

We stop again, however we’re not in the same room. This time, we’re in a den. There’s a fire going in the fireplace as a woman in trousers stands before it.

She’s curvy and her reddish-brown locks sit upon her head like a crown. Her back is to me, so I can’t see her face once again. She has an aura about her that says she’s powerful, but something in her posture gives me the feeling she does not know this.



Before I can ask Yanique about it, the man storms into the room. He looks angrier than before. This time, he's in trousers and a shirt that is rolled up at the sleeves, showing off his tanned arms.

Again, he has aged. I notice something else. Every time we've seen this man, he has worn a distinct ring on his right hand. I wish I could get a closer look as it has grabbed my attention this time.

"You will do as I say, Ray Ann. I have allowed you to do as you please, but I'm putting my foot down this time," he snarls.

"You've allowed me to do as I please? Really? Daddy, I have three friends. None of whom I've ever met face to face. I'll be thirty soon and this... this man you've just introduced me to will be the first man I've ever dated.

"I don't like him. He gives me the creeps. I'm not marrying someone because you say so. I do everything you ask of me, but this is a no. It doesn't feel right. I can't," the woman replies.

"Angelo will make a fine husband," the man says in impatience.

"For who? If you like him so much, you marry him."

"Enough. All I do is to keep you safe—"

"Stop it. Stop it right now. I've heard this before and it still doesn't ring true. You benefit from this, not me," she growls with her fists balled at her sides.

I knit my brows as I watch the sparks surrounding her hands. Looking between the two, I get the feeling neither sees nor notices what's happening.

"In order to keep her hidden from her mate, her magic had to be suppressed and then cloaked once it became stronger. The guardians are at work here," Yanique answers my thoughts.

"But couldn't she hurt someone or herself like this?"

“Also a task the guardians oversee. She will not actualize her powers and abilities until she finds her true mate. Something we must do now. Come, we are close.”

Nausea fills me and I’m not sure if it’s because I will see this woman with my love or if it’s the baby. I go with the latter as my belly warms and a sharp pain runs across my back.

I whimper but manage to stay upright. Yanique squeezes my hand and starts us on our way. After a moment, I’m able to lend my help.

We seem to move faster this time. When we stop, it’s so abrupt it’s like running into a wall. I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

“Here, this is when he finds her,” Yanique says.

Slowly, I open my eyes. I stand frozen in a room filled with mirrors. My gaze lands upon my love.

His looks have changed. It’s not just the clothing. His hair is shorter and has grayed some, but his face is still the same.

I didn’t know his kind could age at all if this is what you would call it. Oddly, it’s just his hair. There are no other changes to mark the passage of time.

However, the thing that takes my breath away is the way he is looking at the woman before him. I turn my gaze to her. She’s gorgeous.

So much smaller than me, but she has a body full of curves. The black dress she has on is formfitting—not modest at all. Her bust and hips are on display. However, her face is stunning, distracting the eye from anything else.

She has bright honey-brown eyes and reddish-brown wavy locks. Her lips are full and look so lush on her pretty face. I don’t think Kendrick would be able to resist her even if she wasn’t his true mate.

“This is her again?” I ask bitterly.

“Yes, this is her. Can you not feel it? She is powerful in her own right. It lies dormant within her, but there is so much power there.”

“She looks so young,” I murmur.

“She is thirty to your thirty and one. Only a year younger than you in our time.”

“I want to leave this place,” I say, turning my back.

Yanique places a hand on my shoulder and gives a gentle squeeze. “Sister, remember what we are here for,” she says softly.

I try to fight back the tears. “He has found his true mate. I am nothing more than a distant memory. I don’t want to see this.”

She turns me to face her and cups my face in her hands as she places her forehead to mine. I’ve done this a million times when she was still very young and frustrated with her training. In this moment, it goes a long way to comfort me as it reminds me of our mother, who did the same for me.

“Whether you want to see this or not is not the reason we are here. You know what we came to do. We must focus on this,” she says.

The tears begin to fall and anger me. I hate crying. There’s never time for tears.

“I don’t know if I can do this. This is my child. That is my love, he is mine.”

She swipes at my tears with her thumbs. “Not anymore. I told you that spell had repercussions. Give me your hands. We must let our sisters know we are ready.”



# *Benjamin*

## *Quick Thinking*

*T*he amulet took me to the village just as the fires were set. It was enough to strike fear in my heart. Those fires could have easily gotten out of control.

Those soldiers were under the bishop's orders. If he could so thoughtlessly place a village in danger, he would have no problem harming my son to get what he wants. Ben is only ten years old. He's innocent in all of this.

As true fear and the severity of the situation set in, I followed after the sisters. That was not an easy task. I thought I had taken an arrow through the heart until I realized the amulet shields me from attacks. The arrow passed right through me without doing any harm.

I wasn't expecting them to enter that cave late last night. It gives off a warning vibe as if no one should trespass or enter without invitation. I haven't entered. I've been watching.

"He will come," I mutter to myself.

All I need is patience and he will arrive. I am sure of it. His lover is the key to finding the others.

Exhaustion tries to take over as my lids become heavy. I take a seat by a tree and lean back against it. My mind goes to my family. Just a week ago, I had a beautiful wife and three children. Now my wife and one of my daughters are gone and a deranged man has taken my son.

I am left to feel helpless and angry. When this is over, it might be time to move away. I don't know if I can remain anywhere near the kingdom of Nar.

The ground shakes, waking me. I didn't realize I'd fallen asleep. Looking around for the source of the quaking, my gaze lands on a black horse. My eyes widen as I see the horse's wings.

I close my eyes and shake my head to clear it. When I look again, there are no wings. Just a huge black horse.

"I think I am losing my mind," I mutter.

When I take note of the rider, I jump to my feet. Reaching for the amulet, I rub it. Nothing happens.

I start to sweat. I know we will find the others here. All I need to do is get the bishop here. However, I don't know how to use this thing.

I barely figured out how to travel with it. I frown and rub a little harder. Still, nothing happens.

Lifting it to my mouth, I blow on it and then rub it again. Still nothing. Muttering to myself, I rush toward the cave where the superbeing just disappeared.

My knees are weak. What if this thing has stopped working and he sees me? He is sure to kill me.

I swallow down the lump in my throat and keep pushing forward as I think of my son. It is a struggle to keep up with him. As I rush behind him, I continue to try to work the amulet to call the bishop here.

No matter what I do, nothing happens. I get the feeling I'm racing to my death. Suddenly, the superbeing stops up ahead.

I drop the amulet and allow it to fall back against my chest. It begins to glow with a green light. It feels warm against me.

The superbeing releases a roar that shakes everything around me. I cower where I stand, covering my head as I sit frozen.

“Will you get up? This is pathetic,” that same cold voice I’m beginning to loathe says.

“Father,” Ben calls out and rushes to wrap his arms around my neck as I raise my head.

“Aw, how touching. You have done well, Benjamin. I knew you wouldn’t disappoint me.

“I can sense the others. I now know where their help comes from. This place reeks of so many we thought we could trust,” the bishop says as I look at him over Ben’s head.

He shrugs and wipes the back of his hand across his mouth. “Let’s go. It’s time to finish this. You will see how we deal with covens and abominations. Your wish is about to come true.”

“I don’t think we should be here. Ben and I will just go.”

“Get. Up. Now,” he growls at me. Then, when I stand, he barks at me as he rips Ben from my hold. “Move.”



# Kendrick

## *Betrayal*

From the moment Hero lands, I get a feeling that I'm not going to like what I find when I get inside. I pick up right away on Venus and her sisters' essence.

They should not be this far out. Nor should they have been able to get this close to our sanctuary and temple. Because this is the place we chose to rest in and allow ourselves to be our most vulnerable, we've made it impossible for anyone other than our true mates and those who created this place to find or enter.

However, I can feel the seal has been broken. I don't have time to reseal the entrance as I need to get to my brothers as well as find out why I sense my woman here when I've never told her how to find this place.

"What are you women doing?" I mutter as I rush through the chambers.

The flow of the lava, the rush of water, the scent of fresh greenery, and the peace of the cravens leading to the temple all tell me my brothers have awakened and are recharging.

My pulse begins to race when I feel that the temple is in use. The magic flowing through the walls is unmistakable. However, other than my brothers or the ones who gifted this place to us, there shouldn't be a single being outside of our true mates who can use this kind of magic here.

I don't have time to process how this could be happening. I know Venus isn't my mate. If she were, I would have known from the first moment I was in her presence.

Yet, as I get to the mouth of the temple, I cannot believe the sight before my eyes. Venus and her sister Yanique stand in the center of our crest, surrounded by a beam of light. Zandra and Annaniah are on the borders of the crest on the north and west sides.

The beam of light surrounding Venus and Yanique changes from a blue to a golden color that's blinding. I'm frozen in shock as Zandra and Annaniah stretch their arms out beside them and begin to chant. A beam of orange light seems to tether the two as if they are holding hands on the outer circle.

Then, two other figures appear in the south and east positions. They give off a stranger power of their own. I can't name it right away. They are not goddesses, but they are not queens, either.

"Venus, what have you done?" I seethe.

The sting of betrayal sets in. The woman I loved betrayed me for power. I was a fool and she somehow used me for this. To steal from the source of our essence.

I roar with anger, shaking everything around me. The sisters are so engrossed in their treachery they don't seem to notice. I feel my brothers awakening to their full strength, although they are not there yet.

Suddenly, Venus and Yanique begin to levitate in the air. I can sense something is wrong. Venus's head falls back and she begins to scream. Yanique releases her hands and falls to her knees.

I can't tear my eyes away from the one who's betrayed me. Venus tears at her clothes and rips her blouse open. Before I



can think to stop this, she bursts into flames.

“No,” I roar.

Even as my heart burns with betrayal, I feel the loss of my love. I drop to my knees as a fire sparks and quickly surrounds the crest and the remaining sisters within.

I’m so engulfed in my grief I don’t sense the presence that appears out of thin air as if cloaked until this very moment. I look down at the blade piercing my chest. It is nearly impossible to kill me and my brothers, but there are few who know blessed iron can pierce our hearts and incapacitate our power long enough to deliver a fatal blow.

A blade through the heart is enough to cause us pain and leave permanent damage. This is why I grab the blade and fight to keep it from touching my heart. All it takes is the tip and my powers begin to lock down on me.

I look up into blue eyes as I fight to keep the blade from going any farther. My muscles shake with the effort. I do not know this man, but the hatred in his eyes says he knows me.

There is something familiar about his presence, but I cannot call on my senses or wit to figure out what. More screams come from within the fire surrounding the crest. It sets in that my love is gone.

She may have chosen power over our love and used me to get to it, but I will always have love for Venus. Right as I think to allow the blade to push through my heart. The man holding the other end flies back, hitting a wall across the room.

My brothers now surround me. Bradan pulls the blade from my chest and rushes to place it in the man who held it in place as I fought against him. I can feel the fury rolling off Bradan.

As I catch my breath, Reilly looks around wildly and sniffs the air. There’s something written on his face, but I cannot place it just yet.

“What has happened here?” he says as he closes his eyes and a pained expression crosses his face.

“I do not know all the answers,” I say.

He and Ardan help me to my feet. They are now looking at me with wide eyes. I look down at my chest and see it’s already healing.

“Why are you looking at me like that? Have you forgotten what your brother looks like?” I ask.

Ardan runs his hand through the front of my hair. “You do not look as you did when we went to slumber.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your hair is gray, Kendrick. Not all of it, but the blessed iron whitened some of your locks.”

“We can worry about that later,” Bradan seethes. “He is gone.”

“I felt others with him,” Reilly says.

“They weren’t with him. These were witches who used our temple for their own agenda.”

“No, I felt them. However, whoever that was trying to run you through, he wasn’t alone. The cloak slipped and I felt others.”

“He is right,” Ardan says.

“I think it’s time we reconsider resting here. Maybe it’s time we stick with our brother and not leave him with the burden of watching over us,” Bradan says.

“I agree. This place is no longer safe for us,” Ardan adds.

“Then we should collect our swords and leave,” Reilly says.

“But this place will collapse and we will be walking around with a source of our power that should remain somewhere we can trust.”

“That is no longer here, my brother. Let these walls fall. We can no longer call this home. We will build another.”

I tug Reilly into a hug, knowing his words are true. “What woke you, brother?” I whisper.

“I felt...” He cuts off. “It was nothing. Let us go.”

I release him and turn to the crest. The fire is out and smoke is settling around it. My heart aches as not even a single ash remains of my love and her sisters.

They were the last of their bloodline. Now gone forever. Venus once shared with me about *The Book of Paths* that kept her and her sisters connected to their bloodline’s history.

I cannot help but wonder if it was destroyed in the fire. I shake the thought off as my brothers and I move into our respective positions around the crest.

The room shakes as we each call forth our swords. Debris falls from the ceiling and the ground breaks apart. All four swords lift from the ground and come to rest in our palms. I say my last goodbye to my love and then vanish from this place before it caves in. Never to look back or see it again.



# Ray

## *Impossible*

### *Present...*

It feels as if I'm dreaming, but I know I'm not. I've just lived through someone's past. Or should I say relived?

It's like pain stabs me in the chest as my mind rushes through visions of the past as well as through memories of my life. The weirdest part about it is that I know I'm not the only one in my head watching all of this.

He is in my head. Kendrick, that's his name. I also sense someone else. All of it is so confusing and overwhelming.

I fight to open my eyes and regain consciousness. I sit up with a gasp as if rising out of water. Cautiously, I lift to my feet and stand on solid ground.

*"Ben kralım,"* Kendrick roars.

The mirrors in the room shatter with his words and the room shakes. I duck and cover my head, waiting for the shards of glass to fall on me, but it never happens.

Heart racing, I peek out from under my arm. Kendrick stands across the room with his chest heaving. However, that's not what has my brain glitching and my eyes wide.

A crown now sits on his head. It seems to pulse with its own energy and electricity sparks around it. Behind him stands what looks almost like a larger holographic, identical version of him.

My entire body is trembling. A zapping sound like a live wire comes from around me. I glance to my left, then my right and nearly piss myself where I stand.

They are not as huge as the hologram figure behind Kendrick, but I'm surrounded by huge knight-looking figures seemingly made of lightning. They are the reasons the glass didn't fall down on me. They are using their shields to cover me.

"Don't be afraid. They are protecting you. They will always protect you," Kendrick says.

"Wh...why? Wh...what are they?"

"These are my knights. I have released my power to see if they would protect you. I am now sure you're my true mate, Ray Ann Ricci."

"Oh," I say dumbly.

He waves his hand and the knights all line up before me and bow. I take a few steps back, then gasp as I realize what really happened on that battlefield. These knights were the ones who turned those men to dust.

In the dream, or whatever that was, it all happened so fast. Glass crunches under my feet with the movement. The knights lift their luminous heads. I'm in awe as I note the expressions of concern on their translucent faces.

Each of them places a hand over their heart and nods their head. Then they vanish. I look to Kendrick and the crown is gone, as is the giant behind him.

He crooks his finger at me. "Come to me, Ray."

I bite my lip and lower my head as I move across the room. It's as if my feet are moving on their own. In my head, I'm berating myself for going to him.

This man has just dropped me from the sky and then he shattered glass over my head. When did I become a masochist?

When I stop before him, there's a pulsing between us. My heart is racing double time and I feel hot all over. He brushes a hand over my hair and then reaches under my chin to lift my head.

"You were in danger. Someone was chasing you. Who were they?"

"I have no idea. I was supposed to be meeting with friends. I... I have friends. We met online. My father doesn't really allow me to go out.

"I snuck out to meet them. My engagement party is tomorrow. One of my friends is in the same boat. She doesn't want to marry the man chosen for her either. I needed to talk to someone because I don't want to marry this guy—"

I gasp and moan into his mouth as he crushes my lips with his and cuts my words off. He shoves his tongue into my mouth in a demanding way as he holds the back of my neck in one hand and grips my hair in the other to tilt my head back and keep me in place.

My toes curl in my shoes and I wrap my arms around his neck. He groans and reaches to grasp a tight hold of my ass. An electric current is coming off him.

It tingles all over and warms my belly. Oh my god, I have a pulse between my legs like never before. He's kissing me with such passion. Now this, this is a first kiss.

"No," is cried out, causing me to jump.

I pull away and look around. "What is it?" Kendrick breathes against my temple.

"Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

I shake my head. It was so loud, but where did it come from? Kendrick turns my face back to his and he begins to nip at my lips. He releases a deep groan and pulls me closer to his warm body.

*“No, get away from him. He’s not yours.”*

I jump away from Kendrick and look around. I turn to look behind me, but no one is there. He wraps his arms around my waist from behind and pulls me back into him.

“You are beautiful. The gods have favored me.”

*“I hate you. He shouldn’t want you so easily. He’s mine.”*

Kendrick moves my hair from my neck and places a kiss against my skin. He then freezes. Before I can make sense of what’s going on, he turns me to face him.

His eyes are blazing again as his gaze scans my face. I place my hands on his chest to steady myself. He closes his eyes and pain fills his expression.

“Venus, what have you done?” he murmurs.

*“Move, let me through. He knows I’m here. Give me control,”* the voice hisses in my head.

I’m so stunned she’s able to push through to the forefront. It’s the weirdest feeling. I have a woman inside me and she’s controlling my body.

“I am here, my love. I’ve done what was needed,” she says.

My voice sounds strange to my own ears. Anger begins to fill me as I feel like I’ve been invaded. Before I can tell this woman to get out of my body, Kendrick speaks, shocking me.

“You can’t be here. This is not your time. This is my true mate. The one the gods have made for me.”

“I don’t care. You were mine first. She is carrying our child,” the woman screams.

Is she kidding me? I think back to what I watched. Oh my god, this woman has taken possession of my body and I’m pregnant?

*“What have you done? I want you out. Take your child with you.*

*“I haven’t even known a man. This is insane. Get out.”*

*“I will not leave. Not until he hears me out. Not until I meet our son.”*

*“I. Said. Go.”*

Power I’ve never felt before surges through me. As my anger flows through me, I force my way through her hold on me. An explosion happens within me and I black out again.



## ***Kendrick***

I CATCH Ray as she passes out. My anger with Venus is still boiling within. I also have rage building toward Candido Ricci. If I’m grasping all of this right, he intended to gain a son by marrying my mate off in order to keep the bond.

Ray is mine; she will never marry another, and our bond to the Ricci family will come to an end. I need more answers and I know just where to start.

“And who is this?” Bradan asks with a smirk on his lips as I find my brothers in the corridor as I make my way to the clubhouse.

“Ray Ann Ricci. Candido’s daughter. My mate.”

“Are you kidding me?” Ardan growls.

“Impossible,” Bradan breathes.

“I think I’ve been wrong about what was done in our temple all those centuries ago. There is a link between Ricci and whatever is going on.”



“How could a human be behind this?”

“That’s the thing, Bradan. I don’t believe they are, not entirely. There is help, but I need to know if my instincts are right.”

“What do you need us to do?” Ardan asks.

“We should begin to check in with the others. See what else the change Reilly felt has affected. Make sure the stones are still safe.”

“Should we just go and retrieve them?”

I shake my head. “I don’t want to throw off the balance.”

“Should I go to the seer?” Reilly asks.

“I will go to see her. You should look into the other names the gods have shown me.”

“What were those again?”

“Taylor, Billy, and Charlie.”

“I’m on it.”

“Your mate,” Bradan says and shakes his head. “Could this mean ours will appear?”

“I get the feeling that is an affirmative,” Reilly answers for me.

“What happened to her? Did you learn something in the room of revelation?” Ardan asks, nodding to Ray in my arms.

“Long story. I will tell you all. I’m taking her up to the clubhouse before I go to see Mabruk.

“She will remain here with me. She’s not to go back to Ricci.”

The room of revelation is below our properties, well underground, away from the humans. As we make our way through the underground caves, I stop at the entrance that leads upstairs to the clubhouse.

“Congratulations, brother. This is a good thing, no matter what? You feel me?” Bradan says.

“I feel you. It is.”

I keep to myself that she's with child and my old lover seems to have taken up residence inside her. I need some answers first.



# Kendrick

## *Answers*

I roll into the seer's territory on the back of my hog. Seers are not very trusting of other beings, so I've chosen to come alone. Mabruk is one of the ancient ones. Her ties go back to when my father and his siblings showed themselves.

She is older than me and my brothers. If anyone can connect the dots for me, it would be Mabruk. I swing my leg over my bike and saunter to the building she calls her home.

"I've been waiting for you."

I look up and find Mabruk on her stoop watching me. Her dark hair is blowing in the light breeze, along with her red dress. Her eyes are glowing, telling me she's seeing.

"Come with me," she says as she turns to head into the building.

The first thing I notice when I enter is the scent of sage mixed with peppermint and orange. I duck to follow her into her den.

Taking a seat at her table, I then wait for her to settle and speak. I narrow my eyes as she pulls her cards. I'm not here for a reading and she knows it.

Those cards are for the curious and humans. I'm here for the real deal. I've known her for too long to believe she needs this crutch.

"I know what you are thinking, my king. I have seen things and I only want to clarify."

"What I want to know will not come from those cards. Something has changed. My father is involved, isn't he?"

She tilts her head and smiles at me. "What makes you say that?"

"You and I know he has allowed for my past to meet my present. This child is somehow his doing. Venus wasn't my true mate. How did I get her pregnant?"

"How is my true mate now with child, my child, when I have never known the feel of her body," I say.

"It is a good thing to have the favor of the gods. Especially when one is being enslaved."

"What does all this mean?"

"There are plays happening that will cause a war. The hunters have turned their attention to your mates. Just as they have forced Ray to you, they will force the others to find their true mates as well."

"The hunters?" I ask and furrow my brows.

"There have been many who have tried to find you all and you've done well to avoid them through time. However, the true hunters have been thwarted at every turn by your guardian."

"Guardian? What guardian?"

Her smile grows. "You didn't think your father would leave you to be hunted and do nothing, did you?"

"He hasn't done much for us, so forgive me," I say dryly and shrug.

“This is where you are wrong. Your father has done more than you know. Freedom is upon you, my king. Be patient.”

“Can you tell me where to find the others’ mates so we can protect them?”

“Each of you is on your own journey. The paths have been set, and each of you is on your own. I will not and cannot interfere.”

I purse my lips and frown. None of this has been very useful so far. Not in the manner in which I want it to be.

“And the child?”

“He will play his part. In due time, in due time. For now, you should bond with your mate. Make it official so your power is shared with her.”

“Is it not too soon? I don’t believe she knows anything about her own powers. She knows even less about me.”

“The old witch will serve her purpose as well. Don’t worry. This is not her time. She can’t remain forever. The stronger your mate becomes, the easier it will be for her to push her out.”

“What has changed? We feel it, but what has happened and how are the Riccis connected?”

“The Ricci family wanted to play and never bothered to learn the rules. Instead of rigging the game as they think they have, they offered an opportunity to your father.

“You don’t play with gods and expect not to get burned. The Ricci family is about to learn a lesson. As for the change... a veil has been lifted.

“An essence has been given to set things in motion. They are all coming. You will be ready when the time comes. For now, bond with your mate. You won’t be ready without her at full strength.”

I drop my gaze to the table in thought. There is a war within. I have to know the truth.

“Venus... did she truly betray me, or is it as I think? She used the temple for whatever this is with my child and my true mate.”

“The answer to that isn’t going to make this easier. You were in love with one woman. She’s now in the body of the woman you will love with your entire being for the rest of eternity.

“Her pain is her own doing. Now and then. You cannot allow this to hold you back. Bond with your mate.”

I nod and stand. With my power, I pull a few coins from our world and go to hand them over. She lifts a hand to halt me.

“This one is on the house. I have a vested interest here.”

“I think I’m starting to see that,” I mutter.

“Congratulations, my king. On your mate and your son.”

A grin comes to my face. I heard her say the child was a boy earlier. However, this time, it truly sets in. I am to have a son.



# Ray

## *Escape*

I wake with my face in a pillow. I inhale and his scent fills my lungs. It sets my whole body on fire. My scalp tingles and it's like I have lava rushing through my veins.

Groaning, I roll over. That doesn't seem to help. He's everywhere. Glancing around the room, I take in the dark colors and masculine vibe. This must be his room.

I groan again and sit up. My head spins with the motion. I palm my forehead and try to remember what happened.

"This is crazy," I murmur to myself.

Pulling my knees into my chest, I then wrap my arms around my legs and wiggle my toes. There's such a stillness about the space. Leaning my cheek on my knees, I close my eyes again.

I need to get back home. My father will be livid when he finds out who I was planning to go meet. I found out about Taylor, Billy, and Lee Ann by accident.

I did one of those ancestry kits, wanting to know more about my heritage. I know my father's wife wasn't my mother. I believe that's the reason why she left.

I used to overhear them arguing about me, or at least I thought it was about me. Then the results came in and I learned of three others who shared my DNA. We connected online and became friends.

They are the only friends I have. I've been boiling with rage and questions about my sisters. Why keep me and separate us?

I shake the thought off. I need to get out of here and figure out a way home. I lost my purse with my phone in it when I was being chased.

“Screw this. I'm out of here before I lose my entire mind.”

I get up and look around for my shoes. Seeing them by the foot of the bed, I grab them and move to the door. Turning the knob, I sag in relief when the door pops open. Tugging it open a bit more, I then peek my head out.

There's a long hallway before me. It doesn't seem like anyone is around, but I hear music in the distance as if someone's having a party. Opting to keep my shoes in my hands, I tiptoe from the room and start up the hall cautiously.

One of the doors to my right opens and out steps a tall blond. He's bare-chested with a cut on. His abs are distracting and his face is too pretty to look at.

He sniffs at the air and smiles. “What do we have here?”

He crowds my space until I'm backed against the wall. I clench my shoes against my chest and look anywhere but at his face.

“You smell delicious. Just the high I'm looking for,” he purrs and pushes a hand through my hair.

*“Are you stupid? Run. He's an incubus.”*

*“What? A what? Why are you still here?”*

*“To save your ass apparently. Now get away from him.”*



“I wouldn’t do that if I were you, brother.”

The deep voice comes from my left. I turn to find another biker. This one has amber eyes and tanned skin. What stands out most is his bright-red hair. He looks like a younger version of Kendrick.

Glancing down at his vest, I read his patch. He’s the VP. I noted earlier that Kendrick wore a president’s patch.

I startle when the blond before me runs his nose up the side of my face and through my hair. A shiver runs through me, but it’s not a welcome one. Not like when I was in Kendrick’s arms.

“Who is she? I want to taste her, but your brother’s scent is all over her.”

“That’s because she’s his. Back away now before I set you on fire,” the redhead growls.

The blond takes a step back and winks at me. “I can’t wait until he’s done with this one. She smells like a pure high.” He rolls his eyes over my body. “Looks like a great lay as well. Try to hang in there, love. If you can handle a king, I’ll be a cakewalk. You feel me?”

He backs away with a dirty grin on his lips. I narrow my eyes at him. He waves a hand in front of him dramatically and bows.

“Until we meet again. Bradan, a pleasure as always, brother.”

“Stay away from her, Rock. You’ve been warned. Kendrick will give no such warning. He will tear your heart out.”

Rock looks to Bradan, then back to me. He lifts a brow and runs his eyes over me one more time. His eyes glow for a moment and he knits his brows.

“Ah, I see. He should bond with her before every male here loses his mind. Her scent and power are intoxicating. If not, he should lock her away before someone who doesn’t have restraint gets a hold of her. You feel me?”

Rock bows with more respect than flair. “It was nice to meet you, my queen.”

“Come, let me get you back to Kendrick’s quarters. Rock is right. You shouldn’t be roaming around,” Bradan murmurs as he holds his hand out for me to walk before him.

I turn and head for the room I came from, then pause and turn back to face him. I have to tilt my head back to look up at him. He looks at me curiously.

“I am Bradan. Kendrick’s younger brother. There are four of us in total. You will meet the others when they return.

“Come, little sister. It is safer for you in Kendrick’s room,” he says.

“But where am I? I need to get home,” I protest.

“You’re in the Immortal Iron Brothers clubhouse. You’re my brother’s true mate. I don’t believe you will be going home anytime soon.”

“What do you mean? What the heck is a true mate? I know nothing about anything you people have said.

“Can someone drop me off at a mental health clinic? I think I spilled a few screws somewhere along the way.”

He chuckles at me. “Kendrick will love you. You’re funny and adorable. I like you already.”

*“Grr. I never met his brothers and here you are a mess and he likes you.”*

*“Oh, bite me. If a strait jacket will get rid of you, sign me up now.”*

*“Ask for Kendrick. He will help sort things out.”*

*“Whatever. You just want to see him. If you’re not going to leave, at least shut up.”*

“Let me get you back. I’ll have something to eat sent to you before I leave,” Bradan says, interrupting our spat.

“Leave? Bu... but you’re the only person I know. Where’s Kendrick? Can I go hang with him?”

Bradán smiles down at me. “He would love that, but he’s not here. Trust me, you would know if he were. I guess I could ask one of the girls to come sit with you.”

“There are other women here?”

I ask the question, knowing I’d feel a lot better if I’m not the only one. He gives a laugh. Now, my interest is piqued.

“Like any other biker club, we have club bunnies, but who should we get?” he says thoughtfully. “Not the succubus. I think they will react to you as Rock did. They don’t discriminate these days. Maybe one of the fairies or she-wolves will work out.”

“Succubus, fairies, she-wolves. I didn’t even make it to the bar to have a drink. Is this why my father has kept me locked up?”

I palm my forehead as my thoughts race. I’ve stepped into the *Twilight Zone*. Maybe I tripped and bumped my head when I was running.

“I’m crazy, aren’t I? Maybe I’ve made this all up in my head. The friends online and being chased. The big hot guy who saved me and dropped me out of thin air.”

“You think Kendrick is hot?” Bradán scoffs.

“I mean, he has this thing about him. What do I know? I’ve never dated before. You’d be surprised what becomes attractive when you’re starved for companionship and attention.”

I shut up once I notice I’m rambling. Bradán continues to smile down at me as if he has a secret.

“I’ve summoned an earth fairy. Her name is Blossom. You will like her. Now come, let’s get you settled in.”

I purse my lips and allow my shoulders to sag. My heart begins to ache for Kendrick. I don’t know him, but I miss him.

I walk back to his room and step inside. This time I take it all in. The huge four-poster bed. The large fireplace. There’s a crest above it with a sword and crown engraved into it.

As soon as I inhale, that feeling returns. My blood heats and my heart races. I break out into a sweat.

“Um, is there a bathroom?”

“Yes, right through there. Use any of his things if you’d like. He won’t mind. Ask Blossom for anything you can’t find. She will be here soon.

“I trust Blossom. The others, I don’t know how they will react to knowing who you are to my brother. We definitely want to keep you from the fire fairies.

“Naughty, they can be. And they say I have a temper. Well, I should go.”

I can’t help the surge of jealousy that hits me. I don’t like the idea of other women around Kendrick. His ex in my head is already something I loathe.

“Okay, thank you.”



# Ray

## *Bond*

*B*lossom was great. She brought me something to eat and she made me laugh a bit. With her help, I found the sound system in Kendrick’s room.

Now she’s off somewhere trying to find me something to wear. I’ve showered and I’m exhausted. I’ve been trying to hold my lids open, but I don’t know if that’s going to happen for much longer.

Kendrick Lamar’s “Love” begins to play as I move around, taking a closer look at his things. The exhaustion of the evening weighs down on me. I climb on the bed and lie with my head at the foot. His scent is too strong on the pillows.

Still, my body heats and my nipples harden against the towel I’m wrapped in. He should bottle his scent and sell it. Women would go crazy for it.

I frown as jealousy burns in my chest. How is it I want this man to myself so badly and I know nothing about him—other than things of his past?

I close my eyes and writhe against the bed as this feeling of need increases. Taking a breath, I try to calm my racing heart. I begin to sweat and my clit aches.

Without opening my eyes, I open the towel and reach to squeeze my breasts. I'm no stranger to bringing myself pleasure. It's the one thing that couldn't be taken from me.

I gasp when something cool touches my skin. Opening my eyes, I come face to face with blazing eyes and a handsome face. He has his lips hovering over mine as we face opposite directions. He's kneeling at the foot of the bed.

I want to lift my head to kiss him, but my stomach caves from the coolness. I glance down my body to find he's dragging a piece of ice from my belly button up between my breasts.

My breath hitches. His presence alone seems so overwhelming. His touch is only heightening the ball of flames building in my belly.

"All my life, I've convinced myself I didn't want to find you. I've spent centuries believing I wouldn't. Now you're here."

He pauses to dart his tongue out to flick against my lips. I release a small moan, wishing he would kiss me. I can't help but pant as he continues with his words.

"You're so beautiful and your arousal smells like the heavens. You were made just for me. You're living proof the gods know me well," he says against my lips.

I whimper when he still doesn't kiss me. He drags the ice up my throat and allows it to drip over my lips. The cool moisture does nothing to sate this burning from within.

In fact, my temperature has risen since he appeared. I bite my lip to keep from begging. He swallows hard as if this is taking all his restraint.

"Please," I plea, losing the battle to keep my dignity.

He places the ice between his teeth and lowers his head to run it across my lips. This is pure torture. I need... I have no

idea what I need. All I know is that he's involved.

He glides his hand down my body, retracing the path of the ice. Only, he moves lower still once he gets to my belly button. He releases a loud growl when his fingertips reach my wet sex.

With skill, he circles my pearl with his fingers before slipping two inside me. I cup his face and lift to close the distance. The ice vanishes and his tongue brushes against mine.

I lift my hips and rock against his hand. I'm so wet I feel my juices dripping between my cheeks. That must turn him on.

Reaching to cup my throat, he deepens the kiss. I gasp and shiver. He's not just kissing me; he's sipping and drinking from my lips.

He breaks the kiss to nip at my chin and kisses my nose. My skin buzzes wherever he touches it. Squeezing my legs around his hand, I twist, turn, and convulse.

He pulls his hand away, causing me to whimper. A dark chuckle comes from his chest. He places his fingers between his lips and closes his eyes as he savors my essence in his mouth.

I turn over and lift to my knees. He looks at me like he's about to devour me. Standing, he tugs his cut off then plants his knee on the bed. He's so large. I should be running, but I've never felt a pull stronger than the one I feel to him.

My eyes widen as he pulls his shirt over his head and his chiseled body comes into view. Damn. I have no other words.

He's a work of art. I wipe the back of my hand across my mouth to make sure I'm not drooling. My mouth is definitely watering.

I reach to touch him with shaky hands. He pushes his fingers into my hair and tugs my head back, then takes my lips in a hard, passionate kiss. I push my fingers into the top of his wavy locks.

They are shorter now in the present. The sides are tapered and the top curls into his face just above his brow line. He groans as he pushes me to lie on my back.

“Kendrick,” I whimper as he kisses his way down my neck.

His lips are warm and soft. Each kiss is like a soft caress. I never want him to stop.

“My name sounds perfect on your lips. I want to taste every part of you. I need to have all of you.”

Is he kidding? I want all of that too. I’m still trying to figure out what he’s waiting for.

“Yes, please.”

He palms one of my breasts and begins to knead it. I arch into him and cry out. His touch is like a trigger; goose bumps rise across my skin and a shiver runs through me.

I reach for his belt buckle, but his pants vanish on their own. I swallow hard as it hits me; this is not a normal man. Maybe we should slow down.

“Oh my god,” I cry out as he sucks my nipple into his mouth and pushes his fingers back into me.

All thoughts of slowing down disappear. His long, thick fingers feel amazing. I begin to gush all over his hand. The sound of my juices is so loud it battles with the sound of my panting and moaning.

“You’re so responsive to me. You’re mine, Ray. No other man—human or other—will ever touch you. Say it, you’re mine.”

“I’m yours. No other will touch me. Kendrick, please. I need... I want... Can you?”

“Not Yet, little one. Soon, but not yet.”

“Why?” I whimper-whine.

He chuckles and kisses his way down my body. Settling between my legs, he leans in and runs his tongue through my folds. I buck my hips off the bed as he begins to feast.



His hums of pleasure rock through my body and cause my scalp to tingle. I'm on sensation overload. His touch, the sounds he's making, his scent, and the feel of his hands on my body are doing something to me that I never want to stop.

As my body coils, I press my hands against the headboard above my head and close my eyes tight. His hums of pleasure continue to vibrate through me like a bassline that's taken residence in my chest. He tightens his grip on my inner thighs as he dives in deeper.

Oh yeah, I'm his. He's signing the deal with his tongue. I never want to know the touch of another.

I come at least four times before he lifts and places a hard kiss on my lips. I can taste myself all over his face and tongue. My pussy is throbbing for him.

He tugs my head back with one hand, deepening the kiss while using his other hand to line up with my entrance. I hold my breath as he begins to push in.

"Relax, little one," he says tightly.

I dig my stiletto nails into his back and inhale through my nose. My eyes cross as he pushes his way in. He fills me to the brink, then stills and kisses my face.

"Good girl. You've done well, Ray." His rumbling voice washes over me like a warm blanket.

My lids fall heavily as if I'm going to pass out. Then he begins to move. Holy shit. This man, or whatever he is, starts to fuck the shit out of me.

He has a tight hold on my ass as he pounds into me, hard and rough. My toes curl from the friction of him moving in and out of me. I bite my lips to keep from screaming.

I swear I feel like my soul leaves my body and snaps back in. I've never had sex, but I don't think this is normal. It feels amazing, but this isn't normal. No freaking way.

"Yes, baby," he growls. He places his forehead to mine. "I, Kendrick, firstborn son of Tanri, bond my heart, body, mind,

and soul to you, Ray Ann Ricci. My essence is your essence. I am your mate and you are mine.”

I don't know what's happening, but the words spill from my lips as if by instinct. “I, Ray Ann Ricci, bond my heart, body, mind, and soul to you, Kendrick, firstborn son of Tanrı. My essence is your essence. I am your mate and you are mine.”

“Fuck, you're perfect.” He looks me in the eyes, and this time, his eyes are white. Electricity seems to spark within them. I dig my nails deeper as I cradle his big body between my legs.

He pulls out and flips me over. With my ass in the air, he reenters me. I grab the sheets as he holds my waist, pinning me down to the mattress.

“Oh shit, you're so deep,” I cry.

He slaps my ass and lifts a leg to plant his feet beside me as he drills into me. I'm so wet he's moving in and out of me with ease.

“You like that?” he breathes and begins to roll his hips into me.

Reaching for my clit he rubs me until my legs begin to shake. My juices are dripping down my leg. My eyes roll in my head and my belly fills with this warm, tingling feeling.

“Come here, baby,” he says as he pulls out and drags me to the side of the bed as he climbs off and stands.

My pussy pulses with his absence. I need him back inside me. He grabs his shaft and guides his way back in.

We lock eyes as he holds my legs open while rocking in and out of me. He's so handsome. He has a strong face with dark brows. For the second time, I note his right brow has two piercings through it and both his ears are pierced.

His hair has thick waves on top. As if his natural curls have been combed through. There are streaks of gray running through his dark locks on top and the faded sides are fully gray. His mustache is dark and his goatee is a blend of gray

and dark hair like the top of his head. Overall, he's sexy as fuck. From his handsome face to his chiseled body.

He pulls out and taps his dick against my pussy before he slides back in. I lift a brow as it dawns on me that he's been shoving all that length and girth into me. However, that's not the only thing I notice with the action.

He's pierced. If I haven't lost my mind, I'm sure I just saw piercings in the underside of his meat. My pussy gushes from the idea of it as I begin to notice the sensation inside of me.

He grins and licks his lips, then leans in to kiss me. I cup his face and kiss him back as he devours my lips. I moan into his mouth as he grabs my butt and kneads it.

"I'm going to come, and the bond will be complete, baby," he breathes as he presses his forehead to mine again.

My eyes roll back in my head as he pumps into me. I feel him swelling inside me. I'm so close, I know I'm going to come with him.

"I will never have enough of you," he says, then latches on to my neck to suck while he explodes inside me.

I squeeze around him, pulling a loud groan from his chest. It's as he licks at my sweat and kisses across my collarbone that I hear the small sobs and whimpers in my head.

I close my eyes and I can see Venus cowered in the recesses of my mind. It's the first time I've been able to see her. My heart breaks for her.

I don't want her in my body, but this can't be easy for her. I'd be devastated if it were me.

*"I'm sorry. He's my mate. I am his."*

*"You don't even know what that means. Please don't speak to me."*

*"I'm sorry."*

*"Shut up."*

*"Okay."*



# *Kendrick*

## *Get to Know You*

*I* hold Ray tightly against my chest. The longer we lie here, the more I can feel the bond growing. There is so much power resting within her.

“You’ve never known you were different?” I murmur.

“I mean, I’ve always felt different, but I didn’t know why. I just thought I was awkward because I wasn’t allowed to have friends.”

I bare my teeth. I have so many things I want to say about how she was raised. When I see Candido, there is a conversation we need to have.

“Um.”

She sits up from my chest and looks at me with a pretty smile on her face. Reaching to tuck a lock of hair behind her ear, I return the smile.

“I want to know more about you. What are you? What does it mean to be a king?”

“We are half demigods, half warlocks. My mother’s kind are called kings and queens. Of all the supers, we are one of the oldest.”

“When you say supers, you mean supernatural beings like witches, fairies, werewolves and things?”

“Yes, there are a plethora of supers that inhabit this earth.”

“But what am I?”

“I haven’t figured that out. Venus came from a line of witches. I know she’s within you, but your blood is your own.

“It has a unique trait I can feel. It’s closer to mine and my kind. I think when I first noted Venus’s blood, it was because of my son.”

She looks down and covers her belly with her hand. I’ve wanted to do the same, but I don’t want to offend her. This is a difficult situation to deal with.

“So this is real? I’m carrying your child from another woman?”

I cup her face and kiss her soft lips. When I break the kiss, I search her eyes with my gaze. I hate the fear I see there.

“This is real. I don’t understand it yet. I know what I saw from the past, but I don’t fully understand it all. Some of the events were blurry to me. Mostly those involving Venus. I could see the events involving me clearly, but not what was shown of her. At least not all of it,” I explain.

“I feel bad for her. I can feel she loves you.”

“I think you two would have been friends in another time.”

She scoffs. “She hates me. I can’t see her wanting to be my friend.”

“Our love was a long, long time ago, but it was a special one. However, she has always known I could find my mate. I take it as favor from the gods that they’ve waited so long for me to find you.

“What I’m saying is Venus will need to come to grips with the fact that I’ve grieved for her. Time has passed and she

shouldn't be here. Our mate bond has given you all of me. I couldn't be hers again, even if I wanted to be."

"But that doesn't change my pain, my love."

"Venus?" I say and furrow my brows.

Looking into Ray's eyes, I can see they have changed from the honey brown that has memorized me to a warm whiskey color. The sadness there has grown, causing me to feel conflicted about what has transpired here this evening.

"Yes, she has allowed me to come forward. Her heart is kind. I hate this and I hate her for being your true mate, but I don't think I could have chosen better for you."

I brush my hand against her cheek. She leans into my touch. I know how hard this must be for Venus. She always dreaded this day.

"Why are you going through this pain? I can't deny Ray. I feel her in my bones. She's in my veins."

"I know this. She is stronger than I thought she would be. I thought I could take her place. Our son needed her body, but I thought I could have it too."

Anger fills me. I loved Venus, but this is my mate. I will not allow harm to come to her.

"You need to go," I say firmly.

"But—"

"No, our time has passed. Our son will be fine with me. Release Ray and go in peace."

I watch as Ray's eyes return. She leans in and places her forehead to mine. Our bond pulses through the connection.

"She isn't hurting me," Ray says softly.

"She wants to push you out."

"But she can't. I have control."

I close my eyes to calm my temper. Ray places her hand over my heart and sighs.

“Tell me what you do for a living,” I say to change the subject.

“I’m the family’s bookkeeper. Other than that, I read a lot.”

I smile. “You will get along with Ardan then. He is our treasurer. He loves to read and is obsessed with numbers.”

She snorts. “I spend most of my days hiding money and cleaning it.”

“Not anymore.”

She looks up at me questioningly. I run my hand down her smooth back. I haven’t been able to keep from touching her.

“You do understand you’re not returning to Candido? You are my mate. I will not allow him to promise you to someone else.

“I also don’t know how far along you are and there will be questions when you start to show.”

“But he’s my father. I can’t just disappear.”

“I will handle Candido. There are things he and I need to discuss. I’m asking you to trust me.”

She searches my eyes. Gods, she’s beautiful. A blush comes to her cheeks.

“Thank you,” she says and ducks her head.

I reach to lift her chin. “You have begun to hear my thoughts?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Good. I want you to know how much you mean to me. It will only grow stronger.”

“It’s crazy, but I think I’m falling in love with you too,” she whispers.

I brush her cheek with my fingertips. “It is not crazy. I longed for you my entire time away from you.”

“The fever, will that happen again?”

“No, not now that we are mated. Although you will feel my presence in other ways.”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“I’m an open book to you. Anything you want to know, ask.”

“Did I really see piercings in your penis?” she asks and bites her lip shyly.

I laugh. The sound rumbles through the room. I can’t remember the last time I laughed and smiled so much.

“You did. The piercings hold our power in. Sort of like a harness for it. The more piercings we have, the more powerful we are.”

“But your penis,” she says and shivers.

I chuckle. “It’s a seven-bar Jacob’s ladder. I’m a very powerful being.”

“You didn’t have piercings in the past?”

“No, I didn’t have to hide my power back then. Times have changed. It’s better that not everyone knows just how powerful I am. Hence, the cock piercing.”

“I think I get it. If they count the face piercings, they may think they can take you. However, you have seven more levels of power.”

I peck her hard on the lips. “Exactly. However, now that you are here, I can remove them all or just a few. Being mated balances us out. It’s less like waving a live wire in the air.”

“I don’t know if I want you to remove those,” she says tiredly.

“I will keep that in mind, my little one.”

I look to the door and smile. Turning my gaze back to Ray, I lift a brow. This is good. I want her to feel at home.

“There’s a nervous little earth fairy pacing outside our bedroom. You should go put her out of her misery.” I chuckle.



“Mm,” she hums sleepily. “I love your voice. It vibrates through me. You should do movie trailers or something. You could totally read me *The Lion King* at night,” she purrs and snuggles into me.

*“You are dismissed, Blossom. Ray will see you in the morning.”*

*“Okay, prez. I’m sorry to bother you.”*

*“No bother. Thank you.”*

“Kendrick?”

“Yes, my little one.”

“I want to learn to use my powers.” She yawns.

“I will help you. We will also train you to fight.”

“Good, I don’t like running. I would rather fight.”

“Sleep, my little one. It’s been a long night.”



# *Kendrick*

## *Where is She?*

*M*y brothers and I pull to the side of the road and cut off our bikes. This is the same location where I found Ray on the street last night. I kick my leg over my bike and move to the middle of the street.

I inhale deeply. Her scent is still faintly in the air. However, that's not what catches my attention. There are other scents that stand out.

"You smell that?" Bradan asks.

"Yeah, I do," Ardan says.

"I do too," I grind out.

"One is human, but he's existing on magic. He's actually rotting inside. What the fuck?" Reilly says.

"The other is one of us. Not a demigod, but a full-blood king," Bradan adds.

"No, there are four full-bloods and the human," I correct.

"What could they want with Ray?" he asks.

“Mabruk says they’re using our mates to pull us out.”

“Big fucking mistake. You feel me?” Bradan seethes.

“Oh, I feel you, brother. I feel you.”

“What do you want to do?” Reilly asks.

“Get some of our best trackers on this. I want to find them before they can get to us or what’s ours.”

“I’m on it,” Reilly says.

“When they’re found, remember, they owe me a pound of flesh. You feel me?”

“I feel you, brother. You will be the first to know when they are found.”

“Good,” I bite out.



## *Candido*

I SWEEP everything off my desk. Then stand with my chest heaving. This can’t be fucking happening right now.

“Where the fuck is she? Someone tell me that you at least know when she took off.” I seethe, glaring at my men.

Marco steps forward. “We haven’t located her yet, boss. The cameras show her sneaking off the property around seven last night.”

“How the fuck did she sneak off the property? Everyone knows she’s not supposed to leave the grounds without my permission and a bodyguard.”

“I’m sorry, boss. I wasn’t here last night. I was handling that meeting across town and making my rounds. I’ll find her. I have all our guys on it.”

“You’re all useless. Forget about it. I’ll have the brothers look into it for me.”

“Do you need me to do anything else?”

“No. All of you get out of my face,” I snarl, wiping the back of my hand across my mouth.

Once my office is empty, I take out my phone to call my brother. He’s the only one outside of my father who knows what I did thirty years ago to secure our bond with the brothers. I can use them to find Ray, but I’m not sure it’s the wisest thing to do.

I was told to keep them away from Ray and the others. At least until I married Ray off and produced a son—technically son-in-law—to carry us to the next generation. I wouldn’t even believe any of this shit to be possible if not for watching my father and grandfather thrive from their connection to those bikers and their magic.

“Hello,” Pauly says as he answers my call.

“We need to talk,” I bite out.

“What’s going on?”

“Ray is missing.”

“Her engagement party is tonight.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

I roll my eyes and pinch the bridge of my nose. My parents might have used all the brains on me. Pauly sure didn’t get much.

“What are you going to do? Will you call it off?”

“No, I was thinking of asking the brothers to find her,” I sigh.

“That’s not a good idea. Come on, Candido, think. If they find her, they’ll have questions.”

“What else am I supposed to do?”

“Where are the other two?”

“Fuck if I know. We just need one male, right? How’s the plan working out with your girl?”

“You know these magical types. His parents want to meet her. Something about not marrying humans who can’t handle their offspring. He’ll take her if she passes their test. Plan *B* is still in motion,” Pauly says.

“We’re so close. Dad said it has to happen this year. I’m going to strangle that girl.”

“Maybe it’s time to find your other daughters. We raised the two they said would be the most powerful, but we don’t want or need their magic—if they have any in the first place. Lee Ann hasn’t done anything special since the day you handed her over.”

I rub my temples. He’s right, but I was told the two strongest would replace the balance. They would give me grandsons and the Ricci family would be able to hold on to the bond we have with the brothers.

I bare my teeth in frustration as I move to the bar in my office. I need a drink. First, my brother and I struggled to have children with our wives. Then, my father found a woman willing to help us.

I was the only one able to get anyone pregnant. However, she gave me four girls. Not one son.

We need a fucking male heir. That’s how we hold on to the brothers. No male, no bond.

We’ve made too much money and have held too much power in New York and New Jersey to just see that all slip through our fingers. I toss my drink back and savor the burn as it slides down my throat.

Slamming the glass down, I crack my neck and roll my shoulders. Where the fuck is she? She doesn’t have friends.

I only allow her to work from home. How does a thirty-year-old woman who knows nothing of the world just vanish?

“I need to think,” I grumble into the phone. “I can’t cancel tonight. I’ll have to come up with something. You’re right. I

can't ask them for help. I'll figure it out. See you tonight."

"See you later."

I hang up and have to keep myself from throwing the phone across the room. However, I don't because I need it to make my next call. I dial and hold my breath as I wait for the call to be answered.

"Hello, Ricci. It's been a long time."

"The girls. I need to know where to find them and what they've done with their lives. Have they stayed pure? Can I put them in the game?"

"Give me an hour. I'll have answers for you."

"One hour. That's all you've got."

"You wait thirty years to check in, and you want to rush me? Yeah, whatever."

The call ends and I'm left seething. Ray better get her ass back home before tonight. My heart tugs when I dare to think something could've happened to her.

"Where are you, my little girl?"



# Ray

## *A Dress*

I wake and stretch my arms above my head. I have a smile on my face as a delicious soreness screams over every muscle in my body. Memories of Kendrick's hands on my body cause me to smile more.

I shake away my thoughts and my mind goes to my father. He's probably red as a tomato at this point. Tonight is my engagement party and he's probably blown a gasket. I'm sure he's noticed my absence by now.

I turn on my side, looking for Kendrick. I'm so disappointed when I don't find him beside me. I pout and reach out to run my hand over the spot where he had lain last night.

*"Oh my God, I slept with a demigod. Who's life is this?"*

*"Yours, but you really should feed my son. Thank you."*

*"Venus? How are you this morning? Are you okay?"*

*"No. I want to leave, but something is holding me here. He doesn't want me here and that hurts more than you can*

*understand.”*

*“I’m sorry.”*

*“I get that. I can feel it in your heart. Maybe you can help me.”*

*“How? What do you need?”*

*“I need to find my sisters. Maybe with your magic, we can figure out how to send me on my way.”*

*“But I know nothing about using my magic.”*

*“I know. I wish I had The Book of Paths. The caves have all I need to help you learn. I’m so sorry your rite of passage was stolen from you.*

*“An enchantress of your power should have had training by now. In my family, you surely would have been marked at birth.”*

*“I need to find something to wear and then I can feed the kid.”*

*“I can give you your first lesson in magic. Let me help you dress.”*

*“Really? What do I need? Candles, a cauldron. Oh, a magic wand?”*

*“Ray. Please shut up.”*

*“You’re rolling your eyes at me.”*

*“I am. Your magic is different from mine; it’s natural, in your blood, but I can still help you. You don’t need anything outside of you.”*

*“Okay, sorry. I used to be a Harry Potter fan.”*

*“A what?”*

*“Oh, never mind. Not in your time. Just tell me what I need to do.”*

*“Do you feel that tingling sensation? Look within for it. It used to help me to think of a color. Assign that color to that tingling when you find it.”*



I close my eyes and tap into the feeling she's talking about. There is a tingling in my fingertips and in my belly. It's stronger in my fingers, so I focus there.

I see purple surrounding my fingertips, following the flow of the tingling. The feeling goes from a tingling to a spark and a hum.

*"Good girl. You're a natural. That is awesome, Ray."*

*"Thanks. Now what?"*

*"Okay, see what it is you want to dress in. Now, pull that humming up and use it to manifest what you see. Open your eyes, love."*

I look into the mirror and gasp. I'm wearing a pink robe and slippers. I can't believe I did it.

*"Okay, I need to shower and then I can try again."*

*"What? Why didn't you just bathe and dress?"*

*"I could've bathed?"*

*"Ugh, you remind me of my little sisters. There is little you cannot do, Ray. Please, feed my son."*

*"Sorry, sorry. Hey."*

*"Yes?"*

*"Can we give him a name?"*

*"It is Knox. That is what I would like."*

*"Okay. Knox it is. That's a cool name."*

*"Food, Ray."*

*"Okay, okay. One sausage, eggs, and cheese coming up."*

I reach for the magic in my fingers and repeat what she told me to do to get dressed. I squeal in delight when a plate appears in my hands with the sandwich. It smells so good my mouth waters.

*"You are a fast learner. Thank you."*

*"No problem. I want him healthy and strong too."*

*“The earth fairy is coming. She wants to be your friend.”*

*“Venus?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“I know we got off to a bad start, but I’d like to be your friend while you’re here.”*

*“You’re sleeping with the only man I’ve ever loved. I have to watch it happen. I don’t know if we can be friends.”*

I sigh. *“I know, but maybe I can figure out a way to shield you or block you out when we... well, you know.”*

*“Maybe.”*

A knock comes at the door. I scarf down the rest of my breakfast and go to answer it. Sure enough, Blossom is on the other side with a huge box in her hands. She looks me over and her cheeks turn pink.

She bows before she speaks. *“Oh, you were able to find something. I’m sorry. I couldn’t find anything in your size.”*

I look down at the leggings and sports bra I dressed myself in on the way to the door. A grin comes to my lips. I did that so effortlessly.

*“Show-off,”* Venus grumbles in my head.

*“Why can’t you just be a good teacher? I’m going with that.”*

*“Thank you.”*

*“You’re welcome.”*

*“Why did you bow? And what’s with the box?”* I say to Blossom.

*“You are mated to King Kendrick. All others will show their respect if we know what’s good for us. This is for you from your mate.”*

*“Wait, how do you know... you know?”*

*“As a fairy, I can see the change in your aura. Others will scent it or feel it. It’s a super thing.”*

“Scent it?” I lift my arm and sniff at my pit.

Blossom laughs. She begins to tap her finger against her lower lip as if in thought. “Um, how do I explain it? Your scent has changed. You still smell like you, but now you smell like him too. Like you sprayed his scent all over you from head to toe.”

In that case, I must smell pretty freaking awesome. I’m not sure how I feel about others being able to smell him on me. At this point, I’m just rolling with it. I just used magic to feed and clothe myself. I shrug to myself. What the heck?

“Oh. Okay, come in.”

I take the box from her and carry it over to the bed. I spot the mess we left on the sheets and quickly try to make the bed with my magic.

“I can change the linens and make the bed for you,” Blossom offers.

*“What’s happening? Why can’t I do it?”* I ask Venus.

*“You are embarrassed and in your emotions. Our emotions can affect our magic. Relax. You are an adult. I’m sure she has known a man before.”*

*“But that’s just it. I was a thirty-year-old virgin. That’s just weird nowadays.”*

*“It’s no one’s business. Not now, not ever. Hold up your head.”*

“You did it,” Blossom cheers and claps her hands.

I told her last night that I didn’t know much about my magic or how far my powers could go. My chest swells with pride to be able to do this in front of her.

“I’m proud of you, my little one.”

The sound of Kendrick’s rumbling voice makes me turn to the door. He’s leaning in the doorway, watching me. The way his eyes roll over me from head to toe makes my cheeks heat.

“Venus is helping me,” I whisper.

He makes a face but doesn't say anything else. Pushing off the doorjamb, he moves to hover over me. Wrapping his arms around my waist, he tugs me close, then leans in to kiss me.

It's not the chaste kiss I was expecting since Blossom is standing right here. It's more of a demanding, possessive kiss. Everything in me settles into a peacefulness.

"I've missed you too," I say when he pulls away.

"I had some club business to handle. I didn't want to wake you," he says against my lips. "Did you sleep well? How are you feeling this morning?"

"I slept like a baby. I'm feeling great. I was about to open this box. What is it?"

He shrugs. "Open it."

I turn and move to open it. I don't miss that he rests a hand on my back as if he can't stand not touching me. I don't mind. I like the warm, heavy feel of his touch.

Sparks course through me. I want to feel his hands everywhere. I grin to myself as his thoughts mirror mine.

He growls and slaps my butt. "Later, my little one. Later."

I open the box and gasp. There's a gorgeous gown inside. I lift it from the box and stare at it.

"What's this for?"

"You wanted to say goodbye to your father. We will both get a chance to do so tonight at your engagement party," he replies.

I hold the gown against my chest and turn to look up at him. "Kendrick, I don't know about this. My father can get a little irrational when it comes to me."

"Do I look as if I'm afraid of anyone? Especially a human," he says with a raised brow.

"No, but—"

"We are going. And when we return, I will peel you out of that dress and have my way with you until the morning hours.

Now, come on. I want my brothers to meet you.”

“Shouldn’t I try on the dress?”

“It will fit,” Blossom says, reminding me she’s still here.

Kendrick looks me over. “It will be fine, but you should change that outfit.”

“What’s wrong with what I have on?”

“We’ll be walking through the clubhouse. There are brothers all around today. I don’t want anyone seeing you like that.”

“Like what?” I frown.

“*Ray*,” he growls. “Just one look at you and I’m hard. You will not walk through my clubhouse like that.”

Blossom snickers. I look at her and roll my eyes. Kendrick grunts and waves a hand in my direction. I look down and I now have on a cute pair of high-waisted jeans with a T-shirt tucked into them.

“You have good taste, but don’t do that again,” I huff. “Besides, that dress is more provocative than what I had on.”

“The dress is appropriate for the point I intend to make this evening and you will be by my side the entire time.”

He turns to Blossom and growls, “Blossom, why do you keep snickering?”

“Sorry, Prez, but you never allow anyone to argue with you. It’s a little funny that you haven’t shut her down yet.”

“Both of you, let’s go,” he grunts.

He laces his fingers with mine and tugs me out of the room beside him. I’ll admit, I’m a little turned on by his dominance. Okay, maybe a lot.



# Ray

## *The Underworld*

We go downstairs from where the bedrooms are and I'm taken aback by how huge this place is. It has an old warehouse vibe, like one that has been converted.

There's so much going on I don't know where to look. There are bikers everywhere, but that's not what has my head spinning. Kendrick tightens his hand around mine and leans down into my ear.

"They all know you belong to me. You are safe here. Besides, the scariest-looking ones are the most harmless," he whispers and kisses my temple.

I dart my gaze around again. This place doesn't really look like what I would expect a motorcycle clubhouse to look like. I mean, it does, but then it doesn't.

These guys are definitely paying their dues. How can I explain? It all looks polished. Like Kendrick keeps a clean house.

There are pool tables, some foosball tables, a few arcade games, two bars, a cool-looking jukebox, and different couches and seating areas all around. There's even a cafeteria-looking setup with tables around it.

What I find really cool is the shop on one side, like a store with Immortal Iron Brothers MC paraphernalia. I look up at Kendrick questioningly.

"There are humans who love to walk on the dark side. Doesn't hurt to earn from them. Our best nights at the bar are when we open to the public. Most of us burn human alcohol off within seconds, so the booze isn't really for us," he answers my unspoken question.

"You let humans in with..." I trail off and look around.

The group I'm referring to has turned to look at me. I groan and palm my forehead. Some of them have horns or scary faces. Others look like ordinary men.

*"They can hear me, can't they?"* I say to Kendrick through our bond.

*"Yes, most of the beings here have super hearing. Relax, they're amused."*

"Those ugly bastards are our resident incubuses. Lucky for them, they can turn pretty when they want," he says aloud.

They all nod and lift their drinks. I give a nervous wave. That's when I notice Rock. He has a smile on his lips as he sips his beer, then tips it toward me.

"Over there, you will find our fae brothers. Mostly tricksters and thieves, the lot of them. Ask them for nothing. It will always come with a price. One I will likely have to put them to ground for."

"Hey, we heard that," a tall guy sitting with the group Kendrick pointed to says and stands.

He has long, thick, dark, silky-looking hair that seems to pass his hips from what I can see. He winks at me. I note the sparkle in his vibrant violet eyes. I gasp when a rose appears before me.

Kendrick growls. “Don’t play with me, Dagger. I’ll turn you into pixie dust and smoke you in my pipe. You feel me?”

Dagger’s grin grows and he takes a bow. “No need to get violent, brother. I just wanted to welcome our queen. We fae are harmless... until we’re not.”

“Exactly,” Kendrick mutters.

Before I can reach for the rose, it’s struck by a tiny bolt of lightning and goes up in flames before falling to the floor in a tiny pile of ash. I frown as I look down at it. Kendrick squeezes my hand and kisses my temple.

“Forget that. I will give you better. Over there, that’s the packs. Our were-brothers.”

“Packs? As in multiple werewolf packs?”

“Yes, the Lycan king had triplets. All alphas. Instead of pitting his sons against each other for the throne, he divided the kingdom into three parts. The Sapphire Moon packs act as one large pack under their three alphas. You also have the occasional rogue who comes through needing our help,” he replies.

“Wait, so you have fairies and wolves in your club, but your club is called Iron Brothers. Isn’t that a conflict of interest for both?”

He laughs. “So you do know something about supers. The club is named after me and my brothers. We don’t hand out iron with their patches. Besides, no one is allowed to touch our iron in any form.”

“I know only what I’ve read in books. I can’t say I’m an expert.”

“Good to know.”

He nods and places a hand on the back of my neck and begins to knead away the tension I hadn’t noticed was building. He kisses my temple and ghosts his nose across my skin. Nodding across the vast space, he continues.

“That empty-looking section over there is reserved for our gargoyle friends. As they can only join us at night, it’s usually



vacant over there. They run a gentleman's club of their own. Our members stop by when they need something from the brotherhood. Not often, but it does happen."

*"Kendrick, is that a ghost behind the bar? Or have I truly lost it,"* I ask through our bond.

*"Yes, Jacobi is a ghost. Our only brother who is. A great asset to the club."*

*"I'll say this through our bond as a warning. In the dark corner over there, those are vampires. Believe most things you've heard about them."*

*"However, they don't always sleep during the day, but they will stick to the shadows when they don't. Remain in the light as much as you can when I'm not around."*

*"But I thought no one would hurt me."*

*"Your blood has an intoxicating scent. Younger vamps are primal. They won't have the sense or restraint to act on their fear of me."*

I stop in my tracks and ball up my fists. Kendrick roars with laughter, clearly reading my thoughts. I turn to him and glare.

"Yes, my little one. Those are our club whores as you called them. Fairies are beautiful in both male and female form. However, you never have to worry about my attraction to them. Their beauty doesn't begin to compare to yours. You can reel all that attitude in," he says through his laughter.

"Are they all fairies?"

"No, some are succubus and others are she-wolves. I'll admit. We have our generously gorgeous share of them all."

*"Those are your brothers on the thrones, correct? Why are all those women around them?"*

*"They are curious to see and meet you. My brothers are also all unmated. It is an honor to be chosen to be our companion."*

I tighten my fists at my sides. If this is what Venus has to go through, I don't think I'm going to make it. This burning in my chest has me ready to set this place on fire.

*“Ray, not many women—human or other can take bedding us. They all believe they want to try, but it never ends the way they think. It's rare for us to take a lover.”*

*“Which is why you, my adorable mate, will find me insatiable for the next two centuries.”*

“You can't be serious. I won't even live that long.”

A rumbling sound comes from his chest. I look up at him questioningly. He slides his hand from my neck into my hair and tugs my head back for a hard, passionate kiss.

“You will be alive for far longer than that. The day you cease to exist, I will willingly take my last breath. Never speak as if not breathing is an option. I will give my life before yours can end.”

“I'm sorry. I didn't know I could live that long.”

He kisses my forehead and inhales deeply. “Come, my brothers are taunting me.”

“How so?”

“They can speak to me as I can speak to you. They are saying I'm afraid to allow you to meet them because they'll take you from me. They all know that's bullshit. Even if you weren't my mate.”

I snicker and wrap my arms around his waist as he leads me up to the dais where his brothers sit upon their thrones. I note that there are two in the center.

*“The one on the right belongs to you.”*

He holds my hand until I'm seated. With a satisfied smile on his face, he dips his head to kiss my lips. He then leans into my ear.

“You were made to sit on a throne. I'll be happy to allow you to use my face for one later,” he says in a rumbling whisper.

I gasp and squirm in my seat. *“They’ll hear you.”*

*“Do I look as if I care? I’m too old to hide how I feel about you.”*

*“About that, how old are you?”*

He winks at me. *“You’re not ready to know that.”*

He moves to take the throne beside me. Bradan stands and comes to bow before me. I give him a smile and nod.

“Welcome to the family, little sister. It’s an honor.”

“I hope I can live up to being a part of the family,” I say.

He winks one of his amber eyes at me. Quickly, I count his piercings, remembering what Kendrick told me last night. I count three in his right ear. However, his long, wavy, fiery-red locks are covering his other ear.

Dropping my gaze to his red beard, I note a piercing in his chin. Okay, that’s six, from what I can see. Then he smiles and his dimples pop, revealing a piercing in his cheek I hadn’t noticed last night in all my nervousness. Still not as powerful as Kendrick.

Makes sense. He is, after all, younger. The piercings take nothing away from their masculinity and ruggedness. Somehow, it adds an edge to them. I can’t deny the power I feel coming from them, and the piercings are meant to lock it away.

Suddenly, Bradan flips his long, wavy red hair to the other side and turns his head, giving me enough time to count the ones in the other ear. I sit, counting to myself. Okay, maybe not too far from his brother.

He turns to look at me again and winks. I whip my head in Kendrick’s direction. He looks at me and smiles.

*“You told him my thoughts,”* I hiss.

He shrugs. *“You are curious about us.”*

I glare at him. It is in that moment he turns his head and I note he has more piercings I didn’t see last night. He has three helixes, a forward helix, a daith, and a tragus piercing, which I

didn't count yesterday. That's... oh my god, seventeen levels of power, holy shit.

*"Close your mouth, baby."* He chuckles in my head.

I close my eyes and swallow hard. I can't help wondering how powerful that really is. I have no point of reference for all of this.

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I am Ardan."

I open my eyes and find a handsome blond version of Bradan. I note to myself that so far, they all have voices like gods. Deep, rumbling, and sexy.

*"I promise to talk in your ear while I fuck you from now on."*

*"Oh my god, how do I block you out?"*

He only chuckles in response. I focus on Ardan to give him a proper greeting. He's looking at me strangely with his brows knit as if he's in thought.

"What is it, brother?"

Ardan shakes his head. "It's nothing. Ray just has a familiar face." He shrugs.

While he's speaking to Kendrick, I take him in. I notice his nose is pierced, as are his right brow and both ears. I count four to the naked eye. I'm starting to think they may be ranked by age.

"I get that sometimes," I say. "It's very nice to meet you, Ardan. I hear we have numbers in common."

His eyes light up and his face becomes animated. I get the feeling he more than loves numbers. I think I like this brother as well.

"We will talk more soon. I'd love to hear your thoughts on our bookkeeping system."

I nod, allowing my geek to show. "I'd like that."

Ardan places a fist over his heart and bows. So far, his brothers aren't as scary as I thought they would be. They're

also not as intimidating as one might believe them to be at first glance.

Next, the dark-haired brother with beautiful golden eyes like Kendrick's lifts from his throne and comes to stand before me. His dark brows bring something mysterious to his face. This one has a presence about him.

However, I can't see any piercings other than the ones in both his lobes. Strange, I guess this one isn't that powerful. Kendrick snorts beside me.

His brother gives me a knowing grin and the tip of a metal piercing peeks from between his lips. *Ohhhh*. Um, maybe he's hiding more like his brother.

Kendrick growls beside me. I reach to cover his hand, gripping the arm of the throne chair. He looks to me and flames are showing in his gaze.

*"It was just a thought. He is the least pierced of you all, yet I don't get the sense that he's the least powerful."*

*"There are reasons for that."*

"I am Reilly. It's nice to finally get to know you, little sister. There are many excited you are here. They've been buzzing all morning.

"Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make your homecoming as welcoming as possible. I am the youngest, but I tend to be the most responsible as well. I will look after you as much as I can," he says.

Kendrick snorts. "The lies you tell. Responsible for what? You still have milk on your breath."

"From a fine pair of tits and a great ass," Reilly shoots back.

Yup, they all have those voices. I squeeze Kendrick's hand as that rumble comes from his chest again. I can't help but smile. He's jealous and there's no need to be. All his brothers are handsome, but I belong to him.

"Thank you, Reilly. I will keep you in mind if I need help."

With that, he places his fist to his heart with a bow and returns to his throne chair. Kendrick turns to lean over and kiss my temple. I close my eyes and savor the connection.

*“Are you up to meeting everyone else? They are asking.”*

*“Sure, why not?”* I return through our bond.

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I LOOK into the mirror and smile. The gown Kendrick gave to me fits like a glove. It has a collar neck design and the top is made of lace that gets sheerer as it flows down over my breasts and into a *V* at the waist.

The back is out and the skirt flows down to my feet. The right side has a high split that shows off my thigh and leg. I love the clear heels on my feet. They give a bit of a stripper vibe, but the look is still classy.

“You look exquisite. I can’t wait to get you back here and all to myself. I’ve shared you more than I would like today,” Kendrick rumbles as he comes up behind me and wraps his arms around my waist.

Looking into his eyes through our reflection, I smile at him. He looks so handsome in his tux. That air of authority and royalty is rolling off him.

His hair is combed neatly to the right. I love the sparkle in his eyes as he smiles back at me. I turn in his arms and look up at him.

“You look very handsome yourself. It’s not too late to forget about this party and spend the night getting to know more about each other.”

He smiles at me and squeezes his arms around me. I know without reading his thoughts that we’re going, no matter how much I don’t want to. He leans in and pecks my lips.

“This needs to be done. We will be home and in bed soon enough. You’ve done so well today. I know it’s been a lot.”

I place my hand over his chest and rest my cheek on it so I don't get makeup on his white shirt. I sigh and inhale his scent to calm my nerves. My entire body relaxes.

“Okay, let's get this over with.”

He kisses the top of my head. Then he places a hand on my waist and leads me from the room. We step into the elevator, heading down. When the doors open, we step out and he leads me to a set of stairs.

*“Ray.”*

*“Yes? What's wrong?”*

*“The Book of Paths. It's here. I can feel it.”*

*“Wait, what? Your family's book? Where?”*

*“I don't know, but I feel its presence.”*

“Everything okay?” Kendrick looks down at me and asks.

“Yes, where are we?”

“The underground tunnels. The garage is down here.”

“It's so dark and cold down here.”

“Come, I will keep you warm. It remains dark because some beings are sensitive to light. Many enter through the caves and not the ground-level entrance where they can be seen,” he continues to explain.

“So this is just an entrance to the clubhouse?”

“No, the room of revelation, where we entered last night, is down here, as well as my private office and a few training rooms.”

*“His office. We need to get to his office.”*

*“Should I ask him about it?”*

*“No, Let's stop talking for now.”*

*“La, la, la, la, la. La, la, la, la, la. La, la, la-la, la-la, la, la, la la-la la.”*

*“What are you doing?” Venus growls.*

*“He can read my thoughts. I’m trying to block him out.”*

*“Ray, please. Stop that mess.”*

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Kendrick asks.

“Yes.”

“Do you always sing in your thoughts?”

“Um, no.”

He reaches for my chin and turns my face up. Then he places a toe-curling kiss on my lips. I’m breathless as he pulls away.

“You can block me from your thoughts. I just don’t want you to. But if you must, close the door. See it in your mind’s eye and pull it closed. You can open and close it as you please,” he says.

I quickly find and close the door he’s talking about. A frown comes to my lips. I don’t like not hearing him either.

“Can you hear Venus when you listen in?”

“No, I haven’t heard her yet. Is she still with you? She isn’t trying to harm you, is she?”

“No, she’s not a bother. She’s been pretty silent. When she does speak, she’s helping me. I’m sort of happy to have her. This would have been so much more of a struggle without her.”

*“I’m happy you have me too. You’re going to be an amazing enchantress. I can help you so much more once we get the book.”*

*“Thank you.”*

I turn my focus back to Kendrick as we climb into a Bentley. I’m taken aback by the car. However, I note several bikes and expensive cars lining the garage.

Kendrick settles in the seat beside me and places his hand on my thigh. I would be distracted by his touch if I weren’t so focused on outside the car as the driver takes off.



I'm in awe as we ride through an underground tunnel. The walls seem to pulse with magic. Soon enough, we're moving so fast it's like beams of light surround us.

Then, like magic, we're on the streets of New York. I look at Kendrick in excitement. That was so amazing.

“What just happened?”

“The tunnels are deep under the ground, where humans will never be able to find them. We've glamoured the clubhouse and our other properties. When coming from the underground, we use magic to come to the surface.”

“I love your world. Not that I know much about my own.” I look down into my lap as I think of all the things I've missed out on.

“My world is your world. You will get to experience plenty in our lifetime together.”

I realize that I've opened the door for him to hear my thoughts. The desire to hear him and to share is too strong to ignore.

I wrap around his arm and lean into him. “I'm looking forward to that.”

He kisses the top of my head and I know I can do this. My father needs to know I'm seeing someone and as a grown-ass woman, I'm putting my foot down. I want Kendrick or nothing.



# Kendrick

## *Party Crashing*

Candido has gone all out on this party. Too bad it's all for nothing. The beauty on my arm is taken. When I leave, she's leaving with me.

"Ray, there you are," a guy says as he runs over to us. "Your father has been losing his mind with worry. Come with me. He'll want to know you're back."

"That's just the thing, Marco. I'm not. You can tell my father I'm here, but we'll need to talk."

Marco looks between me and Ray. His eyes gain a bit of recognition and then go wide. He looks as if he's about to say something but changes his mind and storms off.

With my arm around Ray's waist, I lead us into the ongoing party. Music is playing as the guests mingle. I stop Ray in the middle of the dance floor and sway her in my arms.

The way she looks up at me makes my heart swell with pride. It's been doing a lot of that today. She handled herself

with such grace as she was introduced to my brothers, the brotherhood and the rest of the community.

I bring her fingertips to my lips and place a kiss on them. I feel Candido and his anger before he comes into sight. However, I don't stop swaying with my little one.

"Kendrick," Ray calls.

"I know. It's fine," I murmur against her temple.

"Ray," Candido hisses.

I stop dancing and turn to face him, keeping Ray close to my side with an arm around her waist. When I lock eyes with Candido, he takes a step back then clears his throat.

"Kendrick, how? What are you doing here? I mean, you never come to see me. You always send one of the others."

He speaks the truth. I dealt with his great-grandfather, grandfather, and father. However, I haven't answered Candido's beck and call since he came into leadership. I hate the scent of his fear. He always reeks of it.

"Well, now you have an audience."

"How do you know Ray?"

"You mean your daughter? She and I are very close. Although I'll admit, I was very surprised to meet her. You've been keeping secrets, Candido."

"Let's take this somewhere private," he says nervously.

"Ray, what the hell is going on?" Some guy comes over and asks, glaring at the hand I've been absently rubbing her bare skin with.

He lifts his eyes to fix his glare on me. "Who the fuck is this?"

"Angelo, I have this taken care of. See to the guests," Candido says.

"You've done nothing but embarrass me all night," Angelo hisses.

"Ray," I say.

She looks up at me with tears in her eyes. “Yes?”

I pinch her chin between my fingertips and lift her face. Then I dip my head and devour her mouth in a passionate kiss. She melts right into me. Placing a hand on her ass, I pull her in closer to me.

Gasps of shock ring out all around us. I break the kiss with a satisfied grin on my lips. Looking over Ray’s head at Angelo, I wink.

“Now I think you can justify your feelings of embarrassment. However, you can’t have feelings toward a situation that doesn’t involve you. Ray no longer has anything to do with you”—I bare my teeth and allow my eyes to flash between colors—“now get the fuck out of my face before I turn you to ash.”

“Angelo,” Candido calls after him as he storms away. “Fuck.”

“Daddy, I told you I didn’t want to marry him.”

“So you go behind my back? What the fuck is going on? How did you summon him?” he says seethingly, the last part low.

“How did I what?” Ray says in confusion.

“Maybe you and I should go talk,” I say to her father.

He gives a curt nod. I go to tug Ray with me, but she halts me. I look down at her, but she speaks through our bond.

*“I want to go up and pack my things. Is that okay? I’ll let you know as soon as I’m done.”*

*“I don’t want you away from me.”*

*“I will make it fast and I’ll leave the door open to my thoughts so you can hear me.”*

I purse my lips and frown. “Fine.”

“What the fuck? Are you two just going to stand there staring at each other?” Candido growls.

I turn and grab him by the back of his collar and drag him from the room. His men reach for their guns, but I shoot them all a warning glare.

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” he says, holding up his hands.

I take him to his office and shove him inside. He stumbles forward, using his desk to keep him upright. Folding my arms over my chest, I look down at him. I tower way above his six-two.

He reaches for the ring on his right hand—the ring that binds his family to mine. I want to chop his finger off, but I know I can’t. However, the rules say nothing about me scaring the shit out of him.

“You can’t touch me as long as I have this ring,” he says as he clutches it tightly.

“You should take it off and give it to Ray,” I say.

“You would like that. Is that what’s going on? She figured things out and she’s trying to take you for herself? Un-fucking-believable.”

“She knows nothing about us. As I have known nothing about her. Your time is running out, Candido. Whatever you thought you were planning has failed. There are no loopholes for you to manipulate and even if there were, Ray is not an option. You will say your goodbyes this evening.”

“What? You’re not taking my daughter. What is this, some *Rumpelstiltskin* shit? Get the fuck outa here.”

“It’s not as if you’ve cared for her or taken care of her. I should torture you for the life she’s led.”

“You can’t touch me,” he snarls.

I fly across the room and get into his face, lowering my head to be nose to nose. His eyes grow wide with fear. I can hear the churning of his stomach.

“I cannot put you to ground but do not mistake my ability to find other ways to make you pay. I’ve lived a very long time and know of ways to torture a man for days.

“Let’s not forget, I can heal you and start all over again—over and over again. Try me. I’ve been bored for the last century,” I growl in his face.

“What does this mean? Why do you want her? She’s a nobody, she can’t—”

I growl in his face. He shuts up as his face turns pale. Some gangster. Now, his great-grandfather and grandfather were men I could respect. This is a poor imitation of the Riccis I’ve known and served.

I hate this curse and having to serve anyone, but it’s his lack of honor and character that has led us to want to be set free immediately. I’ve always felt he would betray us as soon as he figured out how.

“You’re the only nobody I see. Speak of Ray that way again and I will force you to give her your ring and then I’ll have you put to ground.”

“You can’t do that.”

I tilt my head to the side. “Are you sure you want to test that theory? I am not of the same kind as the legend speaks of that helped your family enslave us. I am a variation of those kings and queens.

“A much more powerful variation. We’ve never challenged the bond before, but now I have a mind to. Do you want to test what those differences mean?”

“N...no.”

“Good, you will run out your time, and the rings will return to us. Then we are done. Your family’s time is up. You can no longer hold us.”

“We still have time. Six more months. Anything can happen in six months.”

“You will be sorry your ancestors ever came across us. That is a promise.”

*“No, get away from me.”*

I don't so much as pause to think of who might see me or what is happening. I flash from Candido's office to where I sense Ray in the blink of an eye.



## **RAY**

WALKING INTO MY BEDROOM, I look around and frown. This has been like my prison for thirty years. Anger rises as it dawns on me that my gut feeling has always been right.

This was never for my safety. There is so much more going on here. I grab my duffel bag from the closet, shaking my head. I've used this thing maybe a handful of times in my life. Every time was on trips with my father to Italy. Even then, he wouldn't allow me out of his sight, or I was locked down with bodyguards.

*"It's not right. What he has done is wrong,"* Venus speaks up.

*"I know,"* I think sadly.

*"We need to find out why. I don't like this. You're not safe. The more I think about it, the more I know you're not safe."*

*"I will talk to Kendrick when we return home."*

*"Ray—"*

I startle when strong arms wrap around my waist. I know right away it isn't Kendrick. The hum on my skin isn't there. Lips press against my bare shoulder and my skin begins to crawl.

*"You've never dressed like this for me. Who is he? What is he? Did you see that thing with his eyes?"*

I shrug to get Angelo off me. Turning quickly, I push at his chest to gain some space. He doesn't budge.

"Can you step back?" I hiss.

"I'm your fiancé," Angelo bites out.

"No, you're not. So keep your hands off me."

"You allowed him to hang all over you. I've never so much as got a chance to touch you before tonight."

"I wonder why?" I mutter to myself.

This guy has always given off creep vibes. First time we met, he looked at me like he was undressing me while standing right in front of my father. I hadn't even known his name yet and he looked like he wanted to eat me.

Placing a hand on my waist, he tugs me into him. I push his chest and squirm to get out of his hold. He tightens his hold, trapping my arms against my chest in a crossed position.

I can feel Venus's anger rising. She begins to push to come forward. I don't know what she will do, so I fight to maintain control.

"I just want one taste," he says as he grabs my face and tries to kiss me.

I panic and begin to scream in my head. "*No, get away from me.*"

Before I get a chance to fight him off, Venus pushes through. I gasp in surprise as I feel my power come to life and run through me. It feels so intense.

"She said no," Venus roars, freeing my arms and tossing Angelo back with the motion and force of my power.

She lifts my hand for me and a spark of magic lights my palm. My heart is racing. I don't want to kill him, but this anger filling me and the energy coursing through my veins tells me that's exactly what I will do.

Before Venus can release the surge of magic I feel building, Kendrick appears. His face is clouded over with



rage, making his features almost unrecognizable. His hair is blowing as if there's wind whipping through the room.

It dawns on me that he's the wind. I stare in awe as what seems like a tornado picks Angelo up off the floor. The swirling wind disappears. Angelo looks at Kendrick with wide eyes.

He tries to speak, but no words come out. He reaches for his throat. The struggle to breathe is written all over his face. He claws at his neck frantically.

Then, suddenly, his body is engulfed in electricity. It zaps and rolls through his body. His limbs stretch out as his eyes roll back in his head. He's convulsing right before my eyes. After a few seconds, he slumps lifelessly.

"Did he hurt you?" Kendrick asks as he cups my face and looks down at me.

"No, I didn't give him a chance. Take her home. She's in shock," Venus answers for me.

He closes his eyes as if in pain. "Thank you."

"She's carrying our son. I will always protect him."

Kendrick's eyes fly open. "Is he harmed?"

"No, he is well."

With a nod, he dips to lift me into his arms. Venus recedes and I sag into his embrace. We're not out of the room before I pass out.



# *Kendrick*

## *Enraged*

I've watched what happened through Ray's memories while she's been sleeping. Each time I see it through her eyes and hear his words through her thoughts, I want to burn that house down with all the guests still inside.

If I could kill that motherfucker again, I would. I stare down at her as she sits in my lap in the back of the car. I haven't been able to bring myself to release her from my embrace.

"I will never allow you to come to harm again, my little one. Forgive me," I say quietly.

She whimpers and snuggles closer to me. I palm the back of her head, holding her to my chest and dip to kiss the top of her thick locks.

The car stops, bringing me to the present. Claw opens the door for me to step out with Ray still in my arms. I nod to him once I'm out and head for the stairs to get to the elevator to go up to our bedroom.

As I step off the elevator on the sleeping-quarters level, I run into Bradan. His face is clouded over. He looks as if he's ready to explode.

"What has happened?"

"I believe I've found one of the others." He holds up an ID.

Glancing at the picture. My jaw tightens. She looks a bit like Ray with shorter, wavy hair. The name on the ID reads Taylor Ann Ducato.

"Where is she?"

"In my room. Kendrick, I think she's my mate. What does this mean?"

"Mabruk said you all would find your mates. As I told you, these hunters are after them. They will continue to force them to us.

"Whatever changed is revealing them to us before they can get to them. We should be grateful for that."

"That I am. Does this mean the other two will be our brothers' mates? Did Ricci somehow father all our other halves?"

"The gods would be showing their sense of humor."

"Well, I get the feeling they're laughing their asses off."

"Um. Where are you off to?"

"I can't remain in a room with her and not put my hands on her. The fever is real and very strong. I need to go for a walk and clear my head."

"You won't be gone long," I scoff. "The bond will draw you back to her."

"It's already pulling at me. I think it's better I take off," he murmurs.

"Do what you must. I will listen out for her."

"Thanks, brother."

"Is Ardan here? Has Reilly returned?"

“No, Ardan has been staying at his apartment the last few weeks. Reilly went for a ride to clear his head, I guess. You know how he gets. Is Ray all right?”

“She will be okay. It’s been a long two days. She needs the rest.”

“How did it go with Ricci?”

“I would like to find the others. Mates or not, I want to know more about them. I don’t think Candido is done with his plotting. I want to cut him off at the pass.”

“We will find them. Get Ray to bed. I will see you in the morning.”



## ***RAY***

I WAKE up and snuggle closer to the heat beside me. The heaviness around my waist tightens. Opening my eyes, I find a bare, tanned chest pressed against my face.

I look up and golden eyes stare back at me. Kendrick reaches to brush a lock of hair behind my ear. I smile at him and place a kiss on his smooth skin.

“How do you feel? Do you remember what happened?”

It all races back to me. Angelo, Venus using my powers to protect me, Kendrick killing Angelo. My mouth falls open.

“My father is going to be furious with me,” I say.

“Don’t be concerned with your father. He knows how to get rid of a body. He’s done it plenty of times before.”

“What aren’t you telling me? You know my father and a lot more about me than you’re saying. What’s your connection to my dad?”

“I would rather not talk about your father,” he rumbles.

“That’s fine for you. I, on the other hand, need answers.”

“I’m not talking about this tonight, Ray.”

I frown at him and sit up to get out of the bed. I need some space to think to myself. I think I’m about to get up, but Kendrick grabs me and plucks me up.

The next thing I know, I’m straddled over his face. He has a tight hold of my thighs as he feasts on me. I sag into him and moan.

“Do you still want to talk, baby?” he groans from beneath me.

I shake my head. “No,” I whimper.

He releases a dark laugh. “Good, now be a good girl and ride my face.”

I nod in response and begin to rock my hips. This feels ten times better than last night. I lock my fingers into his hair and hold on tight. His hums and groans send shivers through me.

“Kendrick,” I cry out.

Just when I think it can’t get any better because, come on, the man is eating my pussy like the best meal he’s ever had. He then begins to rub my clit. However, he’s not just rubbing me.

There’s an electric current coming from his fingers that’s making it feel like he’s holding a vibrator against me. My body locks up and my stomach caves. My legs are trembling around his head.

“Ah, yes. Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God,” I scream.

I soak his face, but I don’t get to be embarrassed about it, even if I want to be. I’m airborne before I can catch my breath. My eyes roll back as he guides me onto his length.

“*Kenndrricck*,” I drag out on a moan.

He lifts and places a hand on my back and one in my hair, holding me to him as he takes my mouth in a hot kiss. He

drinks from my lips and leaves me breathless as he guides my body over his.

Then he leans into my ear and slays me completely. “You feel what you do to me?” he says tightly.

“I’ve wanted to be in this tight little pussy all day. Yes, that’s right, get wet for me. Let that pussy rain down all over me.”

Wow, is this really happening? It should be illegal for a man to give dick this good. I just want to ride his dick for a week straight or until I’m too numb to feel him inside me anymore.

“If that’s what you want, I’ll make it happen, my little one. I’ll bring you pleasure until you can’t see straight,” he rumbles in my ear.

Oh, right. He can hear my thoughts. I bite my lip and circle my hips. He groans and grabs my ass, squeezing it tightly.

I lean into his ear and smile to myself. I squeeze my pussy around him. “You’re making it hard for me to want anything but you inside me. Show me what it means to be with a king, baby.”

He growls so loud the room shakes. The next thing I know, I’m on my back, screaming my head off. He puts his name all over my body as he straight owns me.

I think my name is Kendrick by the time he comes inside me and I pass out sated and happy.



# Ray

## *Checkup*

I wake encased in warmth. Right away, I know it's Kendrick's body cradling mine. I lift my head and look up to find a concerned and awed look on Kendrick's face as he stares down at me. I look down and my belly is round and swollen.

Popping up, I palm my belly and stare. When I feel something press back, I gasp. I turn to look at Kendrick with wide eyes.

"What's going on?"

"I have no idea. I think you and Venus triggered something last night."

"Babe, I went to bed with a flat stomach. Now, I look like I'm five or six months pregnant. What the heck?"

He reaches for my face and kisses me deeply. I wrap my arms around his neck and return the kiss. He breaks it and places his forehead to mine.

"Call me that again," he breathes.

I knit my brows in thought at first. Then what I called him hits me. I smile and peck his lips.

“Babe.”

He kisses me hard again, then places his forehead to mine. “I’ve called for a doctor.”

I look at him incredulously.

He grins. “She’s an other. She specializes in supers’ births.”

“Do you really think this happened because of last night?”

“I believe so. However, we can’t be sure. I’ve never seen this happen before.”

“He’s moving. Give me your hand.”

I take his hand and place it over my belly. The baby begins to move, bringing a smile to my face. I look into Kendrick’s eyes and they’re sparkling with happiness.

“Hi, Knox, I’m Ray, and that big hand belongs to your daddy,” I coo.

“Knox?” He lifts a brow at me.

“Yeah, that’s his name. Venus named him. I like it.”

He smiles and murmurs the name. The baby moves again with the rumble of Kendrick’s voice. He gives a nod.

“I like it too. Are you hungry?”

“I could eat.”

“Let’s get dressed. I should talk to my brothers about Knox and Venus. There is still much we all should share.”

I get up and move to stand in front of the mirror. My face is glowing and my belly definitely makes this all a reality.

*“The glow suits you. You look pretty. Thanks for last night,”* Venus says.

*“No problem. I told you I’d try. Thanks for saving me, by the way.”*



*“We’ll get you up to speed so you can protect yourself and Knox, but you’re welcome.”*

I yelp when Kendrick comes up behind me and tugs me into his arms. He buries his face into my neck. I sigh contentedly.

Who knew I’d be so happy to be carrying this magical baby? Heck, who knew I’d be mated to a huge demigod I’m falling completely in love with? But here I am.

“Come, let’s get you fed,” Kendrick rumbles.

I turn in his arms and look up at him. He has a huge smile on his face as he looks back at me. I palm his cheek and tilt my head.

“What?”

“I’m falling in love with you too.”



### ***Kendrick***

I AM EXCITED to be a father, but something feels off. I’m worried about Ray and baby Knox. My son is powerful in his own right. I can feel it.

However, I also feel that something about the nature of this pregnancy has altered him and could affect Ray. Her dormant powers kept her shielded before, in a sense.

Now, I can sense Knox in a new way. I want to visit Mabruk again to get some more answers about my son. The gods aren’t allowing me to see much for myself.

If this isn’t safe for Ray, I will need to take action. The one thing the gods have allowed me to see is that she will give me

children of our own. However, when I try to see Knox and his future, it's a blur.

This brings me fear. Although I can see Ray when I follow her life path, when following the boy's, I can't see him or Ray. When I do follow hers, I can see our life, but no Knox.

This isn't normal. I don't understand how there can be one without the other. Unless...

"All seems to be well. The child is healthy as far as I can see and mom is doing well too. Although, I understand your concerns," Dr. Coral says, pulling me from my thoughts.

"How far is she?"

"It would seem she's around twenty-two weeks."

"Will things begin to progress normally from here?" I ask.

"That, I can't tell you. I'd like to do a little research as I've never come across a case like this. However, if I just go by the medical and magical diagnostics, everything looks fine.

"If there are any subtle changes, I'd like to be kept in the loop. This is quite fascinating. A pregnancy from centuries ago. This little guy has the *Guinness Book of Record* title for longest gestational period," Dr. Coral snickers and pushes her glasses up her nose.

"Thank you, Doctor," Ray says.

She's been rather quiet throughout the checkup. Even her thoughts have been muted. I had to check to make sure she didn't shut me out.

In all honesty, I wish I could wrap her in my arms and run away with her. Somewhere where I'd know for sure she'd be safe. Waking and seeing her belly swollen surprised even me.

I've seen many things in my time. Yet I was not ready for this. I've known Ray for a few days. This just doesn't feel right.

I've been angry with Venus on and off. I'm grateful for my son, but I'm furious with her for putting my mate in danger and for making this decision without me.

“What are you thinking about?” Ray asks.

I focus and see Dr. Coral has left. Before I can answer Ray, my brothers come rushing in. As soon as she steps into the room, I can sense my brother’s new mate.

“Brother, what’s going on? We came right away when we were told you were in the infirmary. Ray, are you all right?” Reilly asks.

“I’m fine,” she says and sits up.

“What in the gods?” Ardan breathes as his gaze drops to Ray’s belly.

I go to explain the situation, but Taylor, who’s been hiding behind Bradan’s back, peeks around him and gasps. Her eyes light up with recognition and she darts around my brother, heading straight for Ray.

“Ray,” she cries out.

“Taylor?”

“I thought something happened to you. We met at the bar. Billy called when she couldn’t make it, but you never showed,” Taylor says.

“I was attacked on my way and Kendrick saved me. It’s a long story,” Ray says as she rocks Taylor in her arms and sways her.

“It’s so good to finally meet you. I feel like a missing part of me has returned. Wait until you meet Lee. She’s everything,” Taylor gushes.

“Someone want to tell me what’s going on here?” Reilly says.

“We believe there is a connection between our mates and Ricci.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our mates are sisters,” Bradan replies.

“Kendrick, do you think my sisters are Venus’s sisters? Is that possible?”

“You are carrying my child from a woman in my past. A woman I shouldn’t have been able to impregnate. At this point, anything is possible.”

“So we find Ricci’s daughters and we find our mates?” Ardan asks.

I can tell he’s trying to fight his excitement and failing. I’m happy for my brothers. They have waited a long time, not knowing if they would even have mates—as have I. So much will change for us.

“It’s not that easy,” I say. “From what Mabruk said, your mates will call you to them at the right time. You will not be able to just track them beforehand.”

“Well, how did you find Taylor?” Ardan turns to ask Bradan expectantly.

“I’ve been drawn to her for months. I didn’t know she was my mate. There were no signs before last night. However, she was attacked and I was pulled to her.”

“Technically, I wasn’t attacked, really,” Taylor interrupts, rolling her eyes.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Ferg asked to buy me dinner. It was supposed to be a date. When he didn’t show and I finished studying, I left.

“He just startled me in the parking lot as I went to get into my car,” she says.

*“That’s what she thinks. Her fear called to me. When I arrived, I could smell them.*

*“The one she calls Ferg is one of them. The others were close by. They were going to take her,”* Bradan says as he links me and my brothers.

“Did you get a look at them?” I ask.

*“Only the one. He took off. Something other than I spooked him. There was a light of some sort in the trees across from the lot.”*

*“I want a crew to head back and see if there’s anything to be tracked.”*

*“Already on it,”* Reilly says.

“So the attacks are the triggers,” Ardan says.

“I hate it,” Reilly mutters. “Although I don’t believe one of the sisters will be mine. I have sensed my mate before.

“She would be too old to be their sister. I don’t know what she was, so she may no longer exist without our bond. I have long given up on the idea of finding her.”

I go to ask him when this encounter was, but my words are cut off as the door bursts open. In storms Seraphina, one of the fire fairies. I roll my eyes. I should’ve known this drama was coming.

“Which one is she?” Seraphina hisses.

“That does not matter. I will put you to ground if you touch either of them. Reel that shit in, Seraphina,” Bradan rumbles.

“I am gone for a week and return to hear you have claimed a mate. You said you would warn me, that you would give me time,” Seraphina growls.

“I did not know the pull would be so great. I couldn’t deny her. I didn’t want to. Reel it in, Sera. I am sorry your feelings are hurt, but it is done.”

“It’s done? It’s done,” she screams.

“I said reel that shit the fuck in, now,” Bradan barks.

“Fine, it is done and it will be undone,” Seraphina seethes as her hands begin to glow with flames.

I stand and block Ray and Taylor. Fire fairies can be unpredictable. I warned Bradan about this one. I know we get lonely at times, but Seraphina would have been my very last choice. There would’ve had to have been no other options.

She tossed one of her flames despite me blocking the way. Bradan roars and flashes to shield his mate. However, mine is the one to the rescue.

As Seraphina's flame speeds forth and splits in two to circle around me to get to Ray and Taylor, Ray blocks the flames with a shield and returns them back to their sender.

The flames rejoin and wrap around Seraphina like a lasso, restraining her in its flaming embrace. She squirms to get free, but the flaming restraint only tightens. Rage fills me and I go to end this fairy's sorry life.

*"Don't kill her,"* Ray says through our bond, halting me.

*"She needs to be punished."*

*"For being in love? Would you want that for Venus?"*

*"If she tried to hurt you."*

*"I wouldn't want that. This can't be easy to learn. It's been what, maybe a few minutes or hours for her?"*

*"She's still in the heat of her passion and love. Don't, babe. Please."*

I sigh. Feeling my brother about to do it instead, quickly, I banish Seraphina to the cells. She disappears from the room and Bradan whips around on me.

I turn to look him in his eyes with my own. I've been watching this unfold from above it all. Something I tend to do in situations like this.

Now, looking my brother in his eyes, I take a calming breath. I know what he's thinking. I reach to place a hand on his shoulder. He shrugs it off in his anger.

"Where is she? Why did you spare her? She attacked my mate," he growls.

"She attacked *our* mates and my child. Trust me, I wanted to put her to ground. However, Ray has a point.

"Is she to die for being in love? She hasn't had time to process and think rationally. Fire fairies already naturally have tempers. You, of all, can relate.

"Are all fairies to fear their deaths because they were once our bedmates? We have more important things to handle and discuss. We can deal with Seraphina later," I say calmly.

“He is right, brother,” Ardan says.

“I agree,” Reilly adds.

“Taylor, come. We’re leaving,” Bradan says tightly.

“No,” Ardan breathes. Right away, it’s clear he’s not speaking to us. His eyes begin to glow. “You are my mate?”

With that, he vanishes. All tension leaves the room as we all stand silently. Trying to tap into whether or not our brother needs our help.

“And then, there was one,” Reilly murmurs.

My heart tugs for him. He makes it sound as if he’s resigned to his lonely fate, but I know it isn’t true. If my instincts and memories serve me right, he will be wrong in the end. He shall not be alone.



# Ray

## *One More*

“So you’re pregnant with the baby of our brother’s old lover? The one who disrupted our sleep and our temple,” Bradan says.

He’s still not speaking to Kendrick, but I’ve gotten him to speak to me since Taylor wants to spend time with me and he won’t let her out of his sight. They make such a cute couple.

The way Bradan looks at her would make me believe they’ve been together for years, not one night. It also shows me that my feelings for Kendrick aren’t as nonsensical as I may think they are.

Maybe these feelings I have aren’t Venus’s, as I’ve been telling myself. As I have the thought, Kendrick places a hand on my back and begins to rub circles. It’s like he can sense I need his comfort.

“I didn’t know it was their resting place or temple,” Venus mutters.

“I know. I don’t believe he’s holding it against you.”



*“Can you get them to change the subject? I grow tired of this one.”*

“Can you feel Ardan? Is he okay?” I ask, trying to change the subject as she has asked.

“He is fine. He and his mate need some time,” Bradan says and wiggles his brows.

“Oh.”

“I’m sure he will bring her here once they are done.”

“Do you believe it’s Billy or Lee Ann?” Taylor asks.

“We can’t know for sure. I have a feeling it will be,” Kendrick says.

“I don’t know what the gods are up to, but this has them written all over it,” Reilly murmurs. “You guys want something to eat or drink?”

“Sure, thanks, Reilly.”

“You’re welcome. Taylor?”

“Sure, I could use a bite. That fruit she’s eating looks so good,” she replies, pointing to one of the young women who came in not too long ago with what looks like her band members.

“You don’t want that. Neither of you should ever take fruit from the fairies.”

“Why not?” Taylor asks.

“That fruit knocks humans out. It’s how the fairies kidnap you and take you to the fairy realm. She will become their entertainment until they’re bored with her and they turn her into a pig or bird or some shit,” Bradan replies.

“Oh, but I thought we weren’t human. Wait, what are we anyway?” Taylor frowns.

“I still don’t know,” Kendrick says. “You have human blood, but you’re something else entirely.”

“They feel like our kind, but a crossbreed somehow,” Bradan muses.

“I was thinking the same thing,” Kendrick murmurs as if in thought.

“Have you picked up on the siren vibe?” Reilly says as he places a tray of food down on the table.

Wow, that was fast. My stomach grumbles and I’m thankful for the rapid service. I reach for a fry and pop it into my mouth.

Venus seems to perk up at the mention of sirens. I’ll be honest; my interest has been piqued as well. They have always fascinated me.

“Now that you mention it. Yes,” Kendrick says.

“Really?” I say to him in my thoughts.

*“Yes, during sex. I thought it was the pull of our bond, but the sound of your moans is magical. It has a pull of its own. So much is making sense now.”*

*“What do you mean?”*

*“I could always feel that Venus was more than she thought. There was a tribe of fire sirens loyal to my father.”*

*“Fire sirens? What are those?”*

*“They were born of a phoenix and a siren. A siren said to be one of my father’s friends and companions when he roamed the earth with our mother.”*

“She’s asking how they could be connected to her,” I tell him as Venus fires off questions for him.

*“I’m not certain they are. But it would explain some things. I will need to call on a scholar for more answers. One who oversees the ancient scrolls.”*

*“Ugh.”*

*“What is it?”*

*“Nothing.”*

“Ray,” he drags out in warning.

*“This would be so much easier if Venus and I had access to The Book of Paths.”*

*“Tell her I am sorry, but I believe it was destroyed in the fires.”*

*“Oh no.”*

“Damn, I expected more of you, brother,” Bradan says, causing me to look up.

“I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t have something important to share,” Ardan tosses back.

He’s walking toward us with a stunning woman on his arm. She’s a little darker than me and Taylor, but there’s no mistaking she’s our sister.

“Billy?” I say as I stand holding my belly.

“Hi Ray,” she sings.

I pull her into a tight hug. Venus’s emotions rush me and I almost burst into tears. My sister rocks me in her arms as she holds me tight, making it hard not to let them flow.

*“She smells the same. This is Zandra. My baby sister,”* Venus chokes out.

*“Good, we only need to find one more.”*

“Sit, brother. What is so important?” Kendrick says.



### *How It Began*

“*W*hat are we doing?” Ray asks as we stand in our bedroom. She’s looking up at me with a smile.

She looks adorable. The glow on her face is radiant. Her hair is pulled up into a ponytail and she’s dressed in a cute little dress. I can’t wait to push it over her hips so I can push inside of her.

“You will see once we get there.”

She rolls her eyes and rests her head against my chest as I stand with her in my arms. I hold her as tightly as I can with her growing belly.

“I wish every day could be like this,” she says.

“We will make it so.”

There has been so much going on at the clubhouse in the last month since our mates have started to appear. We have some of our best trackers out looking for the hunters, but they haven’t found anything, even with Reilly’s help.

There’s been a ton of discord among the others and it’s my job to sort them all out. I spend my time mediating rather than getting time to focus on my mate. Then there is Reilly.

As an older brother, I want to do something to help him, but there isn’t much I can do. Ray says the fourth sister’s name is Lee Ann, not Charlie. However, Reilly has come up empty

when looking for a thirty-year-old woman named Lee Ann and his mate has yet to call for him.

The four have only communicated online. Lee Ann has never posted a picture of herself. Therefore, none of the sisters could give us many details to go on.

Taylor is the only one to ever see her in person. While the sisters do somewhat look alike, Taylor says Lee Ann has her own vibe—whatever that’s supposed to mean.

We’re lucky to get that much from the shyest of them all. She hides behind her mate most of the time. Bradan loves that. It feeds his possessive side.

Reilly has asked Bradan if he could see Lee Ann in Taylor’s thoughts, but for some reason, Bradan can’t. Not that his bond link isn’t working with his mate, Lee Ann is just a blur to him, as are some of Ray’s memories for me.

I had thought the blockage was because of Venus until Bradan said he was experiencing the same. Every time I steal some time to go check in with Mabruk, she hasn’t been home. I’m growing frustrated.

“Where did you go? You’re grinding your teeth,” Ray says as she reaches to cup the side of my face.

“It’s nothing. Come, our date awaits.”

“So you’re taking me on a date?” she says and smiles.

I curse to myself. This is why I need to steal a moment for us. My head is all over the place. I want to slow down and do something nice for her.

“Come on, my little one. No more questions.”

“Fine. I hope there’s food on this date. Knox has been more demanding these last few days.”

I laugh. “He’s a growing demigod. What do you expect?”

“We’re not taking the elevator?” she asks as I lead her to the stairs that lead up to the attic.

“No, we’re going up.”

“A date in the attic. Oh, now my interest is piqued.”

I reach to palm her ass and give it a little squeeze. “You say that as if I don’t know how to have a proper date. I’m wounded, little one,” I tease.

“Sorry?” she says, making a cute little face at me.

I can’t help but dip my head and plant a kiss on her sweet, sexy lips. This past month has been the greatest of my entire existence.

My little mate is perfect. She makes me smile and laugh. Something that was highly rare before she arrived.

“Kendrick,” she gasps as we enter the attic of the clubhouse.

I grin from ear to ear as she spins in a circle, looking around with awe in her eyes. This is better than the reaction I was expecting.

“You really listen. Thank you,” she sings.

She’s been having thoughts of wanting to go out in the sun. We haven’t allowed our mates to roam out and about the city without us. Since we have so much going on, on top of our responsibilities, there hasn’t been time for one of us to go out with them.

I don’t want her to feel like a prisoner. Guilt has been nagging at me. I’ve taken her from one gilded prison to another. I truly don’t want that for her.

Looking around, I smile as I take in what this must look like for her. The attic is flooded with sunlight I’ve created just for her. I’ve lined the floor with grass for her to take her shoes off and wiggle her toes in it as she longs to.

Thinking of her desire to do so, I walk over to her and kneel to remove her shoes from her little feet. Either of us could magic her shoes away, but I want to do this for her.

I place a hand on the back of her ankle and glide my palm up her smooth skin. She places her hands on my shoulders as I lift her foot and remove her right shoe first.

Lowering my head, I kiss her cute toes. Placing that foot back down, I then repeat the same actions with the next. Once both shoes are off, I run my hands up the backs of both legs and knead her sexy, thick ass as I look up into her eyes.

“I will bend the world to see you smile.”

She cups my face in her hands and presses her lips to mine. I deepen the kiss as I stand and tug her into me. She moans into my mouth.

I break the kiss and press my forehead to hers before we get too carried away. There’s still a full date before us. I want to spoil her and feed her before I fuck her to sleep.

“Come, let me feed you two.”

I help her lower to the blanket. The deep sigh she makes once she’s seated causes me to laugh. She places a hand on her swollen belly and smiles up at me.

My heart swells as I thank the gods for her. Ray seems to be happy to be carrying this child. I have so much admiration for her.

“What?” she says as she tilts her head.

“You are beautiful. The gods favored me.”

“As they have I. You are very handsome, mister. Now come sit with us. We’re hungry.”

“As you wish.”



## ***RAY***

I HAVEN’T BEEN able to stop smiling. This date has been so romantic. I’ve been fed a delicious lunch and then Kendrick fed me some grapes and pineapples.

I could take a nap right now and life would be perfect. I'm sure he has read my thoughts when he pulls me into him and wraps me in his arms.

"There's no rush. Sleep for as long as you like," he says into my hair.

"Will you tell me a story?"

"What would you like to hear?"

"Whatever you want. I just want to hear your voice."

He's silent for a moment as he thinks. I smile as he settles in his thoughts on what he wants to tell. Intrigued, I settle in for this one.

"I will tell you how I came to be and how I came to know your father."

"I would like that very much," I yawn.

"Humans were the last beings to be created. It all began with my father, Tanrı. He is the alpha god. The one we all come from. He gave essence to create what he called his siblings. Then, they all created creatures of their own. Most supers come from them."

"Wait, your father is the original god? I didn't realize that."

"He is. His first creations after his siblings were my mother's kind. He made them after himself and called them kings and queens.

"They were meant to be immortal and as powerful as him. The only difference was that they couldn't create from the ethereal essence at will and they couldn't change forms as he and the gods could."

"Change form? Can you explain?" I ask.

"You have seen my other form. My brothers and I are able to take that form because of our father. My mother's kind cannot. They are larger and very powerful, but they can't wield the same transformation we can.

"So they can't do the knight thing you do, right?"



“Exactly. We all have a release level that brings us closer to gods than kings and queens or warlocks and witches, as my mother’s people were reduced to.”

“What happened? How did they lose their immortality?”

“My father loved his creations. They were his pride and joy, but my mother, Habun, captured his heart. He favored her above everything.

“My father could sense the others were becoming jealous, so he hid my mother away. I was born and then Bradan and Ardan. His siblings found out about us when Reilly was born. The nature of his powers grabbed their attention.

“My father wouldn’t allow them to change or harm us, but they did punish our mother’s people. They were cursed to become mortal and the mate bond was forced on them.

“One of my uncles was enraged because his affections weren’t returned. When he learned of us, he led the charge so he could punish that king for his unrequited love.

“However, the worst part of it all is the part every king and queen has hated. Humans with knowledge of us can hunt us down and bond us to servitude as long as we aren’t mated.

“There have been legends and rumors that my father stepped in to lessen the terms of the punishment, but I don’t know how much of that is true.”

“What happened to your mother?”

“Tanrı wouldn’t allow her to be punished, not even for a single second. He made her a god. She sits in his court.

“My brothers and I weren’t given the same grace. I have never known why. Tanrı has all but forgotten us,” he says bitterly.

“Okay, I think I’m following, but how did that lead you to my dad?”

He kisses the top of my head and places his palm against my belly. I love the warmth he gives off. My body sags further into him.

“As you know, my brothers and I have not had mates. We have been discovered in the past and bound to a family here and there. We’ve never served them for long. Greed and foolishness have been their downfall each time.

“We cannot deny the bond once discovered and we cannot harm our master,” he says the word *master* with disgust. “Your great-great-grandfather was the one to find us.

“It was in the nineteen twenties. He walked right up to me as if someone told him exactly where to find me. He knew the words to speak and when to speak them.

“We have been in servitude to the Ricci family since. While gangsters from that time have fallen and others have risen and done the same, your family has only ever prospered because of us.

“There is one thing I think has been a result of my father. The bond has been more of a curse to the master in question. In order to hold us, there has to be a male heir. The problem is, the bond will ensure no males are born to the master, thereby freeing us from the bond.”

“Which is why my father wanted to marry me off.”

He kisses my forehead. “I do believe so.”

I look into his eyes. “But you have your mates now. What does that mean?”

“If we find our mate while bonded in servitude, we cannot be held. The bond will run out. When it does, all prosperity and good fortune is lost.”

“Oh, now I get it. I was a pawn to keep you. The irony.” I laugh sleepily.

*“He loves you,”* Venus says sadly.

*“What makes you say that?”*

*“That was more than he has ever told me about his parents. I had to read old text to learn the things I knew.”*

*“That was a long time ago. Maybe he’s just had time to heal.”*

*“He loves you. We should both be able to accept that. Once we find Yanique, I will take my leave.”*

*“Venus?”* She doesn’t reply. *“Venus.”*

I sigh. I would like to believe we’ve become friends. Hearing her sound so dejected makes my heart ache for her.

I’m just about to lose consciousness when Kendrick stiffens beneath me. I open my eyes to find a hard look on his face.

“What is it?”

“Stay here.”



# Kendrick

## *Visitor*

I have always believed Reilly to be the most unique of us all. His touch is truly one of a god. From childhood, he learned to keep his composure, to keep his powers in check.

Reilly is the only one whose powers cannot be fully concealed by blessed iron. He can lock down his lowest levels of power, but the others he keeps concealed on his own. Without a level head, this isn't possible for him to do.

In his anger, death pulses from him. All it takes is one touch. If you have power, he will kill it—stripping it from your being, never to return unless he wills it.

Once your power is gone, with the snap of his fingers, he can take your life's essence completely. If you are mortal, he will end your days with but a whisper. He is the yin and yang of life.

In his most peaceful moments, he breathes life. Walking upon barren lands, he will bring them back to vibrance and vitality. This is why the brothers are calling for me to help.

Reilly, for some reason, has lost his temper. He's tearing the clubhouse up and no one wants to restrain him for fear of the death his touch could bring. Death to their power or death everlasting.

I am the only one who has ever been able to restrain him when he's like this and even I have suffered consequences. I couldn't fully release or transform for a week once. Another time, I lost control over the elements for a year.

Each time, I hid it from him, knowing the guilt he felt for losing his temper. While he could have undone the damage, I know him well enough to know it would have done more harm to him than what was done to me.

I enter the lounge area he's currently wrecking. Immediately, I can see why the brothers have evacuated this level. His anger is pulsing off him. My powers are straining against his aura. I'm glad I left Ray upstairs.

"Fuck," he roars and tosses a chair across the room.

"Reilly," I call calmly.

It's not like him to throw tantrums like this. The consequences are too great. He is usually rational-minded.

He turns to me, his eyes glowing and his chest heaving. Taking a calming breath, he runs a hand through his hair. Pain comes over his face.

He bends at the waist and places his hands on his knees. I'm at a loss for what to do. I've never seen him like this.

"What is wrong, brother?"

"I've found her. I know my mate," he says, his words pained.

"This is good. What has you so enraged?"

"I had her. I had her in my arms. She was mine to take. Then they came out of nowhere. It was like they were ready. They knew not to come close, and they... they used some sort of barrier to shield her from my reach, and now I can't feel her, I can't find her," he says brokenly.

He shakes his head and continues. “She’s in danger. They are after her, not the ones who took her from me, but the hunters. I felt them coming for her. I should be the one there to protect her. *It should be me,*” he roars the last sentence in anguish.

“We will find her, my brother, but I need you to reel it in.”

“I can’t go through this again. Not this time, not with her,” he says brokenly.

Reilly has been through as much loss as I have. To have the power of life and death, but the one time you’re needed, you fail—that’s a heavy burden to bear.

“I don’t understand. Who are these people? How do they know how to hinder *me*?”

“I do not know, but I am sure we will find her.”

“I don’t even know her name. I felt she was in danger, and I went to her. She knew who I was, but I never got her name. Why does she keep slipping through my grasp? Why does love taunt me like this?”

“Is this the same mate you recognized before?”

“I do not know. I don’t see how that could be possible, but... We only get one, so would it not have to be?”

“I only felt her the first time. I caught her scent for but a moment in the past. It was a bit different this time. Gods, she’s beautiful. I have to find her,” he says and stumbles over to an overturned chair.

He rights it and flops down into it. It’s still not safe to get close, but I can feel him reeling it in. Aravos, our gate troll, enters the room.

I look up at him. He never leaves the caves. It is his job to guard the supers’ entrance on the lower level.

He drops to one knee, shaking the room with his size. Slow and cautiously, he bows his head to me, then Reilly. I nod for him to speak.

“Master Reilly, you have a visitor down at the gate,” Aravos says.

“Who is it?” Reilly says dejectedly.

Aravos holds up his hand and opens it. Reilly’s birth tags hang from Aravos’s thick, huge palm. Our birth tags are one of the only gifts we can say we have from our father. The other might as well be a curse.

They are chains with gemmed charms hanging from them. Within the gems are pieces of the blessed iron used to cut us from our mother’s womb.

We all have them and have worn them from the time we were boys. Reilly jumps from his seat and grabs the birth tags from Aravos.

“Where is she?”

“I asked her to wait at the gate when I was told you were in crisis.” Aravos doesn’t get his words out before Reilly vanishes from sight.

“You are all mated now. I will only allow coined entries. Make sure the brotherhood knows. You feel me?” Aravos says.

I turn to him and find him staring at me intently. He may be a troll, but he’s earned his patch like all the rest. He wears his Immortal Iron Brothers cut with pride too.

“I feel you, brother. Rock will be informed to enforce the new rule and get the coins out to the captains to make sure they are distributed.”

“Will it be your crest?”

I create the coin in question and flip him the first of its kind. It’s a mix of my crest, but I add a time dial. I’m not sure why. It just feels right as I craft it.

He stands and bows his head. A light portal appears and he walks into it, traveling back to his post. Trolls are solitary beings. We don’t see much of Aravos if we’re not looking to pass through the gate.

Looking around, I shake my head. This place is a mess. I wave a hand and things are back to the way they were, good as new. Crisis averted. I return to my mate and our attic date.





# Ray

*Charlie*

“*H*ello, sister.”

I rush into the open arms of the woman in front of me. Lee Ann has been in this clubhouse for three days and this is the first time I’m getting to lay eyes on her. Venus bursts into tears as my sister takes me into her embrace.

Without question, this is Yanique. We are both sure of it. She has the same face, same aura, same presence.

“*She hasn’t changed a bit. I can feel her power,*” Venus sobs.

Lee Ann releases me and looks me in the eyes. She cups my face and smiles. Her gaze drops to my belly and her smile grows wider.

“You did it, sister. You got him here, but you didn’t follow our other instructions. You didn’t let go.”

“I got confused. I tried, but my heart was so heavy. When it was time to step through, I got confused and couldn’t leave,” Venus pushes through to say.

Lee Ann sighs and palms my belly. “We will make it right. He is here. That’s all that matters.”

She then palms my cheek. I push Venus back and take back over. “It’s nice to finally meet you, Ray.”

“It’s nice to meet you too. Should I call you Lee Ann or Yanique.”

“You can call me anything but Charlie. I hate that name. Our father.” She pauses to roll her eyes. “He was a piece of work, picking those dumb boy names. I changed my name as soon as I got a chance,” she grumbles.

“How is it you still remember so much?” I say as Venus asks the same question in my head.

“There is something greater at work here. It will take time for me to explain. I think it’s more important to get you up to speed on your magic and to get Taylor and Billy to tap into their new potential.

“We are all greater forms of our old selves now. The sooner you all remember your gifts, the sooner we’ll be ready,” she says.

“Ready for what?”

“For what’s coming.”

I go to ask more questions, but Reilly comes and whispers something in Lee Ann’s ear. She looks up at him lovingly and nods as he laces his fingers with hers.

Without another word, she follows after him as he tugs her away. I sigh and rub my belly. I have so many unanswered questions.

However, from the look on Reilly’s face, I still won’t be getting those answers anytime soon. Pushing down my disappointment, I turn to find Blossom. She keeps me company when Kendrick is too busy with club business and my sisters aren’t around.

Suddenly, my head begins to hurt. Instead of looking for Blossom, I turn to head back to my bedroom. It might be time to take a nap.



## *Candido*

“I FEEL like you’ve been giving me the runaround,” Lombardo growls into the line.

I sit in the back of my car with a growing headache. This is a day straight from the pits of hell. I’ve had call after call come in, each raising my blood pressure. Now this.

“I don’t know what you mean, my friend. I can’t find my daughter either. Maybe the two took off together. Did you ever think about that?”

I know it’s total bullshit, but it’s worth a try. Something smashes on the other end of the phone. This guy wants answers about his son, but I can’t give them to him.

I found the poor bastard dead in Ray’s room. My guys cleaned things up after all the guests were gone. Lucky for me, Lombardo’s flight was delayed and he missed the entire party.

“Get the fuck outa here. You know that’s bullshit. My niece said your whore daughter showed up with some other guy and sucked face with him right in front of Angelo and everyone else.

“What kind of shit show are you running, Ricci? If this is the kind of bullshit you’re on, you can forget about ever doing business with me. You better pray to God I find my son, you slimy piece of shit.”

“I don’t give a fuck about your business. You call my daughter a whore again and I’ll send you pieces of your son once I find him. You cocksucker,” I snarl.

“Fuck you and that whore. Find my son, Ricci. He was last seen going upstairs in your home. Find him,” he barks and

hangs up.

I rub my temple and groan. Ray has really left me in a bind. First, a body in her room. Now I have to deal with this. Not to mention, no one is handling the fucking books.

I wish I could say all of that was the least of my worries. Nope, I look out the window of my car at my brother's home. It's all turning to shit.

I step out of the car and fix my tie. Taking a calming breath, I then storm into Pauly's house. This is un-fucking-real.

"How the fuck did you lose her? What the fuck happened?" I roar as I enter the house.

I march into the living area, where I find my brother pacing. He stops to glare at me. I fold my arms over my chest and glare back.

"I don't know why I allowed you to talk me into this. Do you know what we've done?"

"What have we done, brother?" I say, tilting my head to the side.

"You have talked me into signing my life away. Dealing with those... those things comes with a price. We promised them a bride. They accepted her and now she's fucking gone."

"And whose fault is that? You allowed her to stay with them before they carried through on their end of the bargain. They lost her. That's not our problem."

"Are you insane?" Pauly roars. "This isn't one of the families. We can't go to war with those people, things, whatever the fuck you want to call them. They're going to kill us, and for what?"

"For all of this," I bellow back, holding my arms out to gesture toward his eighty-million-dollar gaudy-ass home. "You had no problem with my plan while you were spending like there was no tomorrow. You haven't taken that ring off your finger either."

“You and Dad made it seem like this would last forever. All we had to do was make sure there was a male. We had the brothers; why get involved with more of them? This is bad, Candido. It’s really bad.”

“It’s nothing we can’t fix. I’ll find Ray and that motherfucker and I’ll fix this,” I seethe.

“I hope it’s that simple because I’m going to need to cover my ass from now on,” he mutters. “*Fuck.*”



# Ray

*Where is He?*

“*R*ay.”

“*UM,*” I mumble in my sleep.

“*Ray, wake up.*”

“*What? No, I’m sleeping, Venus. Leave me alone.*”

“*Knox is gone. Wake up, now,*” she growls.

I sit up and look around, then reach for my belly. She’s right; my stomach is flat and I feel so empty. I toss the covers back and that’s when I realize Kendrick isn’t in bed with me.

I jump from the bed and rush to the mirror. My reflection shows my naked body as I remember it before I started to share it with supernatural beings. I once again look like I love to eat but hit the gym religiously to keep my curves firm.

I worked hard for this body, but I want my bump back. I palm my stomach and look down. Where is my little Knox?

*“What happened? What’s going on?”*

*“I don’t know. One minute, he was there, and then the next, he was gone. I felt him... his power. Then nothing.”*

*“What does this mean? I’m not bleeding. I didn’t miscarry. Where’s our baby?”*

*“I don’t know. That’s why I’m waking you. We need Kendrick. Please reach for him, call for him, do something.”*

I wave my hand for a robe to cover me. Reaching out for our bond, I try to locate Kendrick. As soon as I connect with him, he pulls me to him.

I stumble forward a bit as I appear in his office. I’ve only been in here once before and it was only briefly. Venus and I thought we would sense *The Book of Paths* here and then we could ask for it, but it wasn’t here. She didn’t feel it then.

Tears roll down my cheeks and I run to him. He stands and holds up his hands.

“No, wait,” he rumbles.

However, I’m already in motion, not realizing he’s trying to stop me. I flash to him and throw myself into his arms. It’s the first time I’ve been able to flash.

“Did she just...” Rock says.

“How is she that close? Not even Reilly has gotten that far.” Bradan’s voice follows.

Through my sobbing, I realize we’re not alone. Not knowing what they’re talking about, I ignore them both. Kendrick rubs my back soothingly. I cling to him, not knowing how to tell him what has happened.

“Rock, Dagger, out. We will finish this later,” Kendrick barks.

He kisses the top of my head and brushes my hair back from my face. I look at him through my tears. He searches my gaze and I realize I closed the door to my thoughts while we were making love earlier, before I passed out.

I didn't want him to hear me repeating how much I loved him. I'm still warring with whether these are my true feelings, feelings caused by the bond, or Venus's feelings for him bleeding into mine. It's all happened so fast.

In the last few weeks, I've learned to close my thoughts without closing the bond. Seeing his concern, I open the door and allow him in.

He stiffens and places me on my feet. Shoving his hands in his hair, he stands there staring at my missing baby bump. He looks as perplexed as I feel.

"You didn't put us out, so does someone want to tell us what's going on?" Ardan asks.

"The baby is gone," Reilly murmurs.

"What do you mean gone?" Ardan asks.

"The fetus is no longer in her womb."

"Did she give birth?" Ardan then lowers his voice. "Has she lost him?"

"No," Kendrick says. "She has not miscarried. He is just gone, but Venus is still with her."

"I don't understand what's going on?" I say now, trembling as I bounce from foot to foot.

"Ray?" I turn to look at Bradan. "Do me a favor. Touch Kendrick's desk."

"No," Kendrick roars.

Bradan throws his hands up. "I was just curious."

"All of you, out. You're not helping," Kendrick bites out.

"Do you want me to answer Candido's summon?"

I look up at Kendrick as my father is mentioned. I haven't spoken to him since seeing him at the engagement party two months ago.

"No, fuck him. We are done with him. The rings will return soon. We are all mated now. He and the Ricci family are done."



I move back to wrap my arms around Kendrick as I sob. I've carried Knox for two months. I had begun to bond with him. I talked to him all day and read books to him at night.

I just asked Kendrick about making a nursery this morning. How can he just be gone? I felt him moving while his father made love to me just a few hours ago.

"Why is this happening? Where is he?" I sob. "What happened to our baby?"

Kendrick cups my face and kisses me passionately. I grasp his T-shirt and hold on tight. His kiss is soothing and calms my racing heart.

"We will find out what happened here, but now I can plant a child in your womb that is truly ours. One made of love, not magic."

*"I will find out what happened,"* I think to Venus.

Quickly, I wall her off from my feelings and thoughts. Kendrick already has my robe open as he palms one of my breasts and kneads it. I moan into his mouth and wrap my arms around his neck.

He wraps his arms around my waist and lifts me. I wrap my legs around him as he deepens the kiss. I can feel his indecision as he kisses me.

Reading his thoughts, I understand where it's coming from. He doesn't trust placing me on his desk because of the magic it holds. I shouldn't have been able to come near it. I begin to wonder why I am able to when he moves his lips to my neck and sucks my skin into his mouth.

All thoughts of his desk and its magic are forgotten as he begins to finger me from behind. He takes my lips again and starts to devour me. I smile into his kiss as a thought comes to mind. He growls and squeezes my ass with his free hand.

"Hold on," he says.

We begin to rise and my pussy clenches with excitement. I've wanted to try this since remembering seeing him and Venus do it in the past. I've just never had the courage to ask.

In the blink of an eye, his clothes and my robe vanish. We're levitating over his desk high in the air and he has pulled me to straddle him. I plant my palms on his stomach and sink down on him.

My eyes roll back and I bite my lip as he fills me with his rock-hard shaft. I begin to rock my hips slowly. He's harder than he's ever been.

Gliding his hands up my sides, he cups my breasts as I ride him with more enthusiasm. A deep groan leaves his lips as I claw my nails up his chest. Holding my butt in his palms, he sits up and comes nose to nose with me.

*"This is real. These are my feelings. I do love him. I love him so much. Oh my God, how did I fall so hard and fast?"*

He growls and it shakes the walls. Grasping my throat, he kisses me breathless. It's when he breaks the kiss I realize I didn't close the door back on my thoughts. I only shut Venus out.

"I want to hear you say it out loud, my love," he says huskily.

I cup his face between my hands and press my forehead to his. Our connection is always stronger like this. I soak him in and open my heart to him.

"I love you," I breathe against his lips.

Before the words are fully out of my mouth, he flips us so I'm on my back. My heart leaps into my throat and my stomach drops as I'm now the one facing the ground and he's no longer my support. He moves his lips to my ear.

"I have you, my little one. You will not fall. I can keep us up here all night without dropping you.

"Relax, you will carry my son before the night ends. That I can promise you," he says, pulling a shiver from me as his breath fans my ear.

He pins my legs back and thrusts down into me like he's doing push-ups. I'm so wet he's moving in and out of me with

ease. The way he kisses me has me pointing my toes and clenching my walls around him.

“Fuck, baby. I love the way you take me. Your pussy is so good. Come for me.”

He reaches between us and goes straight for my clit. He zaps me with a low current. I can feel him slowly increasing the flow and pressure of his fingers. He leans in to whisper words of love and devotion.

The rumble of his voice, the magic of his touch, his hard dick working inside me and the fact that I can feel his every emotion and hear all his thoughts pushes me to the edge and kicks me right over.

I come so hard I see stars and feel light-headed. He roars as he spills his seed into me. My body warms from the inside out.

*“Did you just...”*

*“Yes, that’s how we get our true mate pregnant. We know right away. You will start to feel it in a few weeks.”*



## ***Kendrick***

I STAND on the balcony of our bedroom, looking out over Manhattan. The bright lights blur as I stare out at nothing. Seeing but not seeing.

Horns blare, announcing the life and heart of the pulsing city. Yet they cannot tell me where my child has gone. I close my eyes, trying to turn it all off. It’s times like this when I feel as if I were born powerless.

Not willing to fall into a pit of despair, I open my eyes again. The lights gleam back at me, reminding me we burn

bright. Kings always rise. This will be no different.

This city never sleeps, but even those who are awake at this hour have no idea what's coming. I feel it. A shift has happened and we can only prepare.

"I will find you, my son," I murmur to the wind.

Lee Ann has been with us for the last four weeks. I haven't been fool enough to believe that finding her was the end of things. We're not all just going to walk into happily ever after.

My son disappearing is only the beginning of what's to come. This I know for sure. I have not panicked because it's not in my nature to.

I've come to learn the gods set things in motion and we're to ride through the storm. I don't know why Venus is here. I have no clue how Ray was able to carry Knox for the time she has.

I wish I knew why all our mates have appeared now. We all have pieces and parts. Now, we must piece them together. The honeymoons are over. Whatever has been set in motion is coming and it's coming now.

"I am ready. *Ben kralım.*"

My power reaches its full release and I stand as the clouds roll and lightning fills the sky. Folding my arms over my bare chest, I grin.

I have never lost a battle brought to me. I won't start now.



# Ray

## *Training Day*

Out of the corner of my eye, I watch Lee Ann fight as if it's second nature. She and Billy are locked in an intense session as Ardan and Reilly coach them.

*"She has always been a great warrior," Venus says proudly. "But you are about to get your butt kicked. Pay attention. She is meek, but she's a fast learner. Focus."*

I give Taylor my full attention right as she lunges for me. I dodge the blow and counter. Taylor gives me a smile and then she attacks again.

I dance back and take a stance to ready myself. We've been sparring with bo staffs, unlike Lee and Billy, who have upgraded to real weapons. A distracted look comes over Taylor's face.

"Wow, that's crazy," she mutters as she pauses from sparring with me.

I drop my stance and turn to see what she's talking about. Our mates are sparring in the box—as they call it. It's a space

below us. The floor above it is see-through. The box is designed for them to spar at full power.

Seeing Kendrick and Bradan go full out causes my mouth to drop open. The fact that this room was built to sustain them and their powers is only one of the mind-blowing things happening right now.

They both have those holographic figures standing behind them. That's the only way I know how to describe them. Venus has called them avatars.

While Bradan attacks with flames and fire, Kendrick counters with lightning strikes and flames of his own. The avatars move with them. I'm in awe as the two men fight with grins on their faces.

"You can say that again," I breathe.

I don't know why I was so surprised to find they have a combat training room here. These supers have everything they need at their fingertips. The brothers have been training us as if we're preparing for a war.

I don't mind. It's a time for us to learn to protect ourselves and we get to bond. My sisters and I have been growing close. Venus seems happiest when I get to spend time with them.

Which is not as often as one would think. Our mates aren't big on sharing. They would have to let us up for air long enough for that.

I cherish these training sessions because not one brother is willing to allow us to miss them and I get these moments to at least see my sisters and interact with them.

"They are amazing. I'm still in awe that he's mine," Taylor says softly, pulling my attention back to her.

"I know the feeling."

I smile as I look Taylor over. She's the smallest of us all. Small but curvy.

Something we all share. Lee is the tallest. Although next to Reilly, she's still tiny.

When I look at my sisters, I can see why their mates are so crazy about them. Each one of them has her own charisma and personality. Venus didn't have to point out to me which of my sisters were formerly hers.

I recognize them and the essence of their personalities I had a glimpse of. Taylor is shy but incorrigible and curious. She reminds me of Annaniah. Billy is straightforward and cynical. My visions of Zandra always come to mind when we speak.

Then there is Lee. She could be Yanique's twin. Not only does she look like her to me, but they also have the same personality and drive. I like her.

"Here they come. Ugh, I can't even think about him without him knowing and coming to me. I always feel like such a perv," Taylor groans, bringing me from my thoughts once again.

I laugh to myself. I'm sure Kendrick is on his way over here because of my thoughts as well. With chiseled bodies like theirs, how are we not to think dirty thoughts?

Forget the fact that they have sweat dripping down those muscles and they're showing off. I bite down on my lip as Kendrick saunters his way over to me. As he gets to me, he tugs me right into his arms.

"I will never get used to seeing you guys do that. I mean, it blows my mind every time," I say as Kendrick wraps his arms around me.

I peek around him to look at the hologram figure, still trying to wrap my mind around how it's possible. Before I can reach out and try to touch the avatar, Kendrick pulls him back in.

I frown and poke my lip out. I'm so curious about those giants. I know I'm like a kid trying to poke and prod at a new toy, but how can I not be?

"Your curiosity is endearing, but you do not need to poke at a shadow of me when you can touch the real thing," Kendrick chuckles.

“What does it mean?” I ask.

“What does what mean?”

“The words you say before he appears.”

He kisses my forehead and squeezes his arms around me. “You will figure that out on your own,” he replies.

“How?”

“You’re my mate. There will come a time when you will master your powers and that will allow mine to yield to you. Someday, you will have your own form of transformation and you will understand the words to call it forth.”

“No way,” I gasp. “I’ll have my own guy?”

His head falls back as he laughs. When he looks back at me, mirth dances within his golden eyes. I love this look on him. Kendrick can be so serious at times.

“I don’t know if you will gain that skill. Remember what I told you. That ability is more from my father. But when you know your true strength in your heart, you will know the words.”

“Okay, let’s get back to work. I need to master this stuff so I can be a badass and have that glow.”

“That glow?” he says with amusement.

“Yeah, *The Last Dragon*. Oh wait, never mind. It’s a movie.”

“Bruce Leroy. I know of it.” He winks down at me.

“Seriously, you’ve seen it? You watch movies?”

“When you live as long as we have, you do a lot of human things to pass the time. Come, my little one. Bo staffs and then you can move to something else,” he laughs and releases me.

I roll my eyes. I’m so tired of sparring with these wooden sticks. I want to learn more about using my magic as a weapon.

“*He is right. You need more discipline,*” Venus sighs.



Poor Venus, she hasn't really been up to helping. Although she shows up for me. I get it.

We don't know for sure what happened to Knox. Kendrick has tried to reassure us both that he's fine. I wish I could be as sure as he is.

Venus is heartbroken. Lee Ann is the sister she needs to spend time with to learn how to leave, but Lee Ann is the one with the most possessive mate.

Reilly is super protective. He keeps my sister by his side at all times. Venus wants to talk heart to heart with her.

I think I understand that. It's only been two days. While I'm concerned about Knox, I trust Kendrick knows what he's talking about. To be honest, I, too, feel as if he's fine.

More magic, more secrets. I had a nanny who used to tell me all secrets come to light. I used to love that lady. I'm trusting in her words now.



# Kendrick

## *The Seer*

“This is it,” I say to Ray as I help her from the back of my bike and remove her helmet.

“The brownstone?” She points.

“Yes.” I scan her face. “Why do you look so disappointed?”

“I don’t know. She’s a seer. I was expecting something else.” She shrugs.

Venus has been pushing her way through all morning, demanding I find answers about our son. She should know better—I bend for no one. The only reason I’m bending to her demands now is because Ray looks exhausted.

It’s been three days and I still haven’t felt a change as if Knox is in danger. I know this is something the gods have set in motion. Venus is lucky this isn’t a punishment for what she’s done. Which it may be.

Yet she’s demanding for me to do something by possessing my mate whenever she puts her guard down. Livid isn’t the

word to describe how I feel. I still don't know why I can't hear Venus until she takes possession.

Even when Ray doesn't have me blocked out, I can't seem to communicate with Venus or hear any of the things Ray tells me she says. Being that she's sharing my mate's body, I thought I'd have more access to her without her taking full possession of Ray.

I want it to stop. I will not allow her to keep draining my mate with her demands. Knox is gone. Venus should be as well.

We are here to see Mabruk so I can get some answers and free Ray of my past. This is not her burden and yet she carries it.

It's pissing me off. I have crazy supers to deal with. More and more conflicts are happening within our community that need my attention before things boil over.

It's not normal. Yes, I play mediator often, but not this often. Supers are agitated and acting out. That's where my focus should be.

Venus has argued that I just don't care about our son. That isn't true. The simple fact is I can feel that he's safe. He's still a living essence.

"I know you're annoyed, but she needs this. I think she'll settle once we at least have some type of answer," Ray says as she places her small hand in mine.

"You have a beautiful heart. Your empathy for a woman who has taken your body hostage, forced her will on you, and tried to steal your first experience in motherhood is commendable."

"Damn, when you put it like that, I guess I understand your anger on my behalf," she says with a laugh, still showing more grace than I think she should.

"Ah, you have brought her with you this time," Mabruk says as she opens the door when we get to the top of the stairs as if she's been waiting for us.

“You aren’t hiding from me this time,” I counter.

Mabruk has been here every time I’ve come by. I don’t believe for a second she wasn’t. I had patience with these games before. That patience has run out.

“Come inside. I will help as much as I can.”

We follow her into the brownstone. Ray wraps around my arm and stays close as she moves with me. I look down at her and wink to help her relax.

*“She is harmless. Take a breath.”*

*“Does she live alone?”*

*“Yes, why?”*

*“I feel someone or something else.”*

I pause and reach out to see if I feel someone else. There is a faint trace of another. *“Perhaps she had a visitor before us.”*

*“Oh, okay.”*

“Please, sit,” Mabruk says after lighting a candle.

“Ray Ann Ricci. You are more powerful than I could have imagined. You have so much unlocked potential. When you come into your own, wow. You will be a force,” Mabruk gushes.

“We are not here about her potential. I need to know what happened to my son. Where is he? Is he safe? What are the gods playing at now?”

“I told you before. The boy has a purpose. Tanrı is with him himself.”

“What does that mean? Where do I find my son?” I bark out.

“You will not find him. He will find you.”

“Is he okay? Did I do something wrong to lose him?”

“No, you did nothing wrong. Actually, you have pleased the gods. They will bless you with a gift for your heart.

“You have a light about you. It draws others to you because of this. You will be given a light that is needed in darkness. A correction must be made because of past errors. Tanrı creates perfection. It is we who always get in the way and ruin that.”

“You are speaking of Venus?” I ask.

“Yes, she has made a few errors. Your father is determined to complete his mission. This had to be done. The boy is fine. The play is in motion,” she replies.

Then she turns to look at Ray. “My dear, it’s time to let go. You missed your mark. All will not be lost. Just let go.”

“She doesn’t know how,” Ray says.

“When the time is right, you and the others can help.”

“How?” Ray asks.

“The answers appear when the truth is near.”

“She says thank you,” Ray says.

“You all are welcome. Now, as for you and your brothers. You will know when the time is coming.”

“Time for?”

“Be well, My King.”

I sigh and purse my lips. I do not know what has just happened, but I get the feeling Ray and Venus understand. Good, now she can go. We are done here.



## *VENUS*

I KNOW Kendrick and his bloodline can sense each other’s life force. However, Knox is different. I don’t know if they have

that bond. At least not yet.

What if something happened to him? I needed this reassurance. Although she spoke in riddles, the seer brought me some peace.

However, I was not expecting the seer to blame me for all of this or for her to tell me to leave. I understood her words. It's what I've known all along.

*"I need to find The Book of Paths."*

*"I know, but you haven't sensed it since that day. How do we find it?"*

*"We will talk to Yanique."*

*"You mean Lee. Good luck with that."*

*"Ugh, you are right. I don't understand why he's so possessive. The others aren't that bad,"* I huff.

*"Something happened in his past. That's what I'm getting from Kendrick's thoughts. Something bad."*

*"But I need to speak with her."*

*"Don't worry, we will figure it out and then you can be free to leave."*

I want to go more than she knows. However, my son is missing. Even if I knew how to leave, I can't now. Not without knowing where he is.

I can feel Kendrick's anger toward me, but my love for my son is greater than anything else. I will not go until I know he is safe.

*"Thank you, Ray. You're the only one who understands."*

*"He is fine. We will find him. I promise."*



# *Candido*

## *Treasure Chest*

“*I*f you’re going to tell me you still haven’t found her or that cocksucker and his merry band of freaks, don’t even bother taking a seat or opening your mouth. Get the fuck outa here,” I snarl as Marko and Julian step up to my table.

This redhead in my lap is earning her money as she grinds her skinny ass on me. Her tits are the real prize. I don’t have time and I’m not in the mood for the bullshit these two come with.

I’m ready to explode at this point. I came out to my nightclub, Treasure Chest, to look at some tits and ass to get my mind off the bullshit. It’s like I walked down a block lined with ladders and passed under every single one.

I can’t catch a fucking break. I’m facing a RICO, my businesses are being audited, and my fucking accountant is MIA. Ray had responsibilities to this family and she’s left me high and dry.

The money hasn't been properly cleaned in two months. The feds are going to have me by the balls. I can hear them now. "We got him."

Bastards.

I haven't had to grease a hand in my life. Now, I'm emptying my safes trying to stay out of this bullshit and those fucking biker freaks won't come when I call for them. Motherfuckers.

Some daughter of mine. I've given her anything she's ever wanted. Private hairstylist and nail techs to the house, a personal shopper who brought in all the latest styles.

Nothing was ever too good for her, but she couldn't do this one thing. Half of this is her fault. Not to mention, I haven't heard the last from Lombardo. He wants answers for his son.

*Fuck.*

"Ungrateful brat," I grumble to myself and take a sip of my drink.

I slide my gaze to the side to eye Marko as he takes a seat. I snort. This motherfucker must think I'm joking.

"Why are you sitting? You know what? Why the fuck are you still here?"

"You'll want to hear what I have to say, boss," he says.

I place my glass down and tap the redhead to get her ass off my lap. I lost my hard-on anyway. She stands and sways her bony ass as she walks away, looking for some chump to drain for her next dye job.

No wonder this place ain't earning like it used to. I shrug the thought off. Nothing is earning like it used to. I need to figure out how to get those biker wizards back under control. My father would have a stroke.

"Go on, what you got for me?"

"I have a friend of a friend who can get me into the biker club. It's gonna cost a little, but I'm told Ray is with him there," he says.



“How much is a little?”

“Forty grand.”

“Fuck outa here. Are you shitting me?”

“That’s what it takes to get me in.” He shrugs.

I sigh and sit back in my seat. I need to renegotiate the terms of this agreement. Fuck it, I can’t keep going like this.

If they won’t come to me, I’ll go to them. My daughters have left me with no options. Four, four brats and not one is useful in my time of need. Not even the one I love.

“Set it up,” I snarl.

### ***THE HUNTER***

I LOVE it when they do my work for me. You can always get to your prey through the object of their affection. I’ve intentionally herded those women to my prey.

Through them, I will finally accomplish my life’s mission. Justice will be served. I smile at the blonde dancing in my lap. She looks back at me with a smile on her bright-ruby-painted lips.

There is one constant in time. Desperation. One man’s desperation is another’s treasure.

“Yes, you will do,” I whisper in her ear as she leans back against my chest.



# *Kendrick*

## *A Gift*

*F*rom the moment we enter the clubhouse, I know this day isn't about to turn for the better. The light fairies are buzzing about, trying to gain entry to the gate.

I look to Aravos and lift a brow. He shrugs his shoulders. I sigh and summon Dagger. These are his people.

Guiding Ray upstairs, I head straight for the clubhouse's main floor. My brothers are sitting in their throne chairs with their mates beside them. Well, Reilly has Lee Ann in his lap.

I grin and shake my head. A few light fairies pass by me. I pause to watch them, wondering what's going on. Their eyes are alight and their skin is aglow. That only means one thing.

"What's happening?" Ray asks as we get to the dais.

"A child has been born," I reply.

"Really?" she says. Her eyes light up with excitement.

"When a fairy is born, there is a celebration of their birth. The glowing eyes and skin mean she or he has been born of a

royal. But why are they all here? The ceremony is usually in the father's home," I muse aloud.

"Not when the father is gone," Dagger says as he appears.

"Who's the father?" Ray asks.

"Not sure I can answer that for you."

"So a royal has had a child and doesn't know or want to reveal the father? You deal with this. Have the djinns solved their issue, or do I still need to intervene?"

"Those genies do as they wish. I say shove them all in a bottle and be done with it," Dagger mutters and waves me off. "But Prez, the light fairy needs to be addressed. It's Asuka."

I groan and roll my eyes. Trouble follows Asuka. She doesn't intend for things to happen, but they do.

For example, her husband mysteriously died six months after their wedding. We still don't know what happened. For her to have a child, I can only imagine what's next. It sure wouldn't belong to her husband.

"How is this my problem?"

"I will allow her to tell you and your mate what she told me," Dagger says, his voice filled with amusement.

Asuka steps up with a small glowing bundle in her arms. Moving forward, she takes a knee and bows. I stiffen immediately. The child's scent is extremely strong.

"Ah, you smell it too?" Dagger says.

"What is this?" My brothers and I growl in unison.

"She is a gift from the gods," Asuka says.

She stands and moves to hand the baby over to Ray. Ray takes the child and the look of awe, then happiness that comes to her face tells me I'm not going to take this child away from her.

"I was told to tell you, well done. He will right all wrongs now. Time and light will bring freedom and truth. We all come from the one.

“When we separate. We lose our way, but light and time bring correction. The past, present, and future will align, and balance will be set. Accept this gift.”

“Why does your child smell of my father and your dead husband?” I bite out.

“I asked to have one more night. I offered anything to have one more night with my Orin.”

“And now you have a hybrid child you are giving to my mate?” I snarl.

“This child has a purpose. She is the future. All things have meaning. All darkness succumbs to light. My gift has now become hers.”

Asuka places her hand over her chest and bows her head as she backs away. All the other light fairies do the same.

“A light is born, a beacon is hung. All hail Princess Avionne,” they all sing.

“Well, ain’t this some shit,” I mutter under my breath.

“Better you than me. You feel me?” Bradan laughs.

“Shut your ass up. You... feel me?”

My brother holds his hands up as his eyes dance with mirth. I close my eyes and bare my teeth as I listen to Ray’s thoughts. She’s in love.

I have eons of experience being a man. I was ready to raise a son. What am I to do with a little girl? My father, indeed, has a sense of humor.



# Ray

## *The Wolves*

“*S*he’s very pretty,” Venus murmurs.

“*She’s gorgeous,*” I coo down at the little bundle in my arms.

Her eyes are big and bright, nothing like a human newborn. She has a head full of hair and her little cheeks are adorable. I place my pinkie in her tiny hand and she wraps her little fingers around it.

“Oh,” I startle when her fingers start to glow and my pinkie becomes warm.

“*She likes you.*”

“*I love her. Is it different for fae? Her mother gave her away so easily.*”

“*Her mother did what I was supposed to, but yes, for fae, it is different. The light will always connect them. And her mother knows you’re not a fairy. Someday, this little one will have to go to her people to learn.*”

*“Does that mean I don’t get to keep her?” I ask sadly.*

*“For the time being, you are fine. You will have plenty of your own children by the time she leaves. Think of it like an apprenticeship. They still have that, don’t they?”*

*“Yes, but college is more common these days.”*

*“College? What is this?”*

*“It’s like finishing school. Okay, wait. Think of it as sort of an apprenticeship for two to four years, but with tons of books and lectures.*

*“Sounds like the same thing to me.”*

*“Fine, you’re right. My bad.”*

*“Well, it will be like that. She will be free to return to you once her training is done. Fae have long lifespans. You will have plenty of time with her.”*

“Why does she smell so sweet?” I say out loud.

“Because she carries the scent of a god,” Kendrick says as he walks up behind me and wraps his arms around my waist. “Fairies have a sweet aroma, but hers is stronger because a god intervened in her creation.

“Is that why you called her a hybrid?”

“Yes. Also, Orin was a mind fairy. So she’s part light, part mind. Very rare. Fairies don’t often mix, especially not royals. She will be special.”

“She already is special. Princess Avionne, the hybrid princess. My gift from the gods. That sounds so unreal.”

“I wonder what the cost will be.”

“Kendrick,” I groan. “You don’t have to be so pessimistic all the time.”

“When you have lived as long as I and seen the things I’ve seen, you will proceed with more caution regarding the gifts you accept as well.”

He kisses the back of my head. “Besides, I’m starting to get jealous. I want to see you holding our child. I don’t know

why everyone wants to do my job for me.”

“*Oh, get over it already,*” Venus huffs, making me snicker.

“What’s so funny?” he rambles into my neck.

“Venus said get over—”

I turn as I feel him vanish before I finish my words. I blink after him in confusion. What the heck just happened?



## ***Kendrick***

I COULD SENSE Ace the moment he passed through the gate. Before Aravos tried to summon me. He is injured and on the verge of shifting.

Ace is the alpha of the Crescent Sapphire Moon pack. The firstborn alpha. To this day, I have respect for his father’s decision to divide the lands and allow his sons to each rise to be alpha.

Knowing the brothers since they were pups, I couldn’t see them fighting for the rank. I also couldn’t imagine any of them being anything but an alpha. The packs thrive and move as one, so it all worked out for them.

“Ace, what happened?” I ask as Bradan helps him into my office.

“The holy land was attacked. I was there alone to pray to the moon goddess. I was hoping to find guidance to find my mate as you all have,” he says.

The holy land connects all three packs. The wolves use it for ceremonies. However, in truth, the Lycan king designated the land as a holy place because it allowed the rest of the lands to be divided equally.

Ace continues. “I didn’t catch the scent. Not until they were leaving and the wind shifted. I fought him, but it’s like something was keeping me from shifting.”

“You should have gone to the pack doctor to heal before you came. You don’t look well,” I say.

“Kendrick, the stone is gone. He knew where it was.”

My hands begin to spark with electricity. After our temple was disturbed all those centuries ago, we decided to never keep our source stones together in one place. We removed them from our swords and placed them with those we trust.

Bradán has been best friends with the Lycan king for years. He chose to leave his stone with the packs. It should have been safe. The brothers and their father are the only ones who knew it was with them.

“Bradán, go to the holy land. See what you can find out,” I say as this all sets in.

“Should we alert the others?”

“I’m still thinking. I don’t want to lead anyone to them if this was a stroke of luck.”

“I feel you, but if they were able to keep Ace from shifting, we don’t know what we’re up against. This could be those hunters.”

I grunt, knowing he’s right. Bradán has already interjected himself in Taylor’s life. She spends her nights here at the clubhouse, but when she’s not sleeping or training, she does attend her classes. Bradán makes sure she’s safe while she does.

The same goes for Ardan and Billy. The problem is this should be handled by us. We don’t need the stones to fall into the wrong hands. I don’t see how we can stretch ourselves any further.

“For now, let’s find out what happened on the Sapphire grounds. Go to the holy land and see if you can find out what happened. We will move from there.”



The stones are useless without the one sword. No one will find it. And if they did, they couldn't get to it.



# Ray

## *Book of Paths*

“Hey, I don’t have long before Reilly comes looking for me,” Lee Ann says and rolls her eyes while she enters the kitchen to join me and my other sisters.

I asked them to meet me here so we could talk. I also need to figure out what fae babies eat. Blossom should be on her way to help me.

“Okay, is it just me? What’s that all about?” Billy asks.

Lee sighs. “I get it. He has a logical reason, but it’s becoming irrational.”

“What’s the reason?” Taylor asks.

“It’s personal. I don’t know how he would feel if I shared.”

“Don’t you have that fundraiser? What’s he going to do then?”

Lee rolls her eyes. “I have no idea. He’s not trying to listen to a word I have to say about it. Ugh, he’s driving me crazy.”

Avionne begins to cry in my arms. I lift her onto my shoulder and bounce her. Blossom walks in right on time.

“I’ll take her,” she offered.

“Can you help me feed her?”

“My mom says she used to give me goat’s milk mixed with dragon fruit.”

I smile and nod. “One goat’s milk and dragon fruit bottle coming up.”

“We take it cold. Not warm like humans.”

“Got it.” I wave my hand and the bottle appears.

I give it a little chill and hand it over to Blossom. Avionne quiets right down as she begins to suck the milk down. Blossom hands her back to me and rubs my arm as she smiles down at the baby.

“I need your help,” I say as I look up.

“With what?” Billy asks.

“I believe we were all sisters in another life.”

“We were,” Lee says matter-of-factly. “You need our help to set our older sister free, don’t you? Venus has always done things her way. She didn’t trust the process.”

“What are you talking about?” Taylor asks.

“We were all to be reincarnated. Each with more power because of our sacrifice. Venus first had to give up her baby and then step through to be reborn,” Lee starts.

“Wait, what? First, I find out I have magic and a demigod mate. Now you’re telling me we were sisters in a past life?” Billy says.

“You were annoying back then too,” Lee mutters.

“Why do you remember all this and we don’t?” Taylor asks.

“I was the only one mated to the guys in the past. It was my connection to Reilly that allowed us to push ourselves forward. I think that’s why I’ve kept the knowledge.”

“What happened? What went wrong?” I ask.

“We were all to rise again like a phoenix. I knew before I let go Venus chose to follow her son. Stubborn butt,” Lee says. “Now she’s stuck. I can help her, but I’d need back into our ancestors’ caves and those were lost to us with *The Book of Paths*.”

“Maybe not.” The words are said in a rumbling voice.

I turn to find Aravos. There is something so familiar about the troll. Not for the first time, I’ve gotten a feeling as if I know him.

He walks over and places a large book down on the prep table we’re gathered around. My eyes widen as I recognize it from the one I saw in the past.

“*That’s The Book of Paths. How did he get it?*” Venus says.

“How did you get it?” I ask.

“Do you know the name of the caves you seek?” he asks.

“*No*,” Venus answers in my head.

“No,” I say aloud.

“The Halls of Sirens,” Lee answers.

“That is correct. Wisdom teaches us to adapt when faced with adversity. Your bloodline didn’t end with the four of you.

“Not the one responsible for your true power. There were three more. Their instinct for self-preservation opened the door for a lot of things to happen in the future.

“I am but a servant, keeping a sacred item safe and getting it to the right place at the right time,” he says.

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure. You shouldn’t feed that little one after midnight. She could turn into a troll.”

I jump up and toss the bottle down. “Oh my God, I didn’t know,” I say.

“It was a joke. I will make sure to get you ladies copies of my favorite bestiary. You may learn more about your own kind.”

With that, he turns and opens a portal of light to step through. Something tickles my brain as I watch him do so. However, Avionne’s cry shatters the thought just as it starts to form.

“Shall we?” Lee says, placing her hand on the book.

“The caves will open from here?”

“Yes, you all can learn of our heritage and how to tap into your own magic.”

“Let’s go,” Taylor says, rubbing her hands together.

“Go where?” Reilly asks as he steps into the kitchen.

We all groan. Taylor and Billy drop their heads to the table. I palm my forehead as Venus mutters to herself.

*“You would think the man never had pussy before. For the love of the gods.”*

*“Ugh, right? At least we have the book. We’re making progress.”*

“Meet me in the training gym in the morning. He goes out to look for the hunters with a team. I will be free then,” Lee whispers.

I look down at Avionne and her eyes flash with a glow. I smile at her and tap the tip of her nose. “I know, cutie. It will all work itself out,” I coo.



# Ray

## *Hall of Sirens*

I walk over to my sisters as they all stand by the wall in the training room. It's early and my stomach has been acting funny this morning, but I suck it up and push forward.

"Okay, Blossom is babysitting. I have to be back before her chores start," I say as I come to a stop before them.

"Here, you are still the eldest. You will need to open the caves this first time," Lee says, handing over *The Book of Paths*.

I look down at the gold-gilded book. It has a teal center that lights up as soon as it's placed in my palms. It's so beautiful. I can feel the power that's coming from it.

"Is there something I should do?"

"Say the words," Venus says.

"What words?"

"We are the truth. We are here," Lee says.

A light goes off and the words come right to me. “The answers appear when the truth is near,” I say.

The room shakes a little and a door appears in the wall we’re standing in front of. We all look around at each other with our mouths hanging open. Lee Ann shrugs and smiles back at us.

The stone-looking door rolls back. I move forward cautiously. Sconces on the walls come on to light the way. I take the first step down. I’m in awe as the winding stone steps lead down.

To where? I still don’t know, but I don’t get a vibe as if it’s dangerous. In fact, I feel welcome. It’s like coming home.

As if this place has been waiting. We get to the bottom and more sconces come on. The book in my hands begins to glow brighter as the podium that sits between the archways that surround us lights up.

“Place it down,” Lee says.

I move to the podium and place the book over it. It floats and hovers for a moment before it drifts down. It flips open as it settles into place. Lee comes to look over my shoulder.

“The book and the caves always reveal our heart’s desire for knowledge,” Venus says. “Our hearts just have to ask the right questions and have pure intentions.”

I look down at the page the book has opened to and read the title at the top. My eyes widen. Kendrick was on to something.

“*Fire sirens. The Council of the Phoenix,*” Taylor reads aloud.

“What does that mean?” Billy asks.

“It’s our ancestral bloodline. We are more than witches of study. We’re not actually witches at all.

“Not really. The Pumua tribe, which our father was from, was a coven of studying witches. It was his mother who passed the teachings down to us.

“That’s the coven we lost. Our mother was of the fire sirens. Born of ash, risen through song.

“Ray, Venus should remember that *The Book of Paths* didn’t come to us by way of our grandmother. Mother was the one to bring us down here the first time, right before the attack. I believe that was on purpose. She knew what was coming.”

*“Yes, I remember that. It was a few days before the soldiers raided. It was how I knew where to hide and get us all to safety. It saved our lives,”* Venus says.

“Yes, she remembers,” I say.

Lee nods and continues. “We were reborn. Our gift of the phoenix allowed for that. However, for something like this, a sacrifice is demanded. Venus didn’t give her sacrifice. I believe that’s why she’s stuck.”

*“A life for a life,”* Venus murmurs sadly. *“It was a part of the incantation. How could I be so stupid?”*

“How do we fix it?”

“That I do not know yet. I’ve been thinking all night. You were chosen for a reason. You are powerful and you have so much further to go, but I don’t think that’s possible with Venus clinging to you.

“What we need to do is call forth the answers we need while down here. We can look for a solution in hopes of setting her free. Close your eyes and think of the answers you need. The caves will bring them to you,” Lee instructs.

I close my eyes and do as she says. I try to focus on what we need, but so many other things pop into my head. Taylor gasps beside me, breaking my concentration.

I open my eyes and look to her. She’s standing with a stack of books in her arms. Billy tilts her head to read the spines of the books.

“Shibari, Tantra, girl, we’re trying to help our sister and your nasty ass calling on sex books,” Billy scolds.



“I didn’t know this stuff would be down here. My bad,” Taylor says sheepishly.

I roll my eyes. Looking down into my palms, I see a single book. Turning it to read the spine, I sigh.

“*I’m sorry, I’ll try again,*” I say to Venus.

“*No, it is your heart’s desire to learn about your power. Keep this one. The caves make no mistakes. What comes to you is what you need,*” she says.

“I need to go. I have to get to work,” Billy says.

“Yeah, I should go too. I have class. Bradan will be looking for me soon.”

“We can come back another time. Now that the book is in place, we won’t need to come together. Our blood is the key,” Lee says.

“See you guys at training,” I say.

My mind is racing with so much information. I want to get back to my room to read the book that has come to me. I feel like I’m finally getting somewhere.



# Kendrick

## *New Problem*

“Still no leads on those hunters or Bradan’s source stone?” I ask as Reilly joins me to watch over our mates training below.

I don’t want them to know we’re watching, so I’m cloaking my presence as is he. I want to see what they have learned and how each is progressing. I will function better knowing they are capable of defending themselves if needed.

“No, but I think we have a bigger problem. Reports have come in that someone has been buying up blessed iron at an alarming rate. Damian says the gatekeepers are concerned because blacksmiths and alchemists have been passing through to the human realm.”

“When did this start?”

“About a week ago. Dagger took a few mind fairies to find out what’s going on.”

“And?”

“Someone is paying the blacksmiths and alchemists to make some super weapon or something,” Reilly says.

I turn to look at him. “What?” I bite out.

“Brother, this has gone to a new level. We should take action now.”

“And do what? To who? We don’t even know if all of this is connected.”

He sighs and rubs his temples. “I know. You are right.”

“I wish I weren’t, but we need more information. I will not send our brothers on a wild-goose chase.”

“There’s something else.”

“Gods help me. What the fuck more could there be?”

“The fire fairies are becoming a problem. They’re angry about Seraphina. You need to decide on her punishment and deliver it so they’ll pipe down.”

“I will punish her when I decide. Not a moment sooner, you feel me?”

“I thought you would say that,” Reilly says with a smile in his voice.

“Keep on the hunters and the source stone. Have Dagger deal with the fairies. Seraphina was wrong. Bradan and I are well within our rights to put her down if we choose.

“As for the blessed iron, see if the mind fairies can learn more. I don’t want to give away that a source stone is missing, but I’d like to know if they come up in connection to this weapon,” I finish.

“They’re getting stronger,” Reilly says, turning my attention back to our mates sparring below.

Taylor flips backward to dodge a blow from Lee Ann and quickly forms a chakram. They’ve been practicing forming weapons midattack without the need for incantations. For Lee, this has been all a walk in the park.

Taylor and Billy have mastered it, but Ray seems to be struggling a bit. It will come. She's dealing with more than she realizes. There's Venus and now our son. I'll give her a few more days to notice she's pregnant with *our* first child.

She has thought a few times to herself that it didn't take that night. Probably because she was just carrying Knox. She's wrong.

My seed took. Our son is growing strong and healthy. He is the reason her emotions are so high, making these tasks more difficult than they should be for her. I can't help but wonder if this would be the case if Venus were not invading her body.

"She's amazing," Reilly breathes.

I grin as I hear the awe in my brother's voice for his mate. Lee Ann fights like a true warrior. She leaps into the air and flips forward.

When she lands in a crouch, she has twin blades held out at her sides. The blades spark and glow with magic before she fuses them together as one and stands to spin the new weapon above her head.

"That she is. It would be wise to trust her. She isn't a mere human. Her power is great and her skills greater."

Reilly makes a thoughtful grunt. Then he sighs. I understand his feelings, but at some point, he's going to have to let go.

"I'm not ready to go there."

"I know. I thought I'd say it anyway. You feel me?"

"I have work to do."



**RAY**

I WIPE my sweaty forehead with the back of my arm. My stomach rolls and my mouth waters a bit. Shaking my head, I move to grab my water bottle.

“Are you okay?” Lee Ann asks as she walks over to me.

I give her a frustrated frown. I didn’t think this would be so hard for me. However, I’m struggling when my sisters are out here looking like the freaking Avengers.

“I might be too old to learn all this,” I mumble.

Lee Ann laughs so hard tears come to her eyes. I frown harder and fold my arms over my chest. I don’t see what’s so funny. I’m working my ass off.

“Why are you laughing at me?”

“We’re all the same age. Your emotions are besting you. Calm down. Block out Venus’s grumpy ass and lock in. You can do this. Channel your emotions and use them; don’t allow them to rule you,” she says.

*“I have her grumpy. You two get on my nerves,”* Venus snarls.

*“Oh, so now you’re talking?”*

She goes silent on me again. I shrug and go back to ignoring her. She stopped helping me because I yelled at her—only frustrating me even more. My emotions have been all over the place all afternoon.

I push all that down and take a deep, calming breath. She’s right, I’m emotional and we are all the same age. I can do this. I just need to focus.

“Fine. Let’s try again.”

“Actually, I think you should call it a day. Get some rest.”

I sigh. I’m not ready to give up. I’m the only one who hasn’t produced a weapon at will.

“Fine. See you in the morning? I’ll be done with that last book tonight.”

“Sure, see you then.” Lee grabs her things and heads out.

I’m left staring after her, wishing I could remember how to fight and use weapons the way Venus used to. Maybe if I got out more during my youth, I would be better. I release a breath at that thought. I could’ve mastered a ton of things if my father allowed me to be human.

“Here she is, here’s your mama,” Blossom coos as she brings Avionne to me.

My frustrations melt away as I take my little gift into my arms. All else is forgotten as I look into her bright eyes. I place my finger in her tiny hand and her hand glows as she holds on tight.

*“My Mama. Ah, I’ve missed you.”*

I gasp and look up at Blossom with wide eyes. Blossom beams at me as she bounces in place. I look back to Avionne and she’s staring up at me.

“I’ve been dying for you to come back. I totally forgot Orin was a mind fairy. She’s been doing that all morning,” Blossom gushes.

“Wow, what else will she be able to do?” I ask.

“I’m not sure. I haven’t known many hybrid fairies. They’re so rare. I do know royal hybrids are special and have way more power than us normal fairies.”

“Oh, well, maybe I should see if there’s something in the Hall of Sirens that will tell me more about her.”

“I don’t know that you will. We fae are big on keeping our world secret. By the way, you didn’t hear this from me, but Asuka is known to play in alchemy.

“It’s a rumor among the fairies that she and Orin were playing with time magic. No one knows how Orin died because we fairies don’t leave behind bodies. We turn into sparkly dust and that’s that.

“If you ask me, they did something that went terribly wrong. I’m telling you this as a friend. I’d be watching the little one for time magic.

“Time fairies are super rare as well. They’ve become extinct. Some think they can bring them back through alchemy. I wouldn’t put it past Asuka to have played with this child.”

“Should I be concerned? What should I be looking for?” I ask worriedly.

“You shouldn’t be worried, I don’t think. I’d look for time gaps in your memory. Time loops. The opening of time portals. However, you don’t have to worry about that now. She’ll take years to show her true talents.”

“I’ll keep all that in mind,” I say.

Blossom gives me a funny look. “Have you eaten today?”

“No, why?”

“You should be eating to keep up your strength,” she says with a little knowing smile. “Come on. We’ll get you guys fed.”

“*O...kay,*” I drag out and start to walk. “You didn’t eat yet either, my little lightning bug?” I coo to Avionne and rub my nose to hers.

Blossom giggles at my side. I look to her and furrow my brows. However, I don’t get to ask her what that’s all about, as Kendrick connects with me through our bond.

*“You feel tired. I want you to rest, my love.”*



# *Kendrick*

## *Kenji the Master*

*R*ay hands me Avionne as she climbs on the bed next to me. I take the baby and place her against my bare chest. She sighs as if content and her little eyes close. In the last three weeks, this little one has grown on me.

“She likes you too,” Ray says with a smile on her face.

“Are you feeling better? Has the morning sickness passed for today?”

“I hope so. Blossom and the others have been a great help.”

I smile. I was happy to give her a court to help her. As my queen, she should have nothing less.

Jewel and Ember are fairies as well. One light, one fire. I’m waiting for the one who has been gifted to Ray from the mind fairies to arrive.

The water fairies still haven’t made their choice of who will serve. Then, she will have a full court and help with both babies.



“Come here,” I say and hold my arm out for her to come lean against me.

“That’s better,” she murmurs. “I found something in one of the books that came to me. I want you to see it when you have time.”

“Is that right?” I say as I run my fingers through the front of her hair.

“Yeah, just let me lie here for a minute. I’ll get it,” she says sleepily.

I kiss the top of her head as I keep a hand on the baby’s back. I breathe a deep sigh of contentment. I didn’t know how much I wanted a family of my own until this very moment.

I’d do anything for Ray and now our little girl. My mind goes to Knox. Still, nothing has changed.

I feel him out there. My instincts are just telling me he’s safer where he is than here. As my lids grow heavy and I have that thought, the bedroom door bursts open.

Bradán rushes in with flames in his palms, ready to attack. Ray wakes and grabs Avionne from my hold. I straighten and look at my brother in confusion.

“You released her. You released Seraphina and she attacked my mate,” he snarls.

“What are you talking about?” I growl back.

Before he can reply, a flame about five feet high rushes into the room and moves to push Bradán back. He closes his eyes and wraps his arms around the flame.

I watch as he dips his head and presses his lips to the top of the flame in his arms. I knit my brow and tilt my head, trying to understand what’s going on. Bradán is blocking me from our link, so I can’t talk to him in his head.

“Relax, baby. Just calm down,” he murmurs to the flame in his arms.

The flame extinguishes and as the smoke settles, I recognize that the flame is Taylor. A smile of pride comes to

my lips. However, it's short-lived as Bradan's words set in.

"What happened?" I demand.

"Seraphina got free and cornered Taylor in the training room. She forced her into the box so I wouldn't feel her, but I was already on my way there.

"Taylor held her own. Seraphina turned things up when she couldn't best her. That's when Taylor—"

"Transformed," I finish for him with a smile.

Bradan nods. Taylor stands wrapped around his waist as he holds her tight. I'm livid.

"I didn't release her, brother. I will find out who did, but it wasn't me. Well done, Taylor."

"Thank you," she says quietly.

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know, she got away. I came here in my anger after she fled," he says. "I can't let this go. I'm going to hunt her down."

I nod. "I know. Do what you must."

"Kendrick," Ardan calls as he and Billy rush into the room.

I groan. I know I'm not going to like whatever's going to come out of their mouths.

"What's going on?"

"I need to leave."

"To go where?"

"Japan."

My power starts to course through me. Him needing to go to Japan can only mean one thing. His source stone has been compromised.

"Is it gone?" I seethe.

"No, Kenji and the assassins held firm. However, he doesn't believe this will be the only attempt."

Kenji and Ardan have been friends for a very long time. He is the puppet master, an ancient being almost as old as we are. His gifts are unique and unmatched. If a genie and an alchemist had a baby, it would have been Kenji.

His assassins are an asset to his abilities. I thought he'd be the last target these hunters would go after.

Alchemists aspire to be what he is. He has mastered what many never will. He was created with a gift like the gods and the wisdom to match.

“Go and take Billy with you.”

He opens his mouth to protest, but I stand firm in my demand. With Seraphina loose, I have enough going on here to worry about. I can't have a rogue fire fairy, a newborn, and a pregnant mate on my hands.

“She is your mate. She belongs with you.”

Ardan closes his mouth and nods. “Very well. She has been suspended from work, so it's doable.”

“Suspended?”

“Long story and I don't have time. Rock can take my place helping Reilly with the hunters.”

“I will work on finding out who released Seraphina and how she was able to get away. Sounds like we might need to have a lockdown. No humans and no supers who aren't patched in. Old ladies only,” I say.

“Wait, just wait a darn minute. Everyone, slow down. I'm still stuck on Bradan walking in here with flaming hair and hands. Then my little sister runs in here looking like a little flame before returning to her cute little self.

“This is too much. Who the heck is Kenji and can I be a flame too?”

I snort a laugh and shake my head. Leave it to Ray to get the tension out of the room. Bradan gives her a smile and wink before turning his glare on me.

*“You should have let me handle her in the first place,”* he mind links with me as he turns and leaves with Taylor under his arm.

I don't give him a reply because I'm sure he's right. When I find her, she's a dead fairy. The rules are clear. She has broken them twice. This time, very intentionally.

“I will call you when we get there,” Billy says to Ray before Ardan leads her from the room without another word.

I palm Ray's head and tug her into me. Kissing the top of her hair, I close my eyes. If someone cornered her to attack her, I'd lose my mind. I can't blame my brother for being angry with me.



# *Candido*

## *Prayers & Prey*

Sometimes, you just have to take things into your own hands. That's exactly what I've been doing since no one else has shit for brains.

"Forty fucking grand for a fucking lockdown. Fuck outa here. Everyone must think I'm a fucking idiot," I grumble to myself.

I'm out of forty fucking grand and still don't have an in into the Immortal Iron Brothers clubhouse. I've been burned and I'm setting fires in return.

I started with that motherfucker Lombardo. He wasn't going to back off, so I backed him off. He's floating with the fishes along with his son.

Another fifty grand, at least it was well spent and won't come back to me. A little sit-down with those genies Pauly was going to marry Charlie off to and now I'm here.

I've come to church and have an offering to make in order to turn this all around. Who knew those freaks had connections

in the house of the Lord?

No wonder I haven't been to confession in years. I'll forever look at holy water differently. Wouldn't trust the stuff to keep a vamp away, that's for sure.

Heck, I'm questioning this place as I walk in and don't burst into flames. This week alone has earned me a special place in hell. Having Lombardo whacked, having my own daughter suspended from her job. The list goes on and on.

I'm a bastard. Yeah, whatever. If I didn't do it, someone else would. I know Pauly sure as hell isn't going to step his fat ass up. He's more worried about stuffing calamari into his fat face.

I make the sign of the cross as I make my way to the altar. This place is a ghost town this time of night. I guess that's why this bishop has asked me to come in at buttfuck o'clock.

As soon as this guy appears, I feel something is off. He's surrounded by four guys in green hooded robes. I may not have stepped foot into my local parish in a few years, but I know these ain't no altar boys.

"How you doing, Bishop?" I say as I stop a few feet away from the altar.

The bishop looks at me with cold blue eyes and a dead expression. He rolls his gaze over me and makes a face. The look of disdain gives me the feeling as if he can see all my sins.

I also note that he's extremely tall and should be playing in the NBA or something instead of saving souls. He can spare me the glare. I'm not here for his or anyone else's forgiveness. What I need is for my cash to start flowing again and for the feds to get off my back.

"Come," he says and points toward a kneeling bench in front of him.

I nod and lug the case in my hands over to the bench. Placing the case down beside the bench, I then kneel before him, bowing my head. Suddenly, it feels like cool steel has been placed against the back of my neck.

Clearly, I ain't about to receive communion or a blessing. Just my fucking luck. I've been double-crossed.

"Shit," I mutter under my breath.

My heart begins to race. Those bastards set me up. This motherfucker is going to take my head.

"You can relax, Mr. Ricci. I only want to have a conversation with you to get some clarification. Our mutual acquaintances have informed me of your dilemma. I think we can strike a beneficial deal for all parties involved."

"I'd be happy to answer without a sword to my neck," I say and swallow hard.

He gives a dark laugh. "You mortals. Your fear of death is so pathetic. I guess it's rational. If he were to press down, this would be the end of your life.

"As it should be. That's how you were designed. The natural order of things. You know what I don't like?"

"No, Bishop, what's that?" I reply as I stare at his feet before me.

"When the order of things is disrupted. If something is made to be one way, why change the intention? Especially if you're only going to do so for a few and not the whole," he says as if musing to himself.

"I'm not following you."

"I'm sure you're not. Anyway, when the order is broken, correction is needed. This leads to the nasty business of more rules being broken to re-create balance. A thin line to be walked."

"I'm still not getting your question."

"Silence," he barks at me. "You were given a prophecy. You were offered something unnatural in return for something unnatural. I want to know who gave you this erroneous prophecy," he snarls.

"I... I don't know what you're talking about."

“Let me be a little more clear,” he growls, grabbing my hair and tugging my head back.

He looks down at me with those cold blue eyes as one of the hooded guys holds the blade against my skin, sending a chill down my spine as the cool blade bites at my flesh. This bishop is insane. He’s the one who’s unnatural. His face has clouded over and looks dark and eerie.

“A woman came to you and told you that you could keep your bond with those abominations. It was a lie,” he snarls in my face, spit flying and landing on my lip. Fucking gross.

He then continues while scowling down at me. “There will be a child born but not to aid you. I want that child and its mother.

“She has alluded my hunters and time is running out. Where is she? Where are your daughters?”

“I don’t know. I came to you because I don’t know,” I say.

“But you do know who helped you create those atrocities. Tell me who she was,” he snarls.

I think this over. I didn’t get to know my other girls, but I raised Ray. I’m not going to throw her to the wolves.

If I give him any information about her mother or the woman who led me to her, I could be placing all four of my girls in danger. I make the decision to act as if I know nothing. This guy is going to kill me anyway, and if he doesn’t, those genies who sent me here will.

The bishop laughs maniacally. “Oh, you think I need you to speak to get answers?”

With that, he palms my entire face in his hand. My eyes roll back and my face warms from his touch. I feel him reaching into my thoughts.

I fight to keep him out, but the battle is short and fleeting. It feels like I’m being rammed into by a truck. I go limp and black out.





## *BISHOP*

I STEP RIGHT into the time I'm looking for. Before me stands one of those fucking sirens. I thought I killed them all. This one should have died in the tomb I burned her in.

She leads Ricci into an apartment. I growl as another siren steps from one of the rooms. The idiot is salivating to get his hands on her.

I remember when we burned the village she was hiding in. Shape-shifting bitches. There's a reason Tanrı keeps them as pets. They do his bidding in any form they are needed in.

This one has dark brown, silky, smooth-looking skin that looks as if she has bathed in gold every morning since her creation. Her dark locks are brushed back away from her face and fixed in a braid that falls down her back.

Her perky breasts and thick, childbearing hips would entice any fool into her bed. Ricci didn't stand a chance. Even if they didn't promise him a way to continue to hold those abominations in service to him, he would have fallen into her bed.

Moving forward in time, I find Ricci watching as the siren gives birth. My eyes widen and anger fills me as I count three babies crying as the siren pushes forth another.

"Remember, give them masculine names. You must prevent anyone from turning attention to what you have done," the other siren warns.

"My mother's name was Ann. Will Ray Ann, Charlie Ann, Taylor Ann, and Billy Ann work?" Ricci says as he smiles down at the child in his arms.

“Yes, but you will call them Ray, Charlie, Taylor, and Billy. That is a must.”

“And Candido?”

“Yes?” He looks up from the baby to the siren, looking like a lost puppy.

“You cannot raise them all together. Pick one. We will find a home for the others.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“You cannot raise them together. They cannot know about each other. Not yet.”

“But... But I told my wife she was getting quadruplets. I can't just take her one baby now. Do you know how hard it was to talk her into this?” he seethes.

“Pick one,” the siren says more firmly.

“Wait, can I at least allow my brother to raise one?”

The siren looks to the other and lifts a brow. They have a silent conversation. Ricci looks between the four babies as if he's lost.

The one in his arms begins to cry, drawing his attention. He lifts her to his shoulder and begins to sing to her. She quiets for him instantly.

“We will allow this. You should take the two with the most potential,” the siren who's been giving the orders says.

“Is she one?” he asks, pointing to the child in his arms.

“Yes, that she is.”

“I'll take her. The firstborn. This is Ray Ann. She will come with me.”

Having what I need, I back out of his thoughts. I only wanted to know who had been meddling in our affairs. Enough has been hidden from us. I will not fail in my mission.

I will bring order and honor back to my lord and my kind. I turn to Ferg and nod for him to drop the sword. Then I release Ricci and drop him to the ground.

“You want to prosper. I will grant you that, but I need your daughters. You decide what’s more important to you, prosperity or those women.

“Take your money with you. I have no need for it. You are dismissed.”



# Ray

## *The West Gate*

“*I* can take her,” Bay says as I coo down at a stinky little Avionne. I’m trying to get a little bookkeeping done for the club in Ardan’s absence.

He and Billy have been gone for the last two months. For at least three weeks of that, we were on lockdown. Bay and Manisha were only allowed in because they were on their way to be a part of my court.

I still snort at that thought. A court for me. I get that Kendrick sees me as his queen, but it feels so strange to have others treat me as such.

“Thank you. I’m trying to get through all of this before Kendrick is done with his meeting.”

I smile at Bay, who’s the sweetest water fairy ever, and hand her Avionne. She takes her and leaves out of the office I’ve been using for my own. Turning my attention back to the books before me, I blink a few times and frown.

“I can take her,” Bay says as I coo down at a stinky little Avionne. I’m trying to get a little bookkeeping done for the club in Ardan’s absence.

“Thank you. I’m trying to get through all of this before Kendrick is done with his meeting.”

I smile at Bay, who’s the sweetest water fairy ever, and hand her Avionne. She takes her and leaves out of the office I’ve been using for my own.

“*Ray,*” Venus calls.

“*Yes?*”

“*Something is awry.*”

I go to ask her what she’s talking about, but Avionne’s little whimpers grab my attention. I look down at her and wrinkle my nose. Phew, she needs a change.

“You bombed the place, didn’t you, my little stinker,” I coo.

“I can take her,” Bay says.

“*Ray, don’t hand her the baby. I think Avionne is looping time. This has happened at least three times already.*”

“*What? But she’s too young. She can’t be.*”

“*Okay, hand her over and watch.*”

I frown and hand Avionne over. “Thank you. I’m trying to get through all of this before Kendrick is done with his meeting.”

I smile at Bay. She takes her and leaves out of the office. I then turn my attention back to the books before me.

“*Well, shit,*” I think to Venus as Avionne returns to my arms.

“*I want to be with you,*” Avionne communicates to me as I place my finger into her tiny palm.

“Wow, you can turn back time?” I say to her in awe.

She giggles in my head and blinks up at me. Bay stands from the seat she’s in to repeat the same thing we’ve done for I

don't know how long.

"Don't worry about it. I'll change her. Thank you," I say.

"Peewee," Lee Ann says as she enters the room. "Give me that baby. I'll change her. Don't make no sense. Who gets that wrapped up in work?"

"I was just about to send for you. Bay was going to change her for me, but Avionne has been looping time."

"What do you mean?"

"She doesn't want to leave me, so every time I hand her to Bay, she turns back time to get back into my arms. It was like *Ground Hog Day* in here," I say.

"So she can speak to you in your thoughts, she glows like a little glowworm, and she can play with time? Ray, this baby is more than a gift. She's an intention.

"I wouldn't give her to anyone you can't sincerely trust. Look, I can't explain what I'm thinking right now. I have to go. I only came to let you know I'm leaving with Reilly."

"What? To go where?"

"The west gate. It's the gate to the vampire realm."

"Why are you going there?"

"Reilly has something he needs to do there. I'm not sure how long it will take. Ray, promise me you'll keep studying and training."

My heart breaks. I just got my sisters back, but they're all leaving me. Taylor has been out with Bradan, hunting Seraphina and his stone.

When they do come back to the clubhouse, I don't really get to spend time with Taylor. I only speak to Billy when she has time to call and check in. Now Lee Ann is leaving too.

A panic attack begins to rise. I'm thrown back in time. All at once, I'm alone in that house again, trapped with no friends, no mom, no one.

"Ray?" Lee Ann says with concern in her voice.

*“Ray, calm down. You’re not alone. I’m here, you have Avionne and Kendrick is always here for you,”* Venus says.

Right as she says those words, Kendrick appears. He rushes to me and lifts me, taking my seat as he tugs me and Avionne onto his lap. He kisses my temple and murmurs words of love and affection.

“I have her. You go on and go with Reilly. It’s time to leave,” he says to Lee Ann as she looks at me with concern.

I can tell she’s hesitant to leave. For a moment, I don’t think she will. She glances at the door then back at me.

“Will she be okay?”

“Yes, I will take care of her. As soon as you all return, it’ll be time for the bonding ceremony. You all should be able to link to one another as well as the community,” he replies. “That way, in your absence, you will always be linked.”

“Yes, that would be best. I will be in touch as soon as I can,” she says before she takes off.

Kendrick palms the side of my face and turns it so I’m looking up into his eyes. Tears blur my vision. I hadn’t thought about how lonely I had been with my dad in months.

Between learning, adjusting to my new life, being pregnant and not being pregnant to being pregnant again, and everything else going on, I’ve been too distracted to think about the past. Now, as it hits me and my sisters are all gone, I feel hollow.

“You will never be alone again. I will be with you and they will return. No one will lock you up to spend your days alone. Anytime you need me, call. Open your mind to me and I’ll be there,” Kendrick breathes against my lips.

*“And I will be here until we find my son. You are never alone, Ray. I promise,”* Venus says.

I swallow down my abandonment and isolation issues and suck it up. I’m stronger than this. I haven’t been that scared little girl in a long time. I’m not going back there now.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about. Forget all of this. Come with me. I want to show you something,” Kendrick says.



### *Kendrick*

I WANT to do this while I have a free moment. I could stand some time to get away from it all myself. When I felt Ray’s emotions, I rushed right to her.

Hearing her thoughts tugged at my heart. I wish I could bring all my brothers’ mates back home to be with her, but they are where they’re needed. I don’t know how long Reilly will be gone.

Another stone has been taken. That’s a problem, as Reilly’s stone wasn’t just hidden. It was used to hold closed the prison of a very powerful vampire. A vampire with a grudge against Reilly and the vampire lord, Damian.

It took decades to lock Faustus away. The chaos that ensued after almost collapsed the hierarchy of the vampire world. We did, after all, lock away their king.

If Faustus has escaped now that the stone is gone, we have much bigger problems on our hands. There are those who still pledge their allegiance to the old vampire king. Reilly needs to get this situation under control before we end up with a war on our hands.

It’s not like we fear the vampires. Still, this would be highly annoying, and we hate to wipe out any form of others. Although my temper is growing short, I may be inclined to do just that.



“Okay, Blossom and Manisha were able to get Avionne to sleep so I could get away,” Ray says.

“A light, mind, and time fairy with the essence of a god,” I say and shake my head.

I’m still trying to wrap my mind around what the gods are up to. Fairies normally don’t display their gifts until they turn two or three. Avionne is barely three months.

“She’s a fairy. Blessed iron would burn. I wonder if there’s another way,” I muse aloud.

“Another way for what?” Ray asks.

“To lock her powers in. She’s so young and powerful already. That could be dangerous in our world. It would be best to conceal her powers for now.”

“I’d kill anyone who tried to harm her,” Ray seethes.

I lift a brow as her eyes glow and her hands spark with purple light. My interest is piqued. This is her, not Venus. I’ve never seen her tap into her power like this.

“Reel it in, my little one. I’m just thinking.”

She shakes her head as if to clear it. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what’s going on with me today.”

I pull her into my embrace and kiss the top of her head. She relaxes into my hold and wraps her arms around my waist. I sway her as I continue to think of ways to conceal Avionne’s power.

“Will we need to pierce our children?” Ray whispers after a few moments.

I sigh. I’ve thought about this. The world is so different from when I was a child.

“The chains our birth tags hang from were my mother and father’s way of harnessing our powers when we were children. To keep us hidden. We would need to see how powerful they are and then we can decide what’s right. We were teens before we reached a level where piercing would be needed, and back then, we didn’t need to hide as we do now.”

“Who are you hiding from? Are they more powerful than you? Will our baby be in danger?”

I release a heavy breath. I don't talk about this often. It's a bitter pill to swallow.

“You remember I told you about my uncle? The one who led the others to punish my mother's kind,” I start.

“Yes.”

“He has hated us and would destroy us if he could. We live among the other supers because they are all creations of his siblings. It is an act of war for a god to destroy another god's creation without permission.”

“So if he thinks you belong to one of the others, he won't touch you?”

“Right. I now know from Mabruk that there has also been a guardian watching over us. However, these hunters, I do believe they are connected to my uncle.”

“Why is that?”

“Because he's been locked away in another realm for the last three millennia. This wouldn't be the first time his followers have tried us. They have always failed.”

“But why come after you if he's locked away?”

“Because we have the key to his freedom. As long as we live and have that key, he will forever remain a prisoner.”

“Babe?”

“Yes, my love?”

“I think it's time I show you what I found in that book.”

“Will it change my mood for the better?”

“I highly doubt it.”

“Will my lack of knowledge end our world today?”

“No.”

“Then I want to show you something. Everything else can wait.”



# Ray

## *Visions of Paradise*

“Lie back and close your eyes. Allow your breathing to even out. Clear your mind and listen to my voice. See what paradise means to you,” Kendrick says as he lies beside me on our bed, holding my hand.

I do as he says and relax. I take a few breaths and allow my mind to still. He gives my hand a little squeeze of encouragement.

“Good. Now, I want you to turn right. You see that door? Go on and walk through.”

In my mind, I turn to the door he’s talking about. It’s a steel door with his crest on the front of it. I walk over and turn the knob. When I step through the door, I step into a meadow with lush purple grass.

I look up and the sky is a clear, light-purple color. It’s so majestic and calming. Sunlight beams down on my face, causing me to close my eyes and turn my face up with a smile on my lips.

I inhale deeply. It smells of lavender, lilac, and cotton candy. As I take it all in, strong arms wrap around my waist from behind. I open my eyes as he kisses my neck.

“This is your paradise. Your happy place. We can be and do anything here,” he murmurs against my skin.

“Anything?”

“Yes, anything. See me as you want me; be anything you want to be. This is all for you. Fulfill your heart’s desires, my love.”

I turn in his arms and look up at him. I snicker as his hair is dark and long, just like I saw in his past. He pushes his hand through the silky, wavy locks to push it out of his face.

As he combs it back, it changes back to the way I know it. He gives me a crooked grin. I think I love him more with the salt-and-pepper hair. That’s my Kendrick, the one I’ve fallen in love with.

I cup his cheek. He turns his face to kiss my palm. I close my eyes and bask in the moment.

Suddenly, warm rain begins to fall. Kendrick tugs me into him and uses his cut to cover me. I reach for his wrist.

“No, I want to feel the rain on my skin. I know what I’ve done. Let it fall on me,” I say.

He uncovers me and dips his head to kiss my lips. I slip my hands under his wet T-shirt and glide my fingers up over his strong back. The rain beats down on us softly as he devours my mouth.

He breaks the kiss to move his lips down my neck. A groan leaves his lips as I reach to squeeze him over his jeans. As I think about it, our clothes disappear.

Taking a step back, I admire the man standing before me. No matter how many times we’ve had sex and I’ve seen him naked, I’m always in awe of his chiseled body.

Lowering my gaze to his manhood, I grin. In a single thought, the rain stops and the grass is dry once again. I move back to him and drop to my knees.

I want to give him a gift for all the gifts he showers me with. Taking him into my hands, I stare at his length as it pulses in my hold. He palms the side of my face in a loving caress.

“You don’t—”

His words are cut off as I take him into my mouth. I hum around his delicious flavor. He tastes like my favorite ice cream.

As his taste bursts in my mouth, I start to salivate. Wanting more, I begin to suck and slurp harder as I bob faster. I wasn’t expecting him to taste this good.

“Yes, baby. Just like that,” he groans.

Cupping my jaw, he holds me in place as he widens his stance and starts to pump his hips into my mouth. Drool slides from the sides of my lips down to my chin.

When I start to gag, he pulls back, but I grasp his thighs and take over to keep going. He groans and throws his head back, sliding his hand into my hair to grasp it as I go.

I smile around him as he becomes superhard in my mouth. He tugs my head back and bends to take my lips in a hot kiss. I move my hands to grasp the back of his head. He deepens the kiss and slides his hands to my breasts to knead them.

I start to suck on his tongue and everything changes. He lifts me and guides me onto his shaft. I moan and throw my head back.

“Oh my God, babe, you always feel so good,” I cry out.

He kisses my throat before sucking my skin into his mouth. My eyes cross as he bounces me on his dick. I never want him to stop.

I want to feel him everywhere at once. He chuckles darkly and moves his lips to my ear. I lock my fingers into his hair and hold on tight.

“Your wish is my command,” he says in my ear.

“Oh shit,” I scream as his voice vibrates through me like a caress touching every inch of me.

“You like that, baby? Is this how you want me to fuck you? What do you need?”

“I need you. All I want is you. I love you.”



### ***Kendrick***

I HADN'T BROUGHT her here for this, but I can never deny her. After the way she sucked my cock, I want to bring her nothing but hours of pleasure.

Time stands still here. I have to remind myself of that. Otherwise, we'll return to our world weeks from now. I lower us to the ground and continue to fuck her tight pussy.

Pinning her legs back, I swivel my hips as I look down our bodies at our connection. This is one of my favorite sights. Watching her pussy swallow my cock over and over again as she creams all over me turns me on so much.

“Fuck, Ray. I love you too. What have you done to me?”

“Kendrick, baby, please,” she cries in a plea.

I lean in and take her lips for a hard, drugging kiss. I swirl my tongue in her mouth, savoring her sweet taste. Her pussy tightens around me, telling me how close she is. I groan and grasp her waist.

Wanting to watch her ass bounce against me, I pull out and turn her over. Seeing her fat pussy glistening back at me, I dive in to eat her from the back. I squeeze her cheeks and spread them open as I feast on her.

Knowing how much she loves it, I reach for her clit and allow an electrical current to run through me. She keens and her legs begin to shake. I take her right to the edge and back off.

As she cries my name, I thrust back into her wet heat. She punches at the ground as she throws her hips back at me. I bite my lip as I watch her ass ripple for me. I'll never get tired of watching when that happens.

I reach for her hair and tug her head back as I lock my eyes on the sight. My lip is trapped between my teeth as I groan and grunt my way through every hard thrust.

"Fuck yeah," I breathe as I alternate between slapping her ass cheeks.

She falls forward in a convulsing mess. I follow and continue to fuck this tight little pussy as she gushes all over me. Leaning into her ear, I reach for her hands and lace our fingers together.

"Don't run now. You should be careful what you ask for, little one. You wanted me to fuck you. Now take it. You feel me? Take all of it," I breathe in her ear, sending her into another orgasm.

I have hours of this shit in me. I intend to use them all. I will fulfill all her desires and fantasies because that's my job and my job alone.



# Kendrick

## *Old Text*

“*W*hat are you reading, love?” I ask as I brush Ray’s hair aside and lean in to kiss her neck.

She’s been lost in this book for hours. She was reading it when I left for my meeting and she’s still reading now. I could feel her concentrating the entire time I was away.

“Look at this. It’s the same book I was telling you about. I can’t help but keep coming back to this passage.”

I look at the text she’s reading and crease my brows. Moving my hands to her shoulders, I massage the tension building there. She sighs, covering one of my hands with hers and leaning her head over it.

“Ray, you are able to read this?” I ask in confusion.

“Yes, what are you trying to say, Kendrick?” she says and turns to glare up at me.

I scoff. “This text is not in your language. This is ancient dialogue from way before the English language. It is so old I don’t know if it can be called a language.”



“But I’ve been reading it for weeks. Look.” She turns the pages to find what she’s looking for. “This is the story of your father and his siblings. You were right.

“What happened to your mother and her kind did start a war. It divided the gods because they were tricked into harming the kings and queens and nearly wiping out a species of one of Tanrı’s other creations.

“They warred for years until the accords were formed. To bring peace, your uncle was banished, but in return, your father had to agree not to interfere in your and your brothers’ lives.

“He’s not allowed to aid any of you or step in to change your fates. And look, the accords list you by name. It says Tanrı demanded that.” She points to the page so I can read along with her.

“Look, see? Tanrı, the alpha god, cannot interfere in the fates of Kendrick, the first son. Bradan, the second son. Ardan, the third son or Reilly, the fourth son. That’s so weird. I wonder why he did that.”

I look down at the worn pages she’s reading. She has a perfect understanding of the text before her. I have never seen this book, but I know how to read the script it’s written in.

“Ugh, but there’s a passage missing,” she mumbles to herself, moving her face closer to the book as if that will help. “It’s faded out. I believe it had more to do with what he sacrificed to lock your uncle away, but I can’t be sure.”

My wheels begin to spin. How has this book made its way into those caves? I don’t even have a text like this one in my library. I knew nothing of the accords.

I can only remember the day we were gifted our swords and the Den of Kings. Three messengers came and told us they had come from the gods’ court. Those three men took us to the caves and offered us a place of rest and the temple to hide our swords.

It had been years since we’d seen our mother or father. Reilly had been the most excited to receive the gifts from our

father. I, as the oldest, held too much anger to care. I shake the memory away and focus back on Ray.

“This script was meant only for the gods. You have to have their direct essence to read it,” I murmur as I search her upturned face.

“Well, there’s more. I think it will explain that,” she says excitedly and turns back to the book to flip through a few more pages.

“Here. This is what I found interesting the first time I read this.”

“The first time?”

“Yeah, I returned this book to the Hall of Sirens twice. It’s come back to me again and again. Venus says it’s because I didn’t learn what was needed.”

“Can she read the text as well?”

“No, she doesn’t understand this one. Some of the others, yes, but she doesn’t know this one. I was confused when she said that because it was clear to me.” She shrugs.

I look at the page and begin to read. “The other creation. It was the fire sirens,” I say.

“Yes, your father’s first sibling was identical to him, but in the feminine form. Her name was Güç. Güç loved the form of the phoenix.

“Sirens aren’t all female. History, humans, you know the deal. They made them female in their stories, paintings, and tales.

“Güç fell in love with a siren your father called a friend. His name was Yakışıklı. Because of him, sirens waited at the gods’ feet. Especially Güç and Tanrı, their creator and Yakışıklı’s lover.

“This is how my bloodline came about. I’m a direct descendant of the first fire siren born to Güç and Yakışıklı. You said my blood was unique and felt closer to being like yours. That’s why.

“But that’s not all. There’s a part that I’ve been trying to figure out. Not that I can’t read it. It’s just the way it’s worded, like a prophecy. Hold on, let me get back to it,” she says, speaking quickly in her excitement.

I’m still stuck on the accords. Some of the anger I have for my father recedes as I think he could have abandoned us to keep us safe.

My uncle was an evil bastard. If faced with the decision to give up my family to lock him away, I would have made the same choice for the greater good.

The evil in the world today comes from him. Even locked away in another realm, his essence pours through. Tainting everything it gets near like a toxin. He’s a gas that won’t go away.

“Got it,” Ray says, grabbing my attention and pulling me from my thoughts of my father’s actions.

“Here, it says... the one true god cannot interfere in the fate of his born offspring, but his wisdom will wait them out. The sources will release the seed of darkness and the true god will exact true punishment as the tables are turned.

“Some will return to the hand of their creator; others will be exposed. The war begins with a son. The son of a king is freedom of the kings and a release from the past. As the phoenix rises, so will the son and all order will be restored as the war of the gods is done.”

Ray looks up at me. “What, what’s wrong?”

“Our source stones. I think my father has tried to tell us this all along. He’s been coming. We are to fight the war of the gods.”



**RAY**

“FOCUS, RAY. YOU CAN DO THIS,” Blossom calls out.

I grunt and stand back up, shaking it off. I’m trying to focus, but my mind is still reeling from what Kendrick said earlier. A war is coming and we’re to fight in it.

I’m an accountant. How am I going to fight in the war of the gods? Give it two more months and I’ll be showing again.

When is this war coming? Like, seriously, is it too late to go back to my old life? Never leaving the house and not having friends is starting to look a hell of a lot better than fighting a war with gods.

Fire siren or not, I’m not about that life. Not when it comes to fighting gods. I’ve never so much as had a fight.

“I can barely form a weapon at will,” I murmur.

Jewel attacks, sending me flying back onto my butt. I don’t even get a chance to counter the attack. Forget about drawing a weapon.

“Yeah, I’m gonna sit this one out,” I mutter to myself.

Blossom and the others offered to spar with me. They’ve been pushing me a little harder than my sisters or the guys. I’m starting to get so frustrated. I growl as I take the hand Manisha offers me.

“Can I offer a suggestion?” she says.

“I’ll take all the help I can get.”

“Channel your emotions. The frustration, the worry, everything you’re feeling. Pull it together and use it. It’s all energy. Use that.”

*“She is right. This is what I’ve been trying to tell you,”* Venus says.

*“I know. I’m trying.”*

*“Try harder. You can do this.”*

I nod and close my eyes. It’s not like I can’t use my magic. I just suck at multitasking, apparently.

As my eyes are closed, I think of Knox, Avionne, and this little one I'm carrying. I can do this for them. Kendrick and Lee Ann seem to believe in me. I just need to believe in myself.

"Okay, let's go," I say as I open my eyes.

"There you go," Manisha says with a smile.

"Attack," Blossom yells out.

All five fairies start after me. I run and climb the wall to run around the perimeter of the room as they throw attacks at me. I dodge flames, balls of light, and vines that spurt up and try to wrap around me. Pushing off the wall, I turn and go to form a bow and arrow.

The bow forms, but I'm too slow with the arrow. A light orb hits my hand and the arrow fizzles out. I whimper and drop to the ground, cradling my hand to my chest.

And this is why I've started to block Kendrick out during my training sessions. In the past, he has appeared ready to flatten my sparring partners more than once.

"That was better," Blossom says as she comes to help me up.

"But not good enough," I huff.

"For someone with no training at all until a few months ago, that was awesome," Ember says.

"Again," I growl.

"You're fatigued. Mentally and physically. I think that's enough," Manisha says.

I glare at the mind fairy. I know she means well, but I need to get this right. I get so angry when I think about how my father has handicapped me. Not even a stinking self-defense class.

To think, I thought I was going to fight Kendrick that night he rescued me. That's the most frustrating thing. I may not have the skills, but I've always been a fighter at heart.

Knowing Manisha means well and beginning to feel the exhaustion set in, I sigh and nod. “Okay. Thank you all for your help.”

“It will come. Be patient,” Bay says.



# *Kendrick*

## *Long Day*

*I*t's been a month since Reilly has been gone and three since Ardan has been away. Bradan has been hot on Seraphina's trail, so it's been a while since he's made an appearance at the clubhouse.

We're scattered around the world with so much going on, but we need to make time to meet. We're able to astral project to sit in a room together. This is how we hold church in times like this.

Each of us sits in the clubhouse's boardroom. However, Dagger, Rock, and I are the only ones here in the flesh. My brothers are in a spirit form. They look just as if they are in the flesh, but they are translucent versions of themselves. I call the meeting to order so everyone can get back to their assignments.

"She got away again. Someone is helping her," Bradan growls. "They are staring in our faces while this shit is going on. I want to know who."

“He’s right. Someone helped her escape. I don’t like this,” Reilly says.

“I will take responsibility. She’s a fairy. This falls on us. I will root out the traitor,” Dagger says.

“Send me her sister. I’m done playing games. You feel me.”

“Is this really the route you want to take, brother?”

“Seraphina knows the consequences of playing with me. Send Nori now. I will deal with the rest,” Bradan snarls.

“Dagger, you heard him.”

Dagger nods. This has to be hard for him. Nori and he are friends, but Dagger has always been duty bound.

“Ardan, you have anything for me, brother?”

“Still quiet here. I’m thinking about coming back.”

“I’d hold off on that if I were you. Ray found some ancient text. This isn’t over. Don’t let your guard down just yet.”

“What was in the text?” Reilly asks.

“An old prophecy.”

“Aw fuck. I can tell by your voice I’m not going to like this, brother,” Ardan groans.

“I believe the stones are being stolen to release our uncle. Mabruk spoke of a war. I think it’s the same one the prophecy speaks of.”

“Wait, what?” Reilly snarls.

“The text speaks of our father and a war of gods.”

“A war, now of all times? I have a fucking vampire king on the loose. You’ve got to be shitting me. Can you send me an image of the text?”

“Actually, I was going to send it to you all.”

“Have you spoken to Carlisle? Does Alaric know what’s going on?” Reilly asks.



“No, I haven’t had time to go see them. I will make the time soon. I don’t think anyone will manage to get by them to get to my stone. I chose the gargoyles for a reason.”

“Yeah, sure. All they have to do is wait for sunrise and smash them. Great hiding place,” Ardan says sarcastically.

“The guardians do their job well. No one gets to Alaric with their life.”

“Let’s hope so, brother. We are two for two and I don’t like it,” Bradan says.

“You’re not alone. Reilly, did you need me to send reinforcements? The longer it takes to find Faustus, the stronger he becomes,” I say, wanting to move forward to bring this meeting to an end.

“No, I’ll have this situation under control soon. Lee Ann is working on a solution for the missing stone to seal him back in once we find him.”

“Very well, is there anything else?”

“Not on my end,” Bradan says.

“I suggest we all wrap things up and head home. If we lose another stone, that’s where we’ll all be needed,” Ardan says.

I nod in agreement. However, my mind has taken a pause as the prophecy plays in my head. We are making a lot of assumptions. What we need is answers.

“Meeting adjourned. Be safe, brothers.”

I drop the gavel and my brothers vanish from the room. Dagger and Rock stand to leave with me. I want to catch Ray before she goes to sleep.

“Amy says she’s ready to do that locator spell for you. She believes she can do it if Ray is in the room,” Dagger says as we walk the halls.

“Tell her to hold off. The seer says Knox will come to me. My gut is telling me to trust my son.”

“You sure? If anyone can find him, Amy can.”

I stare ahead for a moment, lost in thought. Then I turn to Dagger. “No. Let him fulfill his purpose. He is my son. He will return to me when he has succeeded in his task. I’ll be waiting.”

“Did you feel that?” Rock says, spinning in a circle.

“Feel what?” Dagger asks.

“Nothing, I need to lay off the high chicks for a while,” Rock grumbles and shakes his head.

“I want you two to come with me to see the gargoyles. We will go the evening after tomorrow. I have that counsel meeting tomorrow.”

“I’m wherever you need me, brother. You feel me?” Dagger says, placing a fist over his chest to bow.

“We’ll be there, brother. Get some rest. You’re looking worn out,” Rock says and makes the same gesture before turning and heading in the other direction toward the main hall.



## **RAY**

“AW, LOOK, SHE’S TURNING OVER,” Blossom coos as Avionne flips over and looks as if she’s about to take off crawling.

She’s growing so fast. I can’t help the smile that comes to my face. The smile drops as her neck comes into view. I quickly grab her into my arms to get a closer look at her skin.

Brushing her hair out of the way, I squint and lean in. There’s a mark on her skin that almost looks as if she was tattooed and branded. I look to Blossom with a scowl on my face.

“What is this, and where did it come from?” I seethe.

Blossom comes closer to get a look. She and Ember gave Avionne her bath tonight. This mark wasn't there before that. The skin around it looks irritated, as if it's fresh.

Kendrick walks into the room right as Blossom wrings her hands and knits her brows in confusion. “I don't know how that got there,” she says.

“What's going on?” Kendrick asks.

“Look at this, I say and turn the baby for him to see.

His brows shoot into his hairline. He sits down on the bed and takes Avionne from me. Brushing her curls out of the way, he takes a closer look.

“Do you remember when I was thinking out loud about how to conceal her powers?” he asks.

“Yeah, what about it?”

“Well, this is the ancient way of doing so. However, this was done when marriages were arranged. They would seal the betrothed's magic and only her intended could unlock it once they came of age. It was once a very common practice among the fairies.”

“What? You're not making any sense. We haven't arranged a marriage for her, and I wouldn't allow someone to seal her magic away like this. Kendrick, what's going on?”

“I don't know, love. I don't know.”

“Let me take her to the nursery. I will keep watch over her tonight,” Blossom says.

“No, I will take her and sit with her,” I nearly sob.

“She will be safe with Blossom. You need your rest. This solves an immediate problem. We will figure out how to unlock it soon enough. You have my word.”

“Marks have been removed. I've heard stories. We don't use the practice much anymore, but I've heard of them being reversed,” Blossom says.

I look at her and purse my lips. I want to know how it got there in the first place. Rolling my eyes, I keep my thoughts to myself because my words aren't going to be too nice at the moment.

*“Now that’s some foolishness. The child couldn’t mark herself,”* Venus grumbles.

*“Right? Exactly.”*



# *Kendrick*

## *Just Breathe*

“*I*’m not a fan of the passive-aggressive behavior, Ray,” I murmur as I lie with my eyes closed.

She has left her thoughts open for me to hear how angry she is about Avionne’s powers being sealed. She’s been stewing and rambling in her head for the last hour.

“Venus agrees with me,” she hisses at me.

My eyes fly open and my nostrils flare. “You would dare mention another woman in our bed? I don’t care what Venus thinks. She shouldn’t be here.”

“Well, she is and you want to know why?”

Lightning fast, I roll over and pin Ray beneath me with her arms over her head. Holding her wrists with one hand, I lift her chin with the fingertips of my other hand. She looks back at me with wide eyes.

“I don’t care to know why. You’re my only concern. You’re unhappy about something that is good for our child.

Something I will reverse when I don't have chaos on my hands.

“Will I find out who did this to her and why? Yes, I will. Will I punish them? Yes, I will. Tell your little friend I have not forgotten about the child she forced on you. Knox is my son. He will come to me when the gods allow.

“You will both reel it in. Now. I don't take demands from anyone, especially not a woman who belongs in my past. You feel me?” I say firmly as we are nose to nose.

“Yes,” Ray replies.

“Just breathe and allow me to take care of it. I said I would, and I will.”

I grin as I read her thoughts. Dipping my head, I take her lips in a hard kiss. She moans and wiggles beneath me.

I break the kiss and lean into her ear. “You like being restrained and my dominance turns you on? Is that right, my little one? Is your pussy wet for me?”

“Yes,” she breathes. “And yes.”

“Good, because I want to remind you of who's in control.”

I watch the side of her face as I move beside her and reach to open the dress shirt she's become accustomed to sleeping in. I don't mind. She looks sexy in it.

Besides, I don't wear it often. She bites her lip as her chest starts to heave while I slowly unbutton the buttons. Pushing the fabric a part, I reach in to drag my fingertips over her soft skin.

I make a path from her collarbone down to the apex of her thighs, but I don't complete the trip to her sweet heat. She turns to look me in the eyes pleadingly.

I grin and reach for the side of her breast, dragging a single finger across her full mounds. I skim both her nipples in the process. She moans and begins to rub her thighs together.

“Oh no. We can't have that,” I croon and reach to hold her legs a part.

I apply pressure to her inner thigh, right in the joint of her leg next to her hot pussy. I can feel the heat coming from her sweet little kitten. The scent of her arousal is mouthwatering.

“Kendrick,” she calls breathlessly.

She whimpers and tries to buck off the bed. Dipping my head, I pull one of her nipples into my mouth. Swirling my tongue around the tightened peak, I savor the soreness my son is creating.

I love that she’s pregnant with my seed, but I haven’t forgotten about our other children. I will take care of Avionne and Knox. When the gods are involved, you have to use wisdom and know when to get involved and when to watch them move.

“Trust me, Ray. Your anger isn’t needed here. I am taking care of things even when you can’t see them,” I say in her ear.

“Kendrick, please.”

I claw my fingers down her thigh to her knee and back up again as I go to suck on her other nipple. She cries out in pleasure, pleading for more.

I allow her nipple to pop free from my mouth and snort against her skin. Ray tugs at my hand still keeping her wrists pinned. Lifting my head, I look her in the eyes.

“I need you,” she says softly.

Not willing to deny her, I move to take her lips in a searing kiss. Moving my hand to her folds, I draw a finger up through her weeping petals. Her juices are already flowing for me.

I groan and deepen the kiss as I push two fingers into her. I release her wrists to pin her hips in place as she starts to rock. I want to build her slowly. There’s no need to rush.

I chuckle as Ray has other plans. My sleep pants vanish, as does her shirt. I lift my head and raise a brow at her.

The smile on her face reminds me why I fell for her so fast. It wasn’t just the bond. Ray has wrapped me around her finger with her fun-loving personality.

I laugh more, I smile more, and I enjoy life more now that she's in it. Putting a smile on her face brings me the greatest pleasure in the world.

Bringing my fingers to my mouth, I suck her sweet essence from my digits. Gods, I'll never get tired of the way her flavor bursts in my mouth. Needing more, I lower to settle between her legs.

I wrap her legs around my neck and begin to feast. She locks her fingers in my hair and proceeds to ride my face. I pull back a little to spit on her clit, then lean back in to tease it with my tongue.

"Oh, yes," she pants.

I take my time building her up and right as I feel her about to fall over the edge, I back off. I do this twice more.

"Kendrick," she growls.

"Still trying to tell me what to do, little one? You're still not learning your lesson," I croon.

"Ugh," she huffs and throws her head back against the pillow.

*"If he doesn't let me come, I'm jumping up off the bed."*

I chuckle at her thoughts. "You can do that, and you won't get to ride this cock tonight," I breathe against her thigh before licking it.

*"Ugh, just fuck me already. Or at least have the decency to allow a horny pregnant woman to come."*

I shrug and move to lie on my back, placing my hands behind my head. Ray turns her head to look at me. I grin up at the ceiling without saying a word.

*"What is he doing? Is he serious?"*

*"Very. Good night, my love."*

"Well, what are you going to do with that?" she growls out loud, pointing at my erection.



I purse my lips to keep from laughing. I have spent centuries managing my urges. This is nothing for me.

“So you have been celibate for centuries then?” Her voice is filled with disbelief and challenge.

“Name once I’ve lied to you since we met.”

“Never, but I don’t believe you.”

I snort. “Good night, Ray.”

“Kendrick,” she groans.

“Yes, my love.”

“Look at it, it’s just sitting there. You want to as much as I do. Come on.”

“I want the women in my life to stop trying to boss me around more.”

“Fine, I’ll leave you alone if you at least tell me what you’ve been doing for sex all this time.”

My smile broadens. “Do you really want to know?”

“Yes, I’m a big girl. I can handle it.”

Without a word, I use my magic to create a shadow version of Ray. I may not have used her image in the past, but this is what I have done. Shadow Ray saunters her way toward me naked.

I keep my eyes on the real Ray to watch her reaction. Her mouth falls open and she blinks a few times as if she can’t believe her eyes.

“What is she doing?”

I look down to see Shadow Ray has climbed on the bed between my legs. She’s about to take me into her mouth. The real Ray growls beside me.

“She’s going to blow me. It’s what I like,” I say nonchalantly.

“The hell she is.”

I roar with laughter as Ray gets to her knees and pushes her shadow image to the floor. The image dissipates, leaving me and my little one in the room alone.

I sit up and cup the side of her face. “Is your curiosity quenched? Would you like to know more?”

She searches my face and then gives me a mischievous grin. Before I can read her thoughts or ask her what it’s about, she lunges for my cock and takes it into her mouth.

*“You said this is what you like,”* she says through our bond.

“Fuck, Ray,” I say through my teeth.

I can feel she has more confidence this time around. Her saliva drops down my balls, making me groan. I reach for her waist and lift her lower body to my face. As she bobs on my length, I feast on her tight pussy.

Using my magic, I help her remain upright. She realizes what I’m doing and begins to use her hands to pump my cock in a circular motion.

This time, I allow her to come as a reward for a stellar performance. I’m getting close, but I want to be inside her, not in her mouth.

“Come here,” I say as I place her back on the bed.

She comes to me quickly, straddling my waist. I hold my shaft up as she sinks down on it. We both release deep groans.

Her pussy is so wet. I’m so hard from her sucking me like it’s her sole duty in life. I grasp her waist and guide her up and down. When she begins to circle her hips, I’m taken to another level.

“If I knew you would fuck me like this, I would have shown you shadow magic sooner,” I grunt.

“If you’re good, I’ll let you do it again and have us both,” she purrs in my ear.

I slap her ass and take over from beneath. She has no idea what she’s just asked for. Holding her to my chest, I fuck her

until she begins to scream as she creams all over me.

“Sit up and turn around,” I command.

She sits up but goes to unseat me. I stop her and turn her while I’m still deep inside her. She moans and falls back into my chest as I cup her breasts.

“Place your feet on my thighs,” I breathe in her ear, then suck on her neck.

Squeezing her mounds, I position her so I can thrust into her. The sound of her wet pussy and her calling my name is music to my ears. Releasing her breasts, I reach for her arms and pin them behind her back as I bounce her with each of my thrusts.

I allow a current to pulse through me, sending a buzz through her body. She looks back over her shoulder at me as she bites down on her lip. The look of love and ecstasy in her gaze tugs at something in me.

“Is this what you wanted? Am I fucking you the way you want?” I growl.

“Oh, God, yes. Please don’t stop.”

“Your pussy is the only one I want, but I’m fucking you to remind you. You’re still not running things. I’m in control.”

“I love you,” she cries.

“I love you too. Now come so I can put you to bed.”



# Ray

## *Memory Glitch*

I stand in the training gym, blocking punch after punch. When it's my turn to counter, I deliver with precision. A smile comes to my lips.

“That was good, Ray. Much better. You're picking up speed too. Do you want to try with weapons this time?” Jewel asks.

“Yeah, I think I might be ready,” I say with a smile.

Training has been going well today. I can't say what has changed, but I'm moving through sequences much faster and with more fluidity. I'm determined to form a weapon today.

“*Venus, are you all right? Do you see this? I'm getting the hang of it,*” I say excitedly.

She's been so quiet all morning. I'm starting to worry about her. She doesn't respond, causing me to really get concerned.

“*Venus?*”

*“I’m here,” she says weakly.*

*“What’s wrong?”*

*“I don’t know. My head hurts and it’s like I keep seeing things from the past.”*

*“Like what?”*

*“It’s nothing. Focus. You’re doing so well. I’ll be fine.”*

I want to talk more, but she’s right. I need to focus. Jewel backs me down and I see an opening to form a weapon and attack.

I go to do just that, but she knocks me on my butt before I can. I punch the floor in frustration. I don’t understand why I’m struggling so much.

*“Again,” I growl and stand.*

*“Gah,” Venus cries out.*

*“Venus, what is it? What’s wrong?”*



## *VENUS*

IT FEELS like I’m being split in two. Since Ray woke this morning, I’ve been flashing back to the past, then back so fast I feel like I have whiplash.

I want to call them visions, but I can feel when I leave Ray’s body and then when I return. It’s giving me vertigo. One minute, I’m here, and the next, I’m back in my time.

I think I’m going to be sick. I don’t want to bother Ray. She has enough on her plate. Besides, I don’t think she can help me.

I hear the panic in her voice, but I can't respond. That feeling of being pulled through time comes back and my stomach rolls. I grasp my head and close my eyes.

*"Venus, I just felt you put a wall up. He will sense this, you know?" Yanique scolds me as we approach my home.*

*"I'm tired, too tired to keep my guard up. I have to do this, just for tonight. I don't want him to be able to search my aura," I whisper.*

*"He will know. You have never hidden yourself from him. He will know what you're doing."*

*"Then I will tell him we were training and I forgot to bring the walls back down," I say.*

*"Venus. I'm warning you. None of this will end well," my sister says.*

I gasp as I'm snapped back into the future. I feel the moment I'm back inside of Ray. The difference between her power and mine registers right away.

I groan and try not to whimper. She's still calling my name. Once I'm able to gather my thoughts, I respond.

*"I know why Kendrick can't hear me," I whisper.*

*"What?"*

*"I know why you are the only one who can hear me in your head," I say this time.*

*"Why?"*

*"He can't hear me because I shut him out. It was a spell I didn't correct before entering this one. I've made so many mistakes. I don't belong here and I think my time is running out. I may never get to meet my son."*

*"Oh, Venus, don't say that. We're still going to find him. Hang in there, okay?"*

*"Okay," I reply, but I'm no longer hopeful.*

Ray is becoming stronger. She may not feel it, but I can. I'm not going to last here for much longer.



## **RAY**

I CAN FEEL Venus's anxiety as if it were my own. Or it might just be my own. I stare down at the phone Ember said came for me this afternoon.

She couldn't tell me from whom or where. Only that it was delivered and I was to get it. Now, I've been staring at the thing like it's going to bite me.

This can only be from my dad. I don't know anyone else. My sisters all call me on the phone Kendrick gave me after I lost mine that night.

The phone rings and I nearly jump out of my skin. I reach for it with a shaky hand. I don't know how I feel about speaking to my dad.

I still have so many unanswered questions. Despite everything, I do love him. Although I never got to go out or do much, he did spoil me.

I was pampered weekly and anything I wanted, I could have. All but friends, freedom, and a real life. I guess none of that is a worthy trade-off. I sigh at my thoughts.

"Hello," I answer the call.

"Hello, sweetheart. How you doing, Ray?"

"Hey, Daddy. I'm fine."

"How's that biker treating you?"

"He's good to me. I can't complain."

He grows silent for a moment. I hold my breath as I wait for him to tell me why he's calling. I was expecting him to do more yelling.

“Listen, I may have handled things wrong. You didn’t like Angelo. I should’ve listened. You’re still my little girl.

“I don’t want something so small to come between us. It’s always been you and me, kid. You’re all I have. I’ve been miserable without you. My world is falling apart. I miss you, Ray.

“Do you remember the song I used to sing to you when you were a little girl? I keep thinking about how you would look up at me like I was the center of your world. I told myself the first time I held you that I’d do right by you,” he says.

Tears roll down my cheeks. I do remember when he would sing to me in Italian. Those were some of my favorite times. He was always so busy, but he made time to have tea parties with me. I remember him reading me bedtime stories and singing me to sleep.

“I miss you too. I don’t know how things got so crazy. Angelo tried to force himself on me and... I hope that didn’t cause you any trouble,” I murmur.

“Forget about it. If I had known that’s what happened, I would have... Never mind. Let’s leave the past in the past. Have dinner with me.

“You remember that time we had that fancy dinner at the docks?” He chuckles to himself. “I couldn’t get away and you were looking forward to our dinner date, so I had the boys put it together for me.

“Boy, did they give me shit for that, but I’d do it again to see that smile on your face.” He chuckles. “That was one of those times when I thought I was doing this father thing right. This thing of ours didn’t mean more than you then.

“It doesn’t mean more than you now. What do you say? Have dinner with your old man?”

“Okay, Daddy. When?”

“That’s my Ray. I’ll send a car for you tomorrow evening.”





# *Candido*

## *Dinner*

“*Y*ou only want to talk to her, right?” I say to the bishop.

“Only a simple conversation. Once she tells me what I need to know, I’ll allow you both to go. I only need the child and the daughter who carries him.

“You say that isn’t this one, so we’ll be on our way as soon as I locate the one I’m looking for,” he replies.

“So none of that head shit you did to me?” I ask to clarify.

“I will only get the information I need. Nothing more.”

“Good, good.” I nod.

I keep to myself that he can’t be looking for any of my girls. We were told to keep them virgins. I got confirmation that the other two were still pure, like Ray and Charlie, before they disappeared.

Unless by Immaculate Conception, he ain’t looking for none of my girls. It’s the only reason I agreed to arrange this

meeting.

I look around the warehouse, taking in all the work the fellas have done for me. I really wanted to do something nice for Ray. I was telling the truth when I said I've been reminiscing about the old days.

She was such a cute kid and always had a smile for me. When Sofia left me, Ray was all I had. I've often wondered about her sisters.

I got to know Charlie some, but she's never really wanted anything to do with me. I've always been a disposable uncle to her. The kid has had an attitude a mile long since day one.

"You ever regret not having kids? I mean, as a man of the cloth and all, do you feel like you missed out?" I ask the bishop as he sits across from me at the table where I'll be having dinner with Ray.

He scoffs in disgust. "I serve a higher power. Such things are mundane to me. My hunters have become my children. They serve their purpose and I serve mine," he says dryly.

"Sometimes, I wish I did things differently. You know—"

"Please spare me the confession," he cuts me off. "I really don't care and there is no absolution waiting for you. I have no penance to offer your conscience. So please, do me the favor of shutting the hell up."

I frown and sit back in my seat. I hate this cocksucker. It will serve him right when he doesn't find a child, and Ray can't tell him how to find the others.

As I stew while we wait, he stands and taps the table. I look up into his cold blue eyes. There's something sinister about his expression.

"It's showtime. Here she comes. Don't disappoint me, Ricci. I've waited a long time to complete my missions. It's all finally falling into place. Do not screw this up." He gives me a smile that looks all sorts of wrong. "Remember, your life is depending on it."

As if back in that church, I can feel the bite of the cool blade against the back of my neck, but there's no sword, and no one's holding it against me. I shake the feeling off and focus on the doors as they are rolled back and the car with my little girl rolls in.



## **RAY**

*“THIS DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT,”* Venus says as the car pulls into the warehouse. *“You should have told Kendrick where you were going. I don't like this.”*

*“I wanted to tell him, but he was busy all morning, and then he left for his meeting. I'm only going to have dinner with my father. Kendrick says he never wants me to feel like a prisoner. This shouldn't be a problem.”*

*“I don't trust your father. There, I said it. This isn't a good idea and I'm not at top strength to help you.”*

I ignore her comment about my dad. I'm more concerned with the fact that I feel her weakening. I haven't said anything, but I'm really worried about her. When I get back to the clubhouse, I'm going to double down on trying to find a way to find Knox.

The Hall of Sirens has to give me something. I've been asking for a way to find Knox, but I keep receiving the same texts. Especially the one with the prophecy and Kendrick's family history.

“Ah, here she is,” my father croons as he opens my door for me, pulling me from my musings.

I step out of the car. He then pulls me into his embrace. I have to admit, I miss his hugs. He has always had a way of

soothing my anxiety with his embrace.

“How you doing, Ray?” he says and kisses my forehead.

“I’m good, Daddy.”

“All right. That’s good to hear. Come, let’s eat. You can tell me all about what you’ve been up to.”

I look around the warehouse. It’s just like that time when I was younger. Lights are strung up all over the place. He has stars projected across the ceiling in my favorite color, purple.

I remember being so giddy when I was ten. The memory has me smiling in the moment. I’ll have to do this for Avionne someday.

“I had them make your favorite. The pasta and vodka gravy. *Mangiare*. Wine?” he asks and holds the bottle over my glass.

“No, I shouldn’t.”

“No?”

“No, I have some bookkeeping to do when I get back.”

A look of relief comes over his face, sending up red flags. Venus’s warning starts to play in my head. I push the thought back.

This is my dad. If anything, he’s always been overprotective of me. I shake my head and dig into the food before me.

“Mm, this is good. New chef?”

“Yeah, Gordo took a vacation. I brought in someone special for tonight.”

“Good call. This is delicious.”

He places his fork down and works his mouth to clean the food out. I give him a smile. I know all his mannerisms so well. He’s about to say something that’s been on his mind.

“You know. I did have reasons for everything I’ve done. In hindsight, none of it would have mattered without you. I wanted to leave you with the Ricci legacy.”

“I got over not having a son the moment I held you in my arms. When I found out I couldn’t keep you all, I couldn’t touch the others. I clung to you, wishing I had the power to protect you all and watch you all grow up to be women,” he says sadly.

“Daddy?”

He holds up a hand and looks me in the eyes. I chew on my lip. I want to tell him I know about my sisters.

“Hold on. I have something I want to talk to you about.” He pauses and clears his throat. “I... our family. We have this thing with your boyfriend and his people. We’ve been in for four generations. Each son gets one of these rings.” He holds up his right hand.

That ring has always caught my attention. The few times I’ve interacted with my Uncle Pauly, I’ve noticed he has one too. I thought it was a family heirloom or something.

“You do know he’s not human?”

“Yeah, I know that.”

“Um, well.” He gives a curt nod and purses his lips. “He and his brothers are some sort of wizards or some shit, but I guess you know that too. They’ve kept our family out of fed shit and the money has always flowed as long as we’ve been connected to them.

“Anyways, we can only keep the bond through the males in the family. Sofia and I tried to have kids. It never happened. Pauly wasn’t having any luck either.

“So this woman introduced herself to your grandfather and said she could help. I’m not gonna lie. Life has been good as a Ricci. I wanted to keep this thing going.”

“Okay, Daddy, where’s all this going?”

“Hold on, I’m almost there. I got a woman pregnant outside my marriage. Sofia knew about it. I promised her children and this was the way. Then the woman got pregnant with the four of you.

“Sofia was so happy. Four little girls. I was annoyed. We needed a boy, but the woman promised it would all work out.

“I’d marry one of you off and that would give me a son. Only once the four of you were born, I was told I had to give three of you up. I could only keep one.

“I couldn’t even look at the other three. You were the first one I held. I refused to pick up another once I was told I couldn’t keep them. You were my Ray Ann.

“I was allowed to give Pauly little Charlie, but that kid has always hated me. You, you were my sunshine. I promise you I’ve done nothing but try to protect you like I was told to.

“I had the other two watched over, but I didn’t want to know anything about them. Sofia couldn’t take knowing there were more of you out there when she couldn’t have them.

“I swear, I should have told her they died in childbirth. She drove me crazy until the day she left me. Anyway, that’s the truth. I thought you should know what the beef is about between me and your boyfriend.”

“Is that all?”

“Yeah, he wants to be free of me and I’m still trying to figure things out. I just want you to know I love you. I have always loved you. I’m your father. Nothing can change that.”

Stabbing at my food, I think his words over. It comes to mind to tell him I love him too, but someone begins to slow clap from behind me. Warning bells go off immediately. I pause with the fork halfway to my mouth.

“Oh, how touching. Hello, Ray Ann.”

Turning slowly, I look over my shoulder. Lifting my gaze, I find cold blue eyes looking back at me. A chill runs through me.

I know this man. He’s the one who tried to run Kendrick through in the Den of Kings. I drop my fork and turn to my father.

“Daddy, what have you done?” I say to him.

“He has done as I have asked. You seem to recognize who I am. How is that, Ray Ann?”

I hate the way he says my name. Dragging out each word with disgust lacing them. I turn back to him and glare at his scowling face.

*“Get out of here now,” Venus growls.*

*“I can’t leave my dad here with this monster.”*

*“Screw your father, he set you up. Don’t you see that?”*

*“He would never. He’s my dad.”*

*“Oh my gods, you’re not this stupid. Please, run. Run now.”*

Before I can answer her or the man standing before me, he palms my face in his hand. My face gets warm from his touch. I fight against whatever he’s trying to do, but my eyes roll back, and I begin to lose the battle.

*“No,” Venus cries out.*

“What are you doing? You said you only wanted to ask her a few questions. You said you wouldn’t do none of that bullshit. Get your hand off my daughter,” my father bellows.

The sound of a struggle sounds around me. Dishes fall and crash. It sounds as if the table is turned over. I can hear my father grunting as if he’s trying to fight someone off.

*“Get the fuck off me,” Daddy snarls.*

I feel Venus push forward as the guy keeps his grasp on me. She’s too weak to pull on my power. I don’t know what she thinks she’s doing.

*“I’m shielding you so he can’t see into your head. He’s one of them. He’s a king.*

*“If you let him in, he will see everything you know. I will hold him off for as long as I can. Open the door. Reach for Kendrick. Do it now.”*

*“Kendrick,” I scream through our link.*

*“I can’t hold on,” Venus gasps.*

Her control slips. I feel him reaching in for my thoughts, but this time, I fight harder. Reaching for my power, I pull it all to my hands and lift them.

“*No*,” I roar.

Purple light bursts forth and sends him flying back across the warehouse into the wall. I’m grabbed on both sides as I stand in awe.

And then the room shakes as the sky rumbles outside. Good, I won’t have to kick all their asses by myself.



## ***Kendrick***

“KING ALARIC WILL SEE YOU NOW,” one of the gargoyles’ servants says once the sun has gone down.

We arrived just before sunset to be the first to have an audience. Not that Alaric or Carlisle would keep me waiting. Alaric and I are old friends. I knew him before the disaster that destroyed his kingdom and turned him into a shell of himself.

Dagger, Rock, and I follow the servant to Alaric’s throne room, if that’s what you want to call it. He sits upon his throne in this gentlemen’s lounge, but it’s a far cry from the throne he once occupied.

I look at my friend. He looks well but still sad and broken. Like me, he sports some gray in his dark hair. His black wings are hidden as this place will be filled with humans this evening.

Membership to this place comes with a heavy price tag, but the members are never late with a single payment. The connections alone are worth every penny.



Alaric and the others have done well for themselves. I'm proud of him and his accomplishments after all he's been through. I've trusted him with my source stone because of his understanding of loss.

"Kendrick," he rumbles as I grow near.

"Alaric, it's good to see you, brother."

*"Kendrick."*

I freeze in my tracks as Ray screams for me through our bond link. I can feel her panic. This meeting will have to wait.

"My mate is in danger. I will return," I say quickly before I vanish, following the pull of my mate bond.



## **RAY**

I KICK OUT, buckling the knee of the hooded figure to my right. As he releases me, I go to shove the one on my left. I get ready to launch a full-on attack, but I'm swept up in a strong wind and lifted in the air.

As the tornado-like wind keeps me high above the room, Kendrick appears with Dagger and Rock. My eyes widen as Dagger's long dark hair is pulled up in a ponytail and a tail is now whipping from his backside as he floats above the ground.

I look to Rock, who's standing on the other side of Kendrick. He looks around, assessing the situation. Then he rubs his hands together and shrugs.

The next thing I know, he has transformed into a dragon. The bishop is now surrounded by men in green robes with hoods. They all look larger than life. Shit is about to get real.

*“They are all original kings. Except for that one, the small one off to the side,” Venus says.*

*“You mean the putrid one?”*

*“Oh gods, you smell that too?”*

*“Yeah, what the heck is that about?”*

*“I think he’s human. He smells of necromancy.”*

*“He smells disgusting. Can he shift his ass downwind? Ugh.”*

*“Where have they come from? And there are so many,” Venus says as if she’s in awe.*

I turn my attention back to the fight below. My guys are winning, but not as fast or easily as Kendrick took out Angelo. These guys are fighting back.

I release a breath I hadn’t realized I was holding as Kendrick drives his sword through the guy he’s been fighting with. I can’t help wondering why he hasn’t released his knights.

*“They will only move to protect you. It’s in their nature. He’s better off fighting without them,” Venus says.*

*“Oh.”*

A cry of agony catches my ear. I look toward the sound to see Dagger has slashed one of the hooded guys with his tail, slicing his side open. Swiftly, Dagger wraps his tail around the ankle of another and lifts him in the air. He then stabs through his chest with his ponytail.

I watch as his dark hair pulls from the guy’s chest, with blood dripping from the blade-shaped tip. His hair literally looks like a shiny black sword.

*“Where’s the bishop?” Venus asks.*

I quickly dart my gaze around. Rock, in his dragon form, has one of the guys pinned to a wall as another slashes at him with a sword. He roars and slaps the guy with his tail.

Kendrick is still engaged in battle. The guy before him is putting up a good fight. Swiftly, Kendrick swings his sword over his shoulder to block a blow coming from a guy who charges him from behind. He then spins so his back is to the wall and he's facing both opponents as they double up on him.

Sparks fill the air from their swords as they collide. The sound of battle surrounds me. I watch with bated breath as Kendrick moves swiftly like this is second nature to him.

I don't want to look away, but I feel in the pit of my stomach I need to set eyes on the bishop. I turn and find him. He has my father by the hair. Whispering in his ear.

My stomach drops. Time seems to come to a stop. I strain as if I can manage to hear what he's saying.

"You're useless to me now. You sold your soul for what, Ricci? I told you not to disappoint me."

"Fuck you, cocksucker," Daddy growls.

I gasp as I'm able to hear their words. My eyes widen because I know my dad is in danger. I can't let this happen.

I hold my hands out and call for my power. It begins to course through me. The strangest thing happens as I start to pull in the tornado surrounding me.

I go with it. Thrusting my palm downward, wind blows up at me as I sail to the ground beneath me. I land on one knee, my palm slamming into the ground and shaking everything around me.

The concrete beneath my knee and palm cracks and ripples until it stops in front of the bishop and my dad. I look into my father's eyes and his face goes from shocked to proud.

*I love you*, he mouths.

I stand and call for my bow and arrow. They form in my palms. I go to pull and release a shot between the bishop's eyes. My brows knit as blood slips from my father's mouth.

I drop my gaze lower and see the blade that's running through his chest. It takes a few beats before what's happening registers. The bow and arrow dissolve from my hands.

My father's body falls to the ground lifelessly, like a period on a sentence. Bringing finality to the situation.

"No," I roar. The word comes up from my toes and pours out of me like a shock wave. The bishop vanishes before he can be knocked back with the force of it like the others in its path.

Strong arms wrap around me. I know it's Kendrick right away. I can't. This is too much.

"Venus," I whimper.

*"That was all you, Ray. You did well. I did not see the blade either. You did well,"* she says weakly.



# *The Hunter*

## *Depleted*

*A*nger fills me as I walk these city streets tonight. I hate that I have to claim another so soon. However, that battle has weakened me.

Still, I have fared better than my brothers. Our numbers have been depleted. That abomination and his friends surprised us. Although, the girl was the real shock and blow to our numbers.

She wiped out our men with but a word. A single word and she brought the battle to an end. I still can't believe what I witnessed.

If not for the bishop grabbing me on his way out, I wouldn't have made it. I bare my teeth in anger. Good men were lost. Only three of my brothers remain. Because they were out on another assignment.

Those we lost answered the call to serve the cause and now they're gone. Their life force was extended for a purpose, but they won't see the day when we complete the mission. It is a shame.

“You shouldn’t be out alone at this time of night,” I whisper in the blonde’s ear as I cover her mouth with my hand.

She tries to struggle, but it’s futile. She will not break free and she won’t get away. Her life is needed for a greater cause.

She’s in the right place at the right time to be a part of history. This is an honor. I will do right by her sacrifice.

The unnatural witch will pay. All of them will pay. I won’t stop until they do.



# Kendrick

## *Devastated Mate*

I'm so angry with Ray, but I'm also proud of her. My heart hurts for her loss. I might not have liked Ricci, but he meant something to his daughter.

"Is there anything we can do, brother?" Dagger asks.

"Not right now. I will let you know if I need anything," I say as I carry Ray to our room.

She hasn't said a word since we left the warehouse. My mate is devastated. I wish I had the power to turn back time for her.

I can hear her blaming herself for this. She thinks she could have saved him if she was faster. Ricci wasn't up against an ordinary human or a low-level super.

To be honest, I think he got what he deserved. He lured her there for those bastards. There's no telling what they would have done if I hadn't gotten there.

Even if she did move faster, this would have been his fate. I was going to kill him myself as soon as the ring was

returned. Those hunters and their leader did me a favor.

“We need to go back for his body. I have to bury him properly,” Ray murmurs out of the blue.

“I will have it taken care of.”

“Thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me.”

“Kendrick?”

“Yes, my love.”

“I’m sorry. He was my dad. I didn’t think he was trying to set me up. I only wanted to have dinner with him and hear him out. I didn’t know,” she sobs.

“I understand. It is done now. You are safe and I know what these hunters look like and what we are up against. Not that you left many of them standing.”

“What do you mean?”

“I believe only the bishop and one other got away. If that was all their men, you diminished their numbers with your attack.”

“What attack?”

I open my mind for her to see what happened through my eyes as I was able to watch it all from above the room. Thus, giving her a bird’s-eye view. While she’s watching for herself, I search her face.

Her lips part and her eyes widen. “Oh,” she breathes and closes her eyes, looking away from me.

“Can we go to my happy place? Please,” she whispers.

I kiss her temple. “Of course. We will go as soon as I get you to our room.”

“Thank you.”

We fall silent as I make it to our bedroom and close us in. Placing her on the bed, I pull her shoes from her feet. She pushes back until she can place her head on her pillow.



However, once I climb onto the bed and lie on my back, I pull her into my arms so she can lie on my chest.

“I want to scream. I want a moment to lose myself,” she whispers.

“We’ll take the time for you to do whatever you need. Remember, close your eyes and allow your breathing to even out,” I say as I rub her back.

“Clear your mind and follow the sound of my voice. When you find the door, walk through it. I’ll be waiting.”

Her mind is clouded. It will take her a bit longer this time to cross over. I stand in the void, waiting for her. Slowly, light and space begin to form.



## ***RAY***

I KNOW I want to get away, but I can’t think of my place of peace. There is no paradise in my head at the moment. Then it hits me. The last place I would think I would find peace comes to mind.

The door appears and I rush over and run through it. I find Kendrick inside, sitting on my childhood bed. I drop to my knees and release the scream I’ve been holding in.

I scream until my voice is raw and my head hurts. I didn’t get to tell him I loved him too. I never got to say it back.

What hurts most is that I know he betrayed me and brought me there for that man. Yet I can’t stop seeing his lifeless body fall to the ground, over and over again. I can’t make sense of any of it.

“Let it all go, my love. It will be okay,” Kendrick says into my hair as he gets on the floor and wraps around me.

His embrace soothes my aching heart. If not for him, I'd probably be the one with a sword through me. I have no idea how long I sit sobbing in Kendrick's arms.

He sits and allows me to fall apart as he murmurs reassuring words and rubs my hair and back. After some time, I lift my head and look around the re-creation of my old bedroom.

"It's time to say goodbye," I whisper.

The room begins to change as I think of what I need most right now. The sky appears in that calming light-purple color. Kendrick and I now sit in a hot steaming bath, releasing the tension from my body.

He grunts in approval and begins to wash my hair. I close my eyes and sag back against his chest. My heart still aches, but I'm trying to make sense of where I go from here.

"He was trying to see into my head. What do you think he was looking for?" I ask as Kendrick rinses the soap out of my hair.

"I don't know. I'm starting to feel like all we have is questions and no answers. My visions aren't giving much either."

"There were so many of them."

"Yes, which is odd as many of my mother's kind have been diluted. There aren't many originals to speak of."

"But those were all originals?"

"Yes, all purebloods. They should have died off by now."

"Although I could sense something was off about them."

"I wish I knew what that missing passage says. I have a feeling it's important."

"I want you to focus on relaxing for now. Allow me to worry about these things."

"Will you tell the others what has happened?"

"I will call church once I know you're resting."

“Okay. He did love us. Not just me. He loved my sisters too. I understand him now. At least I got that closure,” I murmur.

“Um,” Kendrick hums as he squeezes warm water across my collarbone.

“Yeah, they will probably have the same reaction.”

I wish my sisters could have gotten to know our father. He wasn't all bad. He was only trying to hold on to what he knew all his life. Can anyone blame him for that?

The way he went about it, maybe not, but I can't entirely say I fault him. He did what he was told. Kendrick kisses the back of my head.

“I love your heart. Wrong is wrong, but you are always ready to forgive,” he says.

“Kendrick?”

“Yes, my love.”

“Venus isn't doing so well. I'm worried about her. What happened took a lot out of her,” I say quietly.

“You're getting stronger. This is to be expected.”

“I can't break my promise. We have to find Knox.”

“It will all be well. I need you both to trust me. I know it will be well.”



# *Kendrick*

## *Church*

*I* sit at the Immortal Iron Brothers' table with Rock and Dagger. I summoned my brothers so they would join us as well. As we sit and wait for them to astral project in, my mind turns to my mate.

It took a while, but I was able to get Ray to lie down and go to sleep in our bed. She is stronger than she knows. She'll pull through this.

"How is she?" Dagger asks with concern in his voice.

Ray has grown on my brothers as much as she has me—those who are my blood and those within the brotherhood. Rock and Dagger fought hard to ensure we got her out of that warehouse safely. I have a new respect for the two of them.

I wasn't expecting them to follow me into battle. I was ready to handle things on my own. However, it was an honor to have them fight alongside me.

"She will be well with some rest."

"Where are Bradan and Ardan?" I ask as Reilly appears.

“Ardan had business with Kenji. Bradan has been out hunting,” Reilly says.

“Should we begin without them?”

“I guess. I am on my way back home. My hunt is leading back that way. Girls have started to go missing in our area. This could be Faustus,” Reilly says.

“Excuse me,” I look across the table to Bradan’s seat.

Taylor has astral projected to take his place. My brows shoot up. Immediately, I know something is wrong.

“Taylor, what is wrong?”

“We found Seraphina, but Bradan was injured in battle. They have some type of altered holy iron or something.”

“Blessed iron,” Reilly and I say in unison.

“Yeah, that’s it. Bradan isn’t healing like he should. We’re on our way back, but we need to travel by human transportation. He’s not strong enough to teleport us.”

“Should I send someone to escort you two in?”

“No, I can get him back. He just needs to rest. We wanted to let you all know what’s going on. Is there anything he needs to know?”

“Yes, Ray was attacked by the hunters. She is fine, but Candido Ricci is dead.”

Taylor’s eyes fill with tears and her lips begin to tremble. My heart aches for her as well. I guess Ray isn’t the only one who will be hurt by this.

“My father is gone?” she says softly.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Who did it?”

I don’t miss the fire that comes to her eyes. She, too, is getting stronger. It makes sense. To be Bradan’s mate, she would have to be.

“It was the hunter’s leader.”

She nods silently. I go to ask if she will be okay, but my attention is pulled as Ardan appears. His expression draws my attention.

“It was a trap. The stone is gone. It was stolen during the first attack,” Ardan rushes out.

“What?” Reilly and I snarl at the same time.

“This has not been Kenji. It was a fake. One of Father’s tricksters has been in his place. I’m on my way back. We have to protect the last stone,” Ardan replies.

I sit back in my seat, and the wheels begin to turn. We are missing something. Our focus has been clouded by our mates. Ray’s appearance and Venus being trapped inside her with my son took my attention in the beginning.

Then, the others started to erupt into chaos. After that, Bradan found his mate, but he’s been distracted by his rage and wanting to punish Seraphina. Ardan was focused on Billy until his stone was threatened.

Then Lee Ann appeared, and Reilly’s stone was stolen. He had to turn his attention elsewhere. What if we’ve been overlooking what’s right in our faces?

All of this started with the appearance of Ray. The hunter’s leader wanted to see into Ray’s thoughts. It’s a gift we kings have.

It’s how I fell into Ray’s past life. He knows something and believes Ray knows something as well. I think of the prophecy and grin.

“Come home, but we don’t need to guard the stone. I will take care of it,” I say.

“But Kendrick. They will have all the stones and they can release our uncle. We can’t allow that to happen,” Ardan says.

“Have you ever asked yourselves why our father left something so important with us? Why not keep them in his kingdom under his protection? Why entrust them to us?”

“Because he had plans,” Reilly says.

“Bingo. Trust me. I believe everything is going as our father wants. I’m only going to do my part. Come home.”

“But our father is the one who has been fooling me for months,” Ardan says, seething.

“Exactly, little brother. Not the hunters, our father,” I reply.

Recognition fills Ardan’s eyes. He nods. “I will see to Kenji and come home immediately.”

“I’m on my way as well. Lee Ann wants to see that text in person. How is Ray holding up?”

“Holding up? What happened to Ray?” Ardan asks.

“She was attacked by the hunters and her father was murdered,” I reply.

I note that Taylor has left the meeting. I hope she will be okay. I can’t imagine how this has made her feel.

“She’s resting,” I say to Reilly. “Physically, she’s fine. Mentally and emotionally, she will need some time. She tried to save him but was too late.”

“This might be bad timing, but have the rings returned?” Ardan asks.

I knit my brows. I would have felt if the Riccis’ rings returned. “No, they haven’t,” I reply.

“We are all mated. Now the eldest son is dead. What seems to be the problem?”

“I don’t know, but we will get to that. I think we need to focus on what’s coming.”

“You’re right,” Ardan says.

“Anything else?”

“All good here,” Reilly says.

“Meeting adjourned. I’ll see you, brothers, on this side.”

“See you soon, brother,” my brothers say in unison.



# *The Hunter*

## *Are We Ready*

*Three days later...*

I stand in the church with the bishop. We're waiting for the others to arrive with their report. It's been three days since our numbers were diminished.

My head hurts as visions invade my mind. This always happens before and after I have to refuel. I have not used the girl yet. The bishop wanted to wait until we confirmed our next move.

I close my eyes as my past bombards me. Visions of my loss and the journey I've made to get here hit hard, making my stomach quiver with my anger and rage.

"How much longer?" The bishop's voice pulls me from my vision of the last time I came across one of those monsters in the flesh. The day that changed my fate forever.

I shake my head clear to see Xavier, Ferg and Arlo have entered the sanctuary. The bishop is becoming impatient. I can



feel it and hear it in his voice. With our numbers depleted, we need everything else to fall into place. We need the weapons.

Arlo steps forward and bows. Like me, Arlo wears a face covering with his hood. I can see his eyes and his dark-brown skin but nothing below his cheekbones.

“The test was a success. Our allies are in place. We are ready when you are,” Arlo says.

Arlo is one of the wiser kings and he’s a great warrior. He’s an asset we can’t afford to lose. His knowledge of the sciences and history alone has been invaluable.

It was Arlo who designed the weapons needed to hold those abominations so we could free our master. Tanrı’s biggest mistake in the accords was allowing blessed iron to be a weakness for his offspring.

Arlo was able to figure out how to exploit that weakness. All we needed was to find an alchemist and blacksmith able to create his designs. Greed allowed us to find willing participants.

“Are you sure?” The bishop says, his eyes gleaming with more light than I’ve ever seen.

“Yes. I am sure. Capturing the older three will be simple. What has taken time to perfect has been the containment of the youngest brother,” Arlo begins.

“I know this,” the bishop bites out in frustration. “Are you sure this will work on him? He is the one we have to worry about. None of you will be able to get close enough to him to run him through.

“If you’re not sure you can contain him, we are *not* ready. Look around you. This is what we’ve become. Our allies are no longer a distraction for us. They are our brothers and sisters in arms.

“So I will ask you again, Arlo. Are you sure?”

Arlo straightens and lifts his head. “I am sure. I have perfected my calculations. The work has been done. We will succeed. I am sure.”

“Very well. Then it is time. We will destroy them all before the child is born into existence.

“Once they are all destroyed. We will have the key. He will wait no more,” the bishop croons with excitement.

He turns his gaze to me. “Come, we need you at full strength. Bring me the girl.”

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“DO NOT ALLOW your emotions to get the best of you. You’ve come too far, waited too long, to fail in your mission now,” the bishop says to me when he is done restoring my strength.

I look to the lifeless young woman. Her once healthy and vibrant body is now emaciated. She looks as if her soul has been sucked out.

I close my eyes. It is always hard to see them like this. I’ve never been able to shut out the immediate guilt.

*It is for the cause.*

I remind myself what she’s sacrificed her life for and nod at my thoughts. This will soon be over. I won’t have to find another. Not again.

“I will not fail you. I have no emotions,” I reply.



# Ray

## *Return*

I've been walking around numb for the last three days. I keep playing in my head over and over again what happened, trying to see what I could have done differently. If only I would have released the arrow a few seconds earlier.

"Have you eaten?" Billy asks as she comes to sit with me in the dining room.

I look up and glance at her in confusion. It dawns on me what she's saying. I shake my head.

I had actually come down here to get a bite to eat, but I sat down and forgot what I came here for. I haven't been eating as much. Kendrick has started to bring me food to the room.

He sits with me while he makes sure I eat. Today, he had someplace to be. Knowing I needed to feed this baby, I decided to come down and find something to eat. Yet here I sit, lost in thought.

"No," I reply to her question.

“Here... take this sandwich. Listen, Ray. I get that he raised you and all, but Candido wasn't a good guy. This was going to happen sooner or later,” she says.

“You're right, he raised me. He took care of me. I was supposed to take care of him. I failed.”

“Ray, the man set you up,” she growls.

“I don't want to talk about it. Where's Lee Ann?”

“Preparing for the ceremony.”

“I thought we had to wait for Taylor and Bradan.”

“They're arriving today. Any moment now.”

As soon as she says that, Aravos appears with Bradan in his arms. Taylor is beside them, looking nervous. I jump up and rush over to them. Billy is right beside me.

“Is he okay?” I rush out.

“I needed to get him back here as soon as I could. He's still not healing. I don't know what to do. I've been changing the dressing, but that's not enough.”

“I will take him to the infirmary. The healers will work on him there,” Aravos says.

“I'm coming with you,” Taylor says and rushes after Aravos.

“Are you good? I want to see if I can help,” Billy says.

I nod. “Yeah, I'm fine, go on.”

Knowing I don't have it in me to be any help, I decide not to follow them. If things go south, I'm going to lose my mind. It's better I don't go.

I watch as they disappear. Then I go to grab the sandwich to take it with me. I want to find Lee Ann and see what she's up to.

I make my way downstairs to the temple. It's in the underground part of the clubhouse. I stop and look around as I get to the lower level.

I can't shake the feeling as if someone is watching me. Not seeing anyone, I shrug and keep moving toward the temple. Once the ceremony is complete, my sisters and I will be able to communicate with each other and the members of the community who have pledged their allegiance to the Immortal Iron Brothers and their laws.

We have been given the rules and laws that all others must follow to stay under the brothers' protection. I had no idea how intricate the workings of the club and its connection to the world of others is. Going through the rules and laws has been the one thing to get my mind off my father.

I want to make sure I know everything and that I get this right. This is my new life, my new family. I wouldn't want to disrespect the rules or break any of them.

*"Like he would punish you for it. You've been worrying too much,"* Venus says.

It's been three days and she still sounds so lethargic. I wish I knew what I could do for her. It's not just the way she sounds. I can feel her waning.

*"How are you feeling?"*

*"Tired and anxious. Something is coming. You should be training."*

*"For what? I'm useless."*

*"No, you are not. There was nothing more you could've done. Please forgive yourself. You have babies to think about. Avionne, this sweet little one in here, and Knox."*

*"Wait, you can communicate with this baby?"*

*"Yes, he's a very sweet child."*

*"Kendrick is right? It is a boy?"*

*"Yes, it is. He hasn't told you, has he?"*

*"Told me what?"*

*"Female children are very rare for them. You most likely will only bear sons."*

*“Oh, now that’s some irony for you. Wait, so it’s not impossible, just highly unlikely?”*

*“It would have to be Tanri’s will. It’s considered a gift of the most high when he grants it.”*

*“How do you know this?”*

*“It was in the scrolls when I was looking...”*

She trails off, but I know what she was going to say. When she was looking for a way to take my place. I think fast to change the subject. This is the most she’s spoken to me in days.

*“It’s going to be so weird. Going from being single with no children to having a mate and three infants.”*

*“You will do well. Knox will be lucky to have you. They all will.”*

*“Thanks. I hope you’re right.”*

“Hey, you,” Lee Ann says as I walk into the temple.

She’s sitting in the center of the crest that’s engraved in the middle of the room with a book in her lap. As I get closer, I realize it’s the book with the prophecy.

“Hey,” I say as I look around. This place is almost identical to the temple from the past. I would think I was in the same place if I didn’t know any better.

The sconces on the walls, the engraving on the floor and walls, the moss and foliage growing—all of it throws me back in time to when I watched Venus and her sisters first step into that cave.

“Almost feels the same too, doesn’t it?” Lee Ann asks knowingly.

“Yeah. Kind of eerie, right?”

“A little. Come, I want to show you something.”

I lower to take a seat beside her. She places the book in my lap. I look down at the page and take in a sharp breath. It’s the

page with the missing passage, but the passage is no longer missing.

I look back up at her. “But how?”

She shrugs. “When Reilly told me about it, I had this feeling like I needed to get my hands on the book myself. When I did, the text appeared.”

I look back down at it and read what it says. I shake my head in disbelief. This isn’t what I was expecting.

“They wanted to kill them?” I whisper.

“Yes, it was suggested. Unlike their mother’s kind, they were still immortal. The curse hadn’t affected them the same. I believe they feared Reilly. Even then, he was powerful and unpredictable.

“However, Tanrı wasn’t going to allow them to kill his sons. So, in addition to agreeing not to interfere in their fates, he agreed to make blessed iron their one weakness,” she explains.

I sit lost in thought. I’ve seen what blessed iron can do to one of them. They use it to harness their powers, but I can’t help wondering if someone could find a way to use it against them. My stomach drops.

“Bradán isn’t healing. He and Taylor just returned. I don’t have a good feeling about this.”

“Shit, Reilly mentioned that someone has been buying up all the blessed iron. There was talk of blacksmiths and alchemists as well.

“It’s a good thing we will all be connected soon. We will need to stay on point.”



***Kendrick***

I ENTER the clubhouse with a smile on my face. I have total confidence in the play I've made. Granted, I should have seen it sooner, but now that I have, I know what needs to be done.

I stiffen as I feel my brother's agony. Without a word to Dagger and Rock, I leave them behind and go to the infirmary. I find Taylor outside the infirmary door on the floor, curled into a tiny ball with her eyes glowing as Billy holds and rocks her.

Ardan is pacing with a scowl on his face. The healers are standing in the hall, wringing their hands as they stare at the closed door. Bradan's screams draw my attention. I rush inside to see what's going on.

"Fuck me," Bradan growls as his back bows off the bed.

Reilly is standing across the room, weaving his hands before him. He drops his hands to his sides. His face is filled with frustration and concern. Bradan's body drops back to the bed with a thud.

"Don't stop. I can take it. Keep going," he says through his teeth.

"What's going on?" I demand.

"He's not healing because there's blessed iron embedded in him."

"Bitch shot me with something. It was like the fucking buckshot of a gun or some shit," Bradan grinds out. "I'm gonna rip her fucking head off when I find her. Her and that motherfucker with her."

"I can get it out, but it's gonna hurt like a motherfucker and I have to be careful not to pull his powers with it."

"Where's Little Bit? Is she all right?"

"Taylor is right outside. She looks like she's fine. Worried, but fine," I say.

"That woman is a fucking trooper. My mate is a ride or die for real, brother. I love that woman," Bradan says while



wincing.

“You should step back out,” Reilly says.

I nod and step out of the room. Now that I know Reilly is the one healing Bradan, I get why everyone is in the hall. I run a hand through my hair.

The last thing we need is for Bradan to lose his power, but that iron can't remain. I close my eyes as his screams increase. Billy yelps, grabbing my attention. I turn to see her patting at her shoulder.

“Sorry,” Taylor says, her eyes wide. “I'm losing control. I hate hearing him in pain.”

“I get it. Don't worry, but you stay your little ass over there for now,” Billy says.

I snort at the two. I note that something has changed with Billy as well. She's giving off much more power than before when she and Ardan left.

My brother walks over to his mate and places a palm over the area Taylor accidentally singed. She looks up at him with a smile and gives him a nod.

I'm sure they are speaking to one another through their link. My heart begins to ache for Ray. I haven't seen her in a few hours. I hope she has eaten and gotten some rest.

“What are all the long faces for? You'd think a motherfucker died or something. Hell ain't got a flame hot enough to burn me. You feel me,” Bradan pants as he comes through the infirmary door and leans in its jamb.

“Bra,” Taylor sings and jumps up from the floor to run into his arms.

He grunts as he lifts her up onto his waist, clearly still in pain. I look into his eyes. He gives me a nod. Reilly steps from the room, looking concerned.

“I don't like this. A weapon that can blast blessed iron at us is a problem.”

“I’ve sent Dagger and Rock out to double our efforts to find Seraphina. I want to know where she got the weapon from.”

“You still believe our father is on our side in all of this?” Ardan asks.

“Yes, I do. Actually, I’m certain,” I say.

“How so?”

“Not here out in the open. We need to complete the ceremony. We can get to all this later. We don’t know who we can trust,” Reilly says as he glances at the healers.

“He’s right,” I say.

I’d prefer to have the women connected to us and the brothers sooner rather than later. Once they are, if something happened to us, they could always connect to the rest of the community.



# Kendrick

## *Here They Come*

*W*e are all gathered in the temple for the ceremony. Bradan looks like he's getting better by the minute. Taylor looks happy as she's tucked into his side.

To be honest, all the sisters look happy to be back together, including Ray, who still looks a little crestfallen over her father. I wish there was more I could do for my mate.

This all has been so hard on her. As much as I want Venus gone, I can see that Ray has feelings of contention about her departure. They have bonded in a way I've yet to understand.

"Shall we get started?" Nuvos asks.

Nuvos is our master of ceremonies. The golem oversees all other weddings, blessings, and bonding ceremonies like this one. When I marry Ray, he will perform that ceremony as well.

"Yes. They're setting up for a celebration upstairs. We shouldn't keep them waiting," I reply.

“Ah, yes. I was informed there would be a stone cake for me. Let’s be quick,” Nuvos says.

My brothers and I move to our respective locations on the crest engraved on the floor, each tugging our mates to stand before us. Nuvos steps into the center as always. I smile down at a nervous-looking Ray.

*“It will be fine, my love. This should only take a few minutes,”* I say through our bond.

*“Okay, I’m just nervous to have so many people in my head. You and Venus are already a lot.”*

*I give a chuckle. “It isn’t like that. You will be able to open and close the link as you do ours. You will get used to it.”*

Nuvos begins and we fall silent. I can feel my brothers’ excitement. This is a big deal for us. Our mates are being brought into the fold. They’re taking their thrones.

However, the excitement is short-lived as simultaneously the four women lift into the air. Their heads are thrown back and their mouths are open. This isn’t normal. Bonding ceremonies don’t happen this way.

“Nuvos, what’s happening?” I demand. “*Nuvos*,” I roar when he doesn’t answer.

He’s still chanting. I look up frantically. The sisters now have their palms turned out at their sides. Lightning jumps from Ray’s palm to Taylor’s. Then flames jump from Taylor’s palm to Billy’s. From Billy’s palm jumps water into Lee Ann’s palm and from Lee Ann’s hand flows sand into Ray’s and the cycle repeats.

A beam of blue light surrounds Nuvos as the sisters remain in the air above us. We’re all so engrossed in the sight before us we are taken by surprise when intruders enter the temple.

Quickly, I surround the sisters in a tornado of wind to protect them. Bradan follows with a wall of fire and Ardan with a wall of ice. I expect Reilly to throw up a defense as well.

That's when I see he's encased in the center of some type of chained sphere. Immediately, I know it's made of blessed iron. I go to release, so my knights will cover Ray as I fight, but I'm blown back. Chains pin me against the wall. I go to blow my way out, but I'm electrocuted instead.

I growl and look around for Bradan and Ardan. They, too, are pinned to the walls by the same chains. I resign myself to defeat. Something I've never done before in my life.

I think of the play I made earlier. I'm glad I followed my gut. Kings always rise.

*Don't let me down.*



## **RAY**

*I'M THROWN BACK in time once again. This time I know I'm in the heavens and this isn't Venus's life. This life belongs to someone else. Someone with way more power.*

*However, I'm not in their body. I'm in their thoughts. As if I'm watching this from their mind.*

*Tanrı, the name comes to mind as I see him appear. A phoenix and a male siren stand before him. The siren has a basket in his hands as if an offering to the alpha god. Tanrı has a smile on his face.*

*The phoenix transforms before my eyes and a chocolate-skinned woman appears. She's absolutely gorgeous. She looks lovingly toward the siren. He takes the form of a man. He, too, has flawless brown skin.*

*Tanrı reaches into the basket and lifts up a small child. He beams up at the baby as he holds her over his head. He kisses her cheek and brings her to his side.*

*“We are gathered here to bless these four—”*

*Tanrı is cut off as all chaos ensues. The rage that comes to his face speaks volumes. I turn away as the siren is struck down. The scream that follows breaks something inside me.*

*I turn to find the blazing phoenix flapping her wings. Then she, Tanrı, the baby in his arms and the basket with the other three babies disappear.*

I gasp as I’m snapped back to the present. Once again, I’m hovering above the room with my sisters. I can feel their power as if it were my own.

*“Now you understand?”* Lee Ann says in my head.

*“Yes, this isn’t just about them. This is about us.”*

*“It’s about you. The first child blessed before the fall. Tanrı had plans for you from the beginning of time.*

*“This was our destiny. The Council of the Phoenix and the fire sirens will rise again. Born of ash, risen through song.”*

I release a roar that comes from deep within. As I do, I absorb the wall of wind surrounding us. The other two barriers disappear as well. I land in a crouch with my head down and my arm with my bow held out.

My power pulses through me. The bow in my hand sparks with an electrical current that makes a zapping sound. My other hand sparks with a purple glow as an arrow forms.

Looking up through my lashes, I glare at the hunter before me. I stare into his green eyes and bare my teeth. Quickly, I dart my gaze around. I see our mates are trapped.

*“They are strong, but this is our house. Bring them down,”* Lee Ann says in my head.

*“The fire bitch is mine,”* Taylor snarls.

*“I will get our mates free,”* Billy says.

I’m ready. I can feel it in my bones. I won’t allow him to defeat me. This is for my father.

*“Let’s go,”* I growl.

Suddenly, the room begins to shake. Debris from the ceiling starts to fall. I whip my head around, trying to figure out what's going on. Then, a bloodcurdling cross between a growl and a grunt fills the air.

*"It's him,"* Venus says.

*"I know."*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Blue Saffire, award-winning, bestselling author of over sixty contemporary romance novels and novellas, writes with the intention to touch the heart and the mind. Blue hooks, weaves, and loops multiple series, keeping you engaged in her worlds. Blue writes for her own publishing company, Perceptive Illusions as Blue Saffire, as well as Royal Blue.

Blue and her husband live in a house filled with laughter and creativity in Long Island, NY. Both working hard to build the Blue brand and cultivate their love for the arts. Creative is their family affair.

Blue holds an MBA in Marketing and Project Management, as well as an MED in Instructional Technology and Curriculum Design. She is also an NLP Master Practitioner.





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OMG! This has been five years in the making. Kendrick has always been larger than life and I needed the space to allow him to breathe. I'm so ready to move to Bradan. I love this universe. So much joy will come from this series for me. I did it. My first full-length paranormal romance. I cried at the end of this one. It hit so different for me.

Thank you, readers, for coming on this new adventure with me. Thank you for your patience. I know some of you have waited a long time for this series. You were around when Kendrick first introduced himself to me. Thank you for the encouraging emails, videos, posts, shares, and DMs. They always go a long way and mean more than you could know.

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**Next!** *Bradan and his fire behind.* 😊.

# THANK YOU

Wait, there is more to come! You can stay updated with my latest releases, learn more about me, the author, and be a part of contests by subscribing to my newsletter at

[www.BlueSaffire.com](http://www.BlueSaffire.com)

If you enjoyed *12 Rounds*, I'd love to hear your thoughts and please feel free to leave a review on my website. And when you do, please let me know by emailing me [TheBlueSaffire@gmail.com](mailto:TheBlueSaffire@gmail.com) or leave a comment on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BlueSaffireDiaries> or Twitter [@TheBlueSaffire](https://twitter.com/TheBlueSaffire)

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