



LOVE
AND
BATTLE

LIZ E. COOPER

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BOOK THREE



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******Content Warning: This book contains conduct of a sexual nature, foul language, and violence. There is also discussion of sexual abuse and death. ******

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CHAPTER 1



BILLIE

*I*t never failed that the day I most wanted to get home was the day my gas would be getting plenty friendly with the empty level. I weighed just going home and getting gas on the way to work in the morning or sucking it up and getting out of this rush hour traffic to get gas, thus making my already annoying commute longer. But the overly anxious part of me didn't like the idea of parking my car at home with a close-to-empty gas tank. What if I had to run for my life in the middle of the night from bad guys, but then my car ran out of gas before I could make any real distance? Then I'm getting got by the bad guys because I have to make a detour to the gas station. That's not smart living.

And so, my overly anxious mind won, and I found myself pulling out of rush hour traffic in the middle of these busy Baltimore streets. I grumbled to myself as I began pumping gas. It was dusk out at only 5:30 pm since Spring had just begun. I couldn't wait until a few more weeks, and it was bright out at this hour. Evening in the city always unsettled me unless I was out in a heavily populated area with lots of lights.

I shook my head, looking at the other patrons at the gas station who were stuck like me. The area was busy and well lit, but my gut still felt off. When my tank was full, I glanced at the main street across from me with cars backed up to no end. Getting a car to let me back in was going to be lots of fun. I gritted my teeth as I put the gas nozzle back.

A woman's scream broke my attention, and I turned to my right to see a stampede of bumpy little green creatures with sharp teeth and claws crawling out of a sewer from the sidewalk of a side road.

Goblins. And they had tiny swords.

You gotta be kidding me.

They weren't moving slowly either. They raced across the gas station and sidewalks and even into traffic, jumping on cars and people. Cars crashed into each other, and people ran, screaming in chaos. It was like an infestation.

I was already drained from using my healing magic all day, so I didn't have the energy for this, both physically and magically. However, I was going to have to pull strength out of my ass or something because these goblins weren't going to let me mind my own business and leave. Two goblins charged at me from behind my blue SUV like hungry lions. I screamed an exploding spell that I'd only ever used these past few months, and a large number of goblins in the area exploded. A blanket of green slime, otherwise known as goblin guts, coated the area around me, including myself. I screamed in shock and disgust. I wasn't sure the spell would work at all, given my low energy, but for it to work and go beyond just the two goblins in front of me surprised me. Even fully powered, I'd never caused that much destruction before in one go. Maybe my energy wasn't as depleted as I thought. I was usually wiped by the end of the day. Although recently less so.

I had my suspicions on the cause of my apparent power-up, but I was in the middle of a battle with little green men, so I had to stay alert and fight until the fight left me. Which was sooner rather than later, because goblins were still running around scratching up cars and stabbing people.

I kept trying to explode them left and right, and they dropped like cockroaches as if I was spraying magical bug spray over the area. Fortunately, or unfortunately, they didn't explode this time. So, there was less mess, but they also weren't dying, just falling sick or hurt. The good part was that the other patrons, most non-magical beings, were better able to finish them off. Not to say there weren't other lycans and vampires smashing them up like gnats. It was really a nasty mess. Goblins weren't that hard to kill if you had some magic, but they were persistent little shits.

When my body decided that I was now running on empty magically, I used my old school windmill and kicking approach to get rid of any more green attackers. A goblin jumped on my back, stabbing me with its tiny sword. I slammed into the gas tank, knocking it off me. Then I grabbed it and ripped its sword away.

My back was on fire, but I was also pissed because I was wearing my favorite tan coat. "I loved this coat, you little fucker!" I screamed before stabbing it in the gut. It screeched a miniature scream, and I kicked it away

from me.

Another goblin sliced at my ankle, bringing me to my knees, and I punched it in the face. It flew in the air, right into a giant werebear who mauled it to death.

Teamwork made the dream work.

I collapsed on the ground before I could even open my car door. The cut on my ankle was pretty deep, right into the muscle, and I didn't think I could stand. Those bastards were small but mighty.

Luckily the police and ambulance were arriving, and help was on the way. I opened my car door and crawled inside the driver's seat, closing the door. I watched as the professionals took out the rest of the goblins, treated the injured, and protected the more defenseless citizens. There was no rush to get to me; I'd survive. Also, I had access to magic to heal my wounds. Sadly, I wished I had enough magic left to take the pain away, but no luck on that.

I dropped the walls in my mind, forgetting I'd raised them from having the others in my pack distract me. I wrestled with letting the guys know what happened but ultimately sent a mental message that I had been out in these streets fighting for my life. Fun fact about being claimed, you had a telepathic connection to your mate. This allowed you to communicate via your mind, and they could feel all of your emotions and, if you weren't under a cloaking spell, they could find you wherever you were located.

I blew out a breath as I tried to breathe through the sharp, aching burn of my wounds. A sudden knock on my window startled me, and I looked to my left to see Tyson Aasare looking in with wide, concerned honey-colored eyes. That was quick.

Saved by the cavalry. I unlocked my door, and he quickly opened it.

"What the hell happened? Are you okay?" he asked, looking me over.

I nodded. "Just some scratches on my back and my ankle."

He swore when he saw my wounds and crouched down in front of me. I swung my legs to the side of the car so he could better review my most pressing injury, which was my ankle. He nicked his thumb with his fangs, and bright red blood pooled on the pad of his thumb; he quickly smeared it over the deep cut. He then did the same with the wound on my back. Instantly, his cool healing vampiric blood began to repair my wound. Although, it would do nothing to repair my shredded coat.

"Thanks, boo," I said in a light-hearted voice. Ty was a worrier, and I liked to make light of situations to ease his equally anxious temperament.

“I’ve asked you too many times, Billie, to not do things that could put you in danger. Why won’t you listen to me?” he implored, eyes softening.

I cringed as pangs of guilt flooded me. I honestly hated to see him worried. I loved that he cared so much, and making him concerned was not my intention. I didn’t have to hear the almost pleading tone in his voice to know he was worried. I could feel it all around me, almost smothering, but he couldn’t help it. It was the bond. Ty was never the best at controlling his emotions in our bond. Still, I didn’t regret having him claim me.

He was the sweetest alpha I’d ever met, and alphas weren’t known to be sweet. They were rare, arrogant, violent, dominant, and strong. Top of the human food chain. People either wanted to be an alpha or be with an alpha. A few months ago, I wanted nothing to do with them. I was an omega, and I’d spent years preventing myself from going into heat and officially transitioning. However, my magic wore off, and I was screwed. My late father, anticipating my predicament, handpicked an alpha pack for me.

Despite his blessings on the pack, I was still in denial and resisted. Being an omega, even more rare than an alpha, was not the best designation in society. We were deemed weak and not useful beyond being great in bed, enhancing the strength of alphas, and being breeders for alphas. Despite the fact that I was a doctor and powerful healing witch, people just saw me as an omega who needed the protection and claiming of an alpha. I was strong. I didn’t need saving. But I did need love...and a family.

I finally realized I needed my alphas in other ways. We were meant for each other. Being claimed lowered the risk of other alphas snatching me off the street or being trafficked. I also had a pack to see me through my seasonal heats. And being claimed also enhanced my own magic, which I was sure was behind my power boost just now.

I foolishly believed that if I was claimed, my guys would relax their overprotectiveness. Then again, my putting up mental walls didn’t help lessen their worry to my whereabouts. I supposed if I hadn’t had my wall up, they would have been here to help me fight. In the mad rush, I forgot about taking my ward down. I was still getting used to things with them.

They had so many rules for me. Even after we’d discovered who had been behind my attacks not that long ago and taken care of them, they kept a tight leash. Elementary school kids got less supervision than me.

I sighed and leaned back in my front passenger seat. “I had to get gas. What did you want me to do? I had to get home.”

Ty sucked his teeth, still crouched down on his toes to face me, and I fought a playful urge to smile. His eyes were heartfelt and kind, and I enjoyed looking into them at eye level, even if he was annoyed with me. He was just so gorgeous. Every part of him. He was the tallest of the guys and had a slimmer build compared to the others, although he was still very toned. This was supposed to be a serious moment but I was getting distracted. “You waited until after you fought to alert us. Lucky for me, Daniel was around, and he teleported us here, but we could have helped.”

I took his hand, which was currently resting on my thigh, and kissed it. “I’m sorry, my love.”

He raised a brow suspiciously. “You’re trying to be sweet, so I don’t stay mad. It won’t work.”

I pouted, but I wasn’t surprised he wouldn’t let it go. They took caring for me very seriously, and I was thankful for that. “I know. I should have called to tell you I was stopping to get gas. And I should have alerted you earlier when the goblins showed up, but I wasn’t thinking. I just knew I had magic, and I had to help those around me. I forgot our connection and to ring you when I’m in danger, but I get it. Things aren’t totally safe. Supernatural crime has been increasing, and I should have been smarter.”

Witches were mostly responsible for keeping the supernatural community in check. My coven was responsible for our town, but the east coast coven, especially ones in the north, were under attack by a mysterious sect of witches and mages that wanted to take over. With our focus on fending off their attacks and eradicating them, lower-level supernatural creatures, like the goblins, were taking full advantage of that distraction and running amok.

He sighed and laced his fingers between mine, his hands warm despite his vampiric state. “It’s understandable what you did.”

“Is it?” Came a deep voice from our left.

I turned to see Daniel Choi casually walk toward us, his hands stuffed in the pockets of his navy pants. He was walking away from a police officer, probably discussing the attacks or helping to kill off some remaining goblins. The handsome fae moved like he was walking a runway, and his style matched. Tonight, he wore a navy-blue three-piece suit. His short, jet-black hair was expectedly styled even though he’d arrived in time to help kick the ass of several more goblins. Yet, he had not a hair out of place, and there were no stains or wrinkles on his clothes. It was a rare sight to see that almost ethereal man look anything other than perfect. Although I knew he used fae

glamour, I still liked the real him as well, flaws and all.

He looked down at me with neutral, dark brown eyes, unnerving me because I couldn't exactly tell how he was feeling. We hadn't bonded yet, and that made him a mystery sometimes.

I lifted a shoulder, giving him a weak smile. "It's hard to remember all the rules sometimes."

He rolled his eyes, adjusting his tie around his neck.

I wasn't a big fan of his eye-rolling. When we first met, everyone except Lance, that was another story, was exceptionally kind to me. Now that I was one of the pack, the honeymoon was over, and they had no problem with letting me know when I annoyed them.

"The rules are there to keep you safe, do try to remember them, princess. It would break us if you got hurt."

He spoke in a careful voice, but the message was clear, and I felt a dull pain in my stomach from the guilt. I didn't want to break them. They'd had enough hurt in their past. A very long time ago, the pack had another omega. As supernatural beings, they'd lived a much longer life than the average human, and that left them with many more years of experience than me since they were older than my thirty years, including heartache. Their first omega was murdered by past enemies when they used to have a more criminal lifestyle. I understood very well their concern for me and the need to prevent the loss of another omega.

I gave him a toothy smile. I didn't want to argue or annoy them. I just wanted to get out of here and go home and eat. My stomach rumbled. "Yes, sir."

He snorted and turned to open the back seat of my car. Since they teleported, we'd all be going home together. "Something tells me you aren't taking this seriously. Back seat," he ordered.

I raised my brows, not liking his tone. "This is my car. I'm driving."

Ty chuckled and stood up, offering me his hand. "No, you aren't, beautiful. You're still healing."

I wanted to say that I was feeling better. Ty's blood worked quickly. *No arguing tonight, Billie, just let it slide. Let the alphas do their thing.* I took his hand and got out of the car.

I looked past Ty to see Lance Fredrickson jog toward us. He was in his fireman's uniform, having accompanied his company when someone called 911. He was the other alpha who I let claim me from the pack. I could see the

determination all over his face and feel the concern, anger, and fear mixed in with Ty's emotions. Their feelings were so strong I could barely think, a dull headache hitting the back of my head. Maybe I wasn't so bothered that I hadn't had everyone claim me yet.

Lance paused in front of me, his large body overshadowing mine, before he grabbed me to him and held me in a tight embrace. And by tight, I mean my ribs could have snapped. I would have loved to inhale his whiskey scent, but my lungs were restricted.

"I can't breathe," I said into his chest, hoping his keen werewolf ears could hear me amongst the commotion around us.

He quickly let me go and assessed me with his ice-blue eyes. "Are you okay?"

I nodded. "Ty fixed me up because I was tapped out of my healing magic. And please don't be mad at me. Danny boy and Tyster are already giving me the third degree."

He dropped his shoulders and looked to Daniel and Ty. Lance was usually the grumpy bear, so I already knew whatever tongue-lashing he had prepared would be especially cutthroat. I crossed my fingers, hoping he would lay off me this once. "Let her have it and get her home safely," he said.

Daniel smirked. "Oh, she will be punished."

Lance grunted. "Good." He then glared at me before turning away and going back to his fire truck.

I wrinkled my brows, perplexed. I was not a child. "I'm a grown-ass woman. We don't do punishment over here."

Daniel tilted his head to the side but didn't say a word, a patient smile on his lips. What the hell did that mean? I was kind of scared.

"I'm injured, remember?" I gave him what I hoped were wide doe eyes. "Also, I'm a mess."

He snapped his fingers, and I was devoid of any green goblin slime. I looked over my shoulder. Even my coat was brand new. Fae magic was cool. I looked back to Daniel with a grateful smile, but he was having none of it.

He raised an expectant eyebrow and motioned his head for me to get in the back seat. I eyed him leerily but did as he implied and moved to the back seat. Daniel closed the door and rounded to the other side. I frowned. What was this about?

Daniel opened the back passenger side door while Ty got in the driver's

seat. “What is he, our chauffeur?” I cracked, slightly nervous.

Neither man spoke as Ty drove away from the crime scene.

I cleared my throat. Someone was in trouble, and I was pretty sure it was me. I really didn’t like having my alphas angry with me. “Tough crowd.”

Daniel turned slightly to me, giving me a deceptively lazy smile. He slid over next to me, and I inhaled his eucalyptus scent. My body began to tingle despite my curious position with him.

He reached over and grabbed a lock of my curls, rubbing them gently between his index and thumb as if they were a newly discovered find. “Let’s recount, princess, all the times you disobeyed us, shall we?”

Alphas really ran on a power trip. All that talk while they were courting me made me believe we’d be partners. Now I got the switch up. I was bamboozled. I should have been mad, but there was something about the way Daniel spoke to me, the baritone of his voice gliding over me like warm water, that really buzzed my core. Was this my kink? Did I like him getting all dominant with me?

I batted my lashes. “I wouldn’t exactly call it disobeying. More like a momentary bout of forgetfulness, but okay.”

I heard Ty snort from the front, but he didn’t say anything else.

Daniel removed his hand and ran a finger slowly down my arm as he spoke. “You go out with Lila one night and take separate ride shares home instead of having us pick you up. You’ve gone on detours more than once when you were to come straight home without so much as a call.” His hand lowered to the hem of my knee-length skirt, inching his hand up my thigh. “You left the house to go for a jog and told no one where you were going. You rarely do the text check-ins.”

His fingers slipped under my skirt, stopping at the edges of my panties. I shivered at his touch. If this was his punishment, I liked where it was going. “In my defense, it’s a lot of rules you guys gave me, and it’s hard to remember them all. I was a single girl before. Now, I’m an omega with a bunch of overprotective alphas bossing me around.”

Daniel leaned into me, pressing his hard chest into my arm. He slipped two fingers inside the side of my panties, fingers a feather touch over my mound. I sucked in a breath and spread my legs, hoping for more. “Is that what we are? Bossy?” he whispered, his breath a tickle on my neck.

“Yes,” I breathed out.

His fingers traced over the folds of my pussy at a languid pace, and I

squirmed under his touch. “Stay still,” he directed, an echo in his voice.

Crap, he was using his alpha voice, and because I was an omega, my body would naturally obey any of his orders if I didn’t have a spell to prevent such control. I did not use a spell, and my body listened. I growled in annoyance.

He responded with a chuckle, his finger now gliding over my clit in a circular motion. I bit my lower lip almost hard enough to draw blood; my center was already starting to slick into my cotton undies.

“These are dangerous times, princess. It wasn’t that long ago that a witch put a bounty on you in the demon world for your capture. We have to make sure everyone got the message to back down. Not to mention that with your coven fighting with that dark mage sect, you have to watch your back. You’ve taken more of an active role in your coven, and everyone knows you’re an omega. Does it make sense why we would have these rules?”

He slipped a finger inside me, his thumb rubbing against my clit. I was efficiently a pool of slick now. It didn’t take much, and omegas got very wet. I was no exception. We’d have to clean the leather seat.

I could hear Ty suck in a deep breath, his hands gripping so tightly to the wheel, his brown knuckles became ashen. “Fuck, she smells so good,” he groaned.

Daniel removed his finger, and I could have cursed. He stuck his index finger in his mouth, closing his eyes. “She tastes good, too. I love that caramel flavor.”

Did I mention omegas and alphas had unique scents and flavors? Even regular beta beings could sense them. I preened under their excitement for my flavor. Hey, a girl liked a compliment.

He moved his fingers back to my pussy to continue his ministrations, and I tossed my head back, body still frozen under his command.

“So, Billie,” he began. “Will you behave and do as we ask?”

I sighed, barely able to concentrate on his words. “Can’t we compromise on some things?”

He tsk-tsked, increasing his rubbing on my clit, two fingers deep in me now, moving in a come-hither motion. “Absolutely not. Not while the threats are still so high. You seem to still not have a true appreciation of the stakes.”

My thighs shook with the impending need to come, frustrated that I could not move to meet the thrust of his fingers and grind of his thumb. I definitely had an understanding of the situation. I just wasn’t fond of living under their

strict rules. Not to mention, I honestly just was crap at remembering. I did try.

I clenched my teeth. "Can I move now?"

Daniel flashed a bit of teeth, knowing he was getting to me. "No."

Jerk. "Why do you have to use your alpha voice on me?"

He kissed me lightly on the cheek as if that would make everything better. With his fingers moving in and out of me, I didn't care what he did as long as he didn't stop.

"Because you are a stubborn princess," he replied. "Now, recite the rules."

I grumbled. "Are you serious?"

He paused his movements. Crap, I saw where this was going. "Fine. I must check in via text when I arrive to work, go on lunch, and leave work for the day."

He slowly moved his fingers again, and I whined in happiness as my pussy throbbed for him. "Continue."

"If I'm going to be late or take a detour, I also have to text or call. If I'm going for a walk or jog, I have to send my route. If I go out with friends, we have to share a ride share, and I have to send you my ride information."

He increased his speed against my clit, and I sucked in a breath, feeling more of my slick drench my thighs. My nerves pulsated in fiery desire. I was definitely going to come soon. I could hear Ty in the front groan, and I knew we were turning him on. I hadn't blocked our connection so he could feel everything I was feeling. That was an interesting bonus to being claimed. When I was in pain, he was in pain. And when I felt pleasure, he felt it too. And I was sure Lance was feeling it, assuming he hadn't blocked me mentally, which would probably be the right thing to do since he was working. It was a good thing we were on the road to our house, only a few minutes away.

"Go on," Daniel ordered, breaking my thoughts.

And yes, there were more rules, boys and girls. "No going anywhere at night alone. If I sense trouble at any time, alert Lance or Ty telepathically. I think that's everything."

It better be because, at that moment, I wanted to come off my seat with ecstasy. Daniel's smooth, long fingers handled me expertly, pressing against my inner spot while manipulating my clit. I tossed my head back and practically hyperventilated as I reached closer and closer to my peak.

“That’s it. See, you do know all the rules. Will you follow them all from now on?”

Shit, if he told me to follow him off a cliff, at that moment, I would probably say yes. “Yes, I’ll do my best.”

“Ah, such a good girl,” he replied in a long drawl that melted my whole entire body.

And just like that, I came, exploding in a body-shaking orgasm right on his hand in front of Ty and everyone nosy enough to look in my back seat.

Ty swerved to the side and stopped the car, his body trembling as he let out a string of expletives, pressing his head against the steering wheel. Clearly, he was feeling my orgasm. Normal Ty was composed and the kind of guy you took home to meet the parents. Sexy time Ty was a mess of nasty. And I loved it.

I smiled at both of my guys, satisfied. “Was that my punishment? I kind of liked it. Next time I-”

Daniel leaned in and claimed my mouth with his, forcing his tongue to meet mine in a dance. And just as quickly, he released me, removing his fingers from my panties. “There won’t be a next time. And if there is, you won’t be orgasming for a very long time.” His eyes were determined, flashing the glowing blue of his true fae eyes.

Welp, that will do it. I believed him. Not all rules were meant to be broken.

CHAPTER 2



BILLIE

Once we got home, I ran up the stairs to shower. I was hungry, but I really needed to change. Living in a house full of men, my room had become my sanctuary. It was one of the biggest, and they had done a fabulous job of making it just right for me. The whole house was nice. Five bedrooms and a guest room in the basement, otherwise known as their man cave. There was also a pool, a pool house, a hot tub and sauna, and a small basketball court.

However, my room, located on the top floor of the four-story home, was the best part. It was bright, with a large king bed and desk on one side and a couch and TV area on another side. I also had a huge closet and my own ensuite bathroom. I didn't think it would feel like home, but they'd done everything they could to make me comfortable.

Although I had my own space, I rarely spent a night alone. I rotated to each guy's room or having them in mine. It was odd, but after this short time, it was a challenge sleeping alone. Despite the rules, I knew the guys meant well, and they cared about me. To be so cherished was a wonderful thing. I complained about the tight reign, but I knew it wouldn't be like this always. I also knew that if I really hated it, they would compromise. They were bossy alphas, but they weren't my masters.

Turns out, my father had really done an excellent job of picking the right pack for me before he passed. I could only kick myself for not realizing it sooner. I'd have saved a lot of time and anguish. Still, a girl had to learn things for herself. I looked over to my bedside table at a picture of my dad and me, taken only a few years ago. I still couldn't believe he was gone. It felt surreal. We'd lost my mother when I was young and had become very

close. He was a powerful witch and leader in my coven. It felt wrong for someone as magical as him to succumb to cancer. But it was supernatural in its origin, and there was only so much we could do. I was prepared for his death, but emotionally, I was still gutted.

Time made the grief manageable, but it didn't erase it. Especially when I recalled a memory, a movie, a song that reminded me of him. Then when I faced problems, my dad was always the person I called for help. I couldn't do that now. Some days I felt a little lost. I knew I was strong enough to move about the world independently. I could make my own decisions, but the comfort I got from leaning on my father as a sounding board was immeasurable.

For a long time, it was my dad and my bestie Lila Ramirez. Just when I lost him, I'd found the guys. Well, the fourth member of the pack, the incubus demon Kai, had broken into my apartment. However, Dad had met the guys and vetted them first and still found them to be fitting, even though they had questionable behavior, like essentially stalking me before actually meeting me. Still, my dad saw something in them that opened me up to realize that they could be my support as well. I just had to know which guy to chat with about what issue. Daniel was good for career advice. Ty was great with financial advice. Lance with health and fitness and Kai with positive mindsets when I was feeling down.

They were a handful, but I loved them. I still proceeded with caution when getting claimed. It was a lot, mixing souls, essentially with another person, and I had done it with two of them. Two very complex people. Ty was sweet, but he'd fought inner turmoil from watching their first omega die and not being able to save her. He'd taken some dark paths, and sometimes, I felt that darkness in him.

Lance was tightly wound 80% of the time, and his mind and emotions could be pure chaos, especially around a full moon. It could be draining. I wanted all my guys to claim me, but I still needed to practice managing the bonds I already had. I was a newbie, and they were rusty.

I heard a knock at my door, bringing me back to the present. I already smelled his gingerbread and honey scent before turning around. Ty leaned against the door frame and gave a short wave. He really was adorable. He even had dimples when he smiled.

"Hey, cutie," I said, walking over to my dresser and pulling out some undergarments.

He raced over to me, my hair blowing against my neck at the wind caused by his speed. He pressed up against me, and I could feel that he was semi-hard. I guessed he was still turned on by that alleged punishment I received. He moved my hair to the side and kissed my neck, sending a shiver through me. “Still want to go see Kai?”

It was a Friday night, and although the day had taken its toll, I had been looking forward to seeing Kai work at his bar. When I first met him, he was the only guy in the pack not working, living off the group’s many investments from a hundred years or more of being alive. Then he decided to go back to work less than a month ago.

He’d had a bar he owned as a sort of silent partner and decided he now wanted to bartend there too. He was great at making drinks, and he liked talking to people. It felt like the right fit. I’d only gone once to see him. Tonight was their karaoke night. Only Ty was coming because Lance was still at his shift, and Dan had to go back to the restaurant he owned.

I rested against his chest. “Yup, let me take a shower and grab a bite. I had a headache earlier, but it’s gone, and your bond is energizing me.”

“That’s what I’m here for, beautiful. We have time. Karaoke doesn’t start until eight. I just came to check in on you. I know a lot’s going on, and we give you a hard time, but you did well tonight. You took out a lot of goblins on your own, and that wasn’t a small feat.”

I beamed from his compliment. I was glad someone else finally said something. I was not a trained fighter. My magic was mainly honed in the art of healing. Of course, since my kidnapping, I’d been doing more self-defense training. Not to mention that an omega and alpha bond was a very cool power boost. I wasn’t practiced in killing off goblins, but I was pretty confident that if that attack had happened a few months ago, I wouldn’t have killed as many as I had.

He brushed his hand down my hair. “You’re capable. You always were. I know we get over-protective. We just love you.”

Heart squeeze.

I turned around and buried my head in his chest to take in more of his smell. I was hopelessly falling in love with this man. With them all.

“Is Lila back yet?” he asked, wrapping his arms around me.

I really wanted to call my bestie. I needed to recap her on the evening’s events, and I had to report the incident to the coven, as was required whenever one of us was attacked. Crap, I forgot she was off the grid on some

solo trip. All I had from her was a text that she was going away to meditate and think about life.

I wanted to pretend that I didn't understand, but I knew she was feeling a little out of sorts now that I was an omega with a pack. They were admittedly taking much of my time. I was a crap friend. I tried to balance it all, but everything was such a challenge. When Lila came back, I was going to take her out for a spa day. Hopefully, I didn't have to break any rules to do it.

"No, she's still off doing her self-care, so it's just us two tonight."

He kissed the top of my head. "A few writer friends might be there too. When it comes to karaoke, the more the merrier."

"You have friends?" I cracked.

He tapped my ass. "Crazy, right? Did you want to shower alone?"

I pulled away from him and grabbed the bottom of his shirt, slowly walking us to my bathroom. "Not tonight."



KAI

"What'll it be?" I asked, giving the woman at the bar my best playboy grin.

She bit her lower lip seductively and batted her false lashes at me. "What would you recommend?" she asked, flipping her long blonde hair over her shoulder. She leaned into the bar counter, giving me a view of her ample cleavage spilling from her low-cut white top. Her name was Grace, and she had become a regular since I started. Tonight, she was with two friends who danced to the music played by the DJ before karaoke began, which would be any minute.

Several months ago, I might have seen her obvious interest and played upon it. I was an incubus demon, and the possibility of a hookup was my weakness. After all, sex and intimacy were where I grew my strength.

However, now, nothing about her tempted me. All I wanted to do was see my omega, and if I hadn't known she'd be coming tonight, I would have left work early. Damn, this job. Whose idea was it again to work for a living? Ah,

yes, I wanted to appear useful and productive for Billie. I couldn't be the unemployed bastard while the rest of the pack worked, including her.

"You like sweet drinks, right?" I asked, already backing away to get the liquor to make her a French martini.

She winked at me. "You know me so well. Make three, please."

I gave her a salute and quickly did the work of making them their drinks. We were moderately busy tonight on the top floor. The bar was two levels and located in the Fell's Point area, not too far from the harbor. The first floor held our live music events and was more of a sit-down with a separate bar. It would be the busiest tonight. I was on the top floor that night, helping to work the second bar. The space was wide, with seating located around the perimeter of the room and a small stage for the DJ and karaoke performance near the stairs and across the room from the bar. After the karaoke set, the floor would be filled with dancing. It would be a long night.

When I turned back to the bar with their drinks, one of the women, a brunette wearing an equally tight red dress, gazed up at me with eyes wide. "I like your horns," she called out.

I gave her a nod of thanks. Sometimes, I went out into the world using magic to hide my incubus form. People got very nervous around demons, and the laws were not the friendliest to us. We didn't have as many rights as others, humans and non-humans. In fact, demons typically required exemptions to move around freely. I'd been alive for a few centuries but never freely. I was always connected to someone else. Even now, Daniel is my sponsor of sorts. Once Billie became my official mate through our claiming, I would finally have my freedom. I never said that to her. The last thing I wanted was to pressure her or have her doubt that my need for her came from anything but my love. Until then, I lived a good life.

Also, demons were assholes. It wasn't shocking that we weren't so free. 75%, probably more, were murderous and deceptive.

The brunette reached out a hand in my direction. "Can I touch them?"

I quickly backed away. "No, sweetheart. A demon's horns are very sensitive."

She raised her brows. "Ooh, how sensitive?"

Grace bumped her with her hip, giggling. "I heard if you rub them, it can be a turn-on. Kind of like..." She trailed off and pointed below her waist.

Really, was this my life?

The brunette sighed. "But they're so cute and small. I'm sure it has

nothing to do with your size since you are an incubus demon and an alpha.”

Damn, right. Horn size had nothing to do with dick size. I puffed out my chest, annoyed by the whole conversation.

Grace eyed me up and down slowly, and I could practically read her mind full of sexual thoughts. “I barely flirt with anyone like some of the others. I heard you have an omega. Guessing it’s not an open arrangement?”

There were omega and alpha pairings that were more business-like, with each party fulfilling the needs of the others but no romance. This was far from our case.

I gave a nonchalant shrug. “Sorry, ladies.” I was very much not apologetic. “My heart is taken.”

The brunette pouted. “Lucky girl.”

I caught a whiff of sweet cream and caramel and looked to the entrance to see Billie and Ty enter. An omega smell, like an alpha scent, was hard to ignore, even if you were a beta. She looked as beautiful as always, her coily brown hair framed her face like rays of sun around her rich complexion. She was dressed in black leather stretch pants and an off-the-shoulder black sweater, her exposed skin practically shimmering under the bar lights. She caught my gaze, and her doe-like eyes beamed, a smile spreading across her full lips. Yeah, this woman had my heart in the palm of her hand. She was my light, and I was perfectly fine with bending my knees to her. “I’m the lucky one.”

The pair moved through the crowd, heading my way. “Excuse me, ladies.” I said, still keeping my eyes on her before eventually turning away to prepare drinks for Billie and Ty.

She liked an old fashioned, and Ty would want a whiskey neat. When I turned back to the bar, they were squished right behind the women. Billie gave a tiny wave. I wanted to jump the bar and collect her in my arms.

“Hey, kitty cat,” I called out, passing her the old fashioned. I gave Ty his drink next, and he gave an appreciative nod.

“Thanks, love,” she replied.

Grace and her friends turned slightly to assess Billie with curious eyes. “Is this her?” Grace asked.

“The one and only, Billie,” I responded with pride.

The brunette leaned forward. “I like your name.”

The other friend, who hadn’t spoken up yet, gave a quick nod of agreement. “You’re very lucky to be an omega.”

Billie gave an awkward chuckle. We knew all too well about her struggle to accept her status. Such a statement wouldn't be a compliment.

Grace moved to face Billie fully, her eyes less friendly than her friends. "I bet they spoil you rotten. You better be treating our Kai well. He's got a fan base here. I hope you aren't worried about that."

Billie gave her cool eyes. I'd never seen her jealous or possessive, until now. She placed a hand over mine. "I sleep just fine at night with him here. I know what we have."

She was a class act. Better than me.

Grace shrugged and walked away, her friends trailing after her.

Billie rolled her eyes and glared at me. I raised my hands in surrender. "What?"

"Stop looking so sexy all the damn time."

I chuckled. "I can't help it, it's in my nature, love. But I'm respectful, always. Please tell me you were a bit jealous. It'll feed my ego."

Ty groaned and tossed me an annoyed look. Maybe I sounded a little desperate to him, but he wasn't the one still without a claim to Billie. They were connected in every way now. I wasn't bitter that she hadn't chosen me first, even though I met her before anyone else. Okay, I was very jealous. The lucky bastard. And I still couldn't get over her allowing that grumpy fart, Lance, to claim her second.

Billie leaned into the bar and crooked her finger at me. I silently moved closer to her, and she quickly kissed me on the lips, licking my mouth before moving back. And just that tiny bit of contact made my dick twitch. How was I going to concentrate for the night?

She gave me a cheesy grin that looked adorable. "Yes, I was jealous. Seeing them made me want to scratch their eyes out. Especially that one in the white top. She seems too familiar with you."

"Sorry, kitty cat. I'll tell her to keep away."

She waved a hand at me, picking up her drink. "No, don't do that. I don't want my pettiness to mess with your money. I just get possessive with you." She frowned, seemingly upset. "That's not like me, but I blame you guys for that."

I chuckled. "Sorry, not sorry."

Ty looked around. "I'm going to grab a table before it gets too busy. I have some friends coming tonight."

I raised my brows in surprise. "You have friends?"

He flipped me off and walked away.

“Aww, he loves me,” I commented, unbothered.

Billie giggled. “Why does he act like we shouldn’t be shocked? He’s practically a hermit.”

I looked up and down the bar, seeing that things had slowed down. I wasn’t the only one working the upstairs bar, so I could relax a bit. Billie sat on a stool and looked at me with expectant eyes, not saying anything. She was waiting for me to talk about what happened to her. I already knew the others had fussed at her about going on her unplanned detour or calling for help sooner. I wasn’t going to give her another round. Instead, I had more pressing issues on my mind.

“What did your coven say about the attack?” I asked.

She let out a breath. “They’re working with the police to find the goblin lair. It’s unusual for goblins to attack like that in a city.”

“And in a crowded area and not late. It’s weird. They had to have known they wouldn’t accomplish much. Goblins are the worst.”

She seesawed her hand and scrunched her face. “Not the worst, but certainly a nuisance.”

I crossed my arms, mind wondering. The witch wars had an effect in the underworld. Everyone picked sides, and there were allies. Demons were notorious for getting into the affairs of humans, and if it was powerful humans, they were especially invested. I had no doubt that the dark mages were getting friendly with some nasty beings.

“You consider this might not have been a random attack?”

Billie looked down at her drink, considering my words. Ever since her attacks and kidnapping, she’d taken more of an active role in her coven. Not to mention she was the daughter of a former high-ranking wizard, and she was an omega who happened to be part of a pack that had our own reputation. And if you added in her best friend, Lila, taking out a dark mage a week ago in an attack on a nearby business, Billie wasn’t a presence to ignore.

“I wouldn’t be surprised. I just didn’t think I was high on the priority list.”

I clicked my tongue. “You continue to underestimate yourself. You don’t fight regularly, but when you do, you pack a punch. If this sect got a hold of you, that would be a win for them. They could have also been testing your power. From what I heard, you took out a bunch of goblins in one go. If

they're going to fuck with you, they needed to know the risk."

She gave a slow nod of understanding. "I showed them the risk."

"That you did." And I didn't like it. They were going to keep testing her or worse, make a grab for her. I'd kept my feelers out in the underworld to try to locate this group or any of their leaders, but they kept their identities very well hidden. The few that had been found out had gone into hiding. They were attacking the upper east coast. For all we knew, their base could be in Maryland or Massachusetts. They most likely had cells in numerous places. I just needed the leaders out. Once they were gone, the rest would be easy. They couldn't have been larger than all the east coast covens combined. Hell, even if they were, the coven was connected to a larger coven worldwide with a high priestess. Were they big enough to fight the highest-ranking, largest magical community? Perhaps it was time to strengthen the rules we'd given Billie.

She would love it.

She narrowed her eyes at me and then pointed, as if reading my eyes. "Don't you dare suggest I go back to the bodyguard thing. I'll follow your rules. I promised Daniel after my punishment."

I cocked a brow, curious. Daniel was never the punisher of our group. Back in the day, when we led a more criminal lifestyle, Daniel was our leader. I was a scout, he planned, Lance was the fighter, and Ty was the one who made sure we grew our wealth with our spoils. If anyone had to do the punishing, it was Lance. Daniel was too much of a pretty boy to get his hands dirty. He was the good cop, while Lance was the bad cop.

"What kind of punishment?"

She pressed her lips tightly together and sipped her drink.

She didn't have to say anything. I already had an idea just by her expression. "That wasn't a damn punishment if you liked it. I will quit this job and follow you around like I'm your new shadow if you break another rule. I will chain you to me and make things very uncomfortable for you."

She leaned back, dropping her shoulders. She was taking my threat very seriously because she knew I was true to my word. I could joke around, but I was serious about keeping my omega safe. We would not lose her.

"What if I have to go to the bathroom?"

I smirked. "That would be the uncomfortable part. More so when I have to go than you."

She stuck her tongue out at me. She was being a brat. Perhaps she wasn't

taking me seriously.

Hmm, lessons had to be learned. I snapped my fingers, and suddenly we were shackled together by the wrists, a long chain connecting us.

She swore, looking down at her left hand. "You gotta be fucking kidding me."

I lifted my hand, which caused her to lean forward. "Clearly, I'm not."

"How are you going to make drinks?"

"Carefully."

"What if I want to sing?"

I smirked. "We'll sing together. I'm partial to 80's rock."

She growled and yanked the chain back, but she wasn't as physically strong as me, so I did not budge. "You really like taking things too far."

"And you enjoy being stubborn."

She gave me a wide grin, batting her lashes. "I was just playing."

I twisted my lips. "No, you weren't."

Ty walked over to us. "So, my friends are here^¾why are you two chained together?"

I puffed out my chest. "I'm teaching her a lesson."

Ty looked back and forth between us, scratching his chin. "This doesn't look good."

I looked over to the other bartender, a woman named Patrice. "Hey Pat, you got this for a little bit? I'm going to the office."

She gave me a curt nod. It would be slow for the next hour until the more intoxicated crowd came in to sing or eventually dance.

I hopped over the bar and grabbed Billie's drink. "Come with me, my pet."

She kicked her leg out at me but didn't connect. "I will fuck you up if you ever call me that again."

I gave her a playful shudder. "Ooh, and what will fucking me look like?"

"Don't play with me. I said fuck you up."

I flicked my pierced tongue out at her. "Same thing."

I started to move, gently pushing her back so she would move too. "Be back, Ty."

She glared up at me. "Why are we going to your office?"

"Because what I'm going to do to you shouldn't be done in public."

Her eyes widened, and she looked ever so slightly nervous. I grinned. Good. It was time she got a little scared of me.

CHAPTER 3



BILLIE

*K*ai was scary.
To others, not to me.

Well, there was our first meeting when he broke into my house, and he was in his demon form, standing in the dark so, yeah, he scared me then. However, now I had ultimate faith and trust in Kai. I loved his incubus look.

His glowing red eyes were hypnotic, and the red, vein-like lines that crisscrossed his body were beautiful against his tanned skin. He was adorned in piercings and tattoos that were mesmerizing to my eyes. The toned cuts of his skin drew my fingers to him like magnets. His collarbone length, black hair, typically pulled back in a ponytail, was out tonight, and the short black horns protruded from his head like a crown.

When he was actively seeking to seduce people to take their sexual energy, he could change to fit that person's desires. Currently, I was the one who gave him energy, and I craved his look. Because I was an omega and he an alpha, the energy exchange was not taxing. I knew it would be even better when he claimed me.

Kai opened the door to his office, which was located down a dark hallway past the bathrooms. He flipped the lights before closing the door and turning to me, face in a scowl. The walls were a dark gray, so the lights didn't do much to brighten the space, and there wasn't a window. "You're looking at me like you want to fuck me."

I smiled. "Maybe I do."

He crossed his arms, and I stumbled forward, the length of the chain shortening. "You just don't want me angry with you."

I huffed, annoyed. Of course, I didn't. They'd sold me on the deal that

they were going to treat me like a queen. I felt more like a child. “I’ve been bamboozled. You guys are mean to me.”

He snorted. “We spoil you rotten. Why are you being a brat?”

Ok, he was right. I was treated like royalty. If I chose not to work, they’d take care of me and not complain or ask for anything. It kind of felt unfair, and I wasn’t the type to take advantage of anyone. Still, I liked to joke around with Kai. He gave good banter. But right now, he looked hella serious, and I needed to read the room.

I cleared my throat. “I won’t break any more rules. Today was a reminder to take things very seriously. In fact, maybe we should move Lila in again when she gets back. She’s just as much in danger. Her ice magic is a beast, and I know she pissed that group off by taking out one of theirs.” I loved Lila. She was like a sister but having her in the house would be a nightmare for her.

Kai grumbled. “She would hate that.”

“Yeah, she would, but safety first.”

He tilted his head, red eyes almost turning into pools of fire. Like I said, scary. “Oh, now you care about safety.”

I gulped. I had really pissed these guys off. Ok, it was time to make more of an effort. “I told Daniel I would do better, and I will, especially if there is a possibility that tonight’s attack was purposeful. I’m not reckless. I just pretend really well.” I beamed up at him, hoping he would chill.

Instead, he walked to his black leather couch to the right of the door and across from a desk and chair, dragging me behind him. He sat down, and I sat beside him, not really having a choice.

He scrunched his face as if I had offended him and then grabbed me by the waist, lifting me up and onto his lap so that I was straddling him.

“Seriously?” I exclaimed, weakly pushing at his chest.

Despite my protesting, I enjoyed the feel of his toned thighs between my legs. The heat from his body wrapped around me like a warm blanket. Being closer to him, I reveled in his earthy cinnamon scent.

His hands stayed at my waist. “Have you ever encountered a dark mage before?”

I shook my head. My father had sheltered me from as much darkness in the world as possible. At least the magical kind. He’d trained me well, but it wasn’t until recently that I had to put my training into action. “I know enough to know I don’t want to be ruled by them. The high coven has some

problematic rules, but there is nothing good about dark mages. Human sacrifice, demon summoning, soul shifting...I don't want it."

Kai tilted his head back slightly, his eyes giving off a faraway look as if he were remembering something. His fingers tensed but not painfully so. Whatever he was thinking about, it wasn't good. "I've dealt with them. This group might be different from what I encountered, but at their core, they are all the same. Anyone willing to use underworldly magic has motivations you don't want ruling you. They are as bad as most demons."

I wanted to ask him more about his past but didn't feel now, when he was technically working, was the right time. I'd tried to get more information about their past lives before, but they were still so selective. Every member of my pack had a darkness in their pasts. They tried their best to hide it. Ty, with a comforting disposition. Daniel, with his sophistication as if he was always 'on.' Lance, with his wall, one I found challenging to break down at the start. And Kai with his jokes. It wasn't surprising since they'd lived so many years, but I was not equipped to understand their pain. It didn't mean I wouldn't give my all to comfort them. I was an omega, after all.

I ran my fingers over his scalp, massaging him through this thick mane of hair. Instantly, his body began to relax.

"If we were mates, maybe I would be less angry. And it would be added protection," he muttered, dropping his head so that I could better scratch his scalp.

Of course, he would throw me not letting him claim me yet in my face. I wanted him as my mate. I just needed to control the connections better. I was woefully inexperienced as an omega, and mating with magical beings was a different playing field. "Soon."

He pumped his hips up toward my core, and I gasped at the contact, feeling the length of him. "If you were in trouble, I could teleport to you quickly as your mate. You picked the two guys in our pack who don't have teleportation magic. It's an inconvenience."

He was right, but it wasn't like I was thinking strategically when I agreed to my claimings. I ground down on him, feeling fortunate that I decided to wear leather stretch pants instead of jeans tonight so I could feel more of him. "I'm sorry, Kai. But I need you to know that I choose you. Always."

He lifted his head and sucked in a breath, closing his eyes. "Say that again."

I smiled, touched by his vulnerability. I kissed him on both cheeks, his

skin smooth and warm. "I choose you."

I ran my hands up to his horns, stroking the hardness of them slowly. He shuddered beneath me. Horns were a sensitive area for demons, and depending on how you touched them, they could elicit just the right response. He'd told me he was very particular about anyone touching them.

"Grip them harder, please, and thank you," he whispered in a low voice.

I did as he requested and was rewarded with the sound of his alpha purr. Never would I have dreamed that hearing someone make a sound similar to a lion's purr would make my neither region ignite.

I increased my pace, enjoying his reaction to me. His long, thin black tail stroked my spine slowly, causing me to arch my back from the tickle. He ground me against him, and now I could feel him growing harder, my pussy dampening against the connection.

"I can't come in my pants. I have to work," he said in a tight voice.

I removed my chained hand from one of his horns and wiggled it. "Set me free."

He gave me a skeptical look. Did he actually think we were going to stay like this?

"I like you chained to me."

I huffed. "I need to take off my pants, and you need to take yours off too, because I want you in me right now."

He tilted his head to the side with a lazy smile. He then snapped his fingers, and instantly we were both without pants and underwear. Gotta love that magic.

I looked down at his rock-hard length. It was smooth, pierced on the underside, and already dripping with precum. I grabbed his hardness and began to pump with one hand, matching the pace I had with the other hand still on one of his horns.

"Fuck," he called before forcing his hand under my blouse and bra, tweaking one of my nipples.

I sucked in a breath, the feel of his fingers bringing my simmering heat to a tingling boil. I rubbed my soaking slit over his length, crying out as my clit found the right angle.

Beautiful, Ty called in my head. Would you mind blocking your mind? You're driving me out of my head right now, and I'd like to not cum in front of all these good people.

I'm on duty, Lance's voice boomed in my head. This is the third time

tonight. You are killing me, woman.

I shrugged in apology, although I knew neither could see me. “Sorry,” I said aloud.

Kai widened his eyes. “Are they feeling this?”

I nodded. “I need to pause and close my mind.” Turning the connection on and off was getting easier, but I still hadn’t mastered it yet.

“Tell Ty to join the party,” Kai suggested. “And make the wolf suffer.”

I wouldn’t do that to Lance. I’d hate to be the cause of any distraction while he was out there saving lives.

I stopped moving against Kai, and he groaned in displeasure. *Come back here, Ty. Lance, I’ll shut my mind off now. I’ll make it up to you.*

Lance grumbled a response, but I knew he’d get over it. I lowered my head, building a wall in my mind. It felt as if something snapped in the back of my head. I didn’t like being cut off from Lance. It made me feel mildly itchy even if, at times, the connection was overwhelming.

Kai brought my attention back to him by lifting me up and lowering me back down onto him. I cried out at the feel of him inside of me, the delicious stretch, the feel of his cool piercings rubbing against my inner walls.

The door opened behind us, and I already smelled Ty’s scent filling the room. I kept my eyes on Kai as he pumped up into me, and I lowered to meet his thrust. I heard Ty close the door, and he moved to us with lightning speed, still fully clothed.

My mind was equally in a pleasure-filled fog, my orgasm within reach. I yanked a hand out at the top of Ty’s jeans before looking up at his face. His brown eyes were already a lust-filled glaze, mouth slightly ajar. Without me having to spell it out, he unzipped his jeans and immediately took out his dick. My eyes lit up like I was getting a present, and I wasted no time grabbing him and pumping him.

My coordination was off as I rode Kai, and he took over, slamming himself up into me until just before his alpha knot entered me. The knot is a wide nodule-like area right before the sack at the base of the penis. The point was to connect us for breeding. Even if we weren’t planning to try for kids, the primitive instinct was to still lock. I doubt he’d put it in me tonight because we’d be locked together for a while until he deflated, and we were on limited time. This was fine with me; my body was already simmering all over.

I could not only feel the fullness of Kai inside of me, gliding over every

wall, but I could telepathically feel the pleasure I was giving Ty. And Ty was feeling both our pleasures as well. It was hard to separate what feeling was coming from where. I just felt an all-consuming mass of ecstasy. My vision clouded, nerves loosened.

I took Ty into my mouth, twirling my tongue around his member as I moved as far down him as I could and back, squeezing the base of him as I did. He pushed into the feeling, eyes fluttering closed. I could already taste the essence of him in the back of my throat. Even if I didn't know what he was feeling, I could tell he was close to coming, and so was I. I loved the intensity.

Kai tightened his hold on my hips. "Kitty cat, I'm going to explode. Release Ty for a second," he ordered through grounded teeth.

I quickly obeyed, not wanting to stand in the way of my man and his orgasm. He quickened his pumps into me, stabbing against my g-spot and ripping a cry from my throat. I continued to fist Ty as he thrust his hips, the sight of him totally at my control excited me. I tightened round Kai, and he shouted an expletive before letting go in a shaking orgasm. I felt his hot seed fire into me, tickling my core. Grinding my teeth, legs tensing, I pulled onto Ty faster and faster. Soon, my orgasm tore from me, and I tossed my head back, riding my climax. Kai supported my back as I shook on top of him.

I didn't have long to come down from my high because I could hear Ty increase his breathing. I quickly wrapped my mouth around him and began to suck again, pumping at his base.

"Fuck, this is turning me on," Kai sighed.

I could feel him still hard inside me. He was an incubus and could go for hours. We'd swapped energy many times when having sex, but I would give him some tonight. I pushed at his chest as I grinded back and forth on him, pouring my power into him. He arched his back, digging his claws into me, but I liked the slight nip of pain. I reveled in the sight of him soaking in my energy. His eyes closed, full mouth open, and body almost spasming under me. His dick began to twirl inside of me. It made no logical sense, but again, demon dick was different. He was better than any toy I'd ever had, and I would be coming again.

"I'm gonna come," Ty shouted, and seconds later, I felt the heat of his release hit the back of my throat. Rope after rope of his seed filled my mouth faster than I could swallow. Cum dribbled down my chin.

"I'm sorry," he said, still shuddering inside my mouth.

I released him, swallowing the taste of him. He really was a teddy bear. “Don’t apologize—” I bit my own words off with a scream as Kai’s dick sped faster and faster inside me, his hand rubbing perfectly on my clit. Moments later, I was another wet mess of ecstasy, seeping over his thighs and onto his couch. I’d have to say a spell to clean this up.

I slumped my shoulders, spent, but Kai tsk-tsked before wrapping his arms around me and thrusting up again in rapid succession. I almost went cross-eyed with the feel of him hard inside me, moving deeper as my clit rubbed against his groin. He came quickly again and somehow, so did I. I would have to lay on that couch and regain movement of my lower extremities because right now, I was a jumble of numb nerves.

Kai’s tail continued to run up and down my back as Ty collapsed down beside us. I was exhausted and just wanted a nap.

“Aww, did I wear my kitty cat out?” Kai purred, kissing the side of my head.

I nodded, snuggling tighter to him.

“Do you want me to take you home?” Ty asked before kissing my shoulder.

I shifted to look at him. He still looked a bit dazed, and his penis was still out, covered in my spit and his cum. I moved to touch it, and he playfully batted my hand away. “Ms. Bellamy, if you touch me again, we won’t leave this room.”

I pouted but agreed. “Well, I don’t want to go home. I want to meet these alleged friends of yours.”

Kai wiggled. “Me too. I like to play make believe.”

He scowled. “You two are rude, and I don’t like you.”

Kai snorted. “You love us. We have a strong bromance going on, and I’m not letting you walk away.”

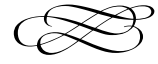
I absolutely adored Kai and Ty’s friendship. They were the closest to each other and seemed the perfect balance. Kai, the extroverted show-off, and Ty, the introverted thinker.

I raised my still chained hand. “Can we get rid of this yet? Or do I have to choke you with it?”

Kai’s eyes grew wide with excitement. “Don’t threaten me with a good time.”

I shook my head and smiled. The guys were a lot, but I loved it. I just needed this dark mage threat to go away so I could finally be at peace.

CHAPTER 4



BILLIE

Three days later, I was greeted with a nice surprise when I returned home from work.

Lila.

Accompanied by a very hot, yet slightly dangerous-looking man.

They sat in the living area, which took up half of the back length of the house, across from the open kitchen and dining areas. My friend sat snuggled close to the man, sipping a glass of wine. He had an arm wrapped around her shoulder, one leg rested on his knee, looking very comfortable on the couch. Kai sat on a loveseat off to the right, drinking a beer and looking too amused. Daniel sat in another cushioned seating to the left of the couch, face its usual neutral.

I scratched my head, a bit confused, and moved into the room, flopping down next to Kai. “Hey, girlie. How was the solo travel?”

She exchanged looks with the man, and they both grinned at each other. Her hazel eyes sparkled, and his unusual silver eyes were filled with admiration. Okay, then, my best friend had met a bae on vacation. He didn’t seem her usual type, but sexy was sexy. Although, what was he? There was something very inhuman about him. I was never good with telling the different paranormal beings apart. That was her specialty.

She cleared her throat. “Right, so it wasn’t exactly a vacation. I was banished to the unseelie fae realm by that creepy green-haired guy we saw at the restaurant some time ago.”

I frowned; I remembered him. He’d been checking her out the whole night. We thought he was interested in her. Seemed he was, but not in the way we thought. “Yeah, are you telling me you’ve been trapped in another

realm the past couple of weeks?”

She tilted her head from side to side, her honey-blonde curls bobbing with the movement. “A little bit.”

Kai chuckled. “A little bit? Kind of seems like an all-or-nothing type of thing.”

She rolled her eyes. “Ok, all.” She looked back at me, patting mystery guy’s thigh. “I already did the intros with the others but didn’t tell them the story yet. This is Xander. He’s a half vampiric fae who came back with me from the fae realm. Xander, this is my bestie, Billie Bellamy.”

He gave me a salute with a lazy smile. “Nice to meet you,” he stated with what sounded like an Irish accent.

“Nice to meet you as well,” I said cautiously. “So, you met my friend in your realm and were so taken with her you came back here with her.”

He bared his fangs at me with a wider grin. “Yes, ma’am. She’s mine now, and I’m hers. I couldn’t have her leave without me.”

“That’s what’s up.” I gave Lila an appreciative nod. “Okay then, girl. And he has an accent.”

Kai grumbled. “I have an accent.”

I bumped his knee with mine. He sounded very American to me. “I mean, yeah, a nondescript United States accent.”

He pffted. “That’s what it is now, but I’m from Chile. Well, the underworld located under Chile.”

So, he’d been holding back a sexy Latin accent from me all this time? I had a few questions, but we were digressing hard. “Okay, I’ll get back to that later and the keeping of the secrets.” I looked back to Lila. “Lady, I need a recap of the past two weeks and how you got back and if that green-haired fucker is dead.”

Lila then went into detail about her past two weeks, which were actually more like two months in the fae world. She’d found her own little pack of men, which made me giddy. Also, she’d killed the green-haired guy who was actually a member of the dark mage sect, and he’d tried to kidnap her for her ice mage powers. Further, he divulged that there was a traitor in our coven that was secretly helping this sect. Not to mention that the sect had allies in an enemy fae group that Xander’s people were currently engaged in war. This was part of the reason that the other men in her pack could not come back and why the portals were closed to that part of the fae realm until the war was over.

I rubbed my forehead, disturbed by this news. “We need to report this to the coven. That guy may not be the only one who has access to fae portals. Even if they closed the ones in your land, Xander, there could be other allies they have with portal access.”

Lila sat forward. “I already spoke to leadership before coming here.”

Xander nodded. “And you have an ally with my people.”

“When they’re done fighting their own battle.” It was nice in theory, but who knew how long the fae would be indisposed with their own civil war.

“That may be, but remember, fae time is quicker, so it might not be as long as you think. Not to mention I am here with other fae in hidden cells who will be searching for and annihilating our mutual enemies. I will make it my mission to ensure my pretty lady and her people are protected.”

Something about the way Xander spoke made me believe it wholeheartedly. I really wanted to get Lila alone for a minute and get the real deal without an audience. I looked over to Daniel. “Maybe you guys might want to chat a bit. I want to steal Lila away for a minute.”

The guys agreed, but the way Xander looked at Lila as she got up and walked away with me made me believe that he didn’t like not being by her side. It was understandable. He came here for her, away from his home, and he didn’t know us.

Once we got to my room, Lila sat down on my couch, glass of wine still in her hand. I could have kicked myself for forgetting to pour myself a glass. I kicked my shoes off and threw my purse on the bed before moving to sit next to her on the couch.

“Ok, how are you really?” I asked, folding my legs up under me.

She gave me a cheesy grin. “Outstanding. The guys are not at all what I would have ever thought I’d be with, and our meeting was less than ideal, but it all worked out wonderfully.”

She went on to talk about how she had been claimed by each one in different ways. Only one of her men was an actual alpha, and his claiming was accidental, but she seemed to be over it all now.

“I feel bad for not realizing you were missing. Those texts I was getting were basic, but things just got busy here...” I trailed off, not knowing what more to say. I was a trash friend.

She waved a dismissive hand at me. “There wouldn’t be anything you could have done but worry. It all worked out for the best in the end.”

“I know, but I just don’t want anything like that to ever happen again. But

it is cool you found out you're part dragon."

"Well, I haven't gotten tested yet but plan to. That opens up a whole new world for me. So, really don't feel bad. Turns out my time away was very eye-opening. And I have an alpha. Who'd have guessed?"

"How does it feel to have so many mates?"

She took a sip of wine, a wistful smile on her face. "It's kind of fun. I mean, the telepathy thing can get crazy at times, but mostly, it was good. Granted, I only had my time with them all for a short while. It's been a few months for you with Lance and Ty? Is it getting any better?"

I blew out an exhausted breath. "I feel like I'm not cracked out to be an omega."

"Nah, you've just got some things to get through. You've still got the grief from your father's death. I know you act like you're good because you were prepared for it, but grief comes and goes. And knowing someone is going to die is different from them actually dying. And let's not forget that betrayal from Chilli. You have healing inside to handle."

She was right. I'd depended so much on my father after my mother's death. We were extremely close, and even though I was there for his final days, had mentally prepared for his passing when he shared his diagnosis, a hole in my heart remained. I knew, in some way, I put a lot of weight on my relationship with Chilli, a coven leader and close friend of my father. I was emotionally lost and looked to her as a surrogate parent, mentor, friend. There were moments in my mind that I sometimes thought she really believed that what she was doing was the right thing. Then I reminded myself that if she cared about me, she would have never forced an alpha pack on me or summoned demons to kidnap me. She was manipulative, and I was vulnerable then. I had a pack of my own now, but they were not my saviors. They, too, had their internal struggles.

I adjusted in my seat, bringing myself back to the present. "Your guys, they don't have any inner turmoil?"

Lila snorted. "Oh yeah, they do. They just seem to accept it. I mean, it doesn't always play out perfectly. Xander can be a loose cannon. And the others have their quirks. Your guys are good, Billie. You just need to let them know they don't have to be perfect, and they can relax now. They got you."

I rested the side of my head on the back of the couch. They definitely had me, and I loved being there with them. "I thought I was letting them know that I was in it for the long haul with them. However, I think it's beyond me.

I don't know if they were ready to have another omega. Sometimes I think they just got caught up in this fortune teller, prophecy thing that I was their next omega and made themselves believe that it was now or never."

"Oh, chica, no. That can't be true. They love you."

"What if it's just a fixation?"

"You don't believe that."

Did I? My mind raced all the time with my decision to accept the pack. I felt certain about my feelings for them, and I felt the immense love radiating through my bonds with Ty and Lance. It was warm and soothing and everything I'd ever wanted to feel from a connection with someone. However, I also felt sparks of pain, anxiety, and grief. It forced me to build a mental wall between us that I sometimes found necessary to put up. Although I hated the feeling of being disconnected, I also hated the feeling of overwhelming sadness out of the blue. Waking me up at night, coming at me in the middle of the day when I was treating a patient, turning a pleasant dream into a nightmare.

I said as much to Lila.

"Have you mentioned it to them?" she asked

I shrugged. "A little. I don't want to seem insensitive."

She frowned, rubbing my shoulder. "Girl, you've got to protect your peace. If they don't know how bad it is, then they won't do the work to make sure they don't drag you into their darkness. How are you going to bond with Daniel and Kai? If they all have issues, they've got to learn how to not make it overtake them. Even in their subconscious. That's what will drag you down."

I smiled at her. Lila had been through a lot of crap in her life, but she survived and thrived. Hell, even getting sent to the unseelie realm had her coming back with more. She was always good at keeping her mental health strong. "I need to be like you when I grow up."

She blew a raspberry. "Girl, please. Send those boys to therapy. Maybe even group therapy."

I rolled my eyes, imagining the challenge of making these four men spill their feelings in front of each other, let alone me. Yet, solo therapy might be a good idea. "I'm going to continue to master the art of blocking, but I will also be more vocal about my concerns. Let them take more ownership in how our mental connection affects each other."

Lila nodded, pointing at me. "That's right. You are the glue that ties them

all together. The key word being together. You aren't alone. Let them carry the burden with you. Who knows, maybe being claimed by them all will balance it out better. Daniel is the leader for a reason, so he could help. And Kai is crazy but clearly strong in mind. If he was a real threat, your father wouldn't have picked him. I have no idea what four alpha claims can do, but I do know that they adore you and wouldn't want you suffering in any way."

She was right. They wouldn't. We'd spent the past few months showing our best sides, but we weren't perfect, nor was I the only one who needed help. I wanted them to know that I was there for them as well. It was time we became the pack we were meant to be, especially with the dark mage threat. We had to help each other be as strong as we could.

CHAPTER 5



DANIEL

I had the evening off from my restaurant, so I was home before Billie when Lila and her fae arrived. My encounters with fae had been limited since I was kicked out of my tribe many years ago. In addition, I was an earthly fae, so I had few interactions with the fae from the home world. It was a complex matter, the life of fae from different realms. Xander was born in the earth realm, like me, but had moved to the fae world as a teenager. I'd been taught all my life that the fae of the realm hated us and thought we were beneath them. The unseelie were slightly different, so I wasn't surprised that Xander seemed to show no signs of arrogance when meeting me.

Before the women returned from their private talk, Xander shifted the conversation to me. "Have you ever visited the fae realm, brother?" he asked, resting his forearms on his thighs.

"No. Never had a desire or even knew how," I answered honestly.

"When the portals open, you should come and visit. We always welcome a member of the lost tribe. My court might try to keep you, but you're an alpha with an omega, so they might let you go."

He said that so matter-of-factly as if it was nothing to threaten detainment. It wasn't exactly enticing me to visit. "I thought those from the realm didn't care for us. And what do you mean, the lost tribe?"

Xander squinted his eyes at me as if he were actually confused by my reaction. "Our kind doesn't turn their back on other fae without cause. Perhaps the seelie fae. They are elitists who sometimes seem to love humans more than their own kind. Unseelie would never."

I cut my eyes at him, slightly annoyed. "I'm a seelie fae." I wasn't that bothered. The elitist part was true. They were also easily threatened by

power. Although we didn't know for sure, my tribe claimed they were of the seelie side of the realm originally. I'd been kicked out of my tribe once I became an adult by my uncle, the ruler, because he felt threatened by my alpha status.

Xander lifted a shoulder, taking another swig of his beer. "Eh, when you live in the human realm, it doesn't matter which you are. You've been lost so long, who can actually tell other than word of mouth."

"Word of mouth is strong."

Kai, who had been unusually silent the whole time, shifted in his seat. He tapped a clawed finger on his chin. "What's a lost tribe, my guy?"

Xander glanced over to him, considering the incubus. "It's weird to be in a pack with a demon. I've never seen such a thing, but then again, my pack has a dragon. What kind are you?"

Kai grinned. "Incubus."

Xander wiggled his brows, slouching down in his seat. "Fun times. How does that work? You needing sexual energy to survive and having an omega?"

I raised a hand to interrupt the pair before they started going down another path and not answering the lost tribe question.

"Ah, yes," Xander said, before I could speak. "Lost tribe are those locked out of the realm. Many, many years ago, the portals between the human and fae realm closed unexpectedly. Those in the human realm were stuck here for centuries. They set up roots and became earth tribes. Had their own traditions and culture and no ability to portal into the fae realm, even now that the portals can be opened. You have to be teleported in by another fae of the realm. You're lost to us."

That was the story I'd heard, more or less, but we'd never called ourselves lost. I presumed it was to lessen the pain of being cut off from our homeland.

Xander pointed to Kai, silver eyes twinkling with mischief. "So, I'm going to assume your omega isn't letting you go out there and do the do with others even if it is your source of power. I'm a blood fae. Like a vampire, except it's more for power, not food. Lila lets me bite her. I don't overdo it. But you're like a vampire, so you need sex or intimacy to survive."

Kai tossed a hand to the side. "An omega is more than enough. Rest assured, I am very satisfied."

Xander put his feet up on the coffee table and looked around the room,

which irritated the well-mannered side of me. “Good for you. Well, you know I have to ask these things. Billie is like a sister to my Lila. I need to make sure she’s being well taken care of.”

I grimaced, still deciding if I liked this guy. He seemed way too relaxed around us. Not threatened, even though we were alphas and he was not. “She’s very well taken care of, as I assume Lila is.”

He glanced over to me, his eyes turning serious. “I’d die for her.”

The fierceness in his eyes and drop in his tone left no doubt in my mind that he meant what he said. I gave him a curt nod of understanding.

We could hear the women coming down the steps, and Xander stood up. “We’ll be leaving, but rest assured, I’ll be working on this mutual enemy of ours. If you ever change your mind about visiting our world, once the portals open, let me know. You might find that it will be quite healing to you.”

I raised an eyebrow, curious. “Healing how?”

He tilted his head to the side. “I can tell you’re glamoured, and I can sense what you’re hiding. Does she know?”

I stiffened. How could he know? My glamour could still fool other fae.

He gave a slight smile. “Lost fae can’t fool realm fae. Magic dilution from not being in the realm where our power comes from and all that.”

Kai shook his head, looking between the two of us with perplexed eyes. “What’s he going on about?”

I kept my eyes focused on Xander, face neutral to control my growing discomfort. “He knows about my...issue. And no, the women don’t know, and I’d like to keep it that way for now.”

He raised his hands in surrender. “It’s your story to tell. Just know, the fae realm can probably help.”

Billie and Lila appeared, whispering to each other with secretive smiles.

Xander headed towards Lila. “Ready to go, my love?”

She placed her hands on her hips. “I suppose. It was good seeing you both. Tell grumpy bear and the hermit, hi.”

Xander gave a salute. “Kai, I need to check out your bar. Your place too, Danny boy.”

Kai chuckled. “Any time, my friend. And he loves it when you call him that, don’t you, Danny boy?”

My upper lip twitched, but I looked away, annoyed. I wanted to grab both menaces by the collar and shake them but decided to keep my cool in front of the women. “Good seeing you again, Lila. Xander.”

After they left, something unsettling gnawed at my insides, as if just seeing the other fae had aggravated my system. I excused myself to go to sleep early that night. However, sleep was not easy. Xander knew my secret. Would he tell Lila? It was my burden to bear, and I did not want Billie to know. The last thing I needed was her believing we needed to use her. She was already overwhelmed with Ty and Lance's poor attempts to hide their inner trauma from her. They were always the least successful with doing such. However, Billie was like a healing elixir to them. I did not want that to be her purpose.

Sleep eventually came, but it was short-lived. I awoke in agonizing pain. It felt like razors were slicing deeply into every surface of my body. I thrashed in the familiar pain, feeling the warm heat of my blood drip down my body. I balled my fist, grinding my teeth together as I prayed for the pain to leave me. Prayed that this fit would be short or that I would find the sweet release of unconsciousness soon. I didn't care that I lay in a pool of my own blood. The attack on my body was relentless, and no amount of magic inside me could fight it.

Unable to hold it in, I let out a loud call of discomfort, instantly cursing myself for giving in to the agony. The others were used to it, but I hadn't had a fit yet since Billie had arrived. Her room was on the top floor next to mine, and I hoped she wasn't hearing anything. I didn't even know what time it was. Maybe she wasn't asleep at all.

A knock at the door tore my mind from the pain only momentarily. I tried to yell an answer, but my throat felt raw and scratching. No sound escaped.

The door opened, and I cursed my poor fortune to find Billie there, dressed in an oversized T-shirt with a worried look on her face. "Everything okay?"

"Ye, yes," I forced out through clenched teeth.

She shook her head, walking further into my room. "No. I don't think I believe that." She flipped on my light switch, which turned on the nearest floor lamp. She gasped when she laid eyes on me.

I knew I looked a bloody mess, and my fae glamour broke whenever these fits occurred. I inhaled a breath, already feeling the sting of the wounds lessening. Was it because she was near? We didn't officially have a connection yet, but she was a magic healer.

She raced toward me and hovered her hands above my body, shutting her eyes as she whispered words of healing magic. She didn't ask questions, just

went right to action. She was a doctor; I understood her immediate response to help. A wave of intoxicating warmth covered every part of my body, numbing the pain of my cuts. My eyes fluttered closed, my tension relaxing.

We remained in silence for several minutes as she continued to heal me. I wasn't sure if it was her magic, her omega status, if my fit was just coming to an end, or even a combination of it all. I was just thankful it was over.

After a while, I opened my eyes to find her kneeling on the floor, looking up at me with worry. Her deep brown eyes were large and watery. I could have kicked myself for putting her in this state.

I lifted myself upright, no longer feeling pain or weakness. It was as if nothing had ever happened, except for the fact that my pajamas and bed were covered in blood.

"I need a quick shower and to change my sheets," I stated, getting up.

I was used to this process. I had a mattress cover underneath my fitted sheets, and my magic was able to clean up the blood easily when washed.

I offered her my hand, and she wordlessly accepted it. I then walked us to my sitting area off to the left of the bed consisting of a two-seater off-white couch and round coffee table in front of a flat screen TV several feet away. "Sit here. I'll explain everything after I clean up. That okay?"

She nodded, looking over to my bed. "Can I change the sheets?"

I walked to the bed and stripped it of my dirty linen. "You don't need to worry about that."

"I want to help."

"You've helped enough, princess. I'll take care of this."

She frowned but didn't say anything. I was embarrassed about everything, but I maintained as much confidence as I could muster and walked into my ensuite bathroom, taking a quick shower. The hot water hit me, cleaning off my night attack and soothing my tense muscles. My long white hair, now in its original fae state, stuck to the side of my face as it got drenched, and I shut my eyes with frustration. This was not what I wanted. I wasn't naïve enough to believe she would never find out, but I had hoped it would occur much later, preferably after I was able to claim her. How would she react once she knew the truth? Would this be yet another burden we'd placed on her? A dread fell heavy in my chest, immobilizing me to leave the bathroom.

Eventually, I gathered myself and got out of the shower, dried up, and wrapped the towel around my waist. When I left the bathroom, to my dismay,

she had already made up the bed and was sitting in it, watching TV.

I shook my head. “Stubborn as always.”

She turned the TV off. “Your couch isn’t that comfortable. I prefer your bed, so I had to make it up.”

I crossed my arms, squinting my eyes in disbelief. “Something tells me that’s a lie.”

She shrugged and patted a space beside her.

I didn’t bother to put on another pair of pajamas and sat down. She instantly wrapped her arms around me, laying her head on my shoulder. “What was that, Daniel? It scared the shit out of me. Did something come in and attack you? We both warded this place, and I didn’t feel anything cross the lines, and our alarm didn’t go off.”

I gathered her in my arms, moving her legs over my lap comfortably. “Nothing came in. I’m sorry I scared you. This was something I never wanted you to see. Especially so soon.”

She ran a hand over my bare pale skin, the wounds now resealed as faint scars. She’d seen me in my natural form before and said she liked it. Many times, insisting I remain this way, but I was self-conscious that the scarring and my pale skin, waist-length white hair and glowing blue eyes made me stand out in a crowd. I liked attention but didn’t want to be gawked at like a zoo animal. My look was even rare in my tribe. Most earth fae looked human, and much of our bloodline was diluted with human blood. Mine, however, was undiluted, and couple that with my alpha DNA, I was not like others.

“What happened to you?” she asked in a quiet voice, tracing a finger over a scar on my forearm.

The touch of her hand brought a shiver out of me, and I held her tighter to me, enjoying the feel of her. I breathed in the intoxicating scent of her and felt my body further loosen. I hated to tell her this story, but I had no choice.

“Many years ago, before I met any of the others, I did things to survive. I was still so young then.”

I was 151 years old now, the second oldest in the group after Kai. I cringed, thinking of how lost I was then.

“I tried to find other fae and was unsuccessful for a very long time. Until one day, I wasn’t.” I paused, bitter anger rising in me. “They welcomed me in with open arms. No one was scared or jealous that I was an alpha. They used my status as a warrior to help defend the tribe, and I was perfectly content with that. And then one day some visitors came. They were vampires, and I

felt uneasy as soon as they arrived. However, the tribe was pressed to do business with them. When they left, I was glad to be rid of them. Except on the way out, I was blindsided and grabbed. They kept me chained in a basement cell, and for countless days, they cut me.”

Billie leaned up and looked at me with sad eyes. “Why were they cutting you?”

I turned my head, not wanting her to read any weakness of emotion on my face. I would tell this story as emotionless as possible. I didn’t want her pity or worry. “Bloodletting. They drank from me. Fae blood is especially potent to them. Like a drug, it temporarily enhances their strength. When I grew too weak, they left me alone for a while. Then, when I got better, they went back to the cutting. I don’t know how long I was in that dark, cold, rank cell. It could have been years. I thought I had lost my mind.”

She shivered, resting her head back on my shoulder. “How did you escape?”

I sighed, looking up at the ceiling. The weight of my story pressed down on me, despite Billie’s presence. “Pure luck. I’d had my strength recovered after a rest period, and a vampire who came to cut me was new. They’d been taking precautions against my magic all that time to avoid me getting over on them. I could sense as soon as this man walked in that whatever guard he had up, was weak. Despite the breaking of my mind, I always tried to glamour them. I was on auto-pilot by then. See a vampire, try my magic. It never worked until then. They had to have purchased some high-quality wards, but maybe that man wasn’t so lucky in what he bought. I wasted no time forcing him to set me free. Once he did, I killed him. I killed anyone who got in front of me before teleporting the hell out of there. I wish I’d killed them all.”

Billie gave me a soft squeeze, relaxing my tension only a fraction. I was still stuck with my anger to totally give in to what she offered. “Why do these cuts still bleed?”

“A sort of fail-safe for them. I’m certain they had a connection to warlocks or witches because vampires don’t have that kind of magic. They were very prepared when they took me. Sometimes they could pull magic from me without opening a new cut. The old wounds would open on their own, and they’d take advantage of it. And any new wounds I received after I escaped did the same. Something dark they put inside me to gain my magic still remains, doing this.”

“Is there something that triggers the wounds?”

I shook my head. “Not really. Stress can. Sometimes I can go months with no incidents. Other times, it can happen once a week for a period of time. It usually doesn’t last too long. Thirty minutes was the longest time. I’ve tried everything I can think of to break this magic, but nothing works. Kai tried his magic. Our former omega tried. Ty even offered up his blood. Nothing. So, I live with this curse. What happened to me is one of the reasons why I glamour myself. Sometimes I wonder if I hadn’t used glamour back then, would they have known how strong I was? An undiluted alpha fae. Who knows what kind of magic energy I give off? Ultimately, it doesn’t matter. I’m stuck now. But it’s my burden to bear.”

She pulled away from me, eyes dark and determined. “But it’s not. I’m here. I have healing magic. I helped you earlier. I’m a witch with a specialty in healing. Let me try.”

I growled, picking her up and shifting her on my bed, head resting on my pillow. “I did not tell you this story so you could try to fix me. I don’t want you for that.”

She looked past me, and I could practically see her mind working. “I get it, Daniel. You don’t want me to think you wanted me as your omega just to heal you. I really believe you actually care about me for me and not my magic or omega status. So, don’t worry about that.”

My heart should have rejoiced at her words, but my brain was too powerful, riddled with shame. She reached up for me, and I scooted back, afraid her touch would weaken me. “That’s good to hear, princess,” I replied in a careful voice. Was she going to say the thing I’d been waiting patiently for? I didn’t want her to do this because she felt sadness for my plight.

“Claim me,” she stated with not a trace of doubt. “Maybe that will help in some way.”

I dropped my shoulders, my stomach heavy with disappointment. So, she was offering this to help me. “Perhaps it’s better you sleep in your own room tonight.”

She shoved at my chest, huffing in annoyance. “And you thought I was stubborn because I didn’t want to join the pack at first.”

“Well, I’m being stubborn for the right reason.”

She sat up, cocking a brow. “And I wasn’t? I think we’re in an equal situation here. You were really pushy in the beginning to help me. I want to do the same. This is a partnership here. You let all the guys try to help, but you won’t let me? Aren’t I part of this pack, too?”

I ground my teeth, considering her words. She made a good argument, but it still felt uncomfortable to me to do something so permanent for the tiny hope it would get rid of whatever dark magic was in my system. “The difference between you and the others, Billie, is that what they tried didn’t change them permanently. This will.”

“Isn’t that the point? Look, I know I’ve had a bit of a struggle with the mental connection, but I’m working on it. You’re the stable leader, maybe you can help me.”

I could. While I had my dark past, I was good at blocking its effects from seeping into the bond. I could also use my fae magic to help her strengthen her own bonding abilities, which included putting up the mental wall comfortably when there was a need.

Sensing my hesitation, she tossed her hands in the air and scooted off the bed. “Fine, I’ll go tell the others that you don’t want to claim me. I’ll ask Kai to, and everyone but the leader of the pack will have claimed me. Real nice.”

I watched her get up and begin to walk away. I was strong. I would not give in. If she was going to be mine, I needed it to be because she was ready and wanted it for herself. I would have my omega, but it would not be surrounded by a need to fix my misery.

But I still wanted my woman.

CHAPTER 6



BILLIE

I wasn't sure my plan would work, but it seems reasoning with the man wasn't working.

Before I could reach the closed door, my body tingled, and I felt a pull on my nerves. Then, suddenly, I was floating backwards in the air like some paper bag in the wind. I gently landed on my back on Daniel's bed again. I looked up at him; he was still sitting, giving me a lazy smile as he waved his hand like a conductor. He'd used his magic to move my body. He'd never done that before. Had I pissed him off that much?

He climbed on top of me, legs on either side of my hips, and pinned my arms down. "You have been a real brat lately."

As if to prove his point, I stuck my tongue out at him.

He chuckled. "Are you looking to get punished again?"

I remembered that day in the car with his fingers inside of me, bringing me to ecstasy. I could already feel my core clench. I quickly put up my mental walls so that Lance and Ty would not be bothered. "Sure."

His icy fae eyes darkened. "It won't be like last time."

I gave a playful pout of disappointment. "Well, that's no fun." I wiggled under his grasp. "What were you planning to do to me?"

"You mean, what *am* I planning to do? For once, you're going to do as I say. Understood?"

I liked when Daniel got bossy. It did things to my lady bits that I couldn't explain. Maybe it was the omega in me. However, I wanted a bit more tonight. "Make me... In your alpha voice."

He studied me for a moment, those cool blue eyes, barely a pupil, unreadable. He then pressed down on me, and I could already feel him begin

to harden between my legs. “You will do as I say. You don’t move unless I tell you to. Tell me you understand.”

His voice boomed like he was using a megaphone. The sound thundering into my head. My body shook to comply. To submit. And I would. “I understand.”

He smiled, a peek of sharp canines showing, eyes hooded. “Good girl.”

My nipples hardened at just his words. “I think I like that.”

He lifted my chin and leaned forward to kiss me. His mouth devoured mine, tongue snaking around my own, sending flutters in my stomach.

He moved back, sitting on the bed, one knee bent, arm resting on it. He swiped his finger upward, and my nightgown began to lift up my body and then over my head. The material moved over my wrists, which were above my head, twisting about until my wrists were bound together. It wasn’t uncomfortable or anything I couldn’t get out of, but just enough to show that I was meant to give up control and be his toy, and I very much wanted to be played with tonight. The cool air tightened my exposed nipples, and I squirmed slightly, forgetting myself. His alpha command was strong, but it didn’t say I couldn’t move an inch.

He lifted a brow. “Did I say you could move?”

I wanted to argue, but I had agreed to follow his orders. “Sorry.”

He leaned forward slightly. “Sorry, what?”

Oh, he was going full-on tonight. I think I had done this to myself. “Sorry, alpha.”

His eyelids fluttered as if just those two words had turned him on. Maybe they had. I didn’t have more time to think on it because he quickly moved to my breast, swiping his tongue over my nipple. It took all my might not to move, and I instead bit my lip.

He moved his hand up my thigh. His fingers were so light on my skin that it felt like feathers, tickling my nerves. I tensed as he moved closer to my already damp core. He flicked his tongue back and forth over my nipple rapidly before abandoning it for the other nipple. The heated wetness of his mouth brought a gasp from me, and I curled my toes. He continued to lick and suck at my breasts until I shook with need. His fingers stayed only at the edges of my panties but did not dip inside or even run over the soaked covering. I could feel my slick already begin to seep down my thighs, and he only used that wetness to rub into my inner thigh. I needed him in me. This was torture.

“Please, alpha,” I whined. Yup, I gave him my omega whine. Two could play this game.

He closed his eyes, and I felt him rock slightly against my thigh. However, he quickly stopped, as if regaining his senses. He looked down at me, his eyes glowing in the dim light. “Not now, princess. You need to be punished more.”

Screw me. Had I been that bad? Maybe I shouldn’t have threatened to have Kai claim me next after leaving his bed. In retrospect, that was kind of messed up. I should apologize. I felt him kiss the bend of my neck before sucking on it, a brimming heat expanding in my body. I widened my legs, wanting to maneuver him between my thighs. He grazed the thin skin on my neck with his teeth, and I arched forward, wanting his bite. His claiming. I wasn’t scared or nervous. I needed his mark on me. There was no doubt. I suddenly felt foolish for being so hesitant with him before. I had to allow some trust with my alphas, but I had to give myself grace as well. I was no expert and had thirty years of being raised to fear being near alphas as an omega. However, I had complete trust in Daniel. Yes, I wanted to help him, but I also just wanted him. Wanted his love. Wanted him as mine.

He withdrew from my neck and moved back to my mouth. I loved the taste of him and the way he possessed my mouth as if he couldn’t get enough. I squirmed when I felt him tweak my nipple and give a slight pinch that sat on the border of pain and pleasure. He moved his hand down my stomach, and his fingers danced lightly over my useless panties, tracing a circular path over my covered clit. Now we were talking. I moaned into his mouth as I could feel myself ache in anticipation.

And, of course, he chose that moment to remove his hand. Bastard. I bit at his lip, and he pulled back from me, an amused look on his ridiculously handsome face. He tore off his towel, and I looked down, mesmerized at his very hard, thick member already glistening with precum. Well, at least he was just as turned on as me. How did he have this kind of willpower? I tugged at the bonds at my wrist, longing to touch him, take him into my mouth, into me.

He chuffed and straddled me, drool pooling at the corners of my mouth as my eyes locked on his member unabashedly. By this time, my panties were thoroughly drenched, and he gazed at me, taking his shaft in his hand and slowly stroking. His own precum was clear and dripped in excess from the slit at his tip like a dripping water faucet. I wanted to taste it, wanted his

minty flavor on my tongue.

With his other hand, he began to massage one of my breasts, tweaking the nipple in a rotation of soft and hard. I moaned, frustrated I couldn't move. Yup, this was punishment.

He gave me another one of his cocky smiles. "Good, little omega."

Should I like being called a little omega? Did I care at that moment? Fuck to the no.

As if rewarding me, he rubbed the tip of his dick up and down my pooled pussy lips, still covered in the failing protective panties. I whined loud enough to raise the dead. He pressed into me, my panties dipping inside of me. Then he moved his tip to my clit, brushing over it in a circular motion. My legs shook against my will as I inched closer to relief.

He moved away again, and I whimpered, but he grabbed the edges of my panties and painstakingly slowly removed them. Meanwhile, his cock was dripping away. His self-control was top-tier level. I just wanted to wrap my thighs around his waist and push him into me at that point. I was almost feral with desire.

He stuck two fingers in and out of me, the obscene squishing sounds of my saturated center filling the room. His thumb covered my clit, rubbering at a leg-shaking pace. I was about to be done. If he stopped now, I was going to have a heart attack. They would have to bury me in the backyard. "Alpha, I need you," I cried. "I'll be good." Yup, I was begging, and I didn't care.

The bastard actually chuckled but kept up his ministrations, much to my relief. "What are you sorry for, little omega?"

I yanked at my bonds again, shutting my eyes as I gave fully into the pleasure. "Sorry for being a brat, my alpha."

"Look me in the eyes and say it again," he purred.

Aww hell, he brought out the purr. I was deceased. I was going to have a heart attack regardless at this point. I didn't even care that he was being a jerk now. He had me in the palm of his hands. I was melting for him. I wanted him, and I wanted that damn bite.

I opened my eyes and gave him a look of absolute submission. "I'm sorry, alpha, for being a brat. I'll be a good little omega for you from now on. Claim me, please. I need it. Please, alpha, bite me. Anywhere you want, alpha."

Those otherworldly blue eyes glowed even brighter, and his snow-white hair lifted in the air, exposing his slightly pointed fae ears. He exhaled a

shaky breath and then positioned his head between my thighs, his hand still busy on my pussy, thankfully.

I arched my back, trembling as I reached closer to my peak. And then I crashed in a flood of passion. A magical euphoric blaze covered me, making me go cross-eyed, and beneath that pleasure was an undercurrent of pain from somewhere on my body I could not immediately place. Visions from a past that were not mine, and emotions I did not wholly own circled within me.

Moments later, when I finally landed back into myself, I felt a wetness on my inner thigh. Daniel was licking me. I wanted to speak words, but I was still so aroused I didn't want to break the moment. Instead, I moaned, still bound. I needed more. That was my only focus for the moment.

Daniel looked up at me, and I smiled sweetly for him. He wasted no time moving again until he was positioned at my entrance. He lifted my left leg onto his shoulder and, locking eyes with me once more, he pushed in. I tossed my head back as he filled me. He pumped faster and faster, his earlier control gone.

"Such a good girl," he groaned, his balls slapping at my entrance, alpha knot pushing slightly in.

I wanted all of him inside me. Wanted more of his praise as my body throbbed beneath him. He speared me with wild abandon, head now tossed back in lost ecstasy.

"Knot," I breathed out, not sure if he would hear me, as my voice was barely a whisper.

However, he heard me because soon, I was filled with the fullness of his knot at the base of his dick. It touched every part of my inner walls, and he moved his thrusting to a sped-up grind to avoid hurting me. He rocked harder and harder, bumping against my clit, and it took nothing for me to come again, slick seeping out between us.

"My omega," he called out before erupting inside me.

I felt the heat of his release, splattering my walls over and over again. His body shuddered above me, and I pressed him to me. I had the sudden urge to be so close to him that I could feel his heartbeat.

With his knot in me, we would be like this for a while. I wasn't ready for pregnancy, so I was on regular and magical birth control, as were the guys. However, despite the breeding purpose of the knot, I still desired to have it within me, and the guys had a desire to knot me. We wanted the closeness,

the connection. It always felt right and satisfying.

Daniel snapped his fingers, and my nightgown binding loosened. I freed my hands and brought them down.

He brought my leg down to his waist. "Are you okay?" he asked.

I nodded, and he smiled before resting his head on my breast. His weight shifted in such a way that he was not heavy. "I love you," he said freely.

My heart squeezed. I absolutely loved his man as well. "I love you, too. Even though I was this close to ending your life for that torture."

He chuckled. "It was torture for me too."

I ran a hand through the strands of his thick, white hair and lifted my other leg to rest over the back of his thighs. A dull aching hit my thigh at the contact of our skin, but I wasn't worried. The significance of it pleased me. "I see you claimed me on the inner thigh."

He kissed the top of my breast. "You did say anywhere."

I had. Although when we first suggested between my legs, I'd had some concerns. An alpha bite was very erogenous when touched by the claimed or the alpha who made the bite. I worried that I'd be turned on any time I crossed my legs or, hell, walked.

"Don't worry, princess," he began. "You can put a wall around it, too. Unless you or I take it down, you won't feel it all the time."

I frowned, shocked. "Wait, an alpha can take down a mental wall?"

He lazily caressed my hip as he spoke. "Yes. And I'm sure you can do the same to me. But I wouldn't do that to you."

I nodded to myself, satisfied I didn't have to worry. "I know you didn't want to claim me tonight, but I'm happy you changed your mind. Thank you for claiming me."

"Thank you for letting me claim you."

"What made you change your mind?"

He lifted his head and wrapped his arms around my waist before doing a flip in the air that gracefully landed him on his back and me on his chest. I yelped in surprise. He was such a show-off.

"I believed you really wanted my bite. I couldn't have you do it as some sort of duty."

"The offer was never out of duty."

"I know that now. Benefit of being connected. I can feel your emotions."

I looked down at his chest. The scars were still there. I rested my head back down on his chest. I liked his scars. There was something about his

imperfections that made me want him more. It showed that he wasn't flawless and that life hadn't always been easy. I could relate to that. However, knowing why those scars were there and knowing what they did to him hurt my heart. I wanted to help. Needed to.

He squeezed me in his arms. "It's okay. It could still work over time. At the very least, our bond could lessen the pain and the number of times it happens."

He could read my emotions like a book now. I'd have to remember to work my wall between us at some point, but for now, I liked the mental connection. It was an easy comfort. Right now, I could feel nothing but contentment from him, not disappointment.

"Do you ever share your bond between Lance and Ty?" he asked, stroking his feathery fingers down my spine.

I snuggled into him, happy for the constant contact and our still connecting bodies. "No. Lance is still very cautious about the bond, and I think he might be even more so with mixing with Ty in particular."

"Yes, he was always like that. He has such a tight control over himself, it was hard to get him to share in the bond. He'd only do so with our first omega. I was hoping that would change."

He had a hard time relaxing, and he might be more stubborn than me, which was saying a lot. "We can work on him."

"He thinks the loupism that ran in his family could somehow badly affect the rest of us if he opens up to a group bond. There's no reason to think that but^{3/4}"

I nodded. "Lance is a worrier."

"Yes, we were close to finally getting him to relax, and then we lost our first omega, and he closed back up again."

I knew this much. They had all reverted in some way when she died. It made it harder for me, but I would handle the challenge. I had sure as hell been a challenge to them in the beginning.

"You're closest to Lance, aren't you?"

I heard Daniel sigh. "Yes, but that might be out of circumstance. I'm the only one he considers stable. Kai is...Kai, and Ty has similar struggles as Lance. They both can be sensitive, so, at times, they might frustrate each other."

"Well, we will help each other."

We had to strengthen. I wanted our bonds to be a beautiful experience for

us all, not a challenge.

CHAPTER 7



BILLIE

Lila looked at me with a wide grin, wiggling her neck. I snorted and looked away from her expectant eyes. We were waiting for our coven meeting to start the following evening, and I'd just told her that I was now claimed by Daniel.

The Baltimore headquarters for our coven was situated in a downtown high-rise, not far from the Inner Harbor. The building was used for supernatural businesses only, with the coven spaces covering the top two floors. We shared the conference spaces, and the monthly meetings occurred on the ground floor conference room.

The room was filled with chairs facing a platform, hosting additional seating for leadership and a podium. In the back of the room near the doors were tables filled with some drinks and refreshments.

"Sooo, are things any better with him?" she asked, sitting sideways on the chair.

"It's only been one day. But, so far so good. It might be because he's good at blocking. Daniel is a calming sea."

Lila tapped her cheek thoughtfully. "Kai mad?"

I grimaced, remembering the incubus' face that morning when I told him. He looked utterly dejected. It made me want to cry. "I did tell him it would happen soon. At this rate, we can only keep on moving. So, it'll happen."

"Well, I'm glad you're pushing forward. Then you'll be complete."

"You haven't gotten claimed by all of them yet? Think you made a mistake?" came a snide voice from behind me.

I turned slightly to face a woman about our age with a short purple pixie cut and large violet eyes rimmed in black eyeliner. She had bright red lips

against ivory-colored skin. A septum piercing adored her nose. She wore a lacy all-black dress and black combat boots. Angelica. I don't think I'd ever seen her wear anything other than black before.

Flanking either side of her were two other women, also dressed in all-black, fashionable creations. On her left was Natsu, a tall, modelesque woman with long orange hair and a blunt bang. She wore a well-fitted black suit jacket with a mesh top underneath and black leather pants paired with heeled, pointed black boots. On Angelica's right was Keisha, a petite woman with almost glowing mahogany skin and shimmery makeup. Her hair was styled in short blonde twists. She eyed me with contempt, crossing her arms over her black mid-drift top, which she paired with black cargo pants, a long black trench coat, and open-toed heels.

I was a grown-ass woman, but somehow, I still had my share of mean girls. They followed me through my teens with judgmental eyes. Being the daughter of a high-ranking wizard got you two groups. Those who wanted to be your friend to get ahead and those who hated you for your perceived privilege. They were the ladder.

I'd tried my best to always be kind to them. I congratulated them on all their successes. Keisha and Angelica ran a successful tattoo and clothing store downtown that had recently opened a second location in Bethesda, Maryland. Natsu was a beauty influencer who also did freelance articles and had recently launched a makeup line that was pretty popular and already in several stores.

Yet, despite all they had going on, they found time to make snide comments about my life choices. I had hopes that maturity would end our bickering, but they were part of the dissenters who did not care for my choice of pack mates. Witch omegas were rare and supposedly a bonus for a coven, so many people claimed a vested interest in who I chose for the wellbeing of the coven. Although, I also suspected they just were annoyed hearing about me all the time in the coven. Not that I blamed them. I didn't care for my business being on display, either.

I rolled my eyes. "Why would you think I made a mistake?" I shot back.

Natsu gave a chiding grin. "They weren't the most prestigious alphas to pick from."

"So, you prefer the pack that Chilli created from magic who helped kidnap me?"

She scoffed. "Of course not. But you could find other options."

Angelica nodded her head. "You barely did a search."

I leaned into the group. "I'm not rehashing this over and over again. This is my life. It has nothing to do with you. Ultimately, the men I picked are good for me and, therefore, will be good for the coven. The end. Move on and stop eavesdropping."

Lila chuckled. "Question, what's going on with y'all's love lives? If you care about making powerful alliances through relationships, you don't have to be an omega to do so. Why don't y'all take one for the team."

Natsu blew out a breath. "Dating is trash in this city."

"Who you telling? So, you think it would have been easier finding a suitable alpha?"

I nodded in agreement with Lila. "I really would like us to be cool with one another. Can't we do that?"

Natsu's face loosened, her eyes softening. "We don't hate you. It's just, we hear things on the street about your guys, and maybe it's not our place to say, but you are a coven sibling, and you need to know."

Angelica elbowed her, eyes giving me an innocent smile. Keisha, who had been feigning boredom and looking at her nails, glanced up at us as if she were holding a secret.

"What's going on?" I asked, already exhausted.

Natsu scooted forward in her chair, shifting her eyes from side to side before speaking, as if making sure no one was listening. "I heard that Kai was a gigolo. Is that the term for it still? It seems so old-fashioned to say."

"Oh, and I heard that Ty had gone blood lust some years back and hurt a bunch of people," Keisha cut in.

Angelica, who seemed to no longer worry about secrecy, nodded vigorously. "And apparently, the reason their last omega died was because they stole from a family they conned. That family put a hit out on your guys, and that's how she died."

Pure anger burned up in me. I balled my fists, pressing my lips tightly together. I knew of Kai's past. I knew that Ty had gone blood lust after losing their omega. And they told me she died when an enemy group of theirs killed her as revenge. I hadn't asked them to go into full details about what led to her death yet. I had the basics and didn't want to pick at that wound. They'd told me they were criminals long ago. Even if it occurred before any of us were born, in the supernatural community, actions were remembered because we had longer lives than normal humans, and history traveled through magic.

I puffed out a breath, trying my best to stop myself from going off on them. Instead, Lila spoke up. “We know that shit. And so did her father. You aren’t telling us anything new. If you were really concerned, you would have said something earlier. You’re just spreading gossip now to make folks look bad. Mind the business that pays you.”

I gave a sweet smile. “You want to be a friend to me? Leave me alone. This isn’t high school. Being a mean girl at 30 is just sad.”

I then turned around, feeling unsettled. They had the desired effect of pissing me off. I couldn’t figure out why they were still so bothered by me. I definitely knew they didn’t care about my dating choices, like the elder coven members who still pushed for arranged marriages based on power. It was more popular with the generations before us, but the process had become lax during the last decade. Younger witches wanted more freedom. Technically, I’d been arranged with the pack, so it was possible Angelica and the others saw me as a disappointment. If things worked out, it would only support the coven leads push to do more arranged pairings again, even for non-omegas and alphas. There was already discussion about reinforcing it in lieu of low marriage rates and high divorce rates.

I couldn’t care about that in terms of my relationship. I would support keeping our right to choose despite my dad’s arrangement. In that light, I wasn’t mad at them for not liking my love success. Of course, they’d want to cast doubt on it. However, the women also brought up a nagging point. One that perhaps Kai’s extra activities hadn’t stopped when he first met Daniel. Or perhaps he had gone back to that life after the death of their first omega. There could be people in this small city who were his former clients. I thought of the women at the bar ogling him, and I silently snarled. Then there was the fact that I didn’t know the full story of the omega’s death. Was it worse than I believed? It was time to find out. I didn’t want anyone hoarding the truth over me, especially people I didn’t like.

Our coven head, an older woman in her late-fifties with long black dreadlocks named Brenda, tapped the mic to begin the meeting. I relaxed my shoulders I hadn’t even realized were bunched during my “discussion” with the ladies, and focused. Some general announcements were covered before Brenda went into the hot topic of the evening, the terrorizing mage sect and the trouble it was causing.

“As you know, we have been battling this group for the past several months. We are still looking for the identity of the leaders or for any

members,” she began.

Leadership wouldn't be sharing all the details because there was a traitor in our midst. We had no clue if this person was in our coven or another east coast one. Frankly, we didn't even know if they were in leadership, but Lila couldn't sit on that information, so she had to report back what she'd learned while in the fae realm.

Brenda looked around the room, her demeanor set on powerful. She was not a particularly tall woman, standing at barely 5'2, but no one ever doubted her strength. Wisdom and power practically radiated around her. I'd loosely seen her throughout my years grow higher and higher in the ranks until she became second-in-charge of the coven after my father. When he left the position to take a higher regional role, she still had to compete in an election to be selected as the next leader. However, she won by a landslide. Not to say there were dissenters that urged for all new leadership. One that was more progressive in their thinking. They thought my father, Brenda, and even Chilli were more from the old guard, and some of the policies they had were too old-fashioned and not adjusting with the times. My lack of involvement in the coven, to any huge degree, made me neutral in my opinions. I mostly did what my father suggested, except for my original resistance to the pack he had selected for me. With Chilli's actions, I decided it was time to become more involved and speak up when needed.

“What we do know is that their attacks are getting more ruthless,” Brenda began. “Our very own Lila Ramirez was banished to the fae realm by one of them. Luckily, she came back safely to us, and we have new allies who are assisting us in the fight.”

Everyone looked at my bestie, and she gave a pageant wave as Brenda recapped her struggle, leaving out the name of the mage who banished her so that we could keep some of what we knew a secret from the traitor.

“What we can share is that some of these mages have allies we didn't consider. A court of unseelie fae. And possibly those from the underworld or unsavory characters from other supernatural or even normal human groups. We hope we are larger in number, and we cannot underestimate what partnerships they've built to support their mission. We also learned that they have been involved in the kidnapping of paranormal beings all over the world and realms. No doubt via dark magic. We are increasing patrols, and we've shared this information with the authorities and government, as well as our sister covens.”

Brenda paused again and looked back at another man sitting on the platform. He was average height with a bald head. He wore round wire-rimmed glasses and was dressed in a tweed jacket, white shirt, and gray slacks. He looked like a college professor. We all knew him as Mr. Chu, the second lead of our chapter. He had a first name, but he appeared to be in his seventies, although we knew he was much older, and it felt disrespectful to call him anything but Mr. Chu.

He rose and walked to the microphone, and Brenda took a step back. “Knowledge is power,” he began, “and we have learned one thing. This group has a name. They call themselves Ascension. They’ve begun to tag certain areas in the east coast, especially if crime related.”

Technically every coven had a name and even its own vibe. In Baltimore, we were called Coven Charm. The D.C. chapter was Coven Capital. The Philadelphia chapter was Coven Liberty. I think you could see the connections. It got more creative in the lesser-known areas.

However, witch, wizard, and mage kind were united by our own laws in the United States. This wasn’t the case all over the world. We had a global union for covens that chose to participate. Our highest-ranking witch in the states, the High Priestess, had placed us in that global coven, and we abided by those global regulations. You didn’t have to join the major coven. There were smaller covens who did their own thing. However, they didn’t have as many resources or the protections we did. If you were a member of the major coven, you had access to everything from college scholarships, financial aid and internships, and references for high positions. In many parts of the world, the covens were in very powerful places. Hollywood, politics, music, Broadway, military, business. A witch was a power player. If you pissed off the wrong witch and weren’t a part of the major coven, you could be majorly blacklisted. I’d heard stories of people becoming homeless because they’d stolen from a coven member. There were even tales of death sentences.

It was possible that whoever was running this Ascension sect had come on the wrong side of a high-coven leader on the east coast. I had no doubt our leadership was digging through who that could be, but there was no telling. With the magic community living long, these could be people who had a hundred or more years of grudges in them. Not to mention how many people just didn’t like that witches were so controlling. I knew we weren’t perfect, but we’d done a lot of good in the world, and not all of us power-tripped.

So, this Ascension group could be full of people who didn’t like our rules,

had been blacklisted, or just wanted their own way to get power. If they got control of our covens by causing chaos and taking out our power heads, they could be closer to running things. If they got high enough, they could even be the High Priestess. She had a powerful magic source around her, and if that was taken, well, it was game over for life as we knew it for the US witches. This source of hers would force all witch, mage, and wizard kind under his or her control. We bonded through blood magic to join the covens, and that gave her power.

I shivered just thinking about what that could look like for us if someone with less morals than the High Priestess was in control.

“This Ascension group is also behind the scenes of several attacks on us by other supernatural beings. We know of that random attack by goblins last week at one of the gas stations downtown. Our very own omega, Billie Bellamy, was there and fought valiantly.”

I cringed at being called Omega Billie. I was a doctor. I didn’t even get that title anymore. Omega seemed to trump a degree.

“And then there was an attack in Brooklyn, just this past weekend, by a criminal group of were panthers at a wizard-owned nightclub. The Ascension are going on social media and claiming responsibility for all of this. And there are countless other attacks. It’s safe to say that they attack where they sense witch energy from members of the major coven. You must stay vigilant. If we are marked for attacks right now, we might want to consider reducing the time we surround ourselves with non-witches to not only protect ourselves but the innocent people around us. If you can telework, do so.”

Lila leaned sideways toward me. “I run a bakery, and you work in a hospital. How we going to do that? I’m not trying to put anyone at risk, but I gotta make a living.”

I nodded in agreement. That was not a feasible solution for many of us. Yes, this fight was focused on the magical community, but it would ultimately have wide-reaching effects. We hadn’t gotten much aid from other groups, but I was certain magic leadership would be calling in favors soon.

Mr. Chu nodded seemingly to himself before continuing, as if collecting his thoughts. “We must do all we can to protect the innocent civilians around us. These attacks also lessen the faith of others in our ability to maintain order. We know that this is the goal of Ascension. It will only be a matter of time before they come into communities claiming to be better protection. They will do all they can to cast doubt on our abilities.”

We had a contract with the local police force to help with supernatural crime. I could see that ending if these attacks kept happening or got worse.

“So, this is a call to you all to be brave, to be cognizant, and to be vocal. We are in this fight together. Any questions?”

Tons of hands went up, and we spent the next thirty minutes in a town hall style question and answer period. I was feeling more stressed with each passing moment. I was powerful, but I wasn't invincible. I certainly didn't have the answer to taking out this threat. That helplessness made me uncomfortable. Normally, we got the message to live life as normal. Not to let the terrorist win. However, our covens, for all our power, had a duty to protect others. We couldn't move on like usual. At least not active, adult members with magic like Lila and me.

Before we left the meeting, Brenda pulled us aside, asking us to meet her in her office on the top floor.

Once there, she closed the door behind her, and we sat down at a small round table off to the right of the door. Her space was large, with floor-to-ceiling windows across from us behind her desk. To the left of the door was a couch, bookshelves, and a wall-mounted TV. I'd rarely got a chance to be in her office. It kind of felt like being called to the principal's office.

“I'm glad you both could make it today. I'll make this quick. I thought you should know that we found out who this Nigel mage was that banished Lila. He's from the area. His father was removed from the coven twenty years ago for summoning a demon to help him financially. Needless to say, he had a grudge. He's been a part of Coven Whitefoot since then. As you know, they are not affiliated with the major coven, and we are having challenges gaining more information from them about Nigel or any suspicious members, but we continue to work on them. They aren't totally disagreeable. They claim to not have any ties with the fae realm but knew that Nigel did trading with the fae.”

Whitefoot was a pretty quiet coven that stuck to itself outside of the city in Westminster. We rarely heard anything negative about them. I used to think that was good until now. Sometimes no news didn't mean good news.

“Thanks for sharing that with us,” I replied.

“Of course. Lila, your misfortune turned out to be helpful to us. I'm only glad it all worked out. Before you both go, I want you to know that we are keeping eyes on you two. Billie, I know you have your pack, and Lila, I know you have your fae protector, but I am concerned. Lila, you were marked

because of your power and partial dragon status. They may not give up on that, especially once they discover that Nigel is dead. Billie, you are an omega witch, and despite what some may say about your pack, they are powerful men. They have a history that precedes them, and there is no doubt of their capabilities.”

I scrunched my face, having an idea where she was headed with this. More stress. “Are you telling us that we’re more of a target than we think?”

She gave a sympathetic nod. “This is just to be between us, and I will know if you share with anyone outside of your mates. We have someone connected with an Ascension member. An insider. They don’t let just anyone in, so there is some kind of trial period. In any event, the word is that they are coming for you, Billie. I wish I had more to share with you on that. I just know that they are honing in on all coven omegas. We can’t afford to lose you. Anyone, really. But since we are on notice of you, especially, I need you to make sure you are never alone. Put your alphas to work.”

Lila crossed her arms, eyebrow cocked. “They would love nothing more.”

She was right. When I told them of this new worry, because I had to for the sake of an open, honest relationship, I’d be back to having my bodyguards 24-7. However, I wasn’t annoyed now. I tensed to think of what this Ascension coven would do if they captured me. They could drain me of my powers and kill me, but most likely, they would force me into a new pack to power-boost them. That would be a nightmare I didn’t want.

We really had to find the leader of this group and get rid of them. I couldn’t live my life in fear forever.

CHAPTER 8



BILLIE

I woke up in the middle of the night, covered in a film of sweat and an unexplainable panic. Someone else was in the room with me. I couldn't see him or her, but I felt it. An irritating itch at the back of my brain. An unsettling brush against the nerves on my arms. I tried to turn my head to scan my room, but my body felt almost separated from my mind. I couldn't will my neck to move.

Lance was supposed to be sleeping beside me when he got home from the station. I recalled falling asleep and expected him to slide in next to me as he sometimes did. However, I didn't feel the weight of his presence beside me on the bed or his gentle snoring. But there was definitely someone else in the room.

I tried to kick out my legs, but again, my body ignored me. I could feel my legs and yet not feel them at the same time. It was different from feeling numb. And there was no mistaking the feeling of being watched. That could have been in my head, but it was persistent. Was Lance or one of the other guys standing there looking at me? I wouldn't have put it past Kai to try to scare me. He'd done it a few times. His version of humor. He was a demon, after all.

I tried to call out, but my mouth also refused to obey.

And then I saw it.

At first, I thought it was the floor lamp standing beside the dresser across from my bed. I could barely make out anything in the dark room. However, my lamp was not that thick nor that tall. Whatever was across from me had to be seven feet tall, and it was human-shaped. Two floating red orbs the size of tiny balls appeared. No, not orbs. Eyes.

Fucking yikes. What the hell was I looking at?

Suddenly the thing that was not a lamp began to move. Its movements were slow and fluid, as if it were wading through water. No, it looked like it was moving in reverse, only it was very much coming my way.

Panic seized my body, and I willed myself to move. To use my magic. Nothing worked. I screamed, but no sound emanated. The shadowy figure continued its sluggish pace my way. This had to be a nightmare. How could it get in if this was real? We were heavily warded and alarmed. Also, I was claimed by three alphas. Surely, they would be able to feel my mental distress.

Unless this creature could prevent it, it wasn't out of the realm of possibility that it could cloak the room so that even mental telepathy would not get through. This had to be a demon. At this point, I just wanted to pass out because staying awake defenseless was stressful.

Lord, I prayed, if you get me through this, I will never watch another scary movie again. Amen.

I remained awake in terror as the giant shadow being finally reached me. It sat down on the bed beside me and then smiled. I knew it smiled because two rows of bright white, razor-sharp teeth appeared not too far below the eyes. The smile was so wide, it had to have split its face, which I couldn't make out, even this close. Thus far, it looked like a tall black monster, and my mind was doing the rest to horrify me. I really needed this to be a dream.

"Precious omega," it began in a deep but horse whisper. "You are almost mine."

I couldn't breathe. I was so scared. Was this another demon trying to take me away? It had been quiet recently. Kai was sure the word had gotten out in the underworld that Chilli's bounty on me had been canceled with her death. Still, it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility that someone didn't get the memo. Not that I cared. I needed him gone.

He leaned forward, and the smell of spice and berries filled my nostrils. What an unexpected scent. I anticipated it to smell like manure like most evil, low-level demons. It was possible this was no level one creature from the underworld. Just my luck.

The demon's face was only inches away from mine now. Something slick and wet slid across my cheek like a slug. Had this fucker licked me?

The redness disappeared, and I assumed it closed its eyes. "Mmm, your taste is euphoric," it stated with a groan. "I want more."

It then opened its mouth impossibly wide.
This time I could scream.



LANCE

I was exhausted and had been looking forward to sleeping beside Billie. She was off the next day, and so was I, so I was glad we were getting our time together without the others. It was funny how I was the least on board with getting another omega, and now, I was grateful for her. Our bond was reassuring and comforting.

I had just cleaned up and was climbing the steps to her level when I heard her let out a blood-curdling scream. I jumped the rest of the steps to her level and threw open her door. She was still on her bed, but her eyes were squeezed tightly, her face pained. I scanned the room, but there was no one else there. She continued to scream until I grabbed her in my arms.

“Billie, open your eyes,” I boomed out in my alpha voice.

She kept screaming, her eyes still shut, sweat sheening her body. Why wasn’t my command working? I heard footsteps behind me, and the lights came on.

“What’s going on?” Daniel asked, standing at the door, Ty beside him.

“I think she’s having a nightmare.” I tapped her cheeks lightly, but she didn’t budge.

Ty crouched down beside the bed and grabbed one of Billie’s hands in between his. His eyes were wide and confused. “Why can’t I sense her in the bond? She’s scared. We should feel that.”

He was right. We should have felt her torment like it was our own. Was it because she was dreaming? I couldn’t recall, all those years ago, if we’d ever felt our first omega have a nightmare. Then I smelt it. It was faint, so I didn’t catch it at first when I entered the room under the sour scent of Billie’s fear. However, it was definitely there. A demonic presence.

“Demon,” I spat.

Kai appeared on the side of the bed. He rolled his shoulders back, face

scrunched in a grimace. “Yeah.”

Daniel climbed on the bed on her other side, placing a hand on her shoulder. His face still remained composed. “Focus on the bond. Will her to wake up,” he ordered of us.

We placed our attention on Billie, whose screams had died out. I wasn’t sure if that was better. Her face was still twisted in fear, her body stiff.

Wake up, baby girl. I commanded in my head, hoping she could hear us telepathically in her mind.

Seconds later, her eyes popped open, and she looked around at us with unfocused eyes. I sighed and brought her to my chest. “It’s okay. I got you.”

“Was there a demon in here?” Kai asked.

She pulled away from me and touched her neck, then dropped her shoulders in apparent relief. “I thought it was real. A demon was in this room, and I couldn’t move. He said something about me almost being his. He knew I was an omega. And then he bit me. It was a dream, but it was so real.”

Daniel nodded his head. “It was a dream. None of my wards went off. Even if a demon could get past our security system, they shouldn’t have been able to get past our wards, at least not without us knowing.”

It had to be a dream since there weren’t any bite marks on her. Still, something wasn’t right. “Why do I smell demon if it was just a dream?”

Kai rubbed his chin, looking down at Billie with worried eyes. “Some demons can communicate through dreams. Boogiemens-type fuckers.”

Billie shivered, wrapping her arms around herself. “Are you saying this wasn’t a dream?”

I pulled her back in my arms, a mixed desire to comfort her as well as myself. “Do you think this dark mage sect sent this thing to scare her? Her coven leaders said she was still vulnerable to threats.”

Kai shrugged. “It’s possible. He can’t hurt you in a dream. Only scare you.”

Billie shook her head, chin resting on my shoulder. I could feel her trembling, and I fought the urge to squeeze her tighter as if that would calm her down more. Instead, I stroked my hand up and down her back, bringing out my alpha purr for her. Instantly, I felt her unwind, and she snuggled closer to me.

“He could scare me to death in my dream. But I don’t think he or it was trying to scare me. At least not directly. I think it’s coming for me. And I don’t care if it’s working with the Ascension or not, I’m on its fucking radar.

It knew I was an omega. And I didn't smell demon, not that I have the best nose for that. I think I smelled alpha," she stated.

I tensed, pausing my purr for a second and switching to a growl of annoyance. I quickly caught myself and went back to purring. I didn't need yet another alpha encroaching into our territory. Billie was ours. She was claimed. Clearly, this asshole didn't care about the bonds. If an alpha tore an omega from her bonded alphas, it would feel like our souls were being ripped out. There were many alphas out there who didn't care. They only wanted what they wanted.

Ty swore beside me, resting his forehead on the hand of Billie's that he was still clutching. I could feel his anxiety rise through the bond, and I tapped his foot with mine to get him focused. She didn't need the added stress, although it was hard for me to keep my cool as well.

Kai groaned, running his hands through his hair. "Fucking demon alphas. They won't give a damn about her being claimed."

"Why Billie of all omegas?" Ty asked, lifting his head. His grasp was still tight on Billie, and I was sure I was going to have to pry him away from her later.

Daniel leaned in and kissed Billie on the shoulder before shifting off the bed. "Because of the bounty Chilli had on her. She was placed on the radar. Even if they won't get any reward from it, who would turn away from an omega with a high level of magic? And they may not have gotten word that she's claimed."

Kai snorted. "Either that or they take us for a joke."

I scowled. "Well then, we will show them we're not. Billie, I hate to ask you, but could you describe this demon? We can do some investigating. I'm assuming it didn't give a name."

She sagged in my arms. "No, forgot to exchange pleasantries while I was being terrified out of my mind. And sadly, my description will be shit. It looked like a human-shaped shadow, except it was stupid tall with red eyes and a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth that practically split its face apart. Oh, and he smelled like spice and berries."

Daniel looked over to Kai, who rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Sounds like it could be a few things. A boogeyman, a shadow demon, a sleep paralysis demon, a nightmare demon. I'll put a feeler out for anything that fits that description. Having a signature alpha scent helps."

Daniel nodded. "Well, the good thing is, although it can break through

our wards in a dream, it can't touch her in reality. So, you're safe, Billie."

She rolled her eyes. "I don't feel that way. Now I have to try to ward my dreams. I know a spell that prevents nightmares, but I don't think that'll be good enough. Anyone else know how to ward against unwanted mental invasion?"

Daniel rubbed his chin. "Besides the mental block, I don't. And it would be hard to keep up when unconscious. Start with the anti-nightmare spell. We'll research if there are any wards that can help."

She gave a curt nod. "I'll contact coven assistance for other options as well."

Daniel nodded. "We'll get right to it, but we'll let you get some rest and regroup in the morning."

Billie scoffed. "You think I'll be able to sleep after that?"

Kai pointed at me in a circular motion. "Wolfy will be here with you. You can paint each other's nails or something."

I gave him the middle finger as he walked away. "You can't help yourself, you little rat-tailed demon."

He blew me a kiss as he left.

Ty stood up and then kissed Billie on the top of the head. "See you in the morning."

She nodded and smiled up at him. I thought about asking her if she wanted him to stay with us, but I really wanted my time with her alone.

When the guys left, she pulled away from me and sat up in her bed, resting her back on her many pillows. She patted the space beside her on her king bed. I silently moved over to her side.

She then rested her head on my shoulder. "I'm tired."

"Let's go to sleep then," I replied.

"No, not like that. Just mentally tired. I really wanted to be done with this demon stuff. I'm not a fighter. I'm a doctor. I just want to heal people and watch k-dramas when I get home."

I chuckled, tapping the side of my head on top of hers. "You can still do all of that. Let us take care of everything for you. That's what we're here for. I'm sure we all can find some kind of magic to make sure that thing doesn't get in your dreams again."

She didn't respond, and I felt a rumbling in my stomach that had nothing to do with hunger. She was unsettled. I'd say it was from the nightmare, but I knew there was more to it. She'd been feeling this way before tonight.

Anytime we'd asked her about how she was feeling, she would say she was fine and just getting used to the connection. I wasn't always the best at reading feelings, even when connected to her, but I knew there was more. I'd spoken to Ty about it several times, and he'd been just as clueless. It seemed our omega was shutting us out, and I didn't like it. I also didn't want to push her too much. I knew she was very much reluctant about the whole alpha and omega world. She'd been nervous about us controlling her and making her submissive. We'd spent a lot of time showing her that we were different.

Correction, the others did. I spent too much time away from her. I had my own demons to fight, and I tried my hardest to keep them from her. I was beginning to wonder if I wasn't trying hard enough. I hadn't done so well with our first omega, Jocelyn, but she had helped me. Of course, I fell back when she was killed. Instead of remembering how she helped, I shut down. Shut her out of my mind. It was easier to forget her. To not feel that pain that the memories brought up.

I needed to be less of a stress to Billie. I didn't want her to worry about my family history of loupism. I'd done the things I needed to do to keep it at bay. She would never have to worry about me.

"Talk to me, baby girl," I said, hoping tonight would be the time she fully opened up and trusted us.

She poked at my rib cage, but I barely felt it, not that she was trying to hurt me. "I'm fine."

"You say that all the time."

"So do you. This isn't the Billie show, you know. We should share our issues. Our burdens."

"I'm good."

"Liar. We're bonded, remember? Even if I don't know exactly what's going on, I can feel it. You're full of agitation or turmoil."

I cringed. I thought by shutting it all out, putting it in a box, I wouldn't be bothered by it. More importantly, *she* wouldn't be bothered by it.

She lifted her head off me and twisted herself so that her legs were over my lap, and she leaned her left side against the fabric headboard and pillows. I ran my hand up her legs, fascinated by the smooth, silky skin. She looked at me with expectant, doe eyes. Damn, she really wanted me to talk? I was sure I had told her all my worries before. I was not a talker.

She pouted. "Fine. You think you hide your trauma, but when you sleep, the control is gone. I feel it. And if I'm asleep at the same time, sometimes I

share your nightmares.”

Fuck. This wasn't what I wanted. She had enough going on than to have to deal with my shit.

She leaned forward and kissed my cheek. I inhaled her scent and felt myself smile in spite of my mood. This woman had that effect on me. My omega.

She began to stroke my face with the gentlest of touches. “Let me help you carry your pain, just like you help me.”

In healthy omega and alpha relationships, the pairing was beyond sex and power and submission. It was about mutual healing. I could use my purr to soothe her, but she could use her touch, hell, her very presence, to calm me.. As a werewolf, we also thrived on touch. She knew this, and I welcomed the connection she was providing me. The least I could do was open up to her as I'd ask of her. It might also take her mind off her own nightmare.

I just hoped neither of us regretted it.

CHAPTER 9



LANCE

I grabbed her hand and kissed it before holding it to my chest. “For a long time, I did blame Ty for Jocelyn’s death, but it wasn’t his fault. I just needed someone to blame. And then I started blaming myself. If only I’d gotten rid of the threat to us in the first place, she would have been safe. If only we’d given up the life of crime earlier. I honestly don’t know if we ever really deserved an omega. Not Jocelyn. Not you. We weren’t good men, Billie.”

Saying that out loud felt like a relief but also a risk. It was no secret that we had committed crimes to gain our riches. If Ty hadn’t wisely invested our treasures, we might still be out there as a gang. However, when we finally decided to end that life, we disbanded, gave our people some kind of severance, and started a more righteous path. However, by the time we’d gone that route, we’d had too many enemies.

Billie shook her head but not out of disappointment, more so confusion. “Not everyone’s past is squeaky clean. You did good things. You helped alphas who were on their own. Alphas who could have gone rogue and harmed innocent omegas. Daniel and Ty have told me all about the businesses you invested in. Startups. You’re silent partners in some really lucrative companies.”

I tilted my head from side to side. I wasn’t the smart one. I was just the enforcer when we interacted with less savory people. “We just have the benefit of age. Ty and Daniel were good about knowing which companies to take a chance on. When you can live for hundreds of years, taking a risk isn’t that big of a thing.”

“Don’t downplay yourselves. You could have invested in all the wrong

things. You made smart moves. And just because you aren't the money guy doesn't mean you didn't have a role. They used you to help get those funds to do the investing. And I know you didn't always get them by legal means, but you didn't go after innocent people all the time."

I snorted. While I really appreciated her kindness towards us, we didn't deserve it. "We went after some innocent people. They happened to be rich, but they didn't deserve our crimes. Even if we gave back to the poor, it didn't make it right. And it came back to bite us."

She narrowed her eyes at me, sucking her teeth. What had I said to piss her off? It was the truth. "Why do you always do that? Why can't you accept kind words about yourself?"

"Because we don't deserve it, Billie. We are lucky to have you, but we don't deserve you."

Her eyes softened as she gave me a sympathetic smile. "I need you to love yourself more, babe. You saved Jocelyn from being taken by barbaric thugs, and from how you all described it, you treated her very well. Even before any of you claimed me, you had my back at every moment. I feel so blessed to have you in my life. I felt so alone when my father died. I tried to prepare for it, but there's only so much you can do. And then, before I could even wallow and hide away, you all appeared, and I didn't have to be alone. You guys and Lila saved me from being hollow inside. We are lucky to have each other."

I heard her words, but my weakness was not accepting happiness. I'd been raised too long as a problem with only the hateful words of others and my own negative thoughts to fill my head. There were times I'd wished I stayed alone in those woods after running from my wolf pack instead of joining Daniel and his gang. Sometimes, I wondered if Daniel had used fae magic to get me out of there.

When I didn't respond, Billie made a slight humph of annoyance and pushed my arm. I side-eyed her, not annoyed but enjoying her playfulness. I loved this woman. I needed to at least try to make an effort to earn her heart. "I hear you. It's just hard."

"You didn't kill Jocelyn."

"I know."

"The men who killed her, they were a criminal organization as well?"

I nodded, my heart tightening as I thought of the past. "Yeah, they saw us growing over the years. At first, they wanted to join forces. But there was

something about them we didn't like. We weren't good, but they were evil. They hurt innocent people. They had an omega at one point, but I'd heard she'd killed herself. The women they had around them didn't look too healthy. They weren't taking care of them. When we turned them down, things got ugly. We'd gone to battle with them a few times over marks. They would threaten our allies. Sabotage our jobs. We did the same. I wanted to start a war. But Daniel thought it would lead to too much destruction. He was right. But if I'd taken out their leader, maybe they wouldn't have gone after Jocelyn to try to weaken us. In the end, we killed them anyway as revenge for her death. And it did lead to a lot of destruction. Some of our people didn't make it. Homes and businesses were destroyed. Daniel almost died. Kai lost an arm."

Billie raised a hand to stop me, her face contorted in confusion. "Kai has two arms now. Either he has a really good prosthetic and needs to share in how he got that magic to work, or I'm missing something."

I hung my head. Of course, the jerk wouldn't tell her everything. "He's a demon and can regenerate limbs. He's lost them a few times."

She grimaced. "Like a lizard?"

I chuckled. Fitting comparison. "Yeah. He's regrown his tail, too, actually."

She tapped her nose in thought. "Both cool and disturbing." She glanced over to me, her eyes seemingly wiser now. "You know, despite everything that's happened, you guys made it out. You can't live a good life if you let negative thoughts continue to haunt your mind. The what-ifs will kill you. And you may not think you deserve me, but I sure as hell want you, so where does that leave us?"

She'd always wanted me. It was always me pushing her away, despite what my wolf wanted. He had no thoughts about his worthiness. He didn't worry about going loupe and hurting her. It was for that reason that I had to stay vigilant. That I couldn't get too comfortable. She was too precious to chance it all.



BILLIE

I was losing him. Sometimes I wondered if I ever really had him. For all the jokes Kai made about Ty being morose and tormented, I found Lance to be equally, if not more, negative. He could look me in the eyes and tell me lies, but I knew what he was trying to cover. I wasn't sure I had the power to get him to understand how amazing he was. Nor did I want to add another worry to his mind, or that his lack of letting go was kind of stressful to me.

I tried to rack my brain with anything I could say to get him to treat me like a strong person and not some fragile thing that could break. I was an omega, and yes, we were supposed to be physically weaker than others. This is what brought on the overprotective alpha sense. However, I was also a witch who took her vitamins and worked out four days a week. I wouldn't break that easily. I thought he would understand this after I had defeated Chilli, a powerful witch, on my own.

I breathed out a sigh and moved into his lap, straddling him. He looked at me with curious clear-blue eyes that made my stomach flutter. He had the most intense face of everyone, and it drove me mad.

"I will love you however you come to me," I began. "You don't have to be perfect. And I know you're scared of going loupe, but the great thing about us being bonded is that I will know if something is off before you even do anything. You aren't the only one who's powerful in this relationship. I can hold my own. I'm not perfect, either. I'm still struggling with the bond, but I don't regret it. Your struggles are my struggles, and vice versa. I'm happy to carry the load and have someone sharing mine. Sure, it's not always easy, but we'll work it out. Because I know it's worth it if we try. Just give me all of you. Please."

He didn't speak, just stared at me, mouth slightly ajar. There was something in his eyes, a pained struggle that broke my heart. I could practically see the internal strife happening inside of him.

"I could hurt you," he said in barely a choked whisper.

His eyes glistened, and I found myself tearing up. What kind of horrors had he seen his loupe family members do that had affected him like this? He told me a bit about how his brother had killed a woman, but I didn't pry further. I knew he'd gone to live in the woods to prevent himself from hurting anyone else.

“Was it more than your brother who went loupe?”

He looked away from me. “The alphas, men and women, in my family mostly go loupe. It can happen at any age. The youngest was ten. The oldest was eighty. Most have to be killed or locked up.”

I shut my eyes. I couldn't imagine the horror the generations of his family had to endure. This was more than I thought. It was basically genetic.

I opened my eyes, looking back at Lance, who kept his head turned from me. I could feel the shame wrapped around him like a vice. “Did they have omegas? The alphas who went loupe?”

He shook his head slowly. “It's the only thing that seems to help. Most of the others who don't go loupe just go into the woods and live the hermit life.”

“That's what you were doing.”

He nodded. “I didn't bother looking for an omega. I didn't think it was worth the risk. We could still be aggressive even with an omega. There was one time an omega was badly hurt, but she didn't die.”

“So, what made you leave the woods? Why'd you take a chance on Daniel but are so weary of me?”

He finally looked back at me with surprised eyes. Had my question been so challenging? Surely, he had thought the same thing before. “I'd like to think Daniel used magic to get me to join him, but I know it was me. I didn't like being alone.”

“Wolfs are meant to be in packs.”

He looked down and ran his hands up my bare thighs, resting them on my hips, and the warmth of his strong, calloused hands tightened my core. I meant to be serious here, but this man was seriously distracting sexiness.

His nostrils flared, probably scenting my slight arousal, but he didn't make any further movements. “To keep the loupism at bay if you don't have an omega, you have to isolate on a full moon and during your rutting season. Staying away from sex and those who you are attracted to also helps. No drugs or alcohol. Meditation. I did all of that.” He smiled slightly, his eyes distant, as if he were remembering something. “Honestly, when Jocelyn came around, it was hard for me to give in with her too.”

I reached up and ran my fingers through his short blond hair. He closed his eyes and leaned forward to my hand, which brought a smile to my lips. I really enjoyed how much he loved my touch. It was almost like a puppy, although I would never tell him that. “But you didn't go loupe with her. Or even after she died. You have excellent control. In every way.”

I said the last part to set him off. The man really did know how to work my body. I let my eyes fall down to his bare chest. I was supposed to be getting deep with him, but I was a distracted omega straddling a ripped-as-hell alpha. Every part of him was toned, and he was the biggest of the guys, although they all were stupidly in shape. As most alphas were. I ran a hand slowly down his defined pecs and over his hard abs, and I momentarily forgot what I was talking to him about. I was a little disappointed in myself.

When I looked back up at him, he was giving me a sideways grin. He could be unsure about many things, but the man was confident when it came to our attraction to each other. “No, I didn’t go loupe with her.”

I continued to explore his chest. “And you won’t go loupe with me.” I leaned forward and licked his right nipple. He instantly tensed, and I lowered myself further onto him. Yup, he was already getting hard.

He didn’t speak, and that exasperated me. He had to give in just a little. I began to rock back and forth over his length. “Say you trust in this. In us.”

He squeezed my ass, tossing his head back against the headboard. “You’re not playing fair, baby girl.”

Man, I loved when he called me *baby girl*. It made my stomach flutter and I found myself grinning like a kid who learned they were going to the amusement park. I kissed his neck, sucking on the thin skin, producing a very happy groan from him. His hands went back to my hips as he ground me against his dick. I could already feel my slick dripping into my panties like a leaking faucet. “Say it,” I urged him.

“I’m trying,” he replied.

I stopped moving and pulled my lips away from him. I grabbed his chin so that he could see me. His eyes were already glazed into his amber wolf form and I clenched my thighs in response without thinking. He really was a sexy beast. “No trying. Do it. Say it.”

He lightly kissed my shoulder where he had claimed me, and instantly, my core simmered. He was playing games. “Billie.”

I gritted my teeth, trying to remain focused. “Lance.”

He smiled, and my heart cracked a little. “I love you.”

Shattered. “I love you, too. Now say it.”

“You’re such a bossy omega.”

I ground into him again for encouragement, and the feel of his member brushing against my clit set my body buzzing. “And you’re such a stubborn alpha.” I gave him my best omega whine to further entice him. When one

wants to get her way, one should employ all the dirty tricks.

My whine set him off and he grabbed the back of my neck, pulling me towards him and kissing me so hard I forgot to breathe. Forgetting myself, I continued to rub myself onto him, moaning into his mouth. My panties were a mess now, and I had no doubt I was perfuming like crazy because the smell of his whiskey alpha scent was all I could inhale at the moment.

He slowly pulled away and rested his forehead against mine. “Fuck, baby girl, you smell so good. I’ll give you whatever you want if you let me taste you. But don’t say you weren’t warned.”

I smiled. I didn’t care about his warning. I just wanted him. I paused my rocking to have one last thought of mental clarity before taking off my useless panties, which refused to stay dry around these damn alphas. “Thank you, Lance. Whenever you’re feeling stressed or down, I’m here for you. Don’t hide it. And I won’t hide mine, either.”

He shuddered beneath me, eyelids lowered in a mixture of lust and endearment. “Did I say I love you?”

“Yes, but keep saying it.”

“I love you. And I also want to fuck you with my mouth. Sit on my face, baby girl. Right now.”

Well, shit. He wasn’t going to get a fight from me on that one. I jumped out of bed like my ass was on fire and tore my panties off and pulled my nightgown over my head for good measure. Slick dripped down my inner thighs, and I pressed them together so I wouldn’t make too much of a mess.

He looked over at my naked body, eyes still wolfen, and licked his lips as if he was awaiting such deliciousness. I could already see his dick straining against his pajamas like a pole.

He moved down flat on the bed and then beckoned me with his fingers, his gaze so intense yet confident my legs actually trembled. I don’t know how I made it over there, but I don’t think my walk was sexy. I climbed back on the bed and moved so that I was positioned right over his face. I could feel my slick dripping, and he opened his mouth to accept it.

“Mmmm,” he moaned before pulling me down further.

I nearly came out of my body just from the feel of his thick tongue on my pussy lips. He lapped up my juices like a man deprived. I braced my hands on the headboard, crying out at the tingling his mouth brought me. His tongue soon found my clit and began a gentle but quick rotation of sucking and licking that drove me wild. I began to grind into his mouth, crying out at the

immense pleasure. My body was on the verge of breaking. I tossed my head back, riding his mouth with abandon.

My toes curled as he moved his expert tongue between my folds, moving up and down the length. He then moved back to my bud, moaning as he tasted me. I really hoped I wasn't drowning him in my slick because the leaking faucet had now become a running tap.

"Shit," I whined. My thighs shook around him, and I gripped the headboard with all my strength as the building pleasure overtook my body. I cried out, not caring who heard me and vaguely aware that I completely forgot to block my mind from Ty and Daniel.

I panted above Lance, my body slowly coming back down, but he continued to lick my sensitive clit. "I think I'm going to collapse on you if you keep it up."

He chuckled into my pussy, sending another electric buzz through my core. However, he let me go, and I climbed off him. I yanked at his pajamas and didn't delay as I straddled him yet again, lowering myself onto his erect and dripping dick. He arched his back as I wrapped around him, groaning out a deep rumble. I clenched my teeth at the feel of his thick rod spearing me, filling me. I rode him hard, and he grasped my hips, slamming me down on him faster and faster.

His knot slammed against my pussy lips, and I tried my best to take him all the way inside of me. He pushed up further, until I had his knot, locking us together. I screamed at the stretch, bordering slightly on painful. He wound his hips and rubbed on my clit, and I shook at the searing heat of pleasure wrapping around every nerve. It took no time before we were both coming, giving in to our growing need for release.

I collapsed on top of him, and he wrapped his arms around me. I was exhausted but satiated. I rubbed my face into the crook of his neck, indulging in his smoky, sweet scent and the feel of his hardness still in me.

"Can you hold me all night?" I whispered. I was being vulnerable, but I was also tired, and sleep slightly scared me after my nightmare or whatever it was. I wasn't sure if even an anti-nightmare spell would be good enough against this supposed demon.

Lance kissed the side of my head. "I'll never let you go, baby girl. You're mine, always."

"And don't you forget it," I said in a drowsy voice.

I was still scared, but I also felt safe. That was because of him. I hoped he

understood just how much I loved him and how I, too, wasn't going to let him go.

CHAPTER 10



BILLIE

I was back at work following my day off, feeling refreshed from my time with Lance, despite the upsetting demon dream. We hadn't done much of anything all day which was a rarity considering that Lance was the most active of them all. I appreciated it, and I secretly knew he was being lazy just for me.

I wasn't sure if my anti-nightmare spell was working, but the demon hadn't visited the next night. The others were looking for wards to stop nighttime visits. I'd reached out to my coven online group about my nightmare. Some had experience with such kinds of visits and shared spells and potions, although they admitted they were never guaranteed, and some wore off. The best thing to do was to get rid of the demon or whatever it was. They likened it to a poltergeist, which tended to haunt a person instead of a place, like a ghost. There was no running away.

Fun times.

On the positive, most agreed that I was too powerful to succumb to it or die in my dreams. Brenda gave me a charm she thought would help. However, she cautioned that we had to focus on finding what this visitor was all about. She even suggested it could be connected to the Ascension. Nothing was coincidence to her, and I agreed.

I grumbled to myself as I went through my charts in my office late that morning, partly distracted from my predicament. I heard a quick knock at my door and turned to see a curvy woman with thick, shoulder-length black hair, a flawless nutmeg complexion, and smiling honey-brown eyes staring at me. I nearly dropped my electronic pad. "Shante! You're back!" I cried.

Lila was my bestie for life. However, Shante Makeba was my work

bestie. She was also an amazing healing witch and an omega. I'd been sort of bummed when she'd gone overseas to do humanitarian work for a while. I jumped up and quickly walked over to her, giving her a tight hug. It was incorrect to say she was just a work bestie. We hung out outside of work, and she got along well with Lila. While I didn't hang out with her as much as Lila, she was still an important part of my life.

She embraced me in a tight squeeze. "I'm back! And so thankful. And it seems I missed a lot." She released me and raised a bag in the air that I only now noticed. "I got two chicken boxes from our favorite place. I know they are unhealthy, and we shouldn't be eating them in a hospital, but the craving was real."

I pointed her to a seat in front of my desk as I went back to sit down. "You don't have to sell me on it."

She took a seat and took out the food as she spoke. "Ok, so now you are fully embracing your omega status. I'm happy you finally did. I was worried, girl."

I nodded in agreement, opening my box of artery-clogging deliciousness. "I was being kind of stubborn."

She took a fry out of her box and waved it at me. "You were in denial."

Shante knew me so well, but that was also because her healing ability wasn't just physical. She had the ability to heal minds as well. In fact, like me, she'd gone to medical school despite her magic and specialized in psychiatry.

I shrugged. "Truth."

"I get it. While I wasn't as averse to being an omega, the claiming part still scares me. What if you pick the wrong guy or guys? What if they die? Does that mean I could die too? I can't go through that horror."

Shante had a unique relationship with being an omega. Her sister was also an omega and had been in a relationship with one alpha. Sadly, he was killed, and her sister was left almost catatonic from the loss. She never recovered, despite everyone's best efforts, and sadly, her sister had essentially died of a broken heart. Since becoming an omega and going into full heat, Shante has never looked for an alpha. She simply took scent covers and heat suppressants. The suppressants were a tad helpful in that they shortened the heating period. She usually went to an omega center to get a trained alpha to help her through that time. Never the same one, so she didn't become attached. I used to look at her as a sister in solidarity. Now, I only wanted the

best for her. I understood that an omega without her alpha was not a fun place to be. Although, I understood her fear. If anything happened to any of my guys, I wasn't sure how I would recover, no matter how stressed they could make me sometimes.

She cleared her throat, bringing me back to the present. "So, I saw the pictures of the men. Seriously, how dare they be that hot?"

"Any romances for you? Perhaps alphas?"

She waved a hand at me. "Girl, there was this one guy, but he kept wanting to get serious. I was only there for a few months."

I bit into a wing and hummed in appreciation. The place had the best lemon pepper wings around. I would savor these calories respectfully. "Of course, he wouldn't leave you alone. You're fabulous."

She flipped her long hair over her shoulder and fluttered her lashes. "Thank you, babes. Speaking of fabulous, have you seen that new doctor? Dr. Timothy Winters."

I frowned, searching my mind, but couldn't recollect. "What department is he in?"

"Surgery. So, you know he's good with his hands."

I snorted. I had a vague recollection of him. "I think he arrived right after you left. So, he's not that new."

Shante shimmed in her seat. "Well, he's new to me, and he is fine as hell."

"I hadn't noticed."

"That's because your alphas blocked your eyesight before you could even glance at him. All the better for me. And he's only a beta. So, you know, marriage material."

I cackled at that. I couldn't judge her. That was me a few months ago. "Since you're back, I need to tell you about the dream I had the other night. Since you are good with mental health."

I went on to tell her about what I experienced and gave her a high-level recap of my challenges with bonding and blocking my alpha's emotions. "Because we don't want to make too light of it, we think it might be some kind of poltergeist, but I heard that sometimes these things latch on to people who have high stress. I know it could also be because of the old bounty on me or even the dark mage group, but I want to rule out all possibilities. A stress-induced demon seems a lot easier to handle."

Shante bit her lip, thinking. "Well, if we're going straight off science, you

probably have a lot of stress and anxiety from all that's happened to you. Let's not belittle things. You lost your father, a mentor betrayed you and tried to kill you, and then another alpha tried to assault you. Not to mention the many demon attacks, and you texted me about the goblins coming out of the woodwork the other day. Add those with this new alpha bonding, and they have their own traumas. It's a lot. I could work with you on it all to see if that helps. I've actually encountered stress demons before. They are irritating and persistent but not invincible."

I let out a breath of relief. It would be wonderful if this was something Shante could really fix.

"My biggest concern is that this thing presents itself as an alpha."

My eyes widened, a frightful thought entering my mind. "It can't claim me in my dream, can it?"

She tapped her chin. "I've never heard such a thing. Claiming has to be physical. Sure, it's magic based, but he can't bite you in your dream."

"Can it find me in real life?"

She shrugged, giving me sympathetic eyes. "Maybe? But not through a dream. Unless you told him in the dream where you were. So, you know, don't do that."

I twisted my lips and side-eyed her. "Thanks."

She pouted. "I'm sorry you're going through all this. But you aren't alone. You got me. Lila, your alphas, and the big handsome bodyguard I passed before coming in here. He's beta too. Marriage material."

I laughed again, happy to have my friend back. "I can't stand you. Not every beta is marriage material."

She shrugged. "Speaking of bodyguards. The coven gave me a bodyguard while all this Ascension foolishness is going down. Seems witch omegas are possible targets?"

I nodded, glad they were thinking of her. There were other omegas in our coven but most were claimed or had live in partners. The coven was not taking any changes with any of the single, unclaimed ones.

We continued to catch up and eat until Shante had to run off for a new urgent care patient. She was on intake today, so she'd get whatever walked through the door. It'd be a long day. Luckily, I was appointments only today. I told her to go, and I would clean up, saving her food for leftovers, of course.

When I left my office, I nearly bumped into the bodyguard that the guys had hired part-time. We actually now had some at the house and one that

came with me to work. While I was happy the guys were not pulled from work watching over me, it was still weird as hell to have anyone there. I was glad Shante had one too so I would feel less like a diva.

I looked up at the towering man. He was a beta but big enough to be mistaken for an alpha. He was also a werewolf and built like a wrestler. He had shoulder-length dark brown locks that framed an intimidatingly stern face. Although very serious about his job, he at least had the decency to relax his composure when patients came by.

“Max, did you take a lunch break?”

He gave me patient eyes, having gone through this song and dance with me every day now. “I don’t break until the end of the day. Although I did sit down.”

I shook my head. “You can sit down any time. Read a book.”

He smiled, pulling something out of his back pocket. An electronic reader. He waved it in front of him like a kid.

“Reading anything good?”

His cheeks reddened a bit, drawing my curiosity. “A dark romance.”

I patted him on the arm. “Love me a romance novel, but I think I like mine on the cozier side.”

“Dr. Bellamy,” a familiar voice called out behind me.

I turned around to see my coworker, Kent Johnson, and another man that looked vaguely familiar. I scrunched my face at them. “Why are we being so formal, Dr. Johnson?”

He looked up at Max with wide, dark brown eyes. Kent was of average height and in good shape but nowhere near as tall or as muscular as Max, so I could understand the weariness of my bodyguard. “You got your protector here. I don’t want him going back to your alphas talking about the extraordinarily good-looking doctor who was getting too familiar with you. I might be a witch, but it still takes me a while to heal, and I’m a lover, not a fighter.” As if to emphasize that, he began to stroke the sides of his cheeks, covered partially by a well-trimmed black beard.

I rolled my eyes. “Stop.”

He lifted his elbow and moved it toward the man standing beside him. “You met Dr. Winters yet?”

I looked over to the man beside him. He was only slightly taller than Kent with smooth, honey-colored skin and deep green eyes behind thin-framed glasses that appeared wiser than his seemingly young age. He had cropped

black hair, and his full mouth was set in a smile. He offered me a hand. “Please, call me Tim. It’s nice to finally meet you. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

I hadn’t heard anything about him, but then again, I’d been kind of busy lately. Still, I felt a little guilty that Shante already knew about him, and she’d just got back.

I shook his hand, returning his smile. “Nice to meet you as well. You’re a witch, too, right? What coven do you come from?”

He nodded. “Yeah, I come from the Jersey City coven. I haven’t joined the Baltimore coven yet. I’ve been lazy.”

I shrugged, letting go of his hand. I couldn’t judge. It was only recently that I became active. “Don’t be too hard on yourself. In fact, you don’t have to join. Although I’d recommend it.” I glanced over to Kent with twisted lips. I wasn’t planning to be as judgment free with him. “When are you coming to the next meeting?”

He grumbled. “Please don’t start. I can still be part of the coven without ever showing up to a meeting. You can just give me the cliff notes like you usually do.”

I blew out a breath. I wanted to be annoyed, but when I frequently skipped meetings, I had Lila do the same. Now that I was more invested after my father’s death, I couldn’t forget that I was like Kent not too long ago. Still, with all that was happening, it would be good for him to attend at least one meeting.

Tim scratched the back of his neck, giving an apologetic look to me as if he’d let me down. “I’ll do better. I’ll check out the next one. It’s probably a good idea to introduce myself to the local coven anyway.”

Kent tossed his head back, giving an exasperated look. “You’re making me look bad now. Fine. I’ll go to the next one, too. But we’re going out for drinks after. Or before. That’s probably better.”

I shook my head. “I’ll text you the next meeting, and we can all go together after work,” I said before heading down the hall to my next appointment, Max trailing me. Perhaps they didn’t see the seriousness in us witches sticking together, but life these past few months had shown me how wrong I was to believe coven life didn’t matter. Or, more importantly, that coven life would find its way into my world regardless of my lack of effort. With this Ascension group threatening all of us, we couldn’t be passive anymore.

By the end of the day, I was exhausted despite having appointments only. That didn't necessarily make my day easy, despite what I told myself.

I trudged up the stairs to my room, intent on taking a shower to wash the day away, but I stopped abruptly at the door. Something about my room was off.

Off was the only word I could use because I couldn't quite put my fingers on it. My room was immaculate. That wasn't a surprise. Daniel had a cleaning crew that came every other week to clean the house. Although we had magic of our own, none of us could do cleaning magic any justice. Daniel's and Kai's were just temporary cover-ups, and mine was weak level, only light dustings and surface cleaning.

We'd debated canceling them until we got things settled but ultimately decided to keep the same two people, with Ty keeping a watchful eye on them. They'd used the same two magical cleaners for a decade now, so I understood the trust.

However, today the cleaning had been different, and it grated at me. What had changed?



KAI

I leaned against the frame of Billie's doorway that evening and watched in amusement as she shifted pillows and sheets around on her bed, muttering in frustration. I wanted to grab her, bury my nose into the bend of her neck, and inhale her scent. I'd thought about it all day, practically itched with the need to touch her, be in her. I did everything I could to allow her to go to her room and relax from work before bothering her. However, I wasn't sure how long I actually gave her.

She usually showered when she came home from work to wash the day's scents away. It was fair to say we had gotten a little^¾okay, a lot more^¾possessive since she had fully become pack. Therefore, the scent of any alpha or even male beta on her raised our hackles. This was nothing she could control. She worked in a hospital and was around new people all the

time. Still, we were primitive beings who wanted our omega all to ourselves.

I could still smell the faint trace of some alpha she had encountered today, but the scent wasn't clear. She had washed but not her hair. Typically, betas needed to touch something to leave their scent. Alphas just needed to be in the same close proximity as another to have their scents drape over everyone like the spray from an aerosol can. Usually, my nose wasn't so intolerant when the faint whiff of alpha still remained in her hair, but today was different. Everything was heightened.

I growled in spite of myself. She glanced over at me with wide eyes. I didn't mean to scare her. Well, perhaps I did a little. I gave her a quick wave and a smirk to make things playful, and she rolled her eyes, shaking her head.

"I didn't even hear you come to the door," she muttered, looking back at her bed.

She leaned into the fitted sheet on her king-sized bed and frowned. Then pulled the plush forest green comforter to her nose. A sound of irritation came out of her mouth.

"What's wrong, kitty cat? Bad day at work?" I asked, strolling in.

She huffed, placing her hands on her hips. She was now in black leggings that outlined her ample ass and a loose crop top. It seemed like too many clothes. She had relaxed enough.

"Work is fine; my room is not. I looked all around but then gave up and washed. Then when I was in the shower, I remembered I didn't check out my bed. I think it's the culprit. It doesn't smell right anymore. It smells like clean linen that was hanging outside on a fresh spring day. That's not a bad thing but I don't want that."

Ah, I knew the problem, and I could help. However, my mind was beginning to cloud right now, and it took much focus to pay attention to our conversation. Danny boy had warned us all to be careful with the kitten when it came to our alpha natures. She had studied the alpha and omega ways but had not lived it. While she had recently accepted things, we didn't want to overwhelm her. Well, more than we already had.

I shook as if pushing away the shivers and looked over to the abundance of pillows in various sizes and textures. Her sheets were high-quality cotton, and the beige throw at the foot of her bed was thick and fluffy. We had a cleaning service come in twice a month, and they did the laundry. She hadn't had any issues with it all these months.

I took a deep inhale, knowing her scent would weaken my already fragile

hold but still wanting to be helpful; Daniel's stupid stern face in my mind. She was right. Our scents were gone. That was no good. I needed everything she had marked. When she went out into the world, I wanted every beta and alpha nearby to wrinkle their noses at the smell of alpha on her. Her scent was throughout the room. I loved it. However, something primitive in me needed to mark her, not just with my bite but with *my* scent. To let whoever stepped foot in her room know that she belonged to someone. That she was cherished. Her irritation at the erasure of our scents showed me she had that same desire.

I smirked at her. "You're adorable. I can help." I needed to, in fact.

Omegas nested. They needed to sleep in a space that was comfortable, soft and cozy. It also needed to have the scents of his or her alphas. Our scents didn't always leave with every wash, but they didn't last forever. We'd gotten in the habit of rubbing our scents back into her sheets and pillows when they faded before she noticed. However, today we'd fallen down on the job.

She flopped down on the bed. The bottom of her T-shirt rose up, exposing her soft belly. I wanted to lick my tongue over that smooth skin.

"Yeah. I need you all to roll around on my bed or something," she surmised.

I snorted and sat down beside her, inhaling her creamy scent. It was very fair to say I was distracted. Damn, I was already getting hard. Or had I already been hard before walking into her room? I didn't know. My mind was a useless jumble all day. "You'll need more than just us rolling back and forth."

She side-eyed me with curiosity. "Your scent is out of control right now." She picked up a pillow and rubbed it over my chest.

I chuckled. I'd rather have her hands on me than the pillow, but I knew what she was trying to do. Lucky for her, this was just the right time for me to help her. I moved the pillow from her hand and tossed it to the head of the bed. I then pushed her back on the bed, balancing my arms on either side of her head as I hovered over her. "We can do better than rubbing your pillow on me."

She raised her brows. "You know, I wanted to talk to you about something."

I had a couple of things to talk to her about too. That dream she had. The dark mages. However, coherent, serious talk was quickly losing the battle.

The fact that I was still forming complete sentences was a miracle only achievable because I was an old demon with a lot of years of practice.

When I didn't respond, she stilled. "What's this about?" She narrowed her eyes and sniffed the air. "Seriously, I can practically feel the heat radiating from your body. Wait, is this a rut? Are you in your rut?" She seemed almost excited when she asked the question.

I grinned, my tail swishing from side to side like a happy puppy. "Yes, kitty cat. Can you handle that?"

She gave an audible gulp, a look of excitement mixed with worry in her eyes. "I sure as hell plan to try. I did a lot of reading up on it. I thought I'd have some prep time but³/₄"

I cut her off with a kiss. "Study time is over. Now it's time for the real thing."

CHAPTER 11



BILLIE

I was about to engage in my very first rut, and I was a bit freaked out. Books can only tell you so much. Lila mentioned that one of her guys was an alpha, and he had been in his rut when they first had sex. It was at that time that he had mistakenly claimed her because he'd gotten carried away. Ty had claimed me too mistakenly, but that was because he was overly excited, he hadn't been in his rut yet. Crap, what would Ty be like in a rut then?

No, I didn't have time to think about that. I was currently being kissed all over by this delightful incubus. His scent of earthy cinnamon wrapped around me so much that I could taste it. I pulled on his tongue as his mouth surrounded mine. I moaned, wanting more of him, and ground my dripping core over the length of his hardness. He growled again, and damn, did that sound just make me flood without effort.

Kai pulled away and looked down at me with intense, glowing red eyes. He was not hiding his true form. His bronzed skin was fully etched in his red tattoos, medium-length black hair draping over his face like parted curtains. His thin tail swished behind him as he pulled at my bottoms. I helped him without speaking, knowing he was single-minded at this point. He yanked my T-shirt over my head and immediately pulled his sweatpants down. His dick sprung free, and I could see it glistening with so much pre-cum that if his pants were lighter, I was sure I would see that they were stained. He kicked his pants all the way off and lifted his shirt over his head in a supernaturally quick movement.

He rubbed his member over my pussy lips, and my body seized at the connection, thighs opening wider. Tapping his forehead to mine, he breathed heavily as if trying to calm himself down. "I really want to take my time,

kitty cat, but I need to be in you. Like, right fucking now.”

I lifted my hips so that he began to enter me, and he wasted no time accepting my invitation before he rammed his way in. I let out a scream at the force, his thickness stretching me. However, soon that slight pain turned to ultimate pleasure as he began to rock back and forth, his piercings brushing against my inner walls. He started to vibrate within me, and that’s when I lost my mind. Every nerve inside of me ignited at the intensity. I arched up to meet his thrust, knowing that I would be bruised in the morning but not caring. I wanted this feeling forever.

Kai suddenly pulled out of me and began to stroke himself rapidly. I gazed up at the erotic scene, my eyes clouded with desire. I needed him inside of me. What was he doing? He bit his lip, a sharp fang exposed, and tilted his head back. And then he erupted with a bass-heavy groan that tickled my clit. His hot seed splashed over my stomach, chest, and bedding. I could have come just watching him as his body shook from his orgasm. He finally stilled and then looked down, eyes red and glowing. Like a man possessed, he bent over and smeared his release into my sheets and cover. I watched in curiosity as he leaned past me and over me, wiping further. He pulled anything dripping from his dick and continued to cover various areas of my bed. He then looked down at me and ran his hands over my chest and stomach, further coating me in his cum.

“Mine,” he said in a dark whisper, face determined.

Well, shit. I sure was. Before I could think of how to respond, his fingers went to my pussy, and he dipped two fingers into me, thumb brushing my clit. I quivered at his touch, begging for it. However, he quickly removed his fingers. Then he rubbed his chest with the fingers coated in my juices.

“Yours,” he stated.

Hell yeah, he was. This was crazy primitive, and I loved every minute of it. I wanted to speak, but I also wanted Kai to be free to go full-on rut. I wanted him to pound me into oblivion.

He grinned at me with those sharp teeth before pushing his fingers back into me, his thumb moving rapidly over my bud. I whined at his touch, feeling my climax hovering around the edges. “Come for me, kitten,” he whispered before bending forward to suck on one of my erect nipples.

The heat of his mouth on me, his thick fingers inside me, and his scent drew my mind into a mix of lustful emotions. My body erupted in pulsating pleasure; my fingers laced in his hair as if it were the only thing preventing

me from floating toward the ceiling.

Kai removed his fingers from me and proceeded to smear more of my juices on him as if it were the most normal thing in the world, and I loved watching it. He grabbed me and rocked back on the bed so that I was lying on top of him.

“Sit on me,” he demanded, lids lowered. He was definitely still in his sex daze.

I did as I was told and straddled him, reaching for his dick to stroke it to life. However, he was still hard and dripping.

I looked down at his member, his knot red and practically throbbing. “Knot me.”

A purr escaped from his chest, and I drenched his thighs with my slick, eyes fluttering.

“Not yet,” he replied before lifting me by the hips and impaling me with his member.

I dropped my head, eyes closing as I balanced my hands on his chest, a sheen of sweat covering it. It felt so good having him in me. His piercings, cool and hard, rubbed against my inner spot with just the right amount of pressure and speed. I bounced on him, my breasts swinging in the air at the movement. He caught them with his hands, massaging and tweaking my nipples as I rode with abandon.

And then I felt it. A swift and gentle brushing over my ass. I glanced over my shoulder and found his tail moving against me. I knew it was like another appendage and, like his horns, I knew it could be an erogenous part of him.

I reached out to grab it, stroking it at the same pace that I ground on him. A line of expletives escaped his lips, and I pressed my lips together in a satisfied smile.

Kai’s hands quickly moved to my hips, and he forced me up and down, pumping his pelvis up rapidly. He brushed against my clit with each thrust, and I felt my body contract as it readied itself for another impending orgasm. I held on tightly to his tail, roughly rubbing it, focusing on the tip.

“Billie, shit. What are you doing to me?” he breathed out before slamming his hips up again.

I then felt it, the force of his knot entering me, stretching me. I screamed his name, squeezing his tail at the same time. He began to vibrate inside of me again. It felt like even his knot was moving. Perhaps it was. The feeling was so intense, bordering on overwhelming. Then I, too, shook with my own

release. My vision darkened, muscles loosened. I felt his heated cum fill me, fluttering my inner walls.

I loosened my grip on his tail and collapsed on his chest with him still inside of me. Still freaking vibrating. I dug my nails into him, readying myself for another orgasm. And then I felt the tip of his pointed tail trail the outside of my other opening. I shuddered, anticipating his next move. The intrusion, his tail dipping into me with slow and careful effort. It was very different than how he had speared me with his dick. His tail was thin but still thick enough to stretch me. It was more like the width of almost two thin fingers.

I heard him suck in a breath as he slowly moved his tail in and out of me, his member still vibrating. I felt like I was floating on a cloud, my body a ball of mush as every nerve was touched. His tail rapidly spun inside of me, and I dug my fingers further into his skin as I trembled at the dual sensations. It felt like too much. I was losing control, and yet I burned for it. Soon I came again, stars blinding my eyes and back hunched, my core leaking in a slick-filled messy release.

Kai squeezed my ass, and I felt him shudder under me, a thundering groan accompanying his movements.

I let out a breath, nearing exhaustion as we settled down.

“How do you feel?” he asked, brushing his hand down my clammy back.

He sounded more in control, but I could feel his heart beating rapidly beneath my hand.

“Amazing. How do you feel?”

“I’m still wound up, but I don’t want to tire you out.”

I chuckled. “I still have some energy.” In fact, I felt so good that I wanted more. More from Kai. More with Kai. He was the last, and we’d be complete.

“Actually, I think it’s time.”

He stopped rubbing my back, and I could feel his body freeze. “Say it.”

I moved up and kissed him quickly on the lips. “Claim me.”

He lifted his hands in the air. “Finally!”

“So where will it be?”

He gave me a mischievous grin. “Where can’t it be?”

I raised a brow. Of course, he would be thinking of problematic places. “Let’s leave my inner thighs alone.” One bite was enough.

He gave me a curt nod. “Okay, I know.” He lifted my hips and released our lock. I was surprised the knot didn’t last as long, but I wouldn’t have

been surprised if he used some type of magic to make it deflate.

He was looking way too happy now, but I could still see the fire burning in those red eyes as he carefully laid me back on the bed. He spread my legs and knelt in between them. I cupped a hand over my vagina. “No biting my lady bits either.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” he responded, looking appalled.

I narrowed my eyes. “Really?”

“Ok I would, but that’s not what I had in mind. Now close your eyes, kitty cat.”

I did, putting complete faith in him. I was letting him bite me, and although my body was still floating in after orgasm glow, I was still nervous about the pain from those teeth.

Soon I felt the gentle touch of soft fingers on one of my nipples and another on my clit, tweaking both. A heat simmered in me again as his fingers fluttered over me like fine silk. I rode out the pleasure, toes curling as my orgasm quickly approached. And beneath that tingling vibration of pleasure somewhere was the prickly heat of a bite.

As always, my mind clouded with thoughts, emotions, and memories that were more than my own. I cried out once again at the mixture of pleasure, pain, and emotion. And then the slick feeling of a smooth tongue.

When I settled down, I opened my eyes to see Kai lapping at my left hip, tending to his claiming bite.

He looked up at me, eyes somehow darkening. “You’re forever mine now, kitty cat. No going back.”

As if I would ever try.



KAI

*I*t was morning, and we had made it through a night filled with my rutting my omega almost into the underworld. I knew she was exhausted with only a few hours of sleep under her. I would have to convince her to call out sick today. Although I may have already texted her boss on her

behalf, and I may have turned off her alarm.

She had her back to me, her ass pressed against my cock, which I tried my hardest to keep down out of respect for her sleep. I lazily stroked my claiming bite on her hip, content that I had finally connected with her. It felt almost surreal that she had even agreed to be our omega. We would never again lose such a treasure.

She shifted slightly, and then I saw her arm reach toward her bedside table. She picked up her cell phone and swore as she looked at the time. “How is it 10:30? I should have heard my alarm!”

“Relax, kitty cat. I took care of everything. You called out sick,” I explained.

She twisted to look at me with incredulous eyes. “Oh, did I?”

I gave her a sheepish grin. “Yes, I overstepped, but as your alpha, I must look out for you. You are exhausted, and that’s my fault. Plus, it’s not like you’re a bad employee. You often work overtime. A sick day here and there is no problem. I even asked if you had a lot of appointments today, and they said today was a light day, and they could find someone to cover what you had scheduled. If it had been busy, I’d have just asked them to let you come in later.”

She perched up on an elbow, her covers falling slightly, almost exposing her breasts. I eyed her covered chest in disappointment.

“And they just accepted your word for everything?”

I ran a hand through my hair, raising my brows apologetically. “Well, I may have magically changed my voice to sound like you.”

She punched me in my chest but not hard enough to hurt. She wasn’t that angry, but she had to let me know that what I had done wasn’t right. I got the point. I wouldn’t do it again. Well, I wouldn’t do it often.

“Well, I did need the rest. I just hate having omega-related excuses,” she began, “Although, I must say, that rut was amazing. And seeing you so feral was stupid hot. Will the others rut soon too? Like when women live together, we can all get on our periods around the same time. It syncs up or something.”

I scrunched my face. “Seriously?”

She made pfft noise. “Don’t act like that’s not out of the realm of possibility. As hot as heats and ruts are, it’s all still biological.”

“We might have ruts in proximity to each other. But not all the time. So, you don’t have to worry. You’ll survive.”

She chuckled. “Good to know. How are you feeling now?”

She peeked down at my semi-hard member, and I could see her eyes widen, probably wondering if she could go another round.

“I’m fine. How are you?” I asked.

“A little sore but in a good way.”

“I could heal you?”

“Nah, I’m good. I kind of like the feeling. It’s weird, don’t judge.”

I leaned forward and kissed her forehead. “Judgement-free zone, kitty cat. And I get it. Sometimes the pain is a reminder.”

She nodded with a shy look on her face. “Speaking of reminders. Before I was dickmatized, I wanted to talk to you about my demon dream.”

I snorted. “Dickmatized. Was it me who made you forget? Because when I came in, it seemed you were busy kicking your bed.”

She rolled her eyes. “Ok, and also getting distracted by my bed smelling less like my alphas and more like fresh laundry. Any who, I wanted to know if you had any new information about what happened to me.”

I sighed, moving to my back, resting an arm under my head. “None of my contacts knew of any dream walker coming for me. It doesn’t mean there aren’t any. The one good thing you have going, assuming a demon is behind this, is that now you have another demon’s mark on you. It’ll act as a ward over you. He can look, but he can’t touch. And most importantly, he can’t kill you.”

Her shoulders dropped, and I was glad I could give her that bit of comfort, although it wasn’t enough for me. I didn’t like anyone fucking with my omega in any way. Billie was powerful, but was she strong enough that demons would take such a risk to have her? There was also the possibility that the dark mages were behind it. Chilli might not have been the only witch with underworld ties, and this Ascension group was no stranger to dark magic. They were behind Lila’s banishing. Perhaps now they had moved on to Billie. Maybe they were even going for Billie because of Lila. There were too many guesses. I just needed to grab one of those mages and tear the truth out of them. Lila’s guy was a truth-seeker; maybe he could help once we got our hands on one. He could rummage through the mage’s brain for answers.

Billie waved a hand in my face, her brows furrowed in concern. “What’s on your mind?”

“Just wondering if the dark mages are behind your dreams. I wouldn’t put it past them. Dark magic wielders are assholes.”

She smirked. “That’s saying a lot from a demon.”

“Experience.” Lots of experience. I’d lived in darkness for years before I met my pack. I’d bought my freedom from the underworld after centuries of work.

“Care to talk about it?” she asked, laying her head on my chest. “I know you grew up in the underworld. You never knew your parents.”

He sighed. “Ah, she wants to get deep after sex. This is your version of pillow talk, I see.”

She lightly patted my chest but didn’t say anything. I knew her game. Loosen me up and then go in for the kill. I wasn’t upset. I knew we’d all been stingy with our tragic life stories. However, I found her very deceptive when she chose to get information from us. With her wet sex pressed against my thigh, I wasn’t going anywhere. So, I had to pay the price with my truth.

“More like I don’t know if I had parents. The underworld is a different place. Beings are sent there as punishment, and beings are born there, that’s mostly the nobility, and then beings are also made there. That’s usually done via dark magic. I don’t remember my childhood. I only know being an incubus. I only know the work. Pleasing people. Taking their energy. Rinse and repeat. I didn’t have school. No relationships. Well, I had friends. I don’t know how long I was there. Time works differently, like the fae realm.”

Billie gave me a light squeeze. I told her things about my time there before. None of it good. The underworld was not a fun place if you weren’t a noble. I was a grunt. The only goal was to get the hell out of there. This was why there were demonic possessions. Dudes wanted out, even if it wasn’t with their own body. That was the best way because most demons didn’t actually blend into society well. And we were mostly not accepted for obvious reasons. As an incubus, I lucked out on the good-looks. Although when servicing my clients, I tended to take the visual their mind most desired. Billie seemed to love the real me.

“You don’t talk about your time before meeting Daniel much,” she said.

“Because it sucked. But you should know about my past interactions with dark mages. I worked for a coven once. And I say ‘work’ very loosely. I was summoned, and they used me. And not just the obvious way. They made sure I did my incubus thing, having sex with as many people as possible. More than I needed to. And the energy I collected, they took a good portion of it to gain power. They were my pimps.”

I heard Billie let out a shocked breath. “Oh, Kai. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not fun when you have to do it. And even when I had sex with the members, I couldn’t steal energy. If I did, I’d be punished. Basically, I was a sex slave.”

I’d never told her this before because, well, it was fucking horrible. It had been a very long time ago, but the wounds were still there. Buried deep inside.

“I hate summoners,” Billie spat. “Besides the obvious fact that trying to control a demon is risky, it’s also cruel. Cruel because what is usually required to even do the summoning and cruel to the being summoned. Not every demon is bad. You aren’t. You didn’t deserve any of that. How did you get free?”

“Seduced a...very powerful client into giving me a spell to break the summoning. I had to promise free services without taking energy until she died, but it was my only option. Took me almost twenty-five years to get free and then another fifty years until the witch who freed me died.”

Billie sat up and looked at me, clutching the sheets to her chest. Tears filled her eyes, but I smiled at her. The last thing I wanted was to make her sad. “It’s all good, kitty cat. Don’t be sad. I’m free now. I only shared this to say that it’s possible for dark mages to summon demons.”

“Are they dead?” she asked, her voice steely as she wiped at her eyes.

I smiled, baring my teeth. “Some died of old age before I could, but the ones who survived, I hunted. I got many of them. Others hid too well, so there are several still out there. But I’m satisfied now. So don’t trouble your head about it.” I opened my arms, beckoning for her to come lay down on my chest again. She took the hint and laid back down. “Look at you. You got a pack of damaged guys. A cursed faerie, a werewolf with a family history of loupism, a vampire with a pension for going blood lust, and a demon who was enslaved. Just a pack of guys bonding over trauma. Feel like running?”

I heard her snuffle, and I wished I’d kept my stupid mouth closed. I wrapped my tail around her leg, running it up and down in a soothing stroke. I wanted to touch my bite, but she was lying on that side, so I purred for her instead. “Sorry, kitten.”

“I’m never going to run from you guys. You’re my family, and I’m happy that you’re mine,” she began, squeezing the hell out of my heart with her words. “You are not a pack of wayward guys with trauma. You’re a pack who knows how to heal and care for each other. And your difficult pasts made you stronger and more caring, and that’s the commonality. Your hearts.

That's what my dad saw. You and Daniel formed a friendship because you both needed to heal. You brought Ty back when he went blood lust. And the way you all look out for Lance is beautiful. I'm so thankful to be your omega."

She couldn't have said anything more perfect. I had never been more appreciative to have fought my way out of the underworld. Whatever demon was after her was going to get a nightmare of his own. He would learn the hard way that I would tear through the underworld to keep her safe.

CHAPTER 12



BILLIE

One month passed as a fully claimed gal. Thankfully, things were going smoothly. I hadn't had another sleep paralysis dream, and I had hopes that maybe Kai's bite, Brenda's charm, and my anti-nightmare spell had combined to do the job against whatever I'd encountered in my dream. It was just the one time, so maybe it wasn't as big of a threat as we feared.

However, too much had occurred around me to let my guard down. In fact, things were so tame now I began to get suspicious. So naturally, when I got a call from my coven head, Brenda, that the high priestess of the United States wanted to meet with Lila and me, I went on high alert.

And by high alert, I meant I was freaked the hell out. Meeting the U.S. head of all witches, wizards, and mages was like meeting the President. Brenda didn't tell me much about why she wanted to meet us, so we were going in blind. I had no idea how to prepare other than to focus almost insistently on what I would wear.

Lila insisted we dress like we were going on a talk show, while I was thinking more like a candidate running for office. We compromised on me wearing a navy-blue jumpsuit and matching blazer and Lila wearing a hot pink suit with a black body suit underneath. I couldn't stop her from wearing colorful earrings the size of my hand, but that was her style. Honestly, it wasn't like the priestess was some uptight woman.

When we walked into the conference room down the hall from the coven office, the priestess was already there chatting with Brenda. Her name was Thalia Giovanni, and her presence in a room could make the strongest man cower if she willed it. Most of the time, she preferred to be deceptive and hide just how much magic she wielded. It practically sucked out the oxygen

in the room. The fact that she could even dampen it down was impressive. No one came for her. At least not anymore. I'd seen her bring unruly people to their knees with just one snap. There was a video still circulating on social media of her subduing an enraged giant troll who was about to step on a group of kindergarteners with just a point of her finger. And by subdue, I mean kill. No one, not even the police and state prosecutor, came for her. There was a reason this Ascension group was coming for the regional chapters and not directly to her. Although I knew it would only be a matter of time.

Thalia had been in her position all my life, and she hadn't aged during that time. A perk of being a witch. She was beautiful and looked no more than a well-preserved fifty with tanned skin, deep green eyes, and long, chocolate-brown hair that went down her back. She was tall and fuller-figured, highlighting her shape in clothes that complemented her curves. Today she was wearing ox blood-colored wide-leg pants and an off-the-shoulder fitted sweater. She paired it with a structural gold necklace that made her look like royalty.

Lila leaned into me. "I feel like we should bow," she whispered.

I agreed, it was intimidating to see Thalia in person.

She looked over to us and waved us to her end of the table as she stood up. "Ah, Billie Bellamy and Lila Ramirez. I've been hearing so much about you two. So glad to finally meet you," she exclaimed, offering her hand.

We each greeted her back, shaking her hand before sitting.

"I bet you're wondering why I asked to meet you. We're all aware of that horrible terrorist group. But there are some things you should know. Both of you. First, I want to begin by apologizing on behalf of magic leadership for all that you went through at the hands of the former regional leader, Chilli. There is no excuse for what she did. She allowed fear to rule her decisions."

I shook my head, confused. "Chilli was strong. Why was she so scared of this group?"

Thalia gave me a patient smile. "Their leadership has a power that will seep into the hearts and minds of people like a slow-moving plague. They grow even as we speak. It's the unknown that made Chilli fearful. Makes many fearful. We don't even have guesstimates of how large this group is. We don't know their leadership, and we don't know who they have on the inside. I've never encountered such unknown threats."

Lila adjusted in her seat next to me, crossing her arms. "It's the unknown

that makes it scarier.”

Thalia tilted her head toward her in agreement. “Correct. And the fact that they have such strength. We know that they were able to gain allies with unseelie fae. We know they have supporters in other groups. Vampires, ghouls, most likely demons. They are calculated, which means whoever is behind this is smart, and he or she is in this for the long, slow haul. I’ve seen slow-moving threats before.”

Brenda tapped the table with her fingers. “It’s in the history books. A warlock faction in Spain, over two hundred years ago, went on a slow-moving offense against Western Europe’s priest at the time. They were scoffed at originally. Such a small group, people thought. Time passed, and their reach extended to Portugal and Italy. Then Germany, France, and England. Over one hundred years of battles and sabotage. The current head of magic in Western Europe comes from that slow-moving faction. They got what they wanted. The good is that they are agreeable with us. However, had they not been, that could have led to the end of our international witch union.”

Thalia looked to us with serious eyes. I could practically feel the power brimming around the edges. “Small threats can become big threats when it comes to witch-kind or any paranormal kind, for that matter. We live long lives. We have the time. So, we don’t take these types of circumstances lightly, and we don’t have the luxury of knowing our enemy as they did in Europe. Chilli believed creating a strong alpha and omega pack could give us the edge. I assume to scare this unknown threat into, perhaps, backing down.”

When bonded, alphas and omegas with paranormal abilities could strengthen our magic. It was safe to say I was stronger than ever. The others had mentioned feeling more powerful as well. Ty, who’d had the longest bond with me, said he moved faster and required less blood to drink. Not to mention that he was able to go out in the day and move about under the sun for longer periods of time. I now understood the appeal, on a more physical level, of wanting a pack.

“Chilli was right about one thing,” Thalia started. “You are strong. The fact that you defeated her with just one alpha bonded to you at the time is quite impressive. I’d be lying if I were to say that assuring your continued allegiance to our coven wasn’t of importance to us.”

I was still amazed at myself for getting through that battle. Although I almost died doing it. I was nowhere near invincible, and if Ty hadn’t

swooped in to fight off the alpha working with Chilli, I would have been done. Sometimes I wondered if Chilli maybe had gotten weaker from the energy she used to control the alphas she had selected or maybe from summoning demons to capture me. It felt like less pressure to have an excuse. I enjoyed staying out of the limelight.

Thalia looked over to Lila. “And you’re important, too. They came after you for recruitment. We’ve heard them come after others. We worry if there are ones not reported. However, the greater concern is how they possess the ability to know which magic users to approach beyond the more famous ones. You don’t use your magic typically beyond running your dessert shop. You aren’t a famous military leader, political leader, or Olympian. We’ve had them approach magic users who are stay-at-home parents, elementary school teachers, beauticians, car service drivers, among others. Nothing that would scream powerful on the surface. And yet they knew who to seek.”

Lila bit the tip of her nail, eyes narrowed. “How is that possible? Do you think they have some sort of magic that lets them spot strength levels in any given area? Like a metal detector?”

Brenda shrugged, leaning back in her chair. Her usually calming dark eyes were now clouded in concern. “Possibly. They knew you were part dragon before even any of us did. They have and are collecting talents.”

They weren’t just collecting talents. They were seeking out unique abilities. It didn’t matter if the person was especially skilled, they just wanted the power. It was possible they thought they could train the person later, or they wanted that member for another reason. It was sinister but smart. The coven had to keep up. Were we gathering people to prepare for something as well? Was that why we were called to meet Thalia? “Are we going to war? How big is this? I want to help, but I’m not a fighter.”

Lila made a disgruntled noise next to me. “Yeah, and I’m retired from the fight. I think I’ve done enough.”

Thalia leaned forward, resting her forearms on the table. “No, dears. There won’t be all-out war. We won’t let that happen. The President is keeping close eyes on this situation and is supportive of us. No one likes what they’re doing and the death and destruction it’s causing to magic users and non-magic users alike.”

Well, that was a relief. What kind of group was this if they were fine possibly taking on the government? Maybe even the international coven union. “That puts us in a good position.”

Lila snorted. “I doubt our military is going to actually fight for us. The coven hasn’t always been their greatest fans.”

Thalia tilted her head from side to side. “Correct. Their support will be within their limits. Death and attacks of non-magic citizens as collateral, they will stamp out. However, our direct infighting, they won’t involve themselves.”

Just great. “So, they’re only kind of sorta our allies. Aren’t we citizens?”

“Yes, but you know that the paranormal have different allowances. In order to have those freedoms, in exchange, we withdraw certain rights. Even with magic users in political power, they still have certain limits they must maintain.”

I knew this and had always felt unsettled by it. Witches and such weren’t allowed health insurance or access to social welfare programs, and we paid higher taxes, or rather, non-paranormal humans got special exemptions. We were also limited on the types of loans we could get as well as grants. And certain paranormals weren’t even allowed to work or live in certain places. Mostly vampires, lycans, orcs, and demons who had an unfortunate history of violence. I wouldn’t have been surprised if the Ascension were, in part, motivated by their dislike of these practices.

“So, what can we do to help?” I asked, finally grasping a better understanding of the situation but still not clear on what Lila or I could do. “If you’re concerned about us going to the other side, you have no worries about that. We both have allegiance to this coven. My family was a strong part of it. And even though I had the issues with Chilli and a few other nosey people in my business, I’m not leaving.”

Lila nodded in agreement. “And we share anything we learn. And we got an unseelie fae court on our side.”

Thalia smiled, her eyes not betraying whatever she was really feeling. For some reason, I didn’t think she was concerned about us betraying the coven. “Yes, that was a major win for us. Especially as they fight that other fae court who aids our enemies. But what I wanted you to understand is that your situation is more than you think. And your safety is of utmost importance. What I’m going to share must be kept private, and I know that you won’t share.”

She said that with confidence. That was probably because she put a secret binding spell on us. I wanted to ask her about that, but I felt like now was not that moment. It was probably in my dad’s grimoire. I was very slowly

working my way through it.

“Billie, your father, may he rest in peace, was a very wise man. He lived a long and meaningful life, but how I wish he’d lived longer. When he picked your pack, he knew what he was doing. Our most powerful seer foresaw things that put your father into action. Billie, I am sorry to say, but it is foreseen that your pack would play a major role in the downfall of our covenant.”

I sucked in a breath, my mind having a challenging time processing what she’d just said. I replayed it back in my head slowly so that I could make sense of it, but I could not comprehend how my guys could ever betray me. “That doesn’t seem right.”

Thalia pursed her lips, sympathy on her face. “I know it might seem impossible, but remember, your pack lived a questionable life, and they had no loyalty to witches. In fact, some of them might even have grudges against our kind.”

I thought of Kai and his enslavement by dark mages. Even Daniel said his vampire captors had to have witches aid them. However, they both seemed healed from those times. “If this were true, why would my father then pick them to be my pack? Why is this even a secret?” It made more sense now why Chilli was so against them, but odd that she wouldn’t lead with that information when she talked about how wrong they were for me.

“Knowledge is power, and keeping certain information secret gives us the upper hand. As far as why your father chose a pack that could possibly lead to our destruction, well, in part, it was the idea of keeping your enemies close.”

That felt like a gut punch. I refused to believe my father would use me in that way. He had spent decades protecting me from turning into an omega. He struggled to find some type of spell that would dampen my nature forever because he feared the toxicity and danger of many alphas. Why would he lead me into the lion’s den? “I don’t believe my father would sacrifice me like that. He cared about my well-being. Also, the guys had a prophet tell them that I was the right omega for them.”

Brenda snorted. “I bet they did. Just because they want you doesn’t mean they want all that comes with you. It doesn’t mean that they are loyal to the covenant.”

Lila grumbled in dissatisfaction, probably feeling just as agitated as I did. “They wouldn’t do that. Her alphas wouldn’t want to cause her that kind of

harm. They aren't selfish. They're actually good men."

I opened my mouth to agree with Lila, but Thalia raised a hand to silence us. "I used a poor choice of words when I said enemies. I can't say that your men will purposefully betray you. They may even do something indirectly that will set a course of action leading to our harm. We don't know."

Brenda spoke up. "Your father believed that the future could be altered. We agreed. He thought your pairing with the pack might change the direction. It was a bold position. Not everyone agreed it could be done. Chilli being one of them. I can't say I was fully on board."

"However," Thalia went on. "It was his hope that with your intervention as their omega, that would change the course. That they could be a great ally to us instead. Please understand, your father honestly believed they would be a good pack for you."

"Maybe, but you're making it sound like it wasn't his first priority," I grumbled. That part pissed the hell out of me. I honestly couldn't believe that my father would take such a risk with me.

"Our seer gave him the belief that the future was flexible. She also believed that you had a role with this pack. However, she did not know if that was good or bad for us. Your father chose to believe it was good."

Thalia gazed at me intently. She was probably searching to see if she could find something in my face to give her the answer. If I understood everything correctly, there was the possibility that my pairing with the alphas could bring on a win for our coven or a loss. My father thought it was a win. Chilli thought it was a loss. Thalia, and maybe even Brenda, didn't seem too sure.

Suddenly I felt hollow. Why hadn't my father talked to me about any of this? Did he not want to influence the future? He was already doing that. It was possible he didn't want to put pressure on me to go with a pack in order to save the coven. That seemed more like him. I definitely would have made the sacrifice if he asked. Not easily, but I would ultimately. That would have put a damper on me more organically getting invested with my guys. However, the outcome would have been the same.

I looked up at the two women. "You don't have to worry about me betraying you. And I'll make sure the pack supports us. They don't have any involvement in what's going on. Nothing they do would connect them to any of this. They're as pedestrian as it gets."

Thalia tilted her head, her smile returning, although I didn't find it

comforting in the least. This was more of her style. Masking what she really thought, the power she really owned. I had no desire to go against her even if I disagreed with the coven. She seemed kind but there was something frightening behind those eyes. “And we ask that you make sure it remains that way. Ensure they understand that whatever troubles they had with our kind in the past were not through us and that the Ascension group won’t bring them what they want.”

“Okay,” I said stiffly. It was clear my words explaining that my guys weren’t up to no good weren’t going to be helpful.

“I don’t mean to upset you, but it’s important that you understand the truth of the situation. Brenda informed me you had dreams of possible demonic origin.”

I looked at her in a daze, still stuck on everything else we had been discussing. I slowly processed what she was saying and nodded. “I haven’t had any since that one.”

She pondered that for a moment before speaking. “That’s good, but still stay cautious. Everything could be related. And as I explained, they could work slow.”

So much for a time of quiet and peace. Let the paranoia begin...again. Any excitement about meeting the High Priestess was now dead and gone.

CHAPTER 13



BILLIE

I felt a slight tap on my shoulder and looked over to Lila as we exited the building. “Wanna get a drink?” she asked with sympathetic eyes, head nodding.

I looked at my watch. “It’s only 12.”

She shrugged. “On a Saturday, so that doesn’t matter.”

“I suppose we could add a splash of orange juice in champagne so it looks like a mimosa.”

Lila leaned back, eyes wide. “Imma get an old fashioned. I don’t care what anybody thinks. This situation calls for brown liquor.”

I pointed at her in agreement.

Since the coven HQ was downtown, we were already within walking distance to many restaurants, so we decided to leave my car where it was and walked to an upscale hotel bar, Max trailing us at a short distance. We sat at the bar and ordered drinks with a side of truffle fries to help soak up the day-drinking we were about to begin.

Lila clapped her hands. “Okay, there’s a lot to process here. On a positive note, I finally get to walk around with a bodyguard like I’m the superstar I always wanted to be.”

I glanced at her, my lips twisted in playful annoyance. Leave it to my bestie to try to take the edge off.

“On the negative side, people want to kill us because they know we won’t betray the coven, and your pack might take us all out. We can dissect this and handle it. No stress.”

I sighed. It was a lot of stress. Added stress I sure as hell didn’t need. “I wish we could tell Shante. She’s great at calming me down and helping me to

rationalize things.”

Lila sucked her teeth before picking up her drink. “She alright. But I’m here. I’m just glad they shared that information with me too. They could have said, ‘Okay, the rest is just for Billie. Go sit in the car.’ But they didn’t. You remember that the next time you call Shante a best friend. She’s a good friend, but there’s only one bestie.” She pointed a thumb at herself.

I put my hands together as if in prayer and pointed them at her. “Can you circle this conversation back to the important part? You know, the part where allegedly my father hyped this pack up to me but failed to mention that they might destroy us?”

Lila nodded solemnly, patting my shoulder. “Of course, maybe Mr. Bill just wanted you to make your own choices without such a huge threat over your head.”

I swished my drink in my hand, staring down at the rich brown liquid surrounding a large, artfully-shaped ice cube. It was a lot of creativity for something that was going to melt soon. “But he could have mentioned something on his deathbed. Maybe in the grimoire or even to you.”

Lila put her drink down and shifted in my direction, her demeanor more serious than before. “You know, future telling is always a tricky thing. It’s ever-moving. When that seer predicted our downfall, it was from a collection of choices that led to an ultimate outcome. All it could take is one of those choices going differently to have a different outcome. Now, we may not know what choice will make the difference or if any different choices will do anything. That’s why I hate going to psychics. The only way it helps is if they tell you what to do to lead you to what they foresee. So, saying shit like ‘you’re going to end up in the hospital today’ is trash. I can’t do anything to stop it but live in fear of what could possibly hurt me. Now, if they say, ‘Don’t commute by car today, there’s going to be a car crash on 695, and you’ll get hit and end up in the hospital,’ well, that’s helpful. I know by changing my choice of going to work by car, I prevent a possible future.”

I lifted my drink for a sip before responding. “Psychics share that kind of information all the time.”

Lila nodded, picking up a couple of fries. “Yes, for smaller things. Big catastrophic events are always vague. The bigger the prediction, the more variables there are. That’s why you never get a detailed answer from them. They can’t tell you when the world will end, when we will go to war, or when there’ll be another pandemic. They can say those things will happen,

but if you ask them to narrow down a date or a decision that could lead to any of these things, it gets really cryptic. This is why your father had to make some guesses. This is a major event, and clearly, the seer wasn't able to narrow down much. All we know is you and your boys are involved." She stuffed the fries in her mouth and nodded as if to put extra emphasis to her point, and then chased it down with her drink.

I studied her for a moment. Lila liked to joke around, but she was a smart woman. She could get deep and very analytical from time to time. It was one of the qualities I loved about her. "You make a lot of damn sense, lady. So, my father decided that the best choice was getting the pack and me together instead of keeping us apart. The question is, what led him to believe that was the route to take?"

Lila scrunched her face up and looked at her drink like it was suspicious. "Oh, this is straight liquor." She blew out a breath. "Let me say some words before I get too tipsy. My mind is buzzing in the right direction right now. Okay, your father studied these men for a long time before he even uttered their names to you. What if his intended purpose of studying them wasn't to vet them as packmates but to see what they were all about? It was, incidentally, through that action that he came to realize that you all were actually meant to be together. And since your guys had a seer who already said the same, it was fate."

Lila wasn't the only one getting buzzed off the drink. I hadn't eaten breakfast and wasn't a heavy drinker to start. The fact that my chest was warming up and probably growing hair made me thankful we had bodyguards to drive us home. However, in the meantime, she was making hella sense, and my mind was following along well. "Okay, let's keep this party going. Let's look at this logically. Chilli didn't have faith that I would do the right things on behalf of the coven. But my dad did. He knew that even if I wasn't heavily involved with the coven, I'd still be loyal. After all, he helped make it a great institution, and he taught me the right way. He fought off racism, sexism, and injustices. I saw the differences he made while in power. I'd never turn my back on it. Therefore, he knew when the seer mentioned me, it had to be because I could make a positive difference. Chilli probably suspected it was for me to defeat the pack, but under her control. Dad most likely thought it was to prevent the pack from going bad." I wiggled in my seat, getting hyped as my logic started to form. "So, no, I can't ask the guys directly if they are going to betray us."

Lila snorted, grabbing several more fries. “Like, they’d say yes.”

I poked my lips out, quickly shaking my head. “Nope, wouldn’t do that.”

“You know, Xander is more than just a regular smegular fae. He is a truth-seeker. Kind of like a very invasive mind reader. I don’t know how he can do it without them knowing, maybe he uses some magic. Any who, he could dig in their heads while they’re unconscious and see what’s going on.”

My eyes widened in shock. “Using magic on them without them knowing is a bit unethical. Not to mention, I’m not sure it’d work on Daniel since he’s also fae.”

Lila tapped her chin. “I can use a spell.”

I bared my teeth at the thought. It all gave me the ick, but our options were limited. “They would be pissed if they found out.”

“Man, didn’t they spy on you for who knows how long? This makes you even.”

“You’re a bad influence.”

She raised her glass in my direction. “So, I’ve been told. You can blame it all on me, that’s fine. What other options we got?”

I blew out a raspberry, thinking. I didn’t want to spy on my guys. I didn’t even want to distrust them. “Hmm, I can notice who’s around them. See if any of those people are shifty or suspicious.”

Lila scrunched her face up in thought. “Don’t those words mean the same thing?”

I lifted a shoulder. “I don’t care. The point is, I look to see if there are any dubious people around them and keep them away. My guys are good and overly protective. On their own, my guys wouldn’t do any bad to the coven unless...” my voice trailed off as my words led my mind to the ultimate problem.

Lila lifted both her hands in front of her, mouth hanging open. I was hoping her mind had led to the same point that mine was wandering. “Girl!”

I lifted my brows. “Yes, girl.”

“They wouldn’t fuck with our coven unless^¾”

“The coven fucked with me!”

The bartender looked over to us with surprised curiosity, and I gave him a sheepish smile as I lowered my voice and hunched closer to Lila. “They don’t care about the coven. They just care about me. Kai has broken into our HQ before to protect me. Chilli hated them, in part, because they were unruly, and she knew she didn’t have the power to control them.”

Lila squished her face together, eyes looking at the bar counter as if it was the one talking to her. “Billie, if our coven ever hurt you on some grand scale, your pack would take out whoever. That’s fact. And you don’t have weak alphas. They ran shit for decades. The only reason they are tame now is because they decided to be. But there is no way in hell they’d risk losing another omega. They would uproot a building and throw it in the middle of traffic to stop that. They would take out all of coven leadership. And they have the connections and intelligence to do so. I mean, that’s super sweet but also scary as hell.”

Sweet and scary was right. Now, we didn’t have any facts to prove this was what the seer meant, but logic being what it was made this highly plausible. Their moral code wouldn’t say, ‘Let’s not kill Brenda or Thalia in revenge or to protect Billie because that would cause a problem.’ They wouldn’t give two fucks. Even Daniel. I could talk to them until I was blue in the face about respecting the coven, and none of them would if it meant allowing any harm to me. In a way, I could see how my father would want me to have that type of protection. He loved the coven, but he always respected my decisions when it came to not heavily relying on my witch connections or even magic to get by. However, maybe his push for me to be more active later on was because he wanted to ensure I was in line with the coven when it came to this pack of alphas.

I just had a hard time figuring out what the coven could do to me to get my guys to take them down. Sure, there were policies I opposed. I could see myself taking more of a stand if witch leadership grew more conservative and less tolerant of others, which was a growing fear among the younger generation. I also didn’t like certain witches, not that I feared people like Angelica would try to hurt me. She was a mean girl, not a killer. But there was a traitor in our midst. Was it possible that the traitor was the real catalyst that could lead to our downfall? Could this traitor be a direct risk to me? I wasn’t sure, but it was all I had to go on. I needed to find this person. Fast.



TY

I bit into my roast beef sandwich and hummed in approval as the flavor melted on my tongue. As a vampire, eating was more a bonus than a necessity. I was old enough now that I could eat for pleasure without regurgitating it like newer vampires. Still, overeating wasn't a good idea, so I limited how much I ate. Most of the time, it was simply for the flavor cravings.

"You know, for a hospital food court, this place has some really good food. I haven't had anything bad yet when I visit."

I looked across the table to Billie, her face set in a thoughtful scowl as she stabbed at her shrimp Caesar salad. She'd barely eaten any of her lunch. In fact, she'd barely said a word. She'd been acting oddly for the past week, ever since her meeting with the high priestess of her coven. I could feel some type of simmering stress within her, we all could. However, when I asked her about it, she said it was just work and coven stuff. I accepted it as truth, but Daniel, the perceptive fae that he was, said it wasn't the full truth but that we shouldn't push her about it. He was certain she would share when she was ready. It was hard for me to see her with a wall up. We were mates now. Still, I had to remember that we had only known her personally, our spying didn't count, a few months. Living together and having the bonds quickened our connection, but there was only so much it could do. Not to mention Billie was a stubborn one.

"You sure you haven't been having any more of those dreams?" I asked, putting my sandwich down.

She looked across the table at me, eyes startled as if just remembering I was there. Well, that didn't hurt my feelings. "Dreams? No," she answered.

I gave her a silent nod, not wanting to pressure her. "Think the guys would be pissed if I took you away for a long weekend to Jamaica?"

She chuckled. "That sounds lovely. And yes, they might be."

"Kai got to go to Puerto Rico with you."

"That was different. Lila was there, and he kind of intruded on our girl's trip."

"Then what can I do to make you happy?"

She put her fork down and reached across the table to place her hand on mine. Her eyes softened. "You already make me so happy, Ty. There's nothing more you need to do. Thank you for coming here to spend my lunch break with me. I'm sorry I've been so distracted. I get in my head sometimes, and it's hard to remember I have a family. But please believe me when I say

everything's go—”

A chorus of screams drowned out her response, and suddenly, we saw a mass of people running past the open cafeteria doors.

“What the hell is going on?” Billie cried, jumping up.

I got up with her as people around us started to scramble and head out of the cafeteria to see what was happening.

Max was already walking. “Stay here,” he ordered before running to the interior doors.

I paused, listening with my vampiric ears for a semblance of what was happening. I heard screaming, fighting, and strange growling sounds. No, it wasn't growling, it was more like strangled, guttural cries. And then I smelled it. A thick whiff of death and decay filled my nostrils, and I grimaced.

“It's the dead,” I stated, taking a step in front of Billie.

She looked at me with wide eyes. “What are you talking about?”

Max rushed back toward us. “Zombies. A horde of them. We need to leave.” He ushered us toward glass doors located at the opposite side of the cafeteria entrance doors, leading to an outside courtyard with more seating and onto the hospital campus.

I backed away, glancing over to them. “Take her home, but I've got to help. A hospital is full of sick people who won't have the strength to fight.”

Zombies weren't particularly strong, and they were easy to kill since, technically, they were already dead. However, they could keep moving no matter how much you maimed or stabbed. So, it was important that you knew how to kill them, which was injuring the brain in some way. Also, they were controlled by a necromancer. Zombies didn't just rise from the dead on their own. Only a magic user could animate them, and only a magic user could keep them moving. If there was a zombie hoard, then a necromancer had to be nearby. They could only be so far from the dead if they were controlling them. I just needed to kill the necromancer, and they would all drop at once.

Billie stopped walking, moving closer to me. “It'll be easier for me to find the necromancer than you.”

She was right. I knew that, but having a horde of zombies attack a hospital was no casual thing. With everything that was happening, I was smart enough to be suspicious that this wasn't a coincidence. There were many members of the coven that worked here, and Billie was already a target. I needed her protected and not rising to whatever bait this had to be.

I looked to the interior doors, watching people scramble for every exit. Any moment now, we'd see our undead guests, and I had to act. "Billie, can you do a spell and tell me where the witch is?"

Billie shrugged, not excited about my answer. "My magic identifying spell isn't that great, but I can try."

I gave her a curt nod, the smell of death growing thicker. "Ok, go outside and recite it, then telepathically tell me where to go. Hopefully, there's only one in the area."

The hairs on the back of my neck rose, alerting me to impending danger. I spun around and did a high kick to the stomach of a zombie entering the cafeteria. A grotesque, heavily decayed man in a dusty suit tumbled to the ground. I raced toward him and ripped his neck from his shoulders. Several other zombies soon began to spill into the room and Max moved Billie and a few others toward the courtyard exit. I had no worries that he would defend them to the death if any undead got past me further into the cafeteria.

A few people stayed back to fight. There were a few witches, vampires, and lycans who worked at the hospital. I could even see non-paranormal beings with weapons attacking the horde. I wasn't so cocky that I thought I could take a zombie invasion on my own, and I needed to focus on getting to the necromancer.

Still, there were way more people running than fighting, and that meant the fighters were getting outnumbered. I zoomed through the room, tossing the undead off victims, then exited into the hallway amidst a crowd of chaos. Zombies were everywhere, more than I imagined. Some were biting, others were pulling and breaking. In the movies, zombies saw humans as food. In reality, they weren't that damn hungry. In reality, they only did what the necromancer directed them to do.

So, if the zombies were attacking, it was because some asshole was making them. I knew this to be true because not one zombie stuck around to eat their victims after maiming or killing them. They were bulldozing through people like Mac trucks. The scent of blood was heavy in the air. I paused, my throat constricting, screams growing louder in my ears along with the heartbeats. There was too much. Too much blood. Splattered on the walls and floors. Pouring from the victims.

My incisors elongated, nails sharpened. My vision darkened, and I didn't have to look into a mirror to know that my eyes had bled full black. I was ready to fight. Back in our gang days, I didn't often fight or get in on the

action if it wasn't needed. It wasn't because I couldn't fight. I was good at it. We all were. That's what made us formidable. And it wasn't because I didn't like to fight. I wasn't feigning for a battle like Kai or even Lance. However, when I fought, there were times I would zone out if there was a strong enough scent of blood in the air. Pulling back could be a problem.

I could already feel my hands twitch, and the heavy bass of my beating heart blared in my ears. I was not an undead vampire. I was born this way from vampires who were able to conceive. We were a rarity, and, to my knowledge, only alpha or omega vampires could bear children. Instead of making my control stronger, it made it weaker than I desired.

I shook my head, refocusing my mind on the mission, and honed in on the undead. Until I heard from Billie, I needed to put down the hoard. I went to work, tearing and ripping. I tried not to bite them as undead blood was disgustingly bitter and could make vampires sick.

I couldn't tell how many undead I ripped apart. There were too many to track, however, I was getting drenched in blood and gore. It dripped into my eyes. It was all I could inhale. But I didn't stop. It felt never-ending, but I knew not as much time had passed as I believed. I made it to another section of the hospital when three zombies jumped me at once. They moved in unison like soldiers and tackled me to the ground, pulling at my arms and legs, biting into my skin. I didn't feel pain as deeply as humans, but I still felt the sharp sting of blunt teeth tearing into my flesh.

I punched a hole through the head of one of the zombies. With my strength and the already decaying body, it was like tearing through cardboard. I pulled back my fist and ignored the inky-colored blood on my hand to toss the next zombie off me.

Ty! Billie screamed in my head. The necromancer should be in the west wing of the hospital in the prenatal section. Third floor. Most likely hiding out in a room.

Thanks, beautiful. Stay safe with Max. I jumped up and stomped on the head of the next zombie and raced to a directory on the wall. Finding where to go, I zoomed through the hospital in a blur to get to my destination. As I made my way to the prenatal unit, I passed more signs of attacks and bloodied victims everywhere. The horde had gotten farther than I thought. Had this necromancer raised a whole cemetery? Maybe two? How had no one noticed? Were they teleported here? That was most probable, although challenging.

When I reached the prenatal wing, I slowed down. The doors were closed and barricaded. However, outside was another blood bath. I ground my teeth, biting into my lip to control the growing unease I felt. Although I was covered in the blood of the dead, it did little to mask the smell of fresh blood all around me. The prenatal unit filled with innocent people and living blood, was not the place I needed to be. My mind was focused solely on killing. I was aware enough to know the difference between the living and the dead, but my hold was tenuous at best.

Everything okay? Billie asked in my head.

Not really. “Yes,” I said aloud. I couldn’t make her worry, or she’d come. However, the very fact that she was checking in on me made me believe that she could feel my nervousness. I wouldn’t hurt anyone. I couldn’t hurt another innocent. Not again.

I reached out to the door with shaky hands and pushed against it. The barricade would work for a little while against weak zombies but not me. I got through and made fast work of checking every room, finding mostly scared and innocent people. How would I know the necromancer when I saw him or her?

Room 314! Billie exclaimed in my head. *I think that’s it. It just now finally popped into my head with the spell. That has to be where the necromancer is. But just in case, don’t kill them. Knock them out. If the zombies drop, we know that you have the right person.*

Smart thinking.

I found the room quickly and kicked open the door, assuming it would be locked. Unsurprisingly, I saw two people in the room. One man, Asian and appearing to be in his late twenties with a buzz cut and dressed in a gray hoodie and matching gray cargo pants, sat in a yoga pose on one of the hospital beds with his eyes closed. In front of him stood a tanned woman, appearing to be of middle eastern descent with a long, braided ponytail. She was young as well, wearing an oversized red T-shirt and loose jeans. She was most likely his protector while he was concentrating on controlling the undead.

She yelled out words in an unfamiliar language, most likely a spell. My body lifted in the air and slammed against the wall as if I was tossed by a mighty wind. I stayed flat. I knew if I moved toward her, she would aim her magic at me before I could get to her. She was going to play defense instead of offense. It was the smart thing to do when fighting a being like me who

possessed speed.

Therefore, I needed to play the waiting game. Move when she was already in action. And so, I waited. We engaged in a stare-down. She gave a look of confusion, probably wondering why I wasn't moving. My face was most likely determined and maybe a bit crazed. I forced myself to focus on her and not the blood pumping in her veins or her companions. I could still smell the blood from down the hall, so it was a struggle.

She finally gave into her impatience and thrust out her arms in my direction, reciting a spell. My body snapped, and I zoomed in her direction before she could finish her words or move her focus to my new location, which was currently behind her. I snapped her neck before my body even came to a complete stop. I then quickly turned to the necromancer and punched him in the face. Unfortunately, in my blood-focused mind, I forgot the whole part of hitting to knock out and not to kill. I was pretty sure I'd killed him because his head was concaved on the side that I punched. I screamed out a curse and grabbed my head, frustrated with myself.

Ty! Billie's voice rang in my head, although it sounded distant. It was hard to concentrate now. All I could focus on was the newly dead bodies around me. Their blood still sweet enough to enjoy. I hated that I was so affected, but my insides were burning, itching. Drool pooled to the tips of my fangs.

Ty, whatever you did, you caught the necromancer. The zombies are tumbling to the ground like rag dolls. You got them. You saved us.

I barely registered her words and soon found my hands back on the dead necromancer. I lifted his shoulders, pulled him to me, and then tore into his neck.

CHAPTER 14



BILLIE

When we exited the cafeteria, all I saw was carnage everywhere. Healers and doctors were rushing about, even those wounded, to help the injured, but there weren't enough of us. Healers could only do so much without getting drained, especially if the injuries were bad, and doctors required time. This was a hospital, we were supposed to save lives, not get people killed.

I rushed over to the injured and began to help with the healing, but it felt like there was not enough aid. Why would they attack a hospital? What point were they making? The only point I could think of was that this hospital was run by a witch, and it held the most magic-using healers in the area. If they were making a point of showing how ineffective we were, this was a good hit. We'd have to beef up security on all witch, mage, and wizard owned and managed establishments.

However, that was more for leadership to organize. My first priority was to heal and then connect with Ty, who hadn't been answering me. I felt something really unsettling in the center of my chest. A tightness I couldn't resolve. I pounded at it uselessly but tried to remain focused on the task at hand. If I kept up this slow healing, I would burn out soon, and we didn't have that luxury. I didn't want to lose not one more soul.

An idea popped into my head, and I quickly pulled on my bonds.

Guys, I need your help.

Everyone answered my call except Ty, which was a problem, and one I'd have to get to afterwards.

I need you to send me your energy. A lot of people need healing here, and I'm wondering if maybe I can heal more if I had some energy boosting.

Of course. Daniel replied in my head.

Not soon after, I felt what could only be described as an energizing bump in my system. It felt like every nerve and muscle was wrapped in a cool bond. Any regular aches I had disappeared. I felt like I could lift a sofa with one hand.

Not wanting to waste the boost, I worked my way through as many people as I could before I started to feel weak again. By that time, between the quicker healings I was doing and my fellow doctors and nurses, we'd attended to everyone in need.

I stood back from my latest healed person and rubbed my eyes with the back of my hand. How long had I been healing? It felt like hours.

Max bent forward, peering at me with worried eyes. "You okay?"

I nodded and then paused. A smell floated past me. Something vaguely familiar. It sat on top of the smell of blood and undead decay like a sickly-sweet scent. Spice and berries.

Recognition shocked my brain, and I twirled around, searching for the shadow creature from my dreams a month ago. I saw nothing at first, but then a dark shape standing at the end of the hallway amongst the chaos caught my eye. I leaned forward, narrowing my eyes, and quickly my heart sped up as it began to slowly move toward me in that odd, disjointed manner. No one around it seemed to notice the creature as it brushed past them, blazing eyes focusing on me.

I grabbed onto Max's sleeve and pointed. "Tell me you see that tall-ass shadow monster walking this way."

Max looked in the direction I pointed. "I don't see a creature. Just people."

He looked back at me with confused eyes. How could he not see anything? It was there, closer now and vivid. There was no hiding.

The creature shook its head. "Only you can see me," it said, its croaking voice making the hairs on the back of my neck stand at attention.

"Am I dreaming?" I questioned, even though I knew I was wide awake. Could I be hallucinating? How could that happen?

"I am no dream nor hallucination. You see me because I will it so."

"Leave me alone!"

"I'm sorry, omega, but I cannot do that. You are too special." It stuck its tongue out, also black, as if tasting the air like a snake, and I trembled, taking a step back. "I wish I could get to you sooner, but these things take time and

great amounts of energy.”

He said it apologetically, as if he couldn't tell by my state of panic that I wanted nothing to do with him. But at least now I understood why I hadn't had any more dreams from him. It took a lot out of him, and perhaps he only had limited access to the human realm. I'd love it if he just stayed in whatever hell hole he resided and left me alone. How had he even found me?

“What are you doing here? While I'm awake. At this moment. Are you a part of this chaos?”

He just looked at me, unblinking. I actually didn't think the creature had eyelids. However, since he didn't say no, I had to assume the answer was yes, which led me to more questions. Perhaps he could tell me something indirectly that could help me get rid of him.

“Did you help set this up? Why?”

It tilted its head to the side. “No. My only goal is you. Everything else is...incidental.”

“How'd you even find out about me?”

“They know all the special ones.”

“What does that mean? Who is 'they?'”

The creature stopped moving toward me and began to fade before my eyes. I could now see through it, its body becoming more translucent until eventually it disappeared.

“The fuck!” I cried at the empty space now in front of me.

Max moved to stand in front of me, scratching his head. “Perhaps you need to rest.”

I sighed. I knew I looked crazy. I just had a one-sided conversation with a being no one else could see. “It's okay, Max. I need to find Ty.”

“He is home.”

“What? How do you know?”

Max waved his cell phone at me. “I texted the group. Daniel responded. He said one of the guards saw him.”

I lifted my upper lip in annoyance. Why wasn't Ty responding then? What the hell was wrong with him? “How could he just leave without saying anything?”

Max shrugged, looking just as perplexed as I felt.

I took my phone out of my pocket and texted my boss that I had to leave early because I was weak from healing. I also had a vampire to question.



When I finally got home, I raced upstairs to Ty's room. I walked inside, but I didn't see him on his bed or at his desk. I turned around and almost left the room when something pulled me to a stop. A tug at my bond. I turned again and walked to the bed. The legs of the furniture were high, leaving enough room for storage and an average-sized body to easily slide under. I dropped down onto my knees and lowered my head, looking under the bed.

Ty lay on his back. He'd mentioned before that sometimes he preferred to sleep under his bed. A vampire thing, as he explained. It felt enclosed and safe to him. I understood that, considering I had a nest bed made of pillows and fabrics mixed with their scents. However, he didn't look so great. He was a mess from all the gore during his fighting, and he was breathing way too fast. Almost hyperventilating. This was new. I could feel the erratic energy emanating from him. It bounced around my insides. And his gingerbread and honey alpha scent was out of control. It was all that I could now smell. His eyes were still all black, and his fangs were exposed, his mouth partially open.

"Ty, honey, are you okay?"

He didn't respond.

I needed help.

Guys, Ty is under his bed, breathing really fast.

Shit. I heard Kai say in my head. He might be in a blood lust right now.

All that blood from the hospital probably set him off. Daniel added.

But the fact that he's isolating himself is good. Kai said.

You should leave him alone. Lance suggested. His voice more forceful in my head.

I'm his omega. Isn't it part of my role to calm him down?

He could bite you. Lance replied.

He'd never hurt her. Kai interjected.

Great. No need having my guy suffer. Signing off.

I put up a mental wall so they wouldn't continue to talk in my head. I had made the decision to stay. The thought of leaving Ty in this state in the hopes that his mind would come back with time was crazy to me. Sure, him knowing to rush home and isolate was a good sign that he had some control, but the fact that he had to hide away was troubling. He'd gone blood lust in

the past and was very closed-lipped about the particulars. I didn't like that trauma for him. I just needed to focus on breaking through to him.

I scooted under the bed next to him and laid still. I needed to approach him in installments. I hoped he wouldn't hurt me, but I wasn't going to be foolish.

When he didn't move, I took that as a good sign and then inched closer until I was against his side. I threw an arm and a leg over his body and looked up at him. He didn't acknowledge me. He wasn't even tempted by me or any traces of blood I still had on me from my healings. It was really as if I was invisible. I could see his nostrils flaring but nothing more. If he was still covered in the stench of blood, that couldn't aid him.

I quietly recited a cleaning spell that made him look less gruesome, although a proper shower was needed for a long-lasting cleaning.

"What can I do for you?" I whispered, not sure if he would really hear me.

He didn't respond, but his breathing slowed a little. Then he moved his arm around me. Feeling encouraged, I snuggled closer to him, and I felt him lift his chest in a deep breath. His hand tightened on me, shaking slightly. The grip was just this side of painful, but at least he hadn't dug his claws into me, yet.

I'd done some research on vampires who had gone blood lust. Mostly they lost control and became feeding machines, focusing solely on obtaining blood. There were levels to it. Low-level blood lust meant they were fine after feeding once. However, it still ended up bad if they killed the person they were feeding on since they were usually not in their right mind. They would take the blood in the most barbaric of ways. Ripping the throat out or breaking the neck.

If they were more far gone, they'd keep killing and feeding even after already being satiated. It became less about surviving from starvation mode and more about just honing in on the feeding mode, much like a zombie.

The most common way of handling blood lusters, as they were often called, was death. Decapitation, damaging the heart. There was usually no going back. Usually. On rare occasions, someone was able to snap the vampire out of their blood trance. However, that was typically for when a vampire was at a low level of blood lust. Higher, and they were at the point of no return. Although not many people had the patience or skill to want to de-escalate a bloodthirsty vampire. They were way too powerful to talk them

down. That could mean more lives lost.

I knew Ty had gone blood lust before, and Kai had talked him down, so it was low level. I was hoping it was the same here since Ty seemed partially in his right mind, having hidden away and not harming me.

“Have you fed?”

He still didn’t answer.

I sighed, frustrated because I wasn’t able to break through. I really thought that just by being an omega, all I had to do was be near him. I guess I needed to do a little more.

I reached over and moved his other hand to his claiming mark at the base of my neck. A slight shiver of pleasure passed through me, and I sucked in a breath. *Focus, girl. This is about him, not you.*

I blinked quickly, getting my mind right. “Mr. Asare, I think you might need to drink some of my blood,” I said in my best seductive voice, knowing he liked when I called him by his last name.

I felt a hitch in his breath, and he slowly turned to me. Without pupils, I couldn’t tell exactly what he was thinking or what he was looking at in the dimly lit room. However, it seemed by the tilt of his head that he was looking at his hand on my neck.

He licked his lower lip, and before I could blink, I found myself on my back. He leaned over me and only hesitated slightly before sinking his fangs into my skin. I pressed my lips tightly at the momentary displeasure and then relaxed as his mouth worked my neck. The feeling went straight to my core, and I felt a fluttering tingle. He wasn’t harsh, his mouth gentle on me despite not using any vampire glamour to increase the pleasure. I squirmed under him as I felt his tongue lap back and forth against my skin, igniting my nerves and drenching my panties. I didn’t think it was meant to be sexual, but it was having that effect. I wondered if he realized.

I moaned, clenching his shirt. I really couldn’t lose myself. We both couldn’t be clouded. Him by the blood lust and me by pure lust. In retrospect, it probably wasn’t the right thing to do to offer him my blood at my claiming spot, but I had hoped the connection would bring him to his right mind.

“Ty,” I whispered, unsure of what I would say next.

He pulled away from my neck at the sound of his name and began to lick my wound. That was a good sign, he could stop. However, my whole body was a pool of throbbing ache, and I needed him. Maybe now *I* was the problem.

He wordlessly moved away from me and scooted from under the bed. He then reached out and pulled me out as well. I sat up and gave him a tiny smile, searching his eyes for any recognition of awareness. They were still all black, which troubled me.

He lowered his head. "Sorry."

Ah. There he was.

Billie? Daniel's voice punched through my head. I guessed I didn't have my walls up high enough, which was probably a good thing.

It's all good, Danny. He'll be okay.

I focused back on Ty, grabbed his face, and looked into those midnight eyes. There was misery on his face and something else. Need. My heart broke for him because I knew that blood lust was one of his darkest moments, and to struggle with it again most likely brought him back to a hard place. A time when he lost his first omega.

"Do you need more blood? It's okay."

He turned his head and kissed my palm. I could feel him trembling beneath my hands, although his harsh breathing had subsided. I moved my hand and unbuttoned my blouse, shrugging it off. Ty looked at me with confused eyes, his brows scrunching. I turned my head, exposing the other side of my neck. If he still needed more, I wouldn't make him beg for it. I still had enough energy.

"Billie," he growled before pouncing on me, his teeth sinking into my neck again.

This time, it didn't feel as good. He still wasn't fully back and had forgotten to glamour the pain of the bite away again. I remained stiff as he wrapped his arms around me and laid me on my back as he continued to suck. Despite the bite being painful, he was still gentle.

He ground his pelvis into me, and I could tell he was getting excited. This, of course, turned me on, and I dampened for him, his scent still incredibly strong. His hand moved up my rib cage to my right breast, still covered by my bra, and he squeezed it, rubbing my nipple in circles with his thumb until it hardened under the fabric.

He groaned into my skin and yanked at my bra straps. Moving away from my neck, he quickly licked it before pulling the rest of my bra down. His mouth found my nipple, and he began to suck. I squirmed under him, the pleasure intense as his fangs scraped at the sensitive skin. And then I felt another stinging bite. He began to suck at my nipple, twirling his tongue

around the bud as he drank my blood.

I moaned, curling my toes as the border of pain and pleasure wrapped around me. I could already feel the slick dripping between my thighs, and I spread my legs wider. He moved his mouth away from me and hooked his fingers in my slacks and panties, pulling them down to my ankles. I had taken my shoes off when I entered the house, and I kicked my pants off the rest of the way, along with my bra.

He still hadn't said anything, and those eyes were still black, but he moved with chaotic determination as he unzipped his jeans with shaky hands. I was worried he might rip them. He was certainly strong enough to. I reached up to help him, but he had already yanked them down before I touched him. And then he entered me. I was already slick, and he slid in with ease, but he didn't go easy on me.

He pounded against me, his mouth mashing against mine. His skin was hot, his tongue tasting of the metallic tang of my blood and his sweet dessert scent. My body quivered with the fullness of him in me despite his roughness. He stopped short of his knot as he continued to rapidly thrust in me, his pelvis brushing my clit. His mouth soon went to my neck again, sucking and drinking. He then quickly came in a crash of swearing and shudders.

I wrapped my arms around his back, his shirt still on and clinging to his skin from his sweat. I could feel the bunching of his back muscles as he propped himself above me.

"You're saying more than one word now. That's good. I mean, it's cursing, but that counts," I observed.

He chuckled, and the bass of his laugh seemed to brush against my clit. I bit my lip and rocked against him. He was still hard inside me, and he took my action as encouragement because he began to push within me again. He thrummed my nipple, rubbing my blood over the sensitive area. The wetness of it set me off, vibrating my clit, and I squeezed my pussy around his member. I was already close to exploding, and as he brushed against my G-spot, I came in a loud cry.

Ty rested only a few minutes, still hard the whole time. He pulled out of me and picked me up, resting me on my left side on his bed. Spooning me, he then thrust into me from behind. I moaned, enjoying the new angle as he hit my inner walls. His hand slipped between my thighs, rubbing my slick onto my pussy lips and clit. I closed my eyes, pushing back against him as I

reveled in the electric feel of him inside me, his chest hot against my back.

Then he sank his fangs into my shoulder. I'd never had him bite me this much before. Still, I didn't hate it. This time, he pushed his glamouring magic into me, and I came again from the dual pleasure, him following soon behind me.

But he wasn't done. He pounded into me again and again. It was as if he had no off button. And my body merged with his, forgetting any type of limitation of orgasms I could possibly have in one session. However, I could feel myself starting to get raw.

When he pulled out of me and settled between my legs again, moving me on my back, I saw that his eyes were now back to their lovely brown. However, he still appeared distant. I thought he was done, but he speared me again, and this time it did hurt just a little. I let out a yelp, and he paused, looking down at me with concern.

The pain was gone, and he looked so desperate then. He really wanted to continue, but he didn't want to hurt me. I could see the struggle to contain himself play across his face. I couldn't understand it at first, but things were beginning to add up between his behavior and his stronger scent. Once I got it, I began to relax again. I patted his shoulder and smiled at him. "I'm okay."

He smiled back at me then, his eyes full of absolute love and adoration. He retracted his fangs, and his dimples appeared, melting my heart. "Beautiful," he whispered and began to move within me again. This time he finally pushed his knot inside me, and I came immediately from the fullness, my body easily stimulated at this point.

He rotated his pelvis in a slow grind as I shuddered around him. A slight movement behind him broke my focus and I saw Daniel at the doorway, arms crossed as he watched us with neutral eyes.

"He's in his rut," Daniel explained, but I already knew.

I nodded, rubbing Ty's back slowly as he continued to rock within me. He kissed my shoulder and neck. In between kisses, he would lick, especially at the bites, further healing them. At this point, I was beginning to feel sorer, but he was knotted in me, and his grinds were slow. Also, he was in his rut, and I wanted to help him like he helped me in my heat. After my experience with Kai, I knew better what to expect. Although Ty's was slightly different in that it was laced with a low-level blood lust.

Do you need me to tell him to stop? I know it can be a lot, and Ty always went longer. He might not stop until you tell him or he falls asleep. Daniel

asked in my head.

It's okay. He's fine.

Daniel gave me a curt nod and closed the door, leaving us alone. I really didn't want to ask Ty to stop. I always enjoyed the closeness with the guys, even if my nether regions would hate me later.

Sometime later, Ty did stop. He flipped us so that we were on our sides, with me resting a leg over his. He'd taken off his shirt at some point, and now I had full contact with his warm body. He ran a hand slowly up and down my back, pulling the covers over my ass, where he later rested his other hand. "Sorry."

I lightly slapped his chest. "Stop saying that. Your rut popped up. You're an alpha."

He scrunched his face, closing his eyes. "It's not just that. I got blood lust again."

"It was barely lust."

He opened his eyes, mouth set in a grimace. "Billie, I can't even remember how many times I bit you."

I waved a dismissive hand at him. "It was fine. I enjoyed it."

"Don't just say things like that. It wasn't fine. I nibbled on you like a chew toy. I wasn't in my right mind. I could have—"

"But you didn't. You would never hurt me. You saved the day, Ty. You're a hero."

He shook his head. "What are you talking about?"

"You killed the necromancer. Sure, all that blood and fighting set you off, but you were still in control. And you knew how to handle it. Don't beat yourself up."

He tossed his head back, still touching me. I was starting to totally unwind, even with him still inside me. It just felt right.

"Billie, going blood lust terrifies me. I'm ashamed it happened again and with you around. And don't say it's okay. It isn't. I need to be safe. Safe for you."

I touched his cheek, bringing his gaze back to me. His eyes were still pained, more haunted now. It upset me to see it. I hated to see him hurt as much as he hated to see me in pain.

"You are safe."

"When I went blood lust all those years ago, I did some bad things. I hurt a lot of people. It was dumb luck that I didn't kill anyone. However, I had to

turn someone to prevent them from dying after I almost killed her. She ran from me after, and despite my many attempts to get in contact with her, she ignored me. Ran whenever I tried to reach her. I only wanted to set things right. At least teach her about being a vampire. Give her whatever she needed. She didn't want that. Only wanted the crazed vampire who hurt her to leave. And so, I did. But because I made her, I can still feel her. It's like a claiming but more parental. I can't let that happen again."

He had never told me that before, and it brought a whole new clarity to why he was so scared of going back to those dark days. While it was awful, I held on to one thing. He had tried to correct his mistake. Even while he was blood lust, he cared.

"Give yourself some grace, Ty. Even at your worst, your heart still allows you to turn it around. Don't forget that. And maybe one day she'll come around. We've got long lives, you never know."

He squeezed me to him but didn't respond.

I wasn't convinced he received what I was saying, but I let it slide. For now, we were all safe, and that was all that mattered. However, we now had an even bigger problem. My dream demon could day walk, and he was working with Ascension. Demons and dark mages together. Just what we didn't need.

CHAPTER 15



BILLIE

*A*nother month passed and the dream demon had made two more appearances since then, just staring and taunting me. However, he didn't touch me or cause harm. He was like a ghost. Frightening, but nothing to truly fear...yet. He kept hinting at his time coming. He was growing strength or perhaps waiting for help the Ascension's promised him for his assistance. I wasn't sure, really. He would neither confirm nor deny their role every time I questioned him. However, I knew they were connected. There were rumors going around of traces of demonic magic at Ascension-related attacks. The group never tried to hide when the chaos they sent out into the world was their doing. They wanted our coven to know. They also wanted other groups to know that our coven was weak for allowing it.

In the meantime, it just meant I had to work extra hard to find out who this demon was or grab a cult member to see if they could tell me. So far, no one had any leads, but we weren't giving up. I was also focused on ensuring my guys were still team coven.

I still couldn't tell the guys about the warning my coven leads had told me, but it weighed on my mind practically every moment. Naturally, because of my bonds, they knew I was sitting on something heavy and didn't appreciate the secret. I tried to brush it off as fear about the demon visits, and they didn't push too much since that was plausible and actually true.

However, I did try to bond more with the guys outside of the home and get a better sense of the influences around them. I went for food and drinks at Kai's and Dan's restaurant and bar more often, and I stopped past Lance's firehouse once a week with food. Ty didn't really see people much; he was a hermit for the most part. Most of his interactions with others were online. I

didn't stress too much about that. I strongly doubted that the catalyst for them betraying us would be an outside person and more this traitor directed toward me. Still, I didn't know for sure.

"That's two," Lila stated, holding two fingers up in my face with a judgmental look.

I rolled my eyes as I chomped on a delicious chocolate cake pop while sitting down at a window seat in her bakery. Her space looked like what I imagined the inside of a blue Tiffany box would look like. It was bright with those iconic blue walls, white marble floors and countertops, circular white table tables and chairs with gold trimming, and colorful pop art everywhere. Popular R&B music blared through the speakers. "Mind your business."

She snorted. "Well, you haven't paid for them, so it is my business."

"I thought friends ate free."

"Who said that?"

"I'm buying a cake today from you."

She shrugged and walked back to her counter. "Sorry, boo. Look, anyway, I wanted to tell you that we don't think your guys are going to betray us."

I raised a brow and got up to walk to the counter, cake pop still in hand. "We?"

She nodded before giving some instruction to her employee that I didn't catch. It was a Friday and not yet busy, but there would be a rush later on. "Yes, Xander and I. And the time he's spent with them, he hasn't found anything suspicious yet in his truth-seeking."

How could I have forgotten that? Looks like she'd gone ahead with her plan, and I decided it best not to know the means. "Well, that's comforting to know."

"Yeah, my crazy guy is pretty helpful when he puts his mind to it. He's been on the road shutting shit down with that enemy fae court."

Although one of her fae was able to return with her, the deal was made that he had to continue the mission of his court to fight the enemy fae, who had cells within the human realm. This ultimately helped my coven because every cell Xander and his people found meant less allies for the Ascension.

"When he called me today, he mentioned he had some news to share. He'll tell us at the party," Lila went on.

The party was my very informal shindig for Ty's birthday. My guys didn't celebrate their birthdays because they were so old, and I guessed they

were over it. However, I was still a birthday fan, and I liked to do something, even if small, for their day. They were all over 100 years old, with Daniel and Kai being the oldest. Daniel was in the low 200s, Kai slightly more. Lance was around 150, and Ty, the youngest, would be turning 137. None of them looked older than 35 at best, so it was easy to forget.

I leaned on the counter. “Okay, I’m looking forward to hearing that news. I hope it’s good. Although knowing he didn’t find any secret plans to betray my coven was good.”

Lila gave me a mischievous smile. “Moving on to another topic. Any more ruts?”

I chuckled, not surprised her mind would go to sex. She was more free with that discussion than me, but I tried to keep up. “No. And I’m glad I have this break. Ty was awesome. But afterwards, I had to put an ice pack on my va-jay-jay. I didn’t even have to do that when I went into heat. Kai didn’t go as long as him.”

Lisa gave a knowing nod. “Not everyone’s ruts are the same. Aww, I miss my alpha.” She pouted and stared off into the distance as if remembering something fondly. I had a good guess what that memory was about.

“Yeah, I’m glad that they have them spaced apart. I thought they would sync up like periods, but I’ve been spared. But it’s still fun to see them go all wild and primitive. Look at me, all excited about being with alphas. They might be a handful, but they really are making a difference in my life. And they’re getting better at blocking energy, so I don’t get overwhelmed.”

I glanced at Lila as I spoke. Her eyes were still unfocused, her head tilted slightly. Yep, she had checked out of our conversation and was thinking about her men. I waved a hand in front of her face to get her attention back. It was time to get my cake and leave. I didn’t blame her. I didn’t know how I would feel if I was to be separated from my alphas for an indefinite amount of time. I hoped I never found out.



KAI

Getting information on the creature that was tormenting Billie was harder I thought. Although it only visited sporadically and did little more than just appear, one visit was enough for me. Demons were not just voyeurs. They wanted to be a part of the party, and this thing had made it clear he wanted Billie. The why didn't matter. Demons tended to want the same thing, freedom from the underworld rule. It was only fun if you were in the ruling class or a high-ranking soldier. For everyone else, it was hot trash.

And most demons were pure assholes, so even if they did get out, they didn't go get a job and contribute to society. They went after whatever means they could to gain power and strength. Most fed on fear, chaos, death, or anger. Whatever toxic traits humans possessed. So, in a way, humans were right to be particular about letting demons have the same rights as other beings. Hell, I could only count on one hand with fingers left over the number of demon friends I knew who weren't so bad.

And it was one of those few friends that I was visiting that evening for some information. However, it wouldn't be an easy visit. I had to go to an earth-bound neutral location. I could send word to the underworld, but there was no way in hell, pun intended, I was going back there. I paid my dues. Once you got out, you didn't go back, if you could help it. However, demons who were lucky enough to escape hell still liked to hang out with each other. This was mostly because few others did. And apparently, designated neutral areas gave off enough indirect summoning energy that some underworld folks could join in the fun for a few hours.

My friend I was visiting was from the underworld, and not yet free to roam the human realm, so I had no choice but to go to a neutral location. Still, I had some enemies, as was common for most demons because, well, we were assholes. Walking in alone would be foolish. I barely trusted my friend to have my back. But I did trust a certain furry beast.

I parked my truck in the lot behind the bar. It was fairly early for it to be busy, so parking was easy. The sky was dusk, and nightfall would be coming soon, but until the blue inked into black, few demons would show up. Demons enjoyed the night more than anything. I know. Cliché.

I looked over to Lance, who sat uncomfortably hunched forward in the front passenger seat. I made him change into his humanoid wolf form before we left so no one could see him change before we entered the bar. I needed him to look like a demon so others would be less likely to bother him. Even if they thought he was just a lycan, they might test him, although less likely

than if he came in looking like a human.

“You gonna be good when we go in? Don’t touch anything. Don’t keep asking me to buy you stuff, and don’t make a scene,” I instructed him with a smirk.

He growled at me in response before opening the car door and getting out. I followed suit and looked up at him. In his wolf humanoid form, he was about seven feet tall. He had the large head of a dark brown wolf. His eyes were the color of amber, and his fangs were as long as my pinky. He stood erect, and his form was that of a man’s, except his hands and feet were a blend of creature and human. His palms were thick and hard like the paws of a wolf, but there were five fingers. He was also sporting black, curved talons instead of fingernails. His feet were in similar shape, and his whole body was covered in thick, dark brown fur. He wore only a pair of dark gray sweats to cover his man bits because I didn’t want bare ass and nuts on my car seat, even if they were partially covered in fur. Also, he wasn’t too fond of the idea of walking around swinging his twigs and berries casually.

I tilted my head toward the door, and we headed inside. The place looked exactly as you would imagine a demon hangout to appear. Dark and smokey. The walls were painted black and displayed some local demon’s idea of artwork that just looked like horror book covers full of shadows and blood. The floors were dark wood and scratched up, most likely from demons with hoofs and clawed feet. To the left of the entrance was a long bar counter partially covered in leather. Further past it was a hallway that led to the bathrooms and the kitchen. In front of us were several circular black lacquered tables and chairs where customers sat. Off to the far right were a few pool tables and some booth seating.

The place smelled like cigars and beer with a hint of fertilizer. Some demons had a foul smell to them, and there was no fully covering it up. I walked toward the booths where I expected my friend to be since it was a bit more private. I easily found her in the last booth against the wall farthest from the entrance.

“Zathria!” I exclaimed, opening my arms to give her a hug.

She scooted out of the booth to embrace me, and I had to bend forward to hug her. Zathria was a succubus and oozed sex appeal if she chose. However, she led with strength, which is how we became friends. It was purely platonic—based on our similar natures. She was the color of the sea with smooth skin. Her eyes were obsidian with red slits as pupils. She had a head

full of big golden curls that came down to her waist. Tonight, she wore a tight-fitting black leather pants and vest set over her curvy stature. Standing at nearly 6'5, she could be imposing, but she changed her height and overall appearance to whatever she wanted to seduce those she was after. She was only let out of hell to seduce and then sucked right back into the underworld when done. My life was similar to hers at one point, and I felt sorry for her. I didn't wish a summoning on her, but it was her best chance at freedom if she could get rid of the summoner.

Moving away from our embrace, I pointed a thumb in Lance's direction. "This is Lance. My best friend forever."

The werewolf huffed but grunted a greeting in response.

Zathria batted her long lashes as she offered a hand to Lance. "Pleasure to meet you, handsome."

Lance shifted awkwardly beside me and shook her hand quickly before letting it go.

"Chill, Zath. He's a taken man."

She pouted. "Why are all the cute ones taken?"

I pointed at her. "Get your eyes fixed."

We sat down in the booth, ordered drinks, and briefly caught up on passing times before getting to the business at hand.

"So," Zathria began after taking a swig of her beer. "We know whoever is haunting your omega is not a low-level demon. He's not trying to possess her because he wants to be with her. Assuming he really is an alpha."

Besides limited access like succubi, or visiting neutral places like this, the only way low-level demons could get in the human world for long was if they possessed people. Otherwise, the best they could do is haunt them. Mostly by playing little tricks on them, whispering ideas in their heads, or giving them nightmares. Not harmless but mostly invisible in the human world.

I nodded. "Yeah, we're sure this thing is more than that."

"Well, word on the street is it's a memnock demon."

I wrinkled my brows in confusion. The name sounded vaguely familiar. "Weren't they supposed to be extinct?"

There were several species of demons. Some were so old we thought them extinct. Namely, they died off from being killed, excised, or just growing weaker over time. Unlike other groups, just because a demon was old didn't mean it was more powerful. Some just got old and weak if they weren't finding a supply of power.

Zathria shrugged. “I thought so too. Thought the angels killed them off a long time ago. Guess they missed some. Memnock demons were power-hungry fuckers, so the damage they did was always big. They were more than a nuisance.”

“Which was why they were tracked down and killed. And barely a demon had their backs because it made for less competition.”

“Word is there is a memnock demon left, and he’s an alpha. Naturally, he’d want to find an omega. A powerful one, and one who could probably be strong enough to bear more of his kind. Omegas are easy to control once they’re claimed, and they’re an endless supply of power if they’re supernatural. Any demon would want an omega, actually.”

I didn’t like the sound of that, and judging by the damn near fire-level heat radiating beside me from Lance, he didn’t either.

Zathria held up her hands. “I’m not saying he’s your guy, but apparently, he was asking a lot of questions. And he’s the one rallying up folk. He’s building a following. Both in the human world and the underworld.”

I lifted a brow in surprise. This was not normal. “Wait, are you saying he has more than just demon followers?”

“Apparently, he has all kinds of followers. Even humans.”

“Multiple?”

Zathria leaned back in her seat, crossing her arms. “That’s what they say.”

“Where can we find this guy? Does he have a name?”

She snorted. “Honey, if folks knew where he was or even his name, he’d be long gone by now. Demon kings would want to take him out if he’s growing a power that could threaten their status’. Those loyal to him aren’t saying much. The fact that I got this much is surprising, and you see how long that took.”

I saw movement from the corner of my eyes. Three demons walked in our direction. They looked more like orcs, except they had gray-scaled skin. They were all bald, with tusk-like teeth protruding from their bottom row. They were giant, taller than Lance in his wolf form, with glowing green eyes. Dressed in pedestrian clothing, they still looked pretty imposing.

They weren’t coming to say hello.

“Zath, I think we might need to end our meeting early. We got company.”

Zathria turned around in the booth to look and then turned back around with a scowl. “Bildorf and his gang. They’re always quick to get in a fight.

They get off on it. I don't know how you pissed them off already, but if I were you, I'd get out of here. He's never lost a fight."

I grinned, exposing my sharp teeth. "Neither have I."

She widened her eyes. "Be careful."

I kept my eyes on the three orc demons as they finally approached our booth, blocking us in. The hair on Lance seemed to lift, and I saw his mouth shift into a silent snarl. It was clear he didn't like the demons being so close to him. I didn't, either.

"Look who we have here. We're in the presence of greatness. Well, a has-been, actually. Malakai the Incubus!" Bildorf shouted, raising his hands in the air. He had a booming voice that sounded congested. My nerves were already grated.

I looked up at him, smiling. "Sorry, do I know you?"

"We had some business in the past. A long time ago before you ditched your kind to go play pack with a bunch of earth beings."

"I was freed, and I'm enjoying it. I hope the same for you."

He chuckled. "Well, not all the same. I don't want to be a whore for a bunch of witches."

Lance growled, and I was mildly surprised he seemed so upset by the insult directed at me. However, he was like a brother. One that I mostly liked to clown, but ultimately, he'd have my back.

I gave a pretend pout. "Aww, are you upset no one would fuck you even if you paid them?"

Bildorf grimaced and took another step closer. "Do you want me to kick your ass? Can't sex your way out of this."

This time, Lance jumped up, bumping back the orc demon with his chest. Aww, Lancey liked me a little bit. I tilted my neck from side to side. Looks like a fight was gonna go down.

Zathria scooted out of her side of the booth and stood up. "Fellas, there's no need to fight and bloody the floors." She moved over to Lance and the orc demon, putting her hand on both their chests as she stood in the middle of them. "What's your deal, Bildorf? We've been in this corner just quietly talking."

Bildorf blew out a breath, beady eyes still on me. "Why do you want to know about the memnock?"

Well, that was interesting. Could me asking questions have got his interest? And if so, why? Did he know where this demon fucker was hiding?

“Why do you care?”

“Because if you have a problem with him, you gotta problem with me.”

“You know where he is?” I reached over and patted Lance on the back so he could move out of the way and let me out of the booth.

Bildorf snorted. “You think if I knew, I would tell you? Now I’ll ask once again, why are you asking about him?”

I tilted my head back, looking up at the demon in annoyance. “Because he’s an asshole, and I need to kill him.”

I heard Zathria mutter a swear word beside me, shaking her head.

Another orc dropped his mouth open, face twisted in an odd mix of confusion and anger. “You can’t. He’s doing good. Gonna get us demons more freedom in the human world. Help us take over.”

Ah, so that was why they were willing to die for this demon.

I lifted a shoulder nonchalantly. “Welp, you’re gonna have to find another hero.”

Bildorf suddenly swiped out a hand, his claws catching me in the chest and knocking me back into the table. That hurt like hell. Acid pain ripped through me, and I didn’t even bother looking down to know that he’d stuck those claws almost down to my organs. Lucky for me, I could self-heal, but this shit was blindingly painful. Still, I didn’t have time to wait and heal to recover.

Lance let out an ear-splitting roar and grabbed Bildorf by the head, twisting. The orc demon stabbed Lance in the gut, and Lance let go, stumbling back. I jumped to action, fighting to ignore the still burning pain in my chest. I balled my hands into fists, and they ignited into a coat of fire. Another orc demon, the one who hadn’t spoken, foolishly raced toward me. I punched him in the face before he could touch me, burning a hole into his skull with my fire hands. The demon dropped to the ground like a heavy rock, unmoving. That tended to happen when you set someone’s head on fire. Even demons weren’t invincible in certain areas of their bodies.

The other demon orc came at Lance, knocking him to the ground. I moved to help him and felt a swift punch to my ribs. Bildorf. I hunched forward but quickly straightened up, not wanting him to see the pain on my face, although I was clearly bleeding.

I turned in his direction. Zathria inched forward, ready to pounce on him, but I shook my head. I didn’t need her help. I didn’t want it. I wanted to gut this demon and tap dance on his head.

I lunged at him, and he raised his arms to block me, but I teleported mid-move and reappeared behind him. Wasting no time, I shoved my hand into his back, pushing through his insides until I reached his chest. Bildorf made a gargled noise, waving his hands behind his head to get to me. I moved my free hand to his throat, digging my claws in as I leaned away from his own swiping hand. The fire in my fist died out, but I didn't need to reignite them. This was good enough.

"I missed tearing your heart out on purpose, but I can easily get to it. And I have no problem ripping your throat out," I began. My injuries were still burning but not as much. It was most likely the endorphins from a good fight. "Now, the only reason you're still alive is because you're going to tell me where this memnock demon is."

"I'm not telling you shit!" Bildorf shouted.

I now noticed eyes on us from the other patrons and employees, although no one made a move to help or stop the fighting.

I dug my claws deeper into his neck and rotated my arm in his chest. Bildorf let out a loud cry. "Wrong answer."

"I don't know where he is. No one does. He just shows up at different times."

"What name does he go by?"

"He never says."

"What does he look like?"

"A fucking shadow with teeth and eyes. You can never tell the difference with those things."

"So, he doesn't come in any other form?"

"No!"

"So, you basically put all your faith in some nameless, faceless stranger for no reason."

"It's not for no reason. We've seen what he can do. I'm not going to let you get in the way of our cause!" he roared.

His claws finally connected to my shoulder. Well, that just pissed me off, so I ripped his throat out. He moved his hands to his neck, making a gagging noise. He still wasn't dead because...demon, so I ripped out his black heart. That did the trick. I removed my hands, covered in the inky black liquid, and watched the large demon fall dead.

"He was no help," I muttered in annoyance, tossing his heart over my shoulder. "Ready to go, Lancey?"

I looked over to the werewolf, who was busy chomping on the now-dead orc demon he had been fighting. Well, he was actually eating a torn-off arm like it was a chicken leg. I grimaced and pointed at him. “You’re going to spoil your appetite for dinner. And you better brush your teeth. You’re not kissing our omega with demon meat breath.”

Lance looked over at me, snarling.

“Snarl all you want to. I said what I said.” I looked over to Zathria, who looked around at the dead orc demons with wide-eyed fascination. No one was going to come after us on this kill. It was a fair fight, and we were just defending ourselves. “Thanks for the information. It was helpful. Even these guys were. I should have thanked them before I killed them.”

Zathria snorted. “You are insane, and I love you. But you should probably leave before another demon wants to test you. And I think your friend is freaking everyone out by eating one of theirs.”

I looked back at Lance, who was licking his mouth. She had a point. Demons didn’t typically eat each other, so I guess the fake out was no longer working. It wasn’t a problem. I wouldn’t be coming back here anytime soon. I had enough information to know this memnock demon was a real threat to our omega and perhaps humankind. This wouldn’t be an easy fight. But we’d handle it. Nobody was taking our omega. Not again.

CHAPTER 16



BILLIE

When I got the text from Lila that she was running late, I wasn't surprised. Xander had just returned from a mission, so I was sure they were making up for lost time. Lost time being only a few days, but new love could be like that. Listen to me, sounding all wise like a veteran omega. Ha!

The party was just going to be us, Lila and Xander, nothing big and fancy. Daniel and I were cooking. Lance was on music duty, and Kai was in charge of drinks. Only both were running late, which left me to my own drinking devices.

Most of the alcohol was in their designated man cave in the basement, but because we were eating and had company, it was easier to bring some upstairs near the kitchen and dining area. I'd gathered what I thought made the most sense but would get Kai to do the rest later. I put them all on the large marble island in the kitchen near the dishes we'd already prepared. I then mixed myself what I hoped would be a good old fashioned before turning just in time to see Kai enter the large living space. He had a distracted look on his face and moved a little stiff, like an old man.

"Everything okay?"

"Sorry I'm late," he announced before giving me a kiss on the cheek. "I got into a little fight. In healing mode."

He grabbed my drink and took a sip. He scrunched his face. "Oh, no, we can do better than this."

I shook my head before I moved to lift his shirt. A deep gash welcomed me across his chest. "What the hell, Kai?"

"Who'd you fight?" Daniel asked, standing near the stove.

“Asshole demons. It’s part of a bigger thing.”

I began to heal his wound with my magic. “Explain.”

He looked around, wincing as my magic knitted his skin and muscle together. “Where is everyone?”

“Lila said they’re running behind,” I replied. I glanced over his shoulder and noticed another ugly gash near his neck. “How many demons did you fight?”

“Three. Lance was with me.”

Satisfied that the wound was healed, I moved his shirt back down. “Where is he now?”

Kai turned to the counter and began to make another drink, but I moved my hands to his neck to heal the other gash. “He ran up to take a quick shower.”

Daniel turned the stove off, face grim. “Ok, so explain.”

“I got news on the demon after Billie. We already knew that whatever’s haunting Billie isn’t some low-level demon. They can’t break into the human realm without help.”

Seeing his wound healed, I stood on my toes and kissed it. I really hated seeing anyone hurt, especially my guys. Kai turned and winked at me before passing me a new drink, and I gave it a sip. Yup, this was why he made the drinks, and I didn’t.

Lance entered the room looking freshly showered with wet hair. “Did you tell them yet?”

Kai rolled his eyes. “You mean in the five minutes you’ve been gone taking a shower? No. And did you really wash? Get all the crevices? Because that was really fast.”

I raised a hand to stop Kai from going further. “Nope, stay on topic. You were about to tell us some important-ish. So, what is this demon? This guy is different because he can be seen when I’m awake.”

“Right. I thought he was just some weak demon since he’d only been in your dreams. But his being at the hospital is different. It means he can project in the waking world.”

Ty, who had been in the living room playing a video game on the large flat-screen TV hanging over the fireplace, stood up and walked toward us. “Does it matter if Billie was the only one who could see him?”

Kai shook his head and then reached out to brush a tight curl behind my ear. It was a small bit of affection, but there was darkness in his eyes that

made me believe he did it to assure himself. It was as if he had to touch me to make sure I was okay. What did he know that concerned him so much?

That made me very worried. It was one thing to think he was like a ghost who couldn't do real damage. It was another if he could show up at work or even at my home. "What did you learn?"

He ran a hand over his hair, which was currently tied back in a high bun, exposing the shorter sides of his hair. "There was a type of demon, before I was even created, that had the ability to communicate through dreams and even materialize in real life. They were called memnock demons. Stupid name. Anyway, the dreamer gave them access to the world. The key was having permission or some form of summoning. This could happen through trickery as well. However, once they came to the human world, they were tied to the dreamer. Beholden to them. Not a fun outcome for them because the dreamer still had control."

"So, what was in it for them to come to the human realm if they were controlled?" I asked, moving to sit on a stool at the island.

Kai made a pfft noise, moving to make himself a drink. "The human realm is still more fun than the underworld. Unless you're in the ruling class. If they were smart, they picked a dreamer they could manipulate easily. They could still go crazy and do what they wanted to others. And if you happened to be an alpha memnock with sense, you'd find yourself an omega's dream to invade. You'd claim them, and then the sky would be the limit. The control issue wouldn't be a factor."

Daniel blew out a breath, crossing his arms. The concern on his face had to match my own because I was feeling borderline panicky. "I'm assuming they were a menace and were mostly killed off?"

Kai nodded. "Absolutely. It wasn't just omegas they went after but just any being with power. They were a smart species, but they reached too far and got noticed by those who had the ability to get rid of them. Too much of a threat."

"And you think Billie's being hunted by these nearly extinct species of demons?"

"I heard there was one still around. They dream-walk, but memnocks could also enter the human realm for short periods of time. They could also manipulate their appearance. And that could include being seen by only a select few. I don't know why this one chooses to make itself look like its true form. The tales I heard were that they could look like people. Especially more

visually attractive ones. The better to fool the dreamer.”

That was odd. Whatever this memnock demon was doing, it wasn't working to manipulate me because I had no desire to be closer to him. “So, then what's his angle for wanting to appear to me the way he is?”

Kai took a swig of his drink and then shrugged. “That's the part I don't understand. He's slow-moving. Slower than I would have thought. I can only attribute that to the fact that he's very old, and his power level is not as high. He's building it back up, but I don't know how he's doing it.”

“But he is,” Lance started. He stood near Ty, surprising me. I hadn't even noticed him leave the living area. I was so engrossed in what Kai was saying. “He's building power for his end game to get Billie, and he's so confident that he doesn't even hide his true form or intentions.”

I shivered slightly, although I wasn't cold. “That's the scary part. What is he doing that makes him so confident? Can we stop him before he gets too powerful? If I don't summon him, then he can't come here, right?”

Kai scratched the back of his neck as he thought. “I'm worried he might be going after more than one dreamer. We know he's building a following for some demon liberation cause. He could be getting power that way, and he could ultimately enter the human world for good if he successfully manipulates another. Then he could directly come to you. That would also explain why he's moving slowly. He's contacting more than just you, which would require more energy.”

“That makes terrifying sense. If I saw him in real life but in a disguise, would I know it's him? Any tale-tell signs?”

Kai dropped his shoulders, putting his drink down on the counter. “I don't know, kitty cat. They aren't that well known anymore, so some information has been lost.”

Lance growled, startling my already shaky disposition. “So, for all we know, this demon could already be manipulating her in disguise. He could be posing as someone she knows.”

The room stood quiet for several moments, letting that possibility sink in.

Finally, Daniel broke the silence. “She can't trust anyone then. Not even us,” he said in a low voice.

I felt like the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, and I held my breath. Was this what my coven leaders had learned when they said one of my guys would betray us? Perhaps the seer was actually seeing the memnock demon in disguise as one of my alphas. That possibility was better than having one

of them betray me. However, it was terrifying to think I could get fooled because I trusted these men so fully now.

I looked over to their faces. Daniel, usually so controlled, now had a stern face, his eyes far away. Kai shook his head slowly, eyes dark and bothered. Lance was gripping a dining room chair tightly, his head hanging low so I couldn't tell what he was thinking, but his emotions, their emotions, ripped through me. Cold fear. I glanced over to Ty, who had sat down. His mouth hung slightly ajar, and I could practically see his mind racing before my eyes. I suddenly felt bad for putting a dark mood on his birthday, although I knew he wouldn't care. Still, we couldn't solve every problem that night.

“Whoever this demon is, we're on alert. I have bodyguards.”

That didn't seem to satisfy them, and I didn't blame them. However, we heard the doorbell ring, and I figured that it was Lila and Xander.

Moments later, after the guards let them through, Lila appeared with more than I bargained on. Xander was there but also two other unfamiliar male faces. A giant of a man with light brown skin, much like Lila's, stood to her right. He had a close-cut hairstyle with what appeared to be flecks of golden strands scattered about. His eyes could only be described as the color of a Caribbean Sea. Almost mesmerizing. Beside him stood another man, shorter but still over 6 feet, with deep brown skin that contrasted with his golden eyes. He was clean-shaven and had a sophisticated air about him. I caught a whiff of smokey sweetness emanating from him. He had to be her alpha. And the taller guy had to be the weredragon she bonded with while in the fae realm.

“So, sorry to pop on some extra guests, but these are my pack.” She pointed to the golden-eyed man. “This is Yosef. My alpha.” She then pointed to the giant. “That's Luca. My fellow dragon.”

We all exchanged greetings. At this moment, we were a little shaky around strangers, but if Lila vouched for them, we'd trust them. She'd at least know her alpha.

“We don't mean to intrude, but Lila said it would be okay,” Yosef stated in a smooth voice. He had a certain aristocracy when he spoke, almost like Daniel. If I hadn't met Xander, I would have thought all the fae were like that.

I shook my head. “No, we have plenty of food. The more, the merrier.”

Xander cleared his throat. “I have some news to share from my travels.”

I waved both of my hands at him. Whatever news he was going to share, I

knew it was going to be serious. We'd had enough of that talk, and I wanted Ty to have some semblance of a celebration. "Can we save it for later and after we cut the cake? Have some drinks?"

He gave me a salute with a wry smile. "Yes, ma'am."

And so, we began our festivities and actually had a fun time. I really liked Lila's guys, and seeing how loving they all were to each other really gave me the warm and fuzzies. I was delighted my friend had finally found her love and a little amused that she ended up having an alpha as well.

I leaned my back against the island, staring into the dining and living area at everyone. I felt a moment of peace and happiness. I pushed aside the mounting worries about my situation, and yet another damn demon coming for me. Instead, I allowed the contentment to wrap around me. A warm body pressed up beside me, and I looked up to see Lance staring down at me with searching eyes.

"Everything okay, baby girl?"

At just the utterance of my pet name, my insides instantly flutter. "I'm good."

He kissed the top of my head and pulled me to his side. "I know we laid a lot on you but know we aren't going to let anything happen to you. We got you."

And I believed him.

Xander, who had been talking conspiratorially to Kai in a corner near the fireplace clapped his hands. "Alright, mates, I'm bordering on getting plastered, so I'd like to fill you in on my quick bit of intel while my wits are still about me."

Ty, who had been playing his video game again, this time with Luca, put the game on pause. Daniel turned the music off.

"A few days ago," Xander began, "my people and I found a Prinathian cell. The Prinaths were our enemies back in the realm. The cell was really tiny, but they were talkers." He looked up at the ceiling and stared wistfully, as if fondly remembering something. "Well, when I dig in their heads for the truth, I like to make it hurt. A lot. In any event, they confirmed they were working with this Ascension group. But more importantly, I found out they work with a dream walker."

I looked over to Kai, who met my worried eyes with his own. This really was big. "A memnock demon?"

"That's what I think, but the way he was described, who knows," Kai

replied.

“Yeah, they said he comes to them as a short, white male with blond hair in his twenties. Anyone in your coven fit that description?”

I shook my head. “Doesn’t stand out. But we also know this demon can change forms,”

Xander continued. “I asked if he gave a name, but they don’t know it either. They just

work alongside him in exchange for power and aid in the fight.”

“How is or was he doing that?”

“That’s the confusing part. They said the dream walker was a dark mage. That he was part of the Ascension. He promised the dark mages would aid them, and we know that came to happen.”

My mind raced with information overload. I was piecing something together in my head, but the glue was only strong assumption. However, nothing could be that much of a coincidence. I’d feel foolish to ignore it. “So, you’re saying this demon isn’t just in cahoots with the dark mages, but he actually *is* a dark mage. He didn’t share that part with me. Not that I expected him to.”

Kai snorted. “And the demons didn’t mention this guy was only half, either. It’s possible they don’t know, or they want his affiliation to be kept secret. It would make sense that he’s only a half, since the memnocks were eradicated. Hell, there could be more half ones out there. The bigger deal is if he’s only half demon, his true form isn’t the shadow creature that Billie and other demons see. It would be human.”

I rubbed my temples. “So, if someone was good at sensing the type of paranormal a person was, what would he come up on the radar as?”

Lila, who had been leaning beside Yosef, raised a finger. She was pretty good at sensing magical energy. “He’d come up as a magical human. Not a demon. But honestly, his alpha status might cover him all up.”

“So, we wouldn’t scent him if he were near? Awesome. What’s happening with me and the Ascension are all related. He’s a dark mage who wants to take over the coven and help his fellow demons out as well. The Ascension taking our coven could literally bring hell on earth. And they’re doing something with the kidnapped supernatural beings that’s related to it all. Most likely strengthening their position. Just like grabbing me and Lila would.”

Lila swore. “How can one fucker have his hands in so many pots? This is making my brain hurt.”

This guy wasn't a full demon, so that made him weaker, but the other half was mage, so maybe it all evened out. Was this demon stronger than we thought? Maybe the slow-moving wasn't because he was weak but because he was gathering troops for something big. Something beyond me. If he was an Ascension member, then maybe I was just collateral.

So how did one stop a shapeshifting demon with magic and powerful followers? I had no idea, but I was going to have to learn.

CHAPTER 17



BILLIE

The following week, I headed to my monthly coven meeting. Lance was my bodyguard that evening, and I welcomed it because I hadn't seen a lot of him due to his late shift duty. When we pulled up to the building, I was shocked to see several ambulances, police cars, and a crowd of on-lookers.

"What the hell is going on?" I asked as Lance parallel parked in an open spot across the street.

Two EMTs carried a body bag on a stretcher, and it was clearly filled with a deceased person. In one of the ambulances, I saw someone being treated, but I couldn't make out who it was from my distance.

I spotted Shante, Kent, and Tim and jogged up to them, Lance by my side. "Guys, what happened?"

Kent shook his head. "Someone attacked the building."

"How did they get in? I thought we had wards and guards?" I asked.

Kent side-eyed me. "That didn't stop them last time when you got grabbed."

Tim stroked his chin, still looking on at the scene. "Wasn't that an inside job, though?"

I nodded. "Exactly." Then I shut my mouth because I remembered that we had a traitor in our midst.

"There you guys are!" I heard Lila exclaim from my right. "Did you hear what happened? Paul was killed, and a few people were injured, including Mr. Chu and Angelica."

I gasped, a twinge of sadness wrapping my heart. I didn't know Paul. I had just seen him from time to time at the meetings. He was a quiet man who

worked for the government in an administrative job. Although he didn't talk much, I knew he came to all the meetings and seemed very dedicated. No one said any negative words about him.

Angelica wasn't a friend, but I didn't wish any physical harm on her. She was a fellow witch. Of course, Mr. Chu was a leader, and we all loved him. "How badly hurt are Mr. Chu and Angelica?"

"Broken leg and a concussion for Angelica and broken ribs and burns for Mr. Chu," Lila replied with a distressed look. "From what I heard, Ascension got in and let out a magic bomb. It was detected on the ward but delayed somehow so no one could react fast enough to get everyone away."

Kent looked upward at the building. "Looks like smoke is coming out of the top floor. I'm guessing HQ is going to be relocated. Damn, this is getting out of hand. That attack on the hospital scared the shit out of me, and now they're taking aim at our coven directly. That's bold. And we can't even retaliate because we don't know where they are. Fucking cowards."

He spat the last words out, and I felt his rage. We had an enemy who knew exactly who we were, but we didn't know them. Even with all our searches and even Xander's, we hadn't found any Ascension holdouts. Lila and Xander seemed to be the only ones who had any prolonged experience with the members, and they didn't have the chance to hold any of them for long.

Lance sneezed several times in a row and rubbed at his nose. He scrunched his face, slightly irritated. Did werewolves get allergies?

A buzzing in my purse got my attention, and I pulled out my phone. I noticed others were doing the same. A text alert from our coven came up, stating that the meeting was canceled due to the attack and that more information would be coming soon.

Shante shook her head. "I asked to help, but they already have witches up there. We can repair the building with magic, so we won't be gone long. I'm surprised Angelica was there without her friends."

"She wasn't supposed to be," a familiar voice sounded behind us.

We turned slightly to see a stony-eyed Natsu and a teary-eyed Keisha.

"We were supposed to close the shop together, but Angie got a message to report to the coven early. Only when I spoke to leadership, no one knew anything about a meeting, and they didn't send her a text. Hardly anyone comes that early outside of the leadership circle. The receptionist, Lou, said Paul was texted to come as well, and so were the others who aren't staff,"

Keisha explained through sniffles.

Now this was strange. It wasn't by chance that these members were hurt, but I couldn't figure out what they had in common that would make them people to kill when compared to anyone else in the coven.

Lance rubbed at his nose again, sniffing several times. "Did the Ascension even talk to them before they did anything?"

Natsu glared up at him. I wasn't sure if she was still not a fan of my pack or just upset about Angelica. Maybe both. "I don't know. But it doesn't make any sense. Maybe they wanted their power."

"What about them made them special? They could have picked anyone. Why them? Did they have a specialized magic like Lila?" Lance pressed, rubbing at his nose with the back of his hand.

I narrowed my eyes. Allergy season hadn't begun, and the smoke from the explosion wasn't that strong from way up high. Still, he had a sensitive were nose.

Natsu huffed and crossed her arms. "None of your business."

Of course, she would be rude. "He's trying to help, Natsu. It's a good question." I looked up to Lance, putting a hand on one of his massive arms. He flared his nostrils, looking around distractedly. He seemed unbothered by Natsu's rudeness. Outside of his interactions with Kai and anyone who threatened me, he really wasn't a hothead. This was good because he was stupid strong, and having a hold on that strength was important. "Are you okay? Allergies?"

He shook his head. "Werewolves don't get allergies or colds."

Lila cut in. "Paul is, well, was a pain mage. He could cause pain or take it away. I think he served in the military years ago, and it was useful then, but wasn't in his current job. It's a useful magic to have. Especially if Ascension would want to use him to cause damage. And Angelica's a psychometric. She can find out about something just by touching an object or person."

"Why would that be important?" Tim asked, looking thoroughly confused.

"Maybe they thought using her could help to get to the ruling stone," Kent replied. He looked over to Lance, who wiped at his face, snorting. "It's what the witch over all the covens in this country uses to maintain her power and position. Our blood oaths when we join our covens connect to that stone."

Natsu sucked her teeth and furrowed her brows. "Can you not tell him

that? He's not coven."

Lila rolled her eyes. "Yeah, but he's her mate. So, he's coven by extension."

Keisha straightened up, her tears no longer wetting her face. "There's no such thing as coven by extension. We don't know that we can trust him. Billie's only known him a few months." She looked over to Lance with suspicious eyes.

It was nearing six months, but who was counting? I wanted to be annoyed, but if the shoe was on the other foot, I'd be concerned too. Not to mention the prophecy that one of my guys would betray us. With all the rubbing of his nose, he did look suspect. More like he was a drug addict. "Seriously, what's up with you?" I whispered to him.

Lance let out a low growl that I hoped wasn't audible to the others. "Something is irritating my senses. I can't figure it out. I need to do a jog around." He eyed me sternly. "Don't leave."

I nodded, hoping he found whatever he was smelling before I had to make awkward excuses about his behavior.

Kent scratched his chin, turning fully to us. "What I want to know is how does this group know what magic strengths people have? Unless it's part of our business that we share, like us being healers at the hospital, it doesn't make sense. Could they have hacked into our coven database?"

All witches, wizards, and mages had to register with the coven to join. If a person had a specialized gift or particular strength in a certain type of magic, like mages such as Lila, they had to register that gift. In some cases, this helped us know who to reach out to in times of need, helped to develop while in school through mentorships, and even guided us in careers.

Were we hacked, or was there an insider who was sharing this information, or maybe they had the ability, like the Prinathians, to tell if someone had special magic? Whatever the case, our information was out there. How could we protect ourselves against an unknown enemy?



LANCE

“*I* wish I could have spoken to Angelica and found out if they said any her. Did they try to convince her to join them like Lila?” Billie stated as we drove back home from her canceled coven meeting.

I tried to pay attention to Billie, but I was a little distracted. I searched all around the perimeter of her headquarters but couldn't find the source of the smell. It was unlike anything I'd ever encountered. A sickly-sweet mix with an underlying antiseptic sent. It made me almost nauseous, and I didn't get nauseous.

If it were up to me, Billie would stay at home until this whole thing was over. I knew better than to believe she would, but the thought did enter my mind. Several times.

I adjusted in the driver's seat, feeling uncomfortable. My skin itched, fingers burned with a need to shift. I was just fine up until we got to the coven HQ. It was possible that the scene had irritated my wolf, but he wasn't a stranger to violence and death. I was a firefighter. Being away from the scene had allowed me to breathe easier again, but I still didn't feel right. The full moon was coming soon, but it was too early to affect my mood or body.

Billie reached out to place a hand on my thigh, and I tensed. She quickly moved her hand away. “Everything okay?” she asked, a tinge of worry in her voice.

I grimaced, feeling like shit for reacting that way. I couldn't explain it. I loved her touch. Craved it. Why were my nerves so raw? “Sorry, Billie. I'm a little off my game.”

“Tired?”

I stretched my neck from side to side. “I don't think so.”

She leaned forward, looking out of the front window to the night sky. “The moon's not full. Can't be that time of the month.”

I snorted, ignoring the clawing of my wolf from my insides. He really wanted out. “You've been around Kai too much, calling it that time of the month. No, it's nothing with the moon.” I wished my wolf understood that.

I gripped the wheel tighter, pushing down on the gas. We were still a little under twenty minutes out. I couldn't burst into wolf while I was driving. Beads of sweat gathered on my forehead, and I gritted my teeth.

“You don't look so good. If it's not the moon, could you be coming into your rut?”

Fuck. No, I couldn't be. I usually had some type of warning beforehand. Rutting as a wolf was more complicated than for the others. It could be

dangerous for Billie. My plan was to lock myself up as I did when I changed monthly into a wolf. My control was too weak during those times, and I didn't want to hurt her or anyone. A few times, before Billie, I was able to rut with another lycan beta, but if I couldn't find one, then I just didn't rut. It wasn't fun, but the alternative, attacking someone or hurting them, was worse.

"It can't be the rut. I get a better warning than that."

Billie scratched her scalp, still giving me concerned eyes. "Ty's rut came out of the blue. I mean, it was probably brought on by the fight and blood though. Hey, maybe I should drive."

I gritted my teeth, my chest felt tight, body overly heated. I sniffed the air, inhaling her scent in an attempt to calm myself, but her sweet scent only set me off further. I looked at the speedometer. I was going 90 miles per hour. I moved my foot to the brake to slow it down. I didn't need the cops right now. I needed to get home. "Maybe I should pull over and get out. You can go home, and I can shift."

She swiftly shook her head. "If you're concerned about me, do you think running off and doing whatever would be better? At least I can help. I thought we talked about this before. You need to stop pushing me away. I want to rut with you. Is that how you say it? Sounds weird."

I wanted to experience my rut with her as well, but something felt off, and that worried me. It was entirely possible that having a new mate changed things. My wolf could be impatient. "Okay, we'll go home. Together."

She placed a hand on my thigh again, and I spread them without thinking. Her scent was scattering all over the car. Apparently, she liked me in this state. She moved her hand up higher, and I growled, feeling myself growing hard.

"Baby girl, it's taking all my control to make sure I get us home safely and without getting a speeding ticket. If you move your hand up any higher, I will no longer be able to promise that."

She slowly lowered her hand with a giggle. "Sorry, babe."

I pressed a button to lower my window. Her scent was heady, and I could feel my vision blurring. This was not the reaction I was expecting. "It's okay. It's okay," I said more to myself than to her.

She turned on my radio and settled on an old early 2000's pop song. "I know this is your favorite song," she cracked.

Pop music was far from my thing, and I knew she was trying to be funny

to take my mind off things, but my body refused to relax. My mind wasn't much better. All I wanted to do was pull the car over to the side of the road, rip her jeans off, and fuck her against the hood of my car with no care about the cars passing by. Did she have any clue how much strength I was using to keep myself together?

I glanced at her singing along to the song and bobbing her head. She looked back at me, brows raised. "Your eyes have gone wolf."

"Shit."

She stopped singing. I was scaring her. I knew it.

"You aren't scaring me. I'm kind of excited."

I furrowed my brows. She really didn't know how low my control was at the moment. "Really?"

"I'm liking the ruts."

Man, that turned me on. Must get home faster. "I might get kind of aggressive, Billie."

She gave me a wicked grin, biting her lower lip. They looked so soft. I wanted them on me. To feel her softness all around me. To taste the sweet caramel flavor of her skin. I had to force myself to watch the road, but it was challenging.

The rest of the ride was tense for me. I was straining in my pants. I absentmindedly placed a hand over my crotch, stifling a groan as I rubbed. The hand wasn't enough. I needed her, but desire was clouding my vision, and I had to get some sort of relief.

"Oh wow, you really can't wait," Billie said in a soft voice, her eyes wide as she watched me like I was some show.

I quickly moved my hand, startled, as if I forgot she was there when she was the one working me up. I couldn't think anymore. I could already feel myself leaking precum. My wolf was gaining ground in my head. He was telling me to take her. Hard. To claim her again and again. To remind her that she was mine. I would keep her in the house. Keep her away from danger. She was too precious.

She sighed. "We're like five minutes from home."

What was she saying? I couldn't think. I snarled, confused. Her scent was overpowering. My body was on fire. Every nerve raw. My teeth grew into their wolfen canines, and my claws on my hands extended. The road ahead became a blur. Where were we headed? Where had we come from?

"Lance?" Billie said in a questioning voice.

I shook my head as if to gather my senses, but it didn't work. I was gone. Floating in a black foggy abyss. My wolf was now at the helm, and he did not know how to drive a damn car. He just knew how to hunt, kill, and fuck. I pulled over to the side of the road and moved the car into park. "Billie, run."

CHAPTER 18



BILLIE

We were near a small woodsy park not far from home when Lance stopped the car. The look in his wolfen eyes and the snarling bass of his voice told me clearly that Lance was no longer at the wheel. It was his wolf. If he was telling me to go, I had to listen. There was a fierceness in his voice that rang a bell of alarm in my head.

I didn't know what a werewolf in his rut was like. What I did know was that he was on the edge of transforming into a beast. I opened the door and jumped out of the car, taking off in a run into the field leading to the park.

I had no plan of action. I wanted to get home; I wasn't far. But I couldn't take the main road because if he told me to run, it was because I needed to get out of his sight. However, he was a damn predator, and I was not built cardio-friendly. In addition, I rarely teleported, so the spell wasn't in my head, and I didn't want to stop and look up the spell in my phone. Lance needed the chase. He was an alpha, and this was part of it all. At least, I hoped. He'd gone a little feral on me before but nothing scary.

I heard the pounding of feet on the ground behind me, and I sped up. He seemed pretty damn close. Adrenaline raced through my body. I was excited but also a little scared. It felt like the time during my childhood when I played hide and seek or freeze tag. Your heart sped up with excitement at not getting found or tagged. It was a fear but a safe fear. I didn't want to get caught, but I also wanted to get caught. I thought about him grabbing me and taking me right there in the woods on the ground. Just the image in my mind made my lady bits tremble in excitement.

A growl that felt way too damn close got me veering left in the direction of our house. I tripped over a fallen log but maintained my footing. I had to

keep moving. Hiding would do no good because he would easily sniff me out. I was sure my horniness was making me perfume more than a garden of flowers.

I galloped down a slight slope and came to a stop at a shallow creek. There were a few large rocks I could hop on to cross it. I spared a look behind me, and amber eyes as bright as flashlights focused on me several feet away. He actually looked quite terrifying in the dark. Suddenly, fear started to take the lead over excitement. Perhaps he really wasn't himself, and I should be worried.

He leaped forward, and I let out an involuntary gasp. I turned and jumped on the rocks to cross the water. In my haste, and because it was dark and hard to see, my foot slipped on one of the rocks in the middle of the creek, and I wound up in the ankle-deep water.

"Crap," I muttered.

Before I could trudge forward, I was suddenly lifted in the air around the waist and tossed on broad shoulders. Lance. I screamed and held onto his waist tightly as he moved through the rest of the creek. Once we crossed, he placed me down on the dirt.

I quickly scooted backwards to get away. He snarled at me, wrapping a hand around my ankle and dragging me to him in a very aggressive fashion I found scary and possessive.

"Stay!" he demanded in his alpha voice.

It echoed through my head, and my body froze. I hated having the alpha voice used on me unless it was by my request. "No!" I shot back, even though I knew it was futile.

I could see^¾even in the dark^¾him give me an incredulous look. Wolf Lance didn't like being told no. Slight panic began to edge its way to the forefront of my mind, however, my body did not move away. He pulled at my coat, bringing it off my left shoulder, and yanked at the collar of my sweater, exposing my skin to the cool air. He then bared his teeth and lightly sunk them into my skin, swiping his tongue over the claiming spot he had given me.

When I tell you it felt like my soul had left my body, I was not lying. His hot mouth on my cool skin, where he had claimed me, electrified every nerve within me. I could have come just from this alone. I moaned, digging my fingers in the dirt and squirming underneath him. My mind slightly dimmed, forgetting any worry I had before.

He continued his licking, and I soon felt his hands yank at my jeans, unbuttoning and unzipping them with feverish speed. He savagely pulled down my jeans and panties in one go. When he moved his mouth from me to pull down his jeans, I took off my coat so that I was able to lay partially on top of it, so my butt wasn't on the ground. I didn't need dirt in the crack of my ass if I wasn't going to be able to get up.

Before I could think about ways to slow him down, he was back on top of me. His eyes focused on my pussy, and he quickly dove down, inhaling my scent. His nose rubbed up my inner thighs, and then he buried his nose in my mound. I sucked in a breath at the intrusion. I heard him take a deep sniff, his body quivering, mouth purring. Soon, I felt his tongue, longer than before, slide along the length of my now-soaking slit.

I trembled underneath him, but his hands held me steady, refusing to let me get away. I rocked against his tongue as it continued a rotation of swiping over my clit and labia. It then pushed inside me, and I cried out as it ran over my sensitive spot. This was not his human tongue. It was too long, and it rammed in and out of me, gliding across my clit before entering me again. The repeated mix electrified me and had my toes curling. I grabbed onto his hair, pulling slightly as I felt my body begin to tense, ready for the impending climax. And then I came, feeling weightless and heavy somehow all together. I gushed my release, squirting him in the face. Unbothered by my messy spray, he lapped at my sensitive pussy lips. My legs shook uncontrollably, and I practically hyperventilated.

Lance ran a hand over his dripping face and rubbed my slick under the neckline of his shirt onto his collarbone and neck as if it were a perfume, eyes steady on me. Shit, that was so fucking hot. He then moved back and actually howled, slightly frightening me. I didn't need him to bring any attention to us. I lifted my hand to touch him, but he gazed down at me with such intensity, I paused. And then he yanked my pants the rest of the way off, taking my tennis shoes with them.

He wordlessly shoved his pants down, and I sucked in a breath as I stared down at his massive erection, weeping with precum. My pussy instantly seized again, dripping even more. He lifted my legs with one hand and rested them on a shoulder. Without slowing down, he then plunged his shaft into me. I was already slick, but the sudden invasion expanding me was still painful. Tears filled my eyes, and I tried to slide back, but he held on to me tightly, pounding into me without slowing down. His head was tossed back,

mouth hanging open, shirt damp with sweat. Slowly the pain subsided, giving way to the pleasure of being filled totally. I felt his dick brush against my inner spot, seizing me with pulsating pleasure. His knot teased my opening but did not move deeper.

I bit my lip almost hard enough to draw blood and closed my eyes as he continued to slam into me, his balls slapping against my ass. The lewd noises of my moans, his grunts, and his slapping against me filled the night air, and I soon came again, flooding slick onto his dick and down my ass crack. He let loose another howl, and I opened my eyes, startled. Except this time, he wasn't Lance. Well, he wasn't human Lance.

He was in his warrior humanoid form. His head wolfen and body covered in thick brown fur. His long tongue hung out to the side of his giant maw, which was dripping slightly with drool. How had I not felt him shift inside of me? Had it happened while I climaxed? I was totally gone. I studied him, my mind still in a half haze of lust as he fucked me. I wasn't sure if I should be scared or turned on, and I tensed despite the hardening of my nipples against my bra. He purred loudly, and my body instantly relaxed, focusing again on him inside of me.

I lifted my shirt over my bra and moved my breasts under the bra, exposing them to the cool air. I stuck a finger in my mouth and tweaked the wet tip over a nipple. My eyelids fluttered at the silky slick feeling. Lance's purring became a growl of approval, and my clit buzzed with impending need. His furry thighs bumped into the back of my legs as he quickened his pace.

"Mine, mine, mine," he grunted in a foreign-sounding deep, gravelly voice. With each pound, he claimed me with a 'mine.' Something feral in me responded to it, pushing back against his furry thighs. And then he jerked, shuddering in an orgasm that ripped another howl from him.

Not taking much of a moment for a break, he moved my legs down on either side of him and lapped across my nipples. I wiggled beneath him as he began to rock again inside of me, clearly not done. Another orgasm burst from me, and I sobbed out a release, slightly dazed, vision blurring at the beast on top of me. He continued to devastate my pussy, pounding into me with utter abandon. I would be sore tomorrow for sure. Perhaps not able to walk even. However, at the moment, I didn't care. Couldn't care.

Lance continued to rut into me, shifting me onto my knees. He did not turn back into his human self for quite some time. I had no idea how long we

were outside, fucking under the stars, however, at some point, my body started to hurt on the hard ground, and the cold started to inch into my bones.

Sensing my discomfort finally seemed to ring into his inner being because Lance shifted back to human, falling down by my side. I sat up and stared down at him, his arm covering his face, one leg bent.

“Are you okay now?” I said in a quiet voice as if we hadn’t been loud before.

A shiver spread over him, but I doubted it was because he was cold. He was still rock hard. “Baby girl, I could fuck you until the sun rises. But it’s not a good idea to stay out here like this.”

I gave a wordless nod and yanked my bra and shirt back down. I reached for my jeans to put them back on.

“I’m sorry,” he said, dropping his arm but still not getting up. “I shouldn’t have shifted or made you run. I don’t know what came over me.”

I shrugged. It was different, but I was unharmed. And now I could say it was even fun. I’d be open to exploring it again. “You are in your rut. It’s normal.”

He grumbled. “Not for me. I wasn’t in control. That only happens on a full moon. Not for a rut. None of this was right.”

I frowned. Now he was worrying me. “What do you think happened then? It wasn’t loupism related. You were a bit aggressive, but you didn’t rip an arm off. You didn’t even bite my mark.”

He shook his head, sitting up. “I was on the edge, Billie. So close. My wolf wanted to treat you like another wolf. I wanted to sink my teeth in your neck and make you submit. Something got in my head. I was fine until we went to the coven meeting.”

“You think someone messed with your head there? Made your rut happen?”

He ran a hand over his short blond hair, a look of frustration covering his face. “I don’t know, but I can’t rule it out. I didn’t feel right there.”

I sighed and touched his cheek, giving him a reassuring smile. “Well, would it help you if I told you I liked it? I might be bow-legged for a few days, but it was still fun. I hope you enjoyed it, too.”

He moved his face, kissing my palm. “It was fucking amazing, baby girl. *You* are amazing. I just don’t want to ever hurt you.”

“And you won’t. I feel safe with you.”

“And I’ll make sure it stays that way.”

He had a fierceness in his icy blue eyes.. However, we were bonded, and he couldn't hide the emotion he was really feeling.

Worry.

When we got home, we explained what happened to the others.

Kai slammed a hand on the kitchen counter. "How can these guys induce a rut? A mage or a demon, it shouldn't be possible."

Daniel rubbed his chin, passing me a glass of water. "Why would anyone want to make a rut happen? How would that aid them?"

Ty leaned against the island, glancing over at Lance, who sat on a stool, forehead lowered on the surface. "Maybe it wasn't a rut they were trying to make happen. Maybe they meant to make him go loupe. Hell, they could have meant to make me go blood lust."

Daniel swore, looking to me. "We're going to need two bodyguards assigned to you. One to watch the other and one to watch you."

I frowned. "What would they gain from forcing you guys to go crazy? If this demon wants me as an omega, why would he put me in danger like that?"

"What if he didn't think you'd be in danger?" Kai offered. "Maybe he thought this would be a way to get rid of the competition. Maybe he thought Lance and Ty would have to be put down. Leaving just Daniel and I to focus on. It would be easier to claim you if we were all gone."

I wanted to throw something. Why couldn't we just be left alone? "Well, jokes on him because it only made us closer." I glanced back over to Lance. "Please stop beating yourself up about this, Lance. We need to focus on the positive, which is that this thing isn't stronger than us. Or our bond."

Also, are you still in your rut? I asked telepathically.

Shit, I feel like an asshole, but yeah. He said back in my head.

You wanna take a shower together?

He lifted his head and smiled at me.

I winked back.

Kai snorted. "Both of you just go upstairs and fuck. Meanwhile, I'm gonna put a word out in the underworld to this demon asshole to come for us, face to face. No tricks, no dreams, no minions. It's time to be done with this bullshit."

I tore my gaze from Lance, alarmed. "You sure that's a good idea? Are we ready for that?"

He nodded. "Yes. We can't keep waiting for him to get stronger. Maybe

if we take him out, we also hurt these Ascension dudes.”

Daniel furrowed his brow. “Taunting him seems reckless, but I don’t think we have much of a choice anymore. The longer we wait, the riskier it gets for us. Let’s stop it now.”

I wasn’t sold on the plan, but I didn’t have anything better. We were only being reactive now. Something had to give.

CHAPTER 19



KAI

The bar was fairly busy that Thursday evening. It was around 6:30 pm, and we were at the last hour of happy hour. Usually, I liked when it was busy. It made the shift go by faster. However, I wanted to be home with Billie. I was borderline lovesick and part worried. Those fuckers had gotten bold, attacking her headquarters two days ago. And something had fucked with Lance's head. Luckily, it had just caused him to go into a rut. If it had made him go loupe and hurt Billie, we would never recover.

The threats weren't just focused on Billie and her coven. All of us were at risk. More concerning, all of us could be used to hurt Billie if we were to believe they could force us to change our very nature, like going into a rut. Assuming that was the real aim.

My call to bring the demon fucker out hadn't gained any traction yet, but I wasn't giving up. We'd also been doing some investigating in the demon areas for anyone aggressively fighting for demon rights who might know where this memnock demon was located. That search was coming up empty as well. It was like this thing was a myth, but we knew he was real, and the damage his followers did was just as real. I used to be good at finding a mark, but I was way out of touch now, despite my many contacts.

The scent of strong, flowery perfume snapped me out of my daze, my hands drying a glass absentmindedly with a towel. My stomach churned. My nose usually wasn't sensitive to smell, but this was different. This was familiar. A memory I'd hoped was long lost played in my mind. Me on my knees, naked, servicing a woman. My head between her legs as she sat on the edge of a bed, grinding into my face. I twisted my lips in disgust at the image. A sour taste in my mouth.

“Kai. Long time no see,” said a female voice with a British accent.

I reluctantly turned my head to the woman, every nerve in my body on alarm. I was never one to be afraid. I’d had a hardened life, and few things bothered me. But those few times, the dark times, sometimes played tricks on my mind. Made me think I was not free. That what was in my nature to do, bring pleasure in exchange for energy, was not for my gain. Seeing her now, one of the members of the dark mage sect that had summoned me many years ago, brought it all back.

Eliza was one of the members who had used and taken from me the most. By Western standards, she was beautiful with wavy, shoulder-length blonde hair and forest green eyes framed by long lashes. Her lips were stained red and thin, upturned in a smirk. Not a trace of a wrinkle showed on her pale, ivory skin, aided by her magical being, no doubt. She wore an off-the-shoulder sweater dress, and she leaned casually on the bar counter, her credit card in the air.

“I’d like a glass of Pinot Noir,” she stated, extending her hand for me to take the card.

I narrowed my eyes at her, remaining still. She was the one that pissed me off the most about not finding. Not one of her cohorts I’d killed would give her location away. “How did you find me? What are you doing here?”

She chuckled. “No pleasantries, I see.” She put her card back in her purse. “I tried to find you so many times, but you were elusive. How did you manage that?”

The witch who freed me had helped with that. After she died, I found other witches who were able to make me hidden from location and summoning. It was expensive but worth it. Eventually, having my claim with Billie also aided that, so I didn’t need the spells anymore.

“Well, lucky me, I got word that you were here. In America. Baltimore.” She sang the name of the city, her eyes tight with a coldness that unsettled my stomach.

“Who told you I was here?”

She shrugged but didn’t respond. It really didn’t matter who. Most likely, the Ascension. I wouldn’t be surprised if they knew all about my past. “Ok, I’ll ask again. Why are you here?”

“I summoned you, and you escaped. I’m here to collect. We had good times. The sex was amazing.”

I grimaced. “For you, maybe.”

She tilted her head, eyes widening in disbelief. “You can’t lie to me. Not to mention, you got energy from it.”

I tightened my lips, not replying. It was true that I gained strength from giving her pleasure. It was automatic since I was an incubus. However, I didn’t have the control, and any power I gained was low because of that. “You inflate how great things were. You were a pimp.”

Anger burned in her eyes, like she had the right. “I gave you everything.”

I clutched the glass so hard in my hand it shattered. I ignored the shards biting into my skin and kept my eyes on the bitch in front of me. “You took everything.”

She chuckled. “In those days for demons, you had a great life.”

“I have a great life now.”

“You’re a bartender,” she said dryly.

“I like it. You can go.”

“We had good times.”

I had tried my best to make the situation bearable, but in relation to my life now, or even with just the guys, those times with the dark mages were not good. “I did what I could to survive and make it through the day.”

She rolled her eyes before digging through her small black purse. “I see you want to be difficult.”

“Yes, you would have to kill me to get me to go back with you.” Not that I wanted to die or risk any harm to Billie, but I couldn’t stomach going back to being Eliza’s or anyone’s sex slave. Or being apart from Billie.

“You had your fun. Now it’s time you come back home. You’ll get used to it again.” She then quickly pulled out her hand and blew in my direction.

A wind of fine power wrapped around my face, getting into my eyes and up my nose. I turned and coughed, wiping at my face. A sudden dizziness overtook me, and I stumbled to the right.

“Oh no, darling, are you okay?” Eliza asked, giving me a tsk-task.

I turned back to her and grabbed onto the bar counter, still feeling unstable. “What did you do to me?”

She giggled, looking around the bar. No one seemed to notice our exchange, no doubt part of her magic. “I just helped things along. Made you more agreeable. So, let’s go. You’re leaving this job.”

My mind screamed no, but my body betrayed me, moving from behind the bar. What the hell kind of magic was this? This was worse than mind control. At least then, I wouldn’t know any better. I was stuck again doing

things I did not want to do.

“Kai! Where you going?” called another bartender, Brian.

“He’s coming home with me, love,” Eliza called. “He’s quitting.”

“He can’t quit. This is his bar!”

She ignored him, and so did I, walking until I stood in front of her. My limbs felt like lead. I tried my best to fight it, but magic was tough to break, and Eliza was a particularly powerful witch. She grabbed my hand. “Well, this is all a bit awkward now, isn’t it? The boss is quitting. I guess this place is yours now,” she called back to Brian.

I glared at her. “That’s not how it works.”

She gave me a quick peck on the lips. “It is now. Let’s go, darling. I parked my rental in the lot.”

I wordlessly followed her out. My mind was blaring in rage. I’d put up a mental block to not cloud Billie’s head, but now, I couldn’t take it down. Another side effect of Eliza’s magic dust, no doubt.

We left the bar, Eliza practically dragging me behind her. “I’ve missed you, Kai. I can’t wait for us to have fun again. The others, well, what’s left of them, miss you, too. We’ve got a lot of time to make up for.”

I snarled in response, and she only laughed. She stopped us in front of the passenger side door of a red Audi. “Here we are, love.” She let go of my hand and pressed it on my chest. “I see you kept in shape.”

The smell of sweet caramel filled my nostrils, simmering my nerves. “What’s going on here?” Billie’s voice rang out in the night.

With Eliza’s arrival, I momentarily forgot that Billie said she was stopping by tonight. I tried to turn my head to see her, but Eliza’s magic would not let me do anything she didn’t order.

She smiled at me before turning in what I assumed was Billie’s direction. “You must be his new omega. I guess you’re kind of pretty. I’m sure being an omega helps.”

“Who the hell are you?” Billie appeared in my line of vision, standing between Eliza and me. Max and another guard we’d hired, a female werewolf named Tessa, stood behind her, surveying the parking lot.

Eliza smiled, offering her hand, but Billie did not take it. “I’m an old friend of Kai’s. A former lover, but we’ll be getting reacquainted now.” She leaned forward and kissed me on the lips again, and I could not move away.

My stomach rumbled, making me sick. I could feel Billie’s shock and confusion stabbing away at me. She had to know this wasn’t me.

Eliza pulled away, wiping the lipstick from my mouth. “Sorry, love, you’re going to have to say goodbye to your mate.”

Billie’s eyes rounded in surprise, like she knew this woman. “Is this the bitch from that dark sect who summoned you?”

I wanted to nod but couldn’t.

Eliza opened the car door. “Clearly, he doesn’t want to talk to you. He was always one to go with the better deal, and I can give him all the attention he wants. None of that splitting it between four guys. And if you ever call me a bitch again, I will rip your tongue out.”

Billie dropped her shoulders, tilting her head to the side as she considered Eliza. “I’m not a fool. You must have used magic on him because our bond is blocked.”

Billie grabbed my hand, lacing our fingers together. A simmer of magic floated around me like a cool breeze. Our bond.

Focus on us, Kai. She said in my head. *You can fight this.*

Her thread of magic tightened around me, and I kept my concentration on it, ignoring the other witch.

“Kai,” Eliza began. “Come with me.”

My legs lifted to move inside the car, but Billie tightened her grip on me. She moved to stand in front of me, and we locked eyes. Those deep doe eyes were mesmerizing, despite the taint of Eliza’s magic. The other witch’s hold was beginning to wane but still lingered.

Eliza raised a hand in Billie’s direction, but Max stepped in front of her, grabbing her wrist. “That would not be a wise idea,” he said in a neutral tone.

Billie’s eyes still remained on mine. However, she looked exhausted, her head hanging to the side. I was torn inside for being yet another problem for her. “I am so sick of people coming for us. He is no longer yours,” she said, still staring at me but talking to Eliza. “Now, I could tell you to leave him alone forever, and you’ll be just fine. But no one wants to listen to reason. They just want things their way. They don’t care who they hurt. And with what you did to Kai all those years ago and now, I’m thinking you aren’t the type who sees reason.”

Eliza shook her wrist free of Max. “What are you getting on about?”

I smiled at Billie; she was buying time. Our bond solidified, joining together as we attacked Eliza’s magic until I felt no more of its heaviness.

Billie returned my smile, straightening up and rolling her shoulders back. A brightness flickered in her eyes, bringing back the energy I’d missed only

moments ago. She then lifted a hand in the air while muttering some words in a language I did not know.

Eliza stumbled back, grabbing at her throat, mouth open in a strangled cry.

“Kai, what should I do?” my omega asked.

There was more to that question than just what could be heard. She was giving me the option to end this or to allow her to do it. I leaned forward and kissed her softly on the lips, the connection between us intensifying. “Nothing, my love. You’ve done enough.”

I then swiftly moved past her and slapped my hand onto Eliza’s chest. She vanished before our eyes but I knew where she was. “Plus, there are camera’s here. We can’t do anything now.”

Billie twirled around, searching for Eliza or the cameras. “Where did you send her?”

“Some place she can’t get out of. I have a special holding cell that’s impenetrable in demon territory. I should have done that as soon as I saw her but I was so surprised. I’ll take care of her in a minute.”

Billie rubbed my arm as she looked up at me. “That was a fucking ordeal. How did she even find you? Will others come?”

“I don’t know the answer to the first question, but I’m not playing anymore games. I’m getting rid of the rest of them. Starting with her.”

Max frowned, looking out onto the main road. “But it still is concerning. The risk exists that more could come.”

I glowered in rage. Yet another damn threat that we didn’t need. Who would have given up my location? It was very possible that my poking at this invisible memnock demon had put me higher on his radar. However, it was probably inevitable. This demon had power, and he knew how to attack us where it hurt. It was time to go back to our old ways and stomp out any threats before they came to pass. Billie’s safety depended on it.

CHAPTER 20



BILLIE

The following weekend, Lila, Shante, and I decided to have a spa day at a popular spa downtown. The weather was unusually warm, with Spring just beginning, and Shante insisted we needed some rejuvenation. I didn't disagree.

The encounter with that witch bitch was like the final straw on the camel's back for me. I didn't know exactly what Kai did with her and that was probably for the best. I was so over it all. First, I lost my father. Then I had to kill a family friend for sending demons to kidnap me. Then my friend was banished to another realm and almost killed. I also had to help fight this crazy Ascension group and some alpha demon mage. Not to mention two of my alphas had abnormal ruts that were most likely connected to the Ascension assholes. And before I could even recover from that, some heifer, most likely sent by the demon mage, tried to snatch Kai. They were doing too damn much.

I settled into the small heated pool that the girls and I had monopolized. It was still really early, and there weren't that many people in the sauna rooms and pools, so we were taking full advantage of it.

"So how ya been, pumpkin doodle?" Shante asked, propping her elbows on the edge of the hot tub.

I snorted, shaking my head. "I'm fine. My guys aren't. Ty and Lance act like they have to atone for something. Kai's gotten less relaxed and more serious. That whole encounter with that woman really shook him. He keeps talking about vanquishing his enemies. Using those exact words. And Daniel is moving about like he's walking on eggshells."

Lila nodded knowingly. "He's seen what the others have put you through,

and he's trying not to be a bother. It's in the alpha nature. Good alphas just want their omega to be happy and protected. They're probably freaking out now."

I hoped that wasn't the case. They were keeping their emotions behind mental walls, so I couldn't really tell what was going on in their heads. I didn't want them stressing out about it. They were great alphas. We just were having some tough times. "I try to make sure they know I don't blame them for anything. I think it's clear this demon is messing with them. He can't get enough juice to come at me directly, so he's pulling these stunts to get them out of the picture."

Shante sucked her teeth, kicking her legs out under the water. "Bitch moves. But are we sure this memnock demon is behind it? Could be the Ascension folks."

I'd thought of that, but it seemed odd for them to focus so much on me. However, maybe I was thinking too much. They were focusing on many people, just in different ways. "You're right. It could be them. But he's apparently part of their group. And we still have that traitor in our midst."

I couldn't tell Shante about the prophecy, but she could know that our eastern covens could be harboring witches who weren't on our side.

Lila turned and leaned on the edge of the pool, kicking her legs behind her like a playful child. "Do we think this traitor could be in our local coven? Or do you think they could be in another one?"

"We've gotten a lot of attention, but other locations have issues as well," I replied.

"That's true," Lila began. "But I have this gut feeling that this is ground zero."

I bit my lip, thinking. I felt the same way as her. Could it possibly be that this dark mage group found our Baltimore coven the most threatening? I'd never considered us the more powerful location. The coven with the best reputation in the U.S. was in New Orleans, which was fitting with its lore. Not to mention, the city just felt like magic. You could touch the ground, and your fingertips would buzz if you were especially sensitive to magical surroundings.

However, in the upper east coast, New York had a lot of magic superstars. Baltimore was often overshadowed by it. However, I wasn't well versed on coven strengths.

"So, if the traitor is possibly in our coven, any ideas who you think it

could be? Everyone, outside of you guys, has felt like a suspect to me. I'm not close to anyone else," I stated.

Shante frowned, lowering her arm and hands into the water. "What about Kent and Tim?"

I shrugged. "I don't know Tim that well, and I only hang out with Kent at work or work gatherings. I don't know his mind that well. He does grumble sometimes about coven practices."

"Yeah, I've heard him complain, and he doesn't go to meeting regularly. Still, he's our friend, and I can't imagine him changing up on us like that."

Lila turned to face us. "You never know what's going on in someone's mind." She groaned, sinking deeper into the water. "I don't like this talk. It's stressful, and we are supposed to be destressing. A clear head and relaxed being can lead to more clarity. So, let's be in the moment. I know it seems crazy to pamper ourselves in the midst of all this chaos, but take it from me, sometimes you have to take a step back to gain your strength. That's how I survived in the fae realm."

Shante snapped three times. "Yaaasss, okay, Lila, with the enlightenment."

I grinned, appreciating Lila for redirecting us. My mind had been in stress mode for so long. I needed to be reminded that it was okay to relax even when times were tough. "So, speaking of fae, how is it living with all your beautiful men in your house?"

She snorted. "Cramped. But also, awesome."

"How long are you going to have that arrangement?"

"Well, they swore to help take down this Ascension group, and their court is backing that. So, they are here at least until then."

"And after that? Are you going to sell your house and get something bigger? Everyone needs their own room, even if they don't sleep in it every night. Trust me."

Lila adjusted in the water, clearing her throat as she looked away, her eyes unsettled.

Shante and I gave her an expectant look, but she didn't speak. "Girl," Shante started. "What's going on?"

"So, promise you won't be mad?" Lila asked, looking at me with worried eyes.

My heart felt like it dropped into my stomach, but I tried my best to wipe my face of any emotion. She didn't even have to say it. I already knew by her

face and her weird silence what she was going to say. “You’re moving to the fae realm, aren’t you?”

She sighed and moved closer to me, grabbing my hand. “Are you upset? I’m so sorry. I just can’t force them all to live here. And I want to be with them. I can come and visit here any time. The portals are open now. Hell, you can even visit. It’s awesome to see.”

I nodded, smiling, but it hurt my face to force the muscles into pleasantries. I understood it. It made sense. Still, having Lila move away to another realm was like losing her. “I get it. I’m happy for you.”

Shante nodded. “That’s wonderful you found love and a family. Can you get cell and internet service in the realm?”

Lila slowly shook her head. “No. So we’ll have to be more purposeful about scheduling our hangouts. However, if you need me for any emergency reason, we can work out a way to communicate. There are fae who mind the portal from the human realm.”

I widened my smile but felt warm tears reach my eyes, blurring my vision. I played in my head how much of an awful friend I had been. Lila and I used to be joined at the hip, sometimes spending the night at each other’s houses. Lately, I had been focusing so much on the guys, and she was left out. She had other friends but none as close as me. The same for me. Outside of Shante, Lila was it. And even after knowing that, I hadn’t given her as much time as she deserved. Hell, I hadn’t even known she was missing.

“Aww, honey, don’t cry,” Lila said, wrapping her arms around me.

I blinked several times, not realizing the tears had escaped down my cheeks. “I’m sorry.”

“No, nothing to apologize about. I want you to know that I didn’t come to this decision lightly. But honestly, you won’t even know I’m missing. Time moves so differently there. I can probably see you every week like nothing’s changed. I’m the one who’s going to be missing you.”

We held on to each other until we heard some sniffing. I looked to Shante, who was dabbing at her face. “Aww, friendship.”

Lila twisted her lips and pointed her thumb back at Shante. “Don’t go making her your bestie now that I’m leaving.”

Shante huffed, putting her hands on her hips. “Oh, that’s so going to happen.”

Before I could respond, an employee at the spa appeared over us, letting us know it was time for our treatments. Shante and I were getting massages,

and Lila was getting a body scrub treatment. We got out of the water and went to our separate treatment rooms.

My room was what I expected it to be, small and dark, with some white tea scent pumped in the room, along with the soothing sounds of harps. The odd thing was that my masseuse was not there. I was escorted to the room and told the masseuse would be there soon.

I took my bikini top and slippers off before getting on the bed and getting under the sheet. I heard a knock at the door, and seconds later, the door opened and closed.

“Hi, Ms. Bellamy. I’ll be your masseuse today,” said a deep male voice.

My body froze. This wasn’t right. “I’m sorry, I asked for a female massage therapist.”

“I know. She’s...no longer available.”

What the fuck? Suddenly I felt very vulnerable being topless with some guy rubbing on me. I specifically wanted a female masseuse. If they had to replace her with a male, then they should have told me beforehand. “Please tell the front that I would like a fem¾” I paused. Why did that voice sound so familiar?

“I’m afraid I can’t do that.”

I heard the door lock, and I quickly clung onto the sheet, twisting around until I was covered and sitting up. I looked on at the man and dropped my mouth open in shock. “Tim? What are you doing here?”

I didn’t want to know. I already had a good idea. Our jobs paid us well, so this was no part-time gig. He was here on purpose. “You’re the traitor, aren’t you?”

Tim snorted, picking up my red bikini top and inspecting it with a tilted head. “Nice.”

I wanted to tell him to put my shit down, however, I had bigger worries to focus on. Tessa was supposed to be waiting outside. She’d seen Tim enough times to remember what he looked like and know he was not supposed to be working here. Something must have happened to her. He was wearing the uniform from the spa, so it was possible Tessa hadn’t paid attention to his face, but I doubted that was the issue. He had more than likely used magic to make Tessa see someone totally different. Or, more likely, gone invisible. That was one of the powers of memnock demons. “Give me that and answer my question.”

Tim looked over to me, his green eyes annoyingly playful, bordering on

cocky as he looked me over. “No, my omega, I am not the traitor. Aim higher.”

His omega? Before I could argue, I caught a whiff of spice and berries. Panic rang in my head, and I tried to call out to my alphas in my mind. However, no one replied. Was our telepathy being blocked from inside this room?

Tim put my bikini top down and walked over to me, hands stuffed in his pockets. “Oh, I think she knows who I am now? I was borderline offended by the traitor comment.”

“You’re the demon who’s been stalking me,” I said in a whisper, my throat dry and tight with fear.

He snapped his fingers, eyes almost glowing. “Bingo.”

“Why are you taking Tim’s image?”

He tossed his hands out to the side. “Did I take his image, or am I him?”

I frowned. No, could he have been Tim this whole time? He was only half-demon, so it made sense that he didn’t need a soul like other demons. The memnock demon M.O., Kai explained, didn’t apply to him.

“I see you’re confused. Let me explain.” He hopped on the table, which pulled at my sheet, bringing it down partially from my chest. He raised a brow and lifted his butt, pulling out some of the sheet so that I could yank it back up. His gentlemanly behavior did nothing to ease my tension, considering he wasn’t supposed to be here in the first place.

“So, yes, I am a demon, but only part. But maybe you know that already. I hear you have friends sniffing around asking about me. There are only a few of my kind left, and of the few, we are all only partial. It was an effort to save our species. My father was a demon, but my mother was a witch. So, I am not bound to the underworld. However, I still have some limits. I would have come to you faster, but I was...preparing. Not to mention, getting to you alone has been quite challenging. Even with us working at the same hospital.”

“That was the point.” I took some comfort knowing he had limits and wasn’t willing to come at me when I was with my guys or bodyguard. Perhaps he wasn’t as strong as I had feared. He could clearly mask his alpha scent, but most of his magic seemed defensive instead of offensive. He could be invisible; he could visit me in my dreams, which led me to my next question. “Why appear as a monster instead of your true form?”

He sighed, giving my leg a light pat, and I quickly scooted them up

toward me. “I had to keep fooling everyone, and I couldn’t do that if you saw my human form. I would think you’d like this form better, though.”

“I don’t like any of your forms.”

He sucked his teeth, giving me a chiding look. “You’re just saying that because you’re mad. I’m sorry I had to deceive you, but I can make it up to you.”

I twisted my lips. “You have nothing I want.”

He scooted forward, eyes glowing with excitement behind his thin framed glasses. Did he even need them? He really was unbothered by me. The way he looked at me was unnerving. It was as if he had finally found a long-lost treasure. I didn’t like it. I liked even less that I couldn’t reach my guys or figure out how to jump off the table and get to the door before he could grab me. I could use magic, but I also wanted to learn a little bit more about him before we began a battle, especially if it would result in me being half-naked.

“Oh, but I do have something you want. I can make it so your friends make it out alive and live comfortable days once the Ascension takes over.”

I shook my head, face masked in a grimace. We already knew the demon was a member of the Ascension, but did he have that kind of clout? “What makes you think they would listen to you?”

He reached for my face, and I batted his hand away. He chuckled, still way too confident for my blood, which was starting to worry me. “They’ll listen to me because I am the Ascension. I put the group together. Part witch, remember?”

Fear sounded an alarm in my head. Was this really true? I wonder if his followers knew he was part demon. Did they know their leader and the demon were one in the same? Witches could be quite elitist at times. Everyone described different appearances. The demons saw a memnock demon. The fae saw a short white man. What did this Ascension group see?

Tim, if that was even his real name, reached out again and touched the side of my head, rubbing his thumb over my left temple in a gesture that was way too loving and familiar for our situation. I balled my fists, turning my head.

“I bet you’re wondering how you’re going to escape. Don’t bother.”

I didn’t want to play into his hands. I wanted answers. “Why are you here? In Baltimore? As the leader, why pick this coven to infiltrate?”

There was no way he’d gotten into our coven without a sponsor. He acknowledged that there was a traitor when he told me to aim higher in my

guess, so it was possible that person sponsored him. We could easily learn their identity. He had to know that. I was sure, since he was telling me his secret, he was beyond the point of wanting to hide anymore. That part worried me. It most likely meant he was coming close to achieving whatever big bad event he thought would be powerful enough to overcome leadership.

“We can lead the witches. Bring fairness to the world,” he went on. “Your demon friend will get more rights. And you won’t have to cater to the needs of such chaotic alphas.”

I didn’t speak, just eyed him viciously, waiting for him to feed me more information. He knew the traitor. I would find out before I acted. Of course, I also needed to keep him talking so I could figure my way out of this predicament.

“You have to know they can’t protect you. I mean,” he raised his hands and looked around the room. “Look at you now. In front of the very being they didn’t want you to be near. You know why, Billie?”

“Enlighten me,” I replied, gripping my sheet tighter.

“Your pack is easy to break, and they give you too much freedom. You’re a strength, not a weakness, but that’s only if you remain away from harm. They should have locked you in that big house until everything was safe. Instead, they get scared you’ll be angry and let you run around.”

I knew he was behind everything. I tightened my lips together, and he smiled. I had to work. I had to live my life and not hide away in fear. That very real need resulted in stress to my guys and also risk to myself. Was this all my fault because I was too independent? That sentence sounded wrong in my head. I wasn’t a child to be put in a bubble. I couldn’t allow men to make me fear the world.

Tim pushed his glasses up his nose. “You know, I wouldn’t even know about you if it wasn’t for Chilli outing you. And then I scented you. Omegas are hard to find. Powerful omegas are even more challenging. Sure, I could find my own, but I have to admit, I don’t really feel like finding another omega with your power level.”

“I would never be with you.”

His eyes softened. Not what I expected. “Never say never. I won’t hurt you. I won’t force myself on you. You would be cherished. Perhaps overprotected but safe, nonetheless.” He dropped his shoulders and sighed. “I am not a monster. Although, I recognize the irony in saying that since I have been appearing to you in my demon form.”

I scooted to the edge of the table, ready to disappear. Maybe I wouldn't get the identity of the traitor, but I had learned something. The power-base was in Baltimore. Tim wasn't here because of me. I was incidental. It was possible he came to this area because of the traitor, who I now suspected had to be his sponsor. I had learned enough. "I don't want whatever you have to offer."

He took his glasses off and used a part of my sheet to clean them, his attention focused away from me for once. "Billie, I think I've been quite kind, all things being considered. We both know that I could destroy your pack if I wanted to."

The heat of anger overtook my fear, and I straightened up with a silent snarl. I'd suspected he was behind everything, but that wasn't going to make me back down. Despite his attempts, we'd succeeded. It would be a fight, but we would win. "Are you threatening my alphas if I don't join you?"

He sighed, putting his glasses back on over bored eyes. His confidence was infuriating. "I know you're angry, and I suspect giving them up will be hard, but it's for the best."

Was he giving me an option? Even with the threat of hurting my pack and my friends, he had to know my answer would never be yes. I'd find a way to defeat him. Sure, I could lie and say I would join him, fake it and find out the truth of what he was cooking up, but the risk was too high.

"If you want me to believe that you'd be a good alpha to me, then give me some time to think about what you're offering. You already gave me the threat, and you know where I live and work. Let me say my goodbyes." I knew it was a long shot, but I needed to leave.

He tapped his chin, squinting his eyes. "I'm not a fool. It was hard enough to get this opportunity. Send them a text goodbye."

Welp, no surprise there. I wasn't going to get any more information out of him. Guess I had to fight with my titties out. So undignified.

I yelled out a wind spell, sending Tim flying off my table. I jumped off and ran for the door, unlocking it with my magic. Tim jumped up, slamming the door shut with his own power. My body slid back, lower back crashing into the table, but I didn't stop. I was getting out. I pushed forward, reciting my one-word destruction spell.

His body constricted, almost pulling in on itself, and he dropped to his knees. He wrapped his arms around himself, screaming. His body flickered in and out like some broken TV set. It was reminiscent of when I saw him

dematerialize in the hospital in his demon form. He toppled to the side, but before he landed on the floor, he exploded in what looked like ash. It sprinkled all over the room, narrowly missing me because I had already run out of the door and right into Tessa.

She looked startled, grabbing me by the shoulders. I had my arms covering my breasts, and she forced me behind her towering stature without asking questions. She raced into the room and seconds later came back with my robe, bikini top, and slippers.

“No one was in there. What happened?” she demanded.

I recapped my interaction with Tim. “But I think I killed him.” It had been too easy. He was supposed to be a powerful demon mage, and I made him explode just like that. I mean, I had killed demons in that fashion before, but he was no lower-level monster. Was I really that powerful? I’d killed Chilli and stopped that witch Eliza. It was possible.

Then again, if I didn’t kill him, what *did* I do? Did I cause any damage? Had he just teleported away?

Tessa looked back in the room and then back and forth down the hall. “I didn’t smell any trace of demon in there.”

“Well, he was only half-demon and an alpha.”

She shook her head, face set in a perplexed scowl. “Doesn’t matter. My nose is strong. I should have smelled something if you vanquished him.”

“So, you think I didn’t kill him?”

She gave me an empathetic look, and I didn’t need her to answer. I just attacked a demon who threatened my pack, and he might have gotten away.

CHAPTER 21



DANIEL

I placed a cup of chai in front of Billie as she sat at the dining room table. My hand shook slightly, but I ignored it. I didn't have time for any other matters right now but Billie. The guys stood about the space along with Lila and her fae protector, Luca, discussing what happened.

"Thanks, Danny," Billie said before looking down at her cup. Her eyes widened. "Wait, is this a chai latte?"

I smiled and took a seat across from her, Ty and Lance occupying the seats next to her.

"I'm really spoiled," she began, giving me a cheesy grin.

"Maybe a little too spoiled," Luca whispered from his perch on the arm of the sectional couch.

Lila, sitting beside him, poked him in the ribs. I narrowed my eyes at him, annoyed he would even suggest such a thing. That's what we were supposed to do. "Omegas are meant to be spoiled." Beads of sweat pooled around my forehead, and I wiped them away, wishing I'd used a napkin. Instead, I rubbed my sweaty palm on my trousers.

Luca raised his brows, a look of brief confusion passing over his eyes. "Yes, omegas and our mates are meant to be spoiled and treasured. I think I used the wrong word."

"Ya think?" Lila muttered, rolling her eyes.

He nodded. "Yes. What I meant was that there was a threat, and you allowed her to continue to leave the house. It is no wonder, then, that things happen."

Billie sputtered, leaning back in her chair. "Allowed me to leave? I am a full-grown adult."

Lila rubbed her forehead. “You really aren’t helping, dude.”

He shrugged, not reading the room. He was either a tad dense or very unaffected about what people thought. Perhaps both. “I’m simply saying, when Lila was in danger, we kept her confined. She remained safe when she stayed inside.”

Kai groaned, pushing away from the kitchen island he had been leaning on. “Way to rub our failure as protectors in our faces. You think it’d be easy to keep Billie in the house? The only thing we could do was compromise and make sure she had a guard.”

Lance folded his arms, a glower painted on his face. “We should have forced her to stay in.”

Billie slapped him on the arm, but I wasn’t far from agreeing. It would have saved us from some of the troubles we’ve encountered, but who was to say other harm wouldn’t have occurred? Perhaps harm in our very own home, which we had avoided so far.

“In all fairness,” Lila began. “I did try to escape several times. If I wasn’t crap at breaking wards, I would have fucked around and found out. Would have been snatched up much earlier than I was.”

“Which only happened because you were outside,” Luca said, tilting his head toward her.

“Yeah, but that fae bitch also came to your house, and she kind of served me my ass in that first fight.”

He grimaced. “I should have had a ward to keep everyone out. You can do better here.”

Billie slapped the table, startling me. I cursed myself for being so easily rattled. My current state wasn’t helping me maintain control, and I needed to be a rock for her. I had to put our omega first. At all cost.

“You guys, I appreciate you wanting to keep me safe, but the difference between Lila’s situation and mine is that she was in a fae realm with no one that she knew. There were way more unknowns for her there. So, keeping her safe inside made sense. She was in hiding from a court that hated humans. I’m not. Anyway, the answer now is not to hide me away. Tim the memnock is going to come for you guys as well. Assuming I didn’t actually kill him and not just piss him off more.”

Kai raised a finger. “First of all, what kind of demon names himself Tim willingly? That’s so basic. Second, I think I can speak for everyone when I say you aren’t sacrificing yourself for us by joining him. Right, Danny boy?”

My stomach twisted in knots, my shirt practically sticking to my back. I wanted to pay attention. I needed to. However, my mind was betraying me with cloudiness.

“Hey, Daniel?” Kai called with concerned eyes. “You good?”

I rolled my shoulders back. “Stellar, and I agree. His deal is trash. You aren’t doing it. Let him come for us. However, I think for now, you should take off work and stay here. He somehow knows where you’re going to be, so you might as well be where you’re safest until we tackle him. Did you tell your coven about your suspicions regarding the traitor?”

Billie nodded. “On the way home, I called my leader. I need to go there later.”

Agitation etched itself around my brain, and I tried to internally bat it away. Why couldn’t our omega just stay still? “Why do you have to leave?”

She frowned. “So, I can help track Tim’s location. We have a witch who can find out information through touch. Since this guy touched me, maybe she can find him that way.”

“Woman, tell them to come here.” She opened her mouth to argue, but I raised a hand in silence. “And I don’t care if your coven likes us or not. They’ll just have to suck it up and come here because you aren’t going anywhere. Period.” I stood up, wobbly on my feet. “I’m exhausted. I need to rest.”

Lance cocked a brow. “We aren’t going to strategize on how to fight this guy?”

I paused. He was right, we needed to have a plan, but I was no use right now. I could barely comprehend words, and my heart was beating so loudly in my chest that I could hardly focus. “Tomorrow morning. Let’s just fortify our wards tonight and make sure all guards are on duty.”

Lila stood up as well. “How about my pack and I stay here for a bit? The more power, the merrier. Assuming you don’t mind it being a bit cramped.”

I nodded. “Good idea. The others can arrange where you’ll sleep.” I gave a wave and rushed up the stairs to my room.

When I got inside, I closed the door, locking it, before falling onto my bed. I tore at my shirt, popping the buttons to get it off. I was drenched through. They had to have seen it. My hair was matted to my head, and I pushed it off my forehead for a tiny bit of relief.

Of all the times to have my rut, why did it have to be now? Billie didn’t need another thing on her plate. This was a distraction we had no time for.

Not to mention, after Lance's and Ty's heats with her, I just needed Billie to be given the softest of treatment by us. Rutting was rarely a gentle endeavor, but that, and all that was going on, had to be stressful for her. We weren't protecting her. We weren't treating her gently. There was too much pressure around her, and I didn't want to add to it.

It was not unknown for an alpha to sit out his rut. For many, that required being tied down and kept far away from any omega. I would probably have to leave for the night, and this timing couldn't be worse.



BILLIE

I stared at the space that Daniel just vacated. He was not okay. I knew exactly the issue. To my sensitive omega nose, I could smell the increase in his eucalyptus scent from several feet away. His eyes had also changed to blue, the true color of his fae appearance. I wasn't sure he even knew how much he was changing. Why he was hiding it was the bigger issue.

Lila looked around the space, tossing her hands out to the side. "What the fuck was that about? Why'd he run off like he had to go take a shit?"

Kai groaned, tossing his head back. "Of all the damn times. He's going into his rut."

"Why'd he run away without his omega?" Luca asked, standing. He was a full foot taller than Lila and made her look like a little person beside him.

Ty, his face bleak, finally opened his mouth to speak. "Because he wants to protect Billie."

He had his hand on my thigh, which had been there since I first sat down. He gave it a light squeeze. I felt it was more for him than for me. Worry was no stranger to Ty, and I got the slight hint from our connection that he was borderline panicking from the replay of my encounter with Tim.

"He's going to have to leave if he doesn't want to put her through his rut," Ty continued.

Well, that wasn't happening. I dropped my shoulders, standing up. "Gotta go, guys. Talk in the morning."

I waved everyone good night and headed out of the room.

“Have fun, chica,” Lila called out. “We’ll get things in order while you do the sex.”

While I was still worried about our current state of affairs, I was more than glad that there were enough people here to help the cause. It would allow me enough time to help my very stubborn pack lead.

When I got to Daniel’s room, I gave a cursory knock but didn’t wait for permission to turn the knob. Unsurprisingly it didn’t budge. “Did you really have to lock the door?” I called.

“I’m going into my rut, and I don’t want to hurt you,” he called back in a strained voice.

I gave the door a light tap with my foot. “Open the door, silly boy. You aren’t going to hurt me. No one has. I know I’m an omega, but I’m not some fragile thing. You should know that by now.”

“We have other things to focus on.”

“We have several people downstairs who are handling security and defenses. Do we really have to have a conversation where I beg you to fuck me? That’s probably what you’re really waiting for, isn’t it? Trying to act all noble. You’re not fooling me.”

I was met with silence which worried me. Was he really going to be this stubborn? Daniel knew better than to think ignoring his rut was the best answer. He’d be off his game even after it was over. Even if rutting didn’t result in pregnancy, like an omega heat, it still was part of the need for release. He’d just be packing on more pent-up frustration until the next rut. I imagined that ignoring a rut felt a lot like constipation. I needed our leader clearheaded and cleared out. Also, I was really liking these alpha ruts, even if they were inadvertently triggered by that demon mage.

The door suddenly opened, and I came face to face with a wild-eyed Daniel drenched in sweat and dressed only in black boxer briefs. His eyes had an unnatural glow that struck me as almost alien. He no longer had the glamoured black hair, but his long white mane hung over his shoulders. I unabashedly looked below his waist and raised a brow to see that he was so hard it looked like he might tear through his underwear. And maybe it caused a little tingle in my girlie bits.

I glanced up at him with a sly smile and pointed at his briefs. “I can help you with that.”

He grimaced, shaking his head. “You don’t have to.”

I huffed and pushed past him to enter the room. It smelled thick of eucalyptus. I inhaled deeply, my body relaxing. My shoes were already off, and I was only wearing a knitted midi-dress. I quickly pulled it over my head and stood in front of the bed, facing him. “I’m not doing you a favor. Is that what you called it when I went into heat?”

Daniel turned to look at me, mouth hanging open, eyes glazed over. I could see the hesitation in his eyes. He looked away, rubbing a hand over his face. “We’re in danger right now. You at least need to be focused. You can ward me in this room, or I can teleport somewhere until morning.”

He would need a little more push. “I swear, if you teleport away right now, you’ll be kicked out of the pack. Three alphas are enough. Or maybe we can look for a new fourth. I can ask Lila’s guys if they know of any alphas willing to leave the fae realm. One who isn’t so stubborn.”

He actually growled, uncovering his face. He quickly caught himself and his mouth quirked up in the right corner, brows relaxed. “Is that so, princess?”

Well, he was calling me princess again, and his ever-present cockiness was back on his face. That was a good sign. I jutted my chin out. “Yup. I’ll replace you.”

He crooked his finger in a come-hither motion, and I felt my body propel forward as if it were being pushed by a great wave. I felt weightless, and the loss of control was a little scary. I stopped in front of Daniel, floating up until I was at his eye level.

He leaned forward and kissed the side of my neck. “Do you think you can easily replace me?”

He pressed his hips into my core, the length of his hardness teasing my covered slit. My clit buzzed, and I dampened my panties as I inhaled his calming scent. Of course, I couldn’t replace him. My fae alpha was one of a kind. Still, I enjoyed teasing him. “Yup, I’m sure it’ll be very easy to do.”

He nipped at my neck and forced his hands between my legs, brushing over his claiming bite on my inner thigh. My body quivered at the double contact, and I bit my lower lip. It felt like satin stroking a sensitive nerve.

He took a step away from me, lifting a brow. “Ah, judging from your body, I don’t think it would be that easy.”

I lifted a shoulder. “Meh.”

“I see. You’re playing with me while I’m in my rut. That’s a dangerous game.”

He then forced his hand inside my panties, his long fingers sliding up my slit, collecting my slick. I squirmed, bowing my back in agonizing pleasure, the touch of his soft hand sending me into a frenzy. How did he have this much control in his rut to toy with me like this? Had I pissed him off that bad?

He moved his hand to the top of my panties and ripped them off. Guess, that answered that question. “Hey, I liked those panties. They didn’t give me wedgies.”

Daniel chuckled before twirling a finger in the air. My body moved to the side and turned until my back rested against the nearest wall, still suspended from the ground. “They can be replaced. Although I do think you need to be punished.”

I looked at him with rounded eyes, wet with anticipation. I could feel my slick seep down my inner thighs. “What are you going to do to me?”

His eyes followed the trail of slick sliding down my thighs, and then he dipped a finger inside me. I sucked in a breath, legs tensing at his invasion. Before I could enjoy it, he removed the finger and stuck it in his mouth, eyes fluttering. His hands shot to his briefs, and he shoved them down, stepping out of them quickly.

I tried to wiggle against the wall, but it felt like my back was stuck there. Only my hands and legs were mobile. He grinned at me, and he looked so otherworldly in the dim light of his room, his blue eyes sparkling and stark white hair blowing gently from some unknown breeze.

He pressed his hands on the wall on both sides of my shoulders. “I’m going to fuck you in every part of this room. Would you like that?”

My nipples hardened at his words, straining against the now annoying bra. I nodded, mouth slightly ajar.

He pressed his lips to mine, forcing his tongue into my mouth. I moaned, his lips soft and warm on my own, trying to uselessly press into him. He pulled away from me and brought a finger up between my breasts. He hooked it under the bra and quickly pulled at it until it tore. I was getting a whole new damn set from him. “I need you to use your words, princess. I need you to say you want me to fuck you because I am on the very edge right now, and when you give in, there’s no going back. It’s okay to say no now.”

The heat of his breath on my skin made it hard for me to think. To concentrate. He was saying words, but all I could focus on was his scent and his hardness. I would not be saying no. “Yes, I want you. I want your rut.”

He gave me a quick kiss on the lips. "Good girl."

And then he slammed into me so hard and fast that a picture fell off the wall to the floor. I cried out as he filled me. His body was hot within me, but I did not want to move away. I wrapped my legs around his waist, and he continued to pound into me, grunting with exertion. He was lost now, his eyes wild and excited. I wrapped my arms around his neck, unable to keep up with his movements. He was thrusting into me so fast.

And then I felt my body slide up the wall until we were both off the ground. Daniel never stopped his movements, and we continued to fuck in the air until I felt him groan out a release, spilling his heated seed inside me. My heart raced, but he was not done with me.

He pulled out and flipped me on my stomach. Now I was discombobulated as I pressed my fingertips onto the wall as if that would prevent me from falling. I raised myself to my knees with ease, clearly aided by his magic. Daniel wasted no time thrusting into me from behind. He dug his fingers into my hips, pounding against my sensitive inner walls. I squeezed his stiffness, wanting to hold on to him as if he could fall out. Even with me being so saturated with my own arousal and his, I didn't think that was a likelihood given how much he was stretching me, but being horizontal against a wall on your knees and defying all sorts of gravity did that to your mind.

I wanted to ponder his fae magic more, but each time he slammed his dick deeper into my drenched core, I lost all care. An expert wind brushed against my clit, and his claiming bite on my inner thigh at the same time. It was an odd pressure, lighter than a finger but more weight on it than actual wind, and it remained over those sensitive areas, blowing back and forth with perfect speed. My clit buzzed at the touch, and I tightened around him again. My knees threatened to give out as I struggled to spread them even more at the deliciously cool feeling of his magic manipulation on my bite. Each swipe of his magic sent mini explosions over my nerves.

I lowered to my forearms, brushing my forehead against the wall. I bit my lower lip, closing my eyes as I allowed myself to feel every part of me in that moment. My heart was beating like a drum, or was that his? I felt like we were blending. His pleasure became mine. His balls slammed against my ass with a lewd smacking sound, and he tightened his grip on my waist. I could feel him straining not to push his knot into me. The struggle in his clouded head threaded into my own. He wanted to dominate me, rut me over and over

again, and he didn't want to slow down. He didn't want the knot to give him time to think, but at the same time, he wanted that connection.

I pushed back against him, wanting it to and not caring if we had to slow down. He playfully slapped my ass. "Not now, princess," he grunted in a strained voice.

I whined in annoyance, and it turned into a long moan as the magic over my clit and bite intensified. My nerves were now electrified, and I balled my fist, practically screaming as I felt my orgasm quickly rise. He joined me in his urgent need for release and furiously fucked me, his dick practically throbbing inside of me, brushing every inner part of me. And then, explosions. My body snapped, and it felt like I had floated away, everything was heightened. I both felt him spill inside me for the second time and, at the same time, feeling the release. It was confusing yet, an indescribable feeling of euphoria. I felt high. Outside of myself. It was both too much and just right.

Stars dotted across my eyes, and I came again so hard my legs shook, yet I did not fall because...magic. Daniel continued to thrust into me, albeit, at a slower pace. More languid, his groans mixed with my whines, filling the quiet of the room.

He pulled out of me, but I remained still, my body still under his magic. I was thankful for that because I felt boneless right about now. I turned my head slightly and saw him float unto his back over to his bed. I scrunched my brows, curious.

However, my curiosity didn't last long as he lifted his hands, moving me in his direction and spinning me until I was hovered over him, legs apart on either side of his hips. "You know I should be bothered by you moving me about like some sort of doll."

He gave me a lazy smile, putting an arm behind his head. "Do you want me to stop?"

I looked down at him. His hard chest was covered in a sheen of sweat. His long white hair spread out around him as if it were laid out on an imaginary pillow. The bicep perched near his head flexed, and those fae blue eyes were partially closed under lustful lids. I pressed my lips tightly together as I gazed further down at the perfect V of his pelvis, leading to his glistening hardness, the tip of his penis engorged and dripping with cum. Shit, and just like that, I was wet again. A droplet of cum mixed with slick fell onto his toned stomach, and his lips parted as if just that contact was enough to bring

excitement. I didn't need to hear him tell me he wanted more. He raised his pelvis slightly, practically humping the air. This was his rut, and he was far from done.

I shook my head, almost making myself dizzy with delirious anticipation of what was next. "Nope, let's keep going."

"Good girl," he whispered in such a low baritone tone that it reached my clit and practically rubbed it. I could have come right then and there.

Instead, I was lowered directly onto his dick. I thought my legs would hang down, but instead, they met an invisible, soft surface. I pressed my hands on his pecks and began to bounce up and down on him, my heavy breasts jiggling with each movement. I closed my eyes as I tightened and loosened around him.

Soon I felt one of his hands squeezing my breast, my nipples stiff with pleasure. "You're doing so well, princess. I'm so very lucky to have you."

I licked my lips, bouncing harder for his praise. I was rewarded with a heavy groan from him and what felt like a wet tongue circling my other nipple rapidly. I gasped in delight as the licking soon turned to sucking, a gentle heat surrounding the sensitive tips of my breasts. My body was quickly building for another release, but I wanted to hold off. I needed his knot.

He pushed his pelvis up, meeting my bounces. My clit pulsed with each brush of his pelvis. "Princess, tell me what you want," he said with a strained voice. I could feel him on the verge. My nerves simmering down to my toes.

"Your knot."

"How do we ask?"

Damn him! How could he be this in control during his rut? This was why he was the pack lead. His control was insane. His knot pressed against my slit, bringing me back to attention. I was going to get him for this. Later.

"Please, may I have your knot, alpha?" I threw it all in there. I didn't have time for the back and forth, I was going to crash soon.

And apparently, that was all I needed because he slammed his knot into me with such force I screamed. Magic continued to brush my nipples and washed over my clit as well. Moments later, I shuddered in another exquisite release, spraying over his dick and onto his pelvis and chest. Daniel hissed and gripped my waist, pumping up into me rapidly until he, too, came again, heating me from the inside.

When it felt like every nerve in my body had dissipated, I collapsed forward onto his chest. He wrapped his arms around me and slowly lowered

us down onto the bed. I snuggled into him, enjoying the tight fit of his knot inside me, filling me, locking us.

He rubbed a comforting hand up and down my back as he began to purr for me. "I'll give you a little break. You did so well, my omega. I'm very proud of you."

I rubbed my cheek against his rumbling chest, content and pleased with his praise. "So did you, my alpha."

He chuckled, squeezing me tighter. We were happy now, and I wanted it to stay this way. Needed it to. However, I knew better. Tomorrow was a different story.

CHAPTER 22



BILLIE

Our house was especially packed now. Lila and her guys ended up spread out in the basement guest room and the pool house outside. I'd forgotten about the pool house, but it was a large space that also served as a studio guest apartment.

I cleaned up but didn't shower as I wasn't sure if washing might disturb any chance Angelica had of tracing Tim. Since I was free for a moment, I decided to go through my father's grimoire again for any assistance. I'd been reading it more frequently lately, but it was as thick as the bible. I wasn't really sure what in particular I could look for to help me. Even when I found spells and potions, I got slowed down because it took time to master them. One didn't just recite a spell and have it automatically work like in the movies. You had to have the right power behind it. The strength and mental focus. It came easy once you mastered it, but until then, you needed to work at it. So the grimoire was almost a course or two in witchcraft on its own. Not to mention the diary-like personal stories my dad added. He'd been alive for over 100 years, so there was a lot in the book.

I usually spent a little time before bed reading it, but since I was, er, busy the prior night, I decided to catch up that morning. Except, the book wasn't in the bedside table drawer that I usually left it in. I frowned, looking around the room. I never took it anywhere. It was too precious. I sometimes locked it away, but the house was basically Fort Knox, and I trusted the guys. My only real security was keeping it in my room.

Which I hadn't been in last night. And there were a lot more people in the house now. I did not need this, and I didn't believe in coincidences.

When I walked down the stairs to the main floor the next morning, I

found the house in a buzz. There were people everywhere. Guards and alphas surrounded the space, and I was sure outside as well. When I woke up, Daniel was already gone, so I had no doubt he was catching up and jumping into the fray.

I spotted Lila in the kitchen baking muffins. “My grimoire is missing,” I announced.

She poured the batter into the muffin pan, not turning around. “You sure? With all that’s going on, maybe you put it somewhere different. We can try a locator spell. Let me just put these muffins in the oven. I know cooking isn’t much, but it beats my nervous energy.”

I leaned against the counter. That was a good idea, and Lila was great at location spells. “Where are the guys?” I asked, looking at the muffins but too unsettled about my grimoire to be able to eat.

“They’ve been fortifying this place all night. Now they’re in the man cave downstairs doing alpha stuff,” she replied, putting the muffins in the oven.

I snorted. “What is alpha stuff?”

She shrugged. “Who knows? I just sent them away because Brenda and Angelica are on the way.”

“Smart thinking. We can all meet in the study.”

She began putting bowls in the sink and putting away ingredients. “I’m surprised nothing happened last night. Maybe you really did kill him, Bill.”

“That would be awesome but too easy. And nothing is ever easy with us.”

She nodded. “By the way, I heard you and Daniel going at it like jackrabbits. I’m surprised you’re able to walk.”

I winked at her. “Thanks for pointing that out. It’s fun to know people hear me having sex. Can we do that location spell now, please and thank you.”

Lila cackled. “Ok, I need you to draw me a rudimentary layout of the house and the surrounding grounds, including where the cars are parked. It has to be in the house. If not, we’ll try work.”

I went to a drawer at the island and took out a large notepad and pen. “I never take it out of the house.”

I made a quick, very basic drawing of our surroundings. Lila did her thing, but no luck.

I cried out, grabbing the sides of my head in frustration. “How the hell do I lose a grimoire? I should have locked it up. I’m so stupid. I got too careless.”

Lila patted me on my shoulder. “Hey, hey, hey. You are not stupid. It was safe all this time. So it went missing in the last, like, 24 hours. That narrows the list of suspects. And we have Xander, so we can truth seek.”

I nodded. “Let’s start asking questions now. My dad’s grimoire is super valuable.”

Before she could respond, we heard the doorbell ring. “That’s probably Brenda and Angelica.”

I sighed. I wanted to focus on my grimoire, but we had competing emergencies. We needed to get to the front of the house to meet the other witches in the study. I did not want to tell Brenda about losing the grimoire. It was embarrassing, and I hoped we could resolve it ourselves before bringing in her aid. Assuming she could help at all.

When we were all settled in the small space with windows overlooking the front lawn, Lila and I perched on the rectangular desk adjacent to the windows and facing the door. Brenda and Angelica sat in the chairs in front of it. We got to business.

Brenda looked around the space. The walls were filled with horror movie posters. The only person who really used the room was Ty, so even though the artwork wasn’t to my taste, we let him have it. “I have to admit, this place looks very secure. There was a ward right at the driveway that I couldn’t get through. A guard had to allow us in only after they got approval from some mic they had in their ear. And then there was another ward to get inside the house,” she relayed.

They did not play around. “I guess they added an extra ward last night.”

Brenda humphed. “It’s more than one extra ward. I think I felt about six layers of wards to get in here.”

Lila nodded. “That’d be about right. Billie’s ward, all the fae’s, and we hired another witch to do a ward because my warding is pretty meh.”

“I still believe you’d both be better off with the coven at a safe house.”

I wasn’t surprised Brenda felt that way, but I had hopes that with us finding out the identity of the Ascension lead, it would make the reality of the prophecy a little less likely.

“Any word on who sponsored Tim to get into our coven?” I asked.

Brenda sighed. “Yes. It was a well-respected member from the New Jersey coven. Sadly, that person died, so we couldn’t question them. And we found no other link between them and the Ascension. It doesn’t mean there wasn’t.”

“How’d they die?”

“They say it was of natural causes. She was a 70-year-old woman but very healthy, and you know, for the magic community that’s still young.”

I did know that. Therefore, natural causes seemed suspicious. “Do we think there was really foul play?”

Angelica scoffed. “Of course, it was. None of this was a coincidence. I wouldn’t be surprised if this Tim guy used her to get into the coven and then killed her so we couldn’t ask questions later.”

“Yeah, it’s possible maybe Tim manipulated this person’s mind since that seems to be his specialty.”

Brenda crossed her legs, letting out an irritated breath. “It’s a strong possibility. We are questioning those close to her to see if she mentioned any particular dreams or seeing a similar creature as you’ve described to me. Still, I’m not pleased that none of us detected his aura in our coven.”

“Demons are tricky, and he’s part witch.” I glanced over to Angelica. It hadn’t been that long ago that she was attacked, but she appeared fully healed. Her usual sour face now looked filled with concern. “How are you feeling?”

She lifted a shoulder. “I’m fine. Thanks for asking.”

Lila raised a hand. “I have a basic question. Tim’s supposed to be this powerful demon witch. And we have a traitor in our midst. Wouldn’t he suspect that we’d be able to trace where he’s located if he gave away his identity? I mean, wouldn’t the traitor tell him about what Angelica could do? Why would he touch Billie? Or, hell, anything at work could be traced to him, right? Did we check his office?”

Brenda adjusted in her seat. “We went straight to the hospital as soon as Billie told us about him. Of course, he wasn’t there, and this morning he was supposed to come in to work but was a no-show. I wouldn’t be surprised if he never returned.”

Angelica leaned forward. “And there was no trace of him in his office or apartment on anything I touched. He wiped all traces of himself from everything. If we can’t find anything on you, we can try to find a patient of his to touch. Assuming he didn’t wear gloves. My magic is better with objects than people. This is really a last resort.”

Lila shook her head, mouth twisted to the side. “Ok, so he scrubbed the hospital and his place so you wouldn’t find him. But he didn’t scrub Billie or use gloves. That would have made him careless. Not his M.O., it seems.”

I rubbed my temples, thinking. I knew she was suspicious of his motives for something bigger, but I wondered if it was really that complex. “He didn’t take precautions with me because he wasn’t planning to let me out of that spa. He didn’t let me get away. I fought him off and then he cleaned his mess up.”

“Well, this guy is smart. He’s going to know we’d try to track him this way. We could even learn the identities of some of his followers in a vision. Why would he take such a risk at the spa if he wasn’t prepared?”

Now that was the important question. Assuming I hadn’t killed him, and he just teleported away somehow, him even letting me leave the spa seemed risky for him. Hell, him not even immediately snatching me up was odd. He was either that confident that he would easily get me back and that we wouldn’t learn anything of importance in the meantime, or he didn’t care.

That was scary to think about. If he wasn’t worried, should *we* be worried? What did he have planned for our demise? Were the covens ready for an unknown attack?

“How long were you with that Tim guy?” Angelica asked, interrupting my thoughts.

I blew out a breath, thinking back to yesterday. “Not long, maybe ten minutes. Is that enough for you to get any trace of him?”

She narrowed her violet eyes, thinking. “Not sure. Touch telepathy isn’t easy. Touching an object is easier than a person, though, which is why we checked the locations first. I have to shift through many visions because usually something and someone is not just touched by one person in their time.”

My eyes widened, thinking of all the people that had touched me recently. Namely, Daniel. Not only was I concerned about our sex overlapping Tim’s touch, but how much of our time last night would Angelica see? It would be embarrassing, but we were all adults here.

My face must have given away my concern because Angelica smirked, crossing her arms. “Worried I might see something you don’t want me to see?” She waved a hand in the air before I could respond. “Don’t worry, I’m not a child. I know all about sex. And I won’t tell anyone what I saw.”

I gave her a doubtful look. I wouldn’t be surprised if she ran back to Keisha and Natsu to gossip about the size of my guy’s dicks or their knots. However, options were limited here, and the greater need was getting rid of the Ascension. If she could find one of their locations by touching me, I’d

have to suck it up.

I tilted my head from side to side. “Okay, let’s get to it. Where do you need to touch?”

She stood up. “Where’s a spot that he touched you?”

I pushed my exposed right arm out. Angelica grabbed it and closed her eyes. I could see her eyeballs move rapidly beneath her lids as if she were having a vivid dream. She suddenly looked down at me with a playful smile. “Lucky girl. Aren’t you having fun?”

I gave her a cheesy smile in return before she closed her eyes again. She wasn’t going to embarrass me.

Seconds passed. “I mean, you have a lot of sex,” Angelica observed.

I rolled my eyes. How much was she seeing? Was she getting these visions in order?

“I mean a lot. Do you even have time to go to work?”

Lila cackled, and I cut my eyes at her before glaring back at Angelica. “Okay, move it along. Do you see Tim or not?”

She frowned, gripping my hand tightly. “Ouch,” I grumbled. “What are you seeing?”

She opened her eyes and let go of my hand, taking a step away. Her face in utter shock.

“What did you see, child?” Brenda asked, uncrossing her legs and scooting forward in her chair.

Angelica gulped and looked away, drawing her hand to a thin silver necklace around her neck. “If I’m connected in any way to the object or person, the visions I get that are the strongest are ones that might have significance to me personally. For instance, in my shop, if a friend comes to get a tattoo, I can obtain the memory of that tattooing experience as the first vision that comes to mind when I touch my tools. For those with less of a connection to me, I have to really focus on what I’m looking for in order to find the right vision. In this case, I just focused on Tim, but what popped up, after sifting through a few of Billie’s escapades, was someone familiar. Someplace I know well.”

Lila huffed. “Well, don’t leave us in suspense. Who did you see?”

Angelica focused back on us, her eyes filling with tears, and my stomach instantly twisted. This wasn’t going to be just anyone. “I saw him with Keisha. In her apartment.”

“Damn it,” Brenda said in a soft voice.

“Could he have bespelled her?” Angelica asked with pleading eyes.

I shrugged. I didn’t like the news, but there were too many variables. “So, you saw them together. That doesn’t mean she’s the traitor. Maybe they were hanging out. Could be dating. She could be just as shocked as us.” I didn’t like the girl, but I didn’t want to leap to conclusions.

Angelica shook her head. “I saw them together. And I saw others. She hosted gatherings at her house. People I’ve never seen before. I can also hear in my visions if I concentrate. I couldn’t get a lot, but I made out enough words to know they were planning attacks. The one in particular was the one on our headquarters. As much as I hate to say this, there is no denying what I heard and saw. She has to be under his spell. She wouldn’t let me get hurt like that.”

Brenda was already on her phone talking to someone about finding Keisha. I wanted to talk to her myself and find the truth. Would I even be able to tell if she was under his trance? Maybe Kai could since he was a demon. Or Xander could get her to spill her secrets.

Brenda clicked off the phone and looked over to Angelica, who had her arms wrapped around herself, a distressed look in her eyes. Had she really not known that her bestie was a traitor? How long had Keisha sided with this group? Had it been from the start? Was she in charge of the Baltimore cell?

“Had you noticed anything odd about Keisha? Nothing strange when you touched her?” Brenda inquired.

Angelica quickly shook her head. “I shut off my gift when I don’t need to use it to preserve my sanity. And Keisha’s been normal. I knew she was seeing someone, but she didn’t want to talk about him because she didn’t want to jinx it. That’s not unusual for her. I didn’t think anything of it.”

That was probably true, but I wanted to know why she would join such a group. Life seemed good for her. “Why do you think she joined them? Did she complain about the coven at all?”

Angelica ran a hand through her short pixie cut, squinting her eyes. “She didn’t care for the whole hierarchy thing in the coven. She thought their rules were too strict. Mentioned them being hypocrites. She didn’t like that you got so much attention either. But that’s because she didn’t like how omegas were treated.”

Lila snorted. “She had a funny way of showing she cared.”

Angelica cut her eyes at my friend. “I didn’t say she did. Keshia had her faults, but betraying us, I don’t understand. She loved being a witch. Sure,

she grumbled about our covenant, but let's be honest, everyone does. It's like any governing rule. We complain about our congress or our president. It doesn't mean we plot to overthrow it."

"Some of us do," Lila countered.

"But she wouldn't approve of dark magic. She wouldn't willingly work with a demon."

I was annoyed at Angelica's unwillingness to acknowledge her friend's fault. Then again, we never suspect the people closest to us. I'd probably do the same if it were Lila or Shante. "I never would have thought Chilli would send demons after me or try to kill me. I trusted her with my life, and she was just using me. Sometimes people get desperate and do things we never would have imagined."

I said the words, but still, it didn't sit right with me that Keisha would be a part of this group. I'd known the woman since we were teens. From the outside, she seemed to live a comfortable life. What had I missed that would have catapulted her down this path? Or was she really just an innocent victim of Tim's dream control?

I looked over to Brenda, hoping she might have an idea, but she avoided our eyes, looking out the window in deep thought. Did she know anything about Keisha that would make sense of any of this? Before I could ask her, Brenda's phone rang, and she swiped it to speak. We fell silent, looking at her as we waited patiently for news on Keisha. We had to find her. I wasn't naïve enough to think getting Keisha would mean Tim would back down. I had a strong suspicion he would have no problem letting his followers get hurt or captured. They were all simply casualties of his greater plan of power.

Brenda got off her call and gave a whispered swear before looking at us. "They have her."

"That was quick," I stated.

"Teleportation."

"I'm surprised she didn't go into hiding after Tim gave himself away."

"You're assuming that demon bastard warned his people. Or this could be all a part of his plan because Keisha is insisting that she will only talk to you, Billie."

Definitely a setup. I poked out my bottom lip, gazing out of the window, partially covered by a bright green bush. "Why would she want to talk to me? Tim probably knows how fortified this place is now and wants to get me out or get in through Keisha. Can't others in the covenant break her mind and get

the truth out? Lila, couldn't Xander do it?"

She gave me a wide-eyed shrug. "No idea, but I think it's worth the try."

Brenda tapped her foot, irritation on her face. "She has some kind of magic hold over her mind. It's not her doing. He clearly has some demonic spell on her. We have to break it, and I have no idea how long that would take. Plus, I think there is more to this, which is why you aren't going. Stay put here." She pointed to Lila. "Get your fae friend, and let's go. We are going to break this spell on Keisha, find these Ascension fools, and stop this once and for all."

Brenda seemed very sure of herself. I, on the other hand, couldn't ignore the queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Something wasn't right, and I had a bad feeling I'd soon find out.

CHAPTER 23



BILLIE

Since Xander had to go with Lila to question Keisha, I couldn't use him to help me in my quest for the grimoire. So I did it the old-fashioned way and asked everyone on the premises. I tried to use a lie detector spell I found on the coven database, but I'd never tried it before, so I wasn't sure if it was strong enough. No one admitted to knowing where it was, including my guys, who I didn't really suspect. However, a nagging thought played at the back of my head all day.

The betrayal.

Besides me, only the guys knew exactly where that grimoire was located. No one else in the last 24 hours would have a need to come up to the top floor or even the floor below except the guys. Still, wouldn't I feel their guilt from doing such a thing? Or some type of strong negative emotion? I didn't know the answer to that. All I knew was that whatever happened to it, the grimoire was probably in the worst possible hands.

Screw my life.

It was almost evening, and still Keisha did not break. Xander was not able to get through the demonic magic. Even Kai tried and failed. Angelica's touch did not work. Shante's mind healing did nothing. This Tim guy was stronger than I anticipated. I didn't think she was going to talk, and even if she did, I wouldn't be surprised if all the cells changed their location by the time we got there. By now, someone had to know she was compromised if they couldn't reach her.

I paced back and forth in the living area, biting my thumbnail as I considered our options. None of them were of any use.

"They should just kill her," Lance muttered. He slouched back on the

couch, looking at the evening news.

I paused my pacing, gaping at him. “What?”

“She’s not breaking. Get rid of her. You could get her arrested, but they would need proof that she was connected to the group, and last I checked, only certain magic-using testimony had any weight in court. A good attorney could easily get her off. Then she’d be back in the street, helping this memnock demon again. If you killed her, at least a necromancer could bring her back and get the truth out of her since she’d be under their control.”

I couldn’t argue with his logic. Any Ascension or cohorts that were killed in the past were useless. Either the brain was too damaged in their death, or they didn’t have much information to share. We finally had someone who would know something. I just didn’t like the idea of killing someone unless it was in self-defense. “The coven can detain her indefinitely.”

Lance scrunched his face, crossing his arms. “Sounds like a drain on resources to...” Lance trailed off and sat up, staring past me to the hallway leading to the front. “I think they’re back.”

I hadn’t heard the door open, but Lance had amazing hearing, so I wasn’t surprised he was already in the know. Moments later, Lila, Xander, Brenda, Shante, and Kai appeared.

“I take it since you’re all back, still no luck?” I asked.

Brenda shook her head. “The spell blocks us from forcing her to tell us what she knows or us pulling it out of her. The only way we can get anything is if she agrees to tell us.”

Xander scratched his head, silver eyes glinting in weariness. “Her mind is a jumbled mess. We put her to sleep, thinking it might be easier for me to dig through it. Even in her dreams, she had blocks up. But not totally. We pieced together some clues, and we’ve got people out now following those leads that might get us to cells. So, this hasn’t been a total waste.”

Brenda gave a curt nod in agreement. “But we’re going to need you, Billie.”

I heard Lance growl behind me, clearly not a fan of that idea. Kai stepped forward, raising a hand toward Lance. “Don’t worry, wolfie. We aren’t taking Billie out of here, and we aren’t bringing Keshia into the house. We have her at the end of the property, right in front of the ward. Billie can stand on the protected side and still talk to her. We’ll all be there.”

Ty walked toward them from the hallway. “What about FaceTiming her?”

Kai shrugged. “We offered that. She wants to see her in person.”

What could she gain by seeing me in person if I was still behind a ward? It was almost the same as doing a video call. “Why?” I asked.

Shante lifted a shoulder, eyes tired. “From what I could make out when I tried to heal her mind, there’s a desperation in her. She wants to see you hurt. Whatever she’s going to say, she wants that reaction in person.”

What could she possibly say that would hurt me? Maybe I didn’t want to know. However, I had to help my coven. “What information do you need?”

“We want the names of those following Tim. Especially if they are in our coven,” Brenda replied. “Xander has gathered enough from her mind to know that Keisha is a high-ranking follower, so she would know some important members. She would also know what their next plan of attack would be.”

“She tells us this information, and they might change their plans.”

“Maybe. But we can also try to strike a deal with her. Get her to work for us, but our window is closing the longer we detain her.”

I thought it all was a long shot, but we didn’t have much else to go on. “Let’s go.”

No one argued with my decision, and the group headed to the backyard, joined by Daniel and some guards. Several guards stood around the area, which consisted of the pool in the center, a pool house to the right, and a patio lounging area, complete with a fire pit off to the left. Beyond the pool area were grass and trees and a wooden fence that surrounded the whole property. At the very center of the back fence, Keisha and our coven members stood, the fence door open so that we could see them. She was bound, wrists in cuffs in front of her. Two coven members stood on either side of her, holding onto her arms. I also had no doubt she was bound by magic.

She looked at me with arrogant disdain as if I were beneath her. She didn’t speak, just glared.

I lifted my shoulders, utterly confused. “Why did you want to talk to me? And why are you looking at me like I’m the one who caught you? You did this to yourself.”

Keisha twisted her lips, looking away. “You’re so clueless. You always have been. Tim came to you with a chance to make a difference, and you ran from it.”

“Of course, I did. Why the hell didn’t you?”

“Not all of us had it easy like you. Not all of us had a father that kept the dark side of this fucked up coven from us. You think what Chilli did to you

was unique? If she succeeded, do you think anyone would have stepped in to help you?"

Before her attack, I actually would have. However, Chilli told me how she'd been forced into marriage for power. My eyes then started to open regarding some of the tactics the coven used. Still, what would make Keisha so disgruntled that she'd turn on her own? Hurt her friends? Follow a demon? "So, you hate the coven so much you risk almost killing your best friend?"

Keisha shook her head. "Some sacrifices had to be made, but I didn't have the power to stop that attack. Even for her."

"What happened to you?"

She looked around at the many faces eyeing her. I could see a flash of pain in her eyes. Whatever it was, she wasn't going to say it in front of this big of an audience. However, it wasn't what I needed to know anyway. I needed intel. "How'd you go undetected? Everyone in the coven was questioned if we knew anything about Ascension and the attacks."

"A mind-locking spell. Our secrets were even hidden from us until we heard a special word, and then we went into action."

I frowned. I'd never heard of a magic like that. "Like you were hypnotized?"

She lifted her hands and looked at her nails as if bored. "In a sense. We'd be aware of the plans and then get bespelled until it was time."

"Was this by other coven members?"

She shook her head. "No, it was by witches not in the coven. Or by demons. Other fae. Those off the grid with less to lose if caught."

"So, how do you remember anything now?"

She pressed her lips tightly together and gave Xander the stinkiest of stink eyes.

He waved at her with a fang-baring grin. "Yeah, I couldn't break her mind completely, but, like I said earlier, I got a few things out of her."

I wanted to ask if there were people in the group who were magically hypnotized into following against their will, but we could flush that out later. One thing I knew, Keisha was not one of those people. Her attitude showed that she had willingly joined this group, so she wouldn't get any sympathy from me.

"Is anyone else in our coven part of your group?" I pressed.

Her face took on the look of confidence again, despite her predicament. "A few in the east coast. "

“Give me names. You do that, and they won’t kill you.” I looked to Brenda. “Right?”

Brenda gave a curt nod.

Keisha laughed. “I’m not afraid of dying. I took the risk when I joined the Ascension.”

“So, are you even planning to give me any information on where we can find your leader?”

Keisha ignored me and looked to Brenda. “I want more than just a promise not to kill me. I don’t want to rot in some coven cell for the rest of my life either.”

Brenda narrowed her eyes at the woman. I could practically feel the heat of her magic brimming around her. It was safe to say that the older witch was pissed. “What is it that you want?”

Keisha gave her a closed-lipped smile that failed to reach her eyes. Whatever deal she was trying to make, I didn’t think it was worth it. “Send me away. I can leave the country. Never to return. To wherever you choose. You can even keep me under observation for the rest of my days.”

That seemed like too good a deal. Sure, she’d be giving up her business and family and friends, but she’d still be free to move about to a degree. And who wanted to expend the resources to keep her under observation? Even if she was magically banished, she could still stir up trouble. Hell, she could start her own group to terrorize a coven overseas.

I looked over to Brenda, who seemed to be pondering that. “What will you tell us in return? And, of course, we’d have to verify it and capture whoever you named before we offer you the deal. We can do a contract spell to make sure both sides do what they agree to,” she replied.

I really didn’t like this deal. There had to be another option, but my mind wasn’t thinking of one quickly enough.

Keisha’s smile grew. “I can give you names of some of the members I can remember from that fae’s mind invasion. I can also give you some cell locations. I don’t, however, know where Tim resides. And I don’t know the next planned attack. But I have a date in my head that might mean something.”

Brenda let out a breath and took her phone out of her pocket. “Give me a minute.” She then walked a distance away to have a conversation with who I assumed was another coven leader.

I shook my head slowly. “How did Tim even find you?”

Keisha glanced back at me, eyes still full of contempt. Seriously, had I wronged her in a past life, because I felt like I didn't deserve all this hate? "He came to me in a dream."

"As a monster?"

She furrowed her brows in confusion. "No. What are you talking about?"

"Do you even know what he looks like in his non-human form?"

She straightened up. "I don't care what he looks like. Only what he stands for."

"Do you know he wants to make me his mate? You hate me. You can't tell me you'd want to follow him with me at his side."

She gritted her teeth. "I'm willing to make that sacrifice."

Damn, she really believed in that demon. What was he saying to her in the dream world that converted her? Was it possible that maybe she was tricked into believing this was all her own choice?

Brenda returned with a stern look on her face that I couldn't read. "You have a deal. We will decide where you go. Now talk."

Keisha made a tsk-tsk noise. "Not without that contract spell."

Brenda looked heavenward. "We'll need to mix blood for that."

Keisha shrugged. "I have time."

Brenda huffed and stepped through the ward. It was made so we could leave easily, but she wouldn't be able to get back through without us opening the ward again for her.

Before our eyes, Brenda conjured a small bowl and a knife. She cut her palm, and we watched as her blood dripped into the small wooden bowl. She waved her hand over the knife, and it was clean again. She then walked to Keshia and cut her hand as well, moving the bowl under the woman's hand. Lowering her head, Brenda whispered a binding contract spell. With this, she would have to honor the deal she made with Keisha and vice versa. If either breached or lied, they would automatically drop dead. Needless to say, contract spells were not too popular because even good faith could lead to an unintended breach, and then you were done.

Keisha shivered with an oddly-placed giggle. I guess the magic tickled.

Something continued to gnaw at me. All this time, I expected a big mic drop regarding why the hell I needed to be here. So far, all of this could have been done before I showed up. "Why did I have to be here?"

Keisha looked up to the sky, shaking her head. "Right, I almost forgot. I guess I can start with the sharing of information. Did you know one of your

guys is betraying you? Care to guess who?”

My insides froze, throat tightened. How did she know about the prophecy? I looked over to Lila, who glanced back at me with wide eyes. I then stole a glance at Brenda, who had paused her chanting.

Keisha giggled again. “Oh, the look on your face, Billie. It’s going to hurt to know you’re tied to such a betrayer forever.”

I gritted my teeth, unable to breathe. I didn’t have time for her verbal poking. “Bitch, who is it?”

She feigned surprise, raising her cuffed wrists to her chest. “Well, that’s not³/₄”

I heard a snap of fingers to my left, and instantly, Keisha disappeared, leaving the two guards who were holding her in surprise.

I took a step forward, confused. “Where the hell did she go? I thought she was warded. She couldn’t have used magic to escape.”

“It’s not possible,” Brenda exclaimed. “She wasn’t that strong.”

Kai, standing off to my right, spun around as if expecting Keisha to show up behind us. “Maybe Tim got her out.”

That was a strong possibility, but he could have done so earlier if that was the case, and Brenda hadn’t even finished the contracting spell to protect Keisha. No, I’d heard something before she disappeared.

That snap. It was so close. I looked to my left, and Daniel was right there in front of me. His eyes were now fae blue, and there was a trace of sorrow in them.

No.

Before I could say anything, he quickly grabbed my wrist and snapped again. I struggled to get away and reached for Kai, who was moving toward us, but it was as if it was all in slow motion. And then our surroundings faded into a white nothingness.

CHAPTER 24



BILLIE

The white mist surrounding us soon disappeared, and I could see I was now standing in a darkly lit living room. The walls were painted a somber gray, and rows of bookshelves filled the wall directly across from us, except for a stone fireplace in the middle and a flat-screen TV above it. A large, black leather U-shaped sectional sat in the middle of the carpeted space, and a rectangular glass coffee stood in front of it. Off to the right of the couch were sliding glass doors that led to a deck.

Honestly, I didn't really care about the surroundings. I was more concerned with where the hell I was and why Daniel did this. I tore my wrist from his grasp, and this time he let me go. I wanted to spit, kick, fight. Confusion and rage locked my mind, burning my insides. Daniel couldn't have betrayed us. He was our leader. He wouldn't do this.

Daniel remained still, his shoulders slumped, arms hanging limply by his side. However, his face was unreadable. Emotionless. It pissed me off. "Explain," I demanded.

He remained silent.

"Speak!"

He did not, which only angered me further. He had betrayed us and didn't even have anything to say for it. My heart felt like it had stopped. It was broken. Unfixable. I wanted to rage out. Throw the closest thing to me. He had been the glue for us. The one so sure that I was right for the pack. The one who helped the others find their way. He had been so considerate of my feelings even in his rut. He protected us. This wasn't right. I needed to understand.

I needed the bond. Maybe I could reach the guys, and they could locate

me like last time. Help Daniel. However, when I called out to them in my bond, there was only radio silence. I couldn't even feel them in my chest like I normally did when I opened our bonds. The only tether I could pick out was Daniel's, and it was pulling tightly inside me. It was almost uncomfortable, like a pulled muscle. I rubbed at my chest, and Daniel mimicked the motion, his face still dull. I wondered if he was feeling the same way.

"Why don't I have the bond with the others? Did you do this?" I questioned.

He didn't respond.

I slapped his chest with both my hands. "Talk to me!" I screamed. I kept hitting him and hitting him as if the contact would knock sense into him. "How long? How long have you been helping that monster? What are you getting out of this?"

He continued to give no answers. He just let me attack without defending himself. He didn't even raise his arms. It was maddening. What was wrong with him?

I kept hitting until I lost energy. It was like fighting a statue at this point. I rested my forehead on his chest, feeling utterly lost and broken. The betrayal stung. Not knowing why, hurt more. I refused to believe Daniel would do this for selfish reasons. What could he have gotten from working with Tim? He'd taken me away. Away from the others. Blocked our bond. Why would he do that to his own pack? "Did Tim do this to you? Is he controlling you?"

Daniel remained frozen, but that had to be the answer. It was the only thing that made sense.

"Aww, this is very sad," came a male voice from behind me.

I moved away from Daniel and turned to see Tim standing at the entrance to the living room. Keisha standing smugly by his side.

I was in such shock at the situation. It took everything in my power not to attack them with my magic. I had to think smart. I needed answers. I needed Daniel fixed.

Sensing my confusion, Tim continued speaking. "I bet you're all sorts of confused. Well, let me clear some things up for you. Your alpha is under my control. I'm actually surprised I got so lucky, considering they are magic beings *and* alphas. They have unique weaknesses."

"Told you your guys weren't that great," Keisha muttered, hands on her hips.

I wanted to race over to her and elbow her to the chin. I understood why

they thought my pack was weak. We had our issues, but we were still strong. It just meant we had to rely on each other even more. And when we bonded, our powers were amazing. There was no denying we'd all gotten noticeably stronger because of our connection.

But out of all the guys, Daniel was the one who hated to rely on others. He took being a leader seriously, which meant he didn't want to ask anyone for help. Needing help didn't make one less of a leader, because he wasn't supposed to be going through this crazy world alone. We were a team.

I looked at his blank face, and my chest tightened. I wouldn't blame him for this. I was sure he didn't even know he was being controlled. "Why did you even need him?"

Tim nodded, moving to the couch and taking a seat. Keisha remained by the entrance to the living room, leaning against the wall. "I did warn you that if you denied me, your friends could be affected, but that wasn't a total truth. I might have slightly misled you into thinking you were the focus of everything."

I squinted my eyes. If I wasn't his focus, then what did he want with my pack? "You were never going to leave the guys alone."

He crossed a leg over a knee, looking comfortable on the plush couch. Was this his home? If only I could connect with my guys. We could send everyone here. Take him out. He was the lead. Maybe everything would crumble if he died. "I'm sorry, but no. Oh, and before I forget, thanks for getting me that grimoire last night, Danny."

I didn't even want to look at him. Daniel had probably gotten my grimoire and teleported to Tim and then back home before anyone even noticed. I felt like vomiting.

"See, I've been working on your pack for years. I needed the pack, which included you. My kind thrives on magic, and the five of you were full of it, like an unlimited battery. You would be my ticket to power and to one day grow the almost totally lost numbers of my kind. All I needed was you as my claimed omega and the control of your pack lead, then I could easily control your pack. With you all and now this grimoire, I'd gain enough power to control the coven." He tossed his hands out to the side, casually shrugging. "So your little attack at the spa did nothing but delay the inevitable. It's better for both of us if you don't fight me on being claimed, and I tried to make it your choice yesterday. I thought I was being quite kind about it all, if we're being honest."

A cold chill raced down my spine. I could not be a pawn, and I could not betray my coven. “How did you even know about us? We haven’t been together for years.”

He wagged an index finger at me, a relaxed smile on his lips. “I can practically see the wheels turning in your head. Ok, let me break it down for you. Demons have seers, just like every other group. When my kind went all but extinct, we relied on future tellers to help us define our path back to greatness. We knew, with our low numbers, that we could not do it alone. We also knew we could not do it openly. Witches are the most powerful beings, and they have high numbers. So, taking over powerful covens and getting to the high-ranking priestess was always the goal. But to get power, we had to have power. Our seer showed us the five of you. You would help us return to greatness. I don’t know why your pack in particular. Maybe it’s the unique dynamic of so many different paranormal kinds. That’s not common. Maybe it’s power level.”

I frowned, taking a step back but having no clue where I would go. I didn’t even know where I was at the moment. None of this made sense. Everyone used seers or prophets. Knowing the future was a high demand. Always was. So, it was no surprise that Tim had based his whole plan on a vision. What bothered me was that out of all the seers that Daniel and the witches had, no one else knew that the memnocks would use us. There was the vague premonition that one of the guys would betray the coven, but at the same time, telling us we should be together. Unless...my eyes widened, and absolute horror shook my core. Could the seers have been misled? “Demons tricked the seers to force us together, didn’t they?”

Tim straightened up, his green eyes glowing with morbid delight. “You are a smart one, aren’t you? Yes, we manipulated, for lack of a better word, the visions told to Daniel’s pack and your coven. Made it so you five were meant to be together. It helped push things along quicker.”

My knees weakened. All this time, I had relied so heavily on my connection to the guys being something that was fate. We were meant to be. They’d done the same. They had invested time and effort into wooing me. Protecting me. My father hadn’t even considered another pack in any real way because of what I now knew was a fake vision. The only real one about us was what the memnocks had seen and what the witches had learned regarding the possible betrayal. Except maybe it wouldn’t be one person from the pack, it would be all of us.

Were we really not supposed to be together? Was Chilli right? No. These men were kind and protective. We had chemistry. I couldn't imagine any other pack being a better fit. However, maybe that was the point. I had been led into thinking they were supposed to be with me, and now my mind was convinced it was true. But did that mean we shouldn't be together?

No, this was not the time to doubt them. Now, I was grateful my bond with the others was muted. I wasn't sure if Daniel somehow had that power as a leader or a fae, but it meant that whatever evilness Tim tried to spread to me, it wouldn't go to the others as long as I kept the bond closed. I just needed to stop his control over Daniel and prevent him from controlling me. Something told me if he could control me, he would have. He was using Daniel to make me give in.

Tim tilted his head, face relaxed in false empathy. "I know it hurts to hear this. But wait, there's more."

How could there fucking be more? I hated this guy so much. I needed to kill him. However, I knew better than to think my magic could cut him off in one go. It clearly hadn't back at the spa. Also, if he was willing to talk, I needed to hear as much as I could. There would probably be information I could use to share with the coven and take down his group. Then I would kill him. "What else?" I said in a tight voice.

His green eyes flashed red. He was taking too much joy in this. "We also made things happen to remove any roadblocks, such as killing the first omega. She was a useless human. The visions showed you, and we certainly weren't going to wait forever for her to die naturally. We'd waited long enough. We also gave your father that supernatural cancer. We needed you isolated, fully invested. He would have been a problem later. Although he pushed you together, he would have paid too much attention to your pack. We needed that grimoire. Also, he would have known about Daniel. I'm still surprised no one else did."

My father. He'd killed my father. My mind went blank, and blind fury took over. I shot out my hands and shouted a spell of destruction. A hole appeared in his stomach, and very human-looking blood and guts poured out. He grabbed his stomach, looking up at me with wild, now-red eyes. Had he not expected me to react with violence? For someone he thought was so powerful, he treated me like I was weak. He'd killed my father. He'd killed Jocelyn. I didn't care anymore about what else he had to say. I just needed him to die.

Only, he didn't die. Instead, he laughed, spitting out blood as he chuckled. "Oh, what a power," he exclaimed though his bloody mouth.

What felt like a truck hit me from my left side, and I was thrown across the room to the sliding glass doors, only they were strong enough that I did not shatter them. Instead, I dropped to the floor like a rag doll. Keisha walked over to me, hands out in my direction as she muttered a warding spell. My body locked up, and I was paralyzed. I glanced over to Daniel, but he remained where he was from the beginning. However, I noticed his hands were balled into fists. He was trying to fight the hold. There was hope.

I looked over to Tim, who was now patting his stomach. The injury was closing before my eyes. Demons were powerful, but how could he rejuvenate that fast? Why hadn't my spell killed him or at least hurt him more? Was it his witch half that had amped up his power? It was the most probable answer. That and the fact that he was a damn alpha. The piece of shit would be challenging to kill, but I would magic him full of holes if I had to.

"See, this is why we wanted you," he continued, hands still on his stomach. His voice sounded slightly breathless as I was sure he was weak and in pain but not down for the count, unfortunately. "You are so strong. I need your power. It would be nice if you could be my omega. We can run your pack, your coven, and the world together."

"You think my coven is going to follow you? Even if you control my pack, that won't be enough."

Tim looked up at me, red eyes upsettingly joyful despite his injury. "Sometimes you don't need the numbers. Sometimes you just need the power. As my fallback, if you and your pack don't follow me, I can still use your magic. I can extract it. And then I can get the ruling stone and control all witch kind."

Extract my power? What was he talking about? We needed to get out of here. I looked back to Daniel, his hand was shaking now. Our bond was still there. I could feel it strong. Despite Tim's control, it didn't beat our mate bond. I pushed my magic into the bond, but I needed to buy us time. I had to keep Tim talking. "What do you mean you extract power?"

"We collect magical beings and take their power, you idiot," Keisha replied in a harsh tone.

Ah, that was the last piece of the puzzle I had wondered about. What were they doing with those kidnapped beings with magic? This was the reason the Prinaths had taken Lila. "And how do you do that, bitch?"

Keisha kicked me in my knee, and I gritted my teeth. I was frozen, but I could still feel. I was going to gut-punch the hell out of her when I got free. For now, I wasn't fighting her hold on me on purpose. I needed to focus my strength on Daniel and breaking Tim's hold over him.

Tim tsk-tsked, remaining seated as if he were just watching a show. "I have some demons and witches at my service who possess the ability to strip power and give it to someone else. It can give one power or enhance it."

I already had a good idea of the answer to my next question, but I had to kill some time. "What happens to the people whose power gets stripped?"

He raised a shoulder, a bored look on his face. "We make them work for us, aid the cause. Those who can't be controlled or rendered useless we dispose of."

I knew what that meant. He killed them. "You're a monster."

Billie, get out of here! Daniel's voice rang in my head.

Had he broken out of Tim's grip? I didn't think looking at him at that moment was smart, as I didn't want to give away what was happening. No, I had to act fast. No more questions. No more resistance. I was ready to kill and find a way to rescue my alpha.

CHAPTER 25



BILLIE

I looked up at Keisha, who was busy gazing at Tim instead of me. I didn't know her warding magic level, but I felt confident enough in mine that I could get out of it.

"So, what's it going to be, omega? Are you willing to be claimed by me?" Tim asked, interrupting my thoughts.

I could still answer him, while concentrating my power to break the ward. Multitasking was my specialty, even with magic. "Absolutely not."

Tim narrowed his eyes, leaning forward and resting his forearms on his thighs. He appeared fully healed. His shirt was ruined, but the skin where I'd put a hole in him was just bruised-looking now. "You do realize that if you don't comply, I can force you. Although, the idea of that is not my preference. In the alternative, I can just strip you of your powers. And you don't need to be conscious for that."

The ward cracked at that exact moment, thank the heavens. I jumped up and pushed a magic blast out of the sliding glass doors. Without looking anywhere else, I took off and jumped through the hole. I crashed onto the hardwood of the deck but quickly got to my feet. Chancing a glance behind me, I saw Daniel racing toward Tim, who was now standing.

"After her!" Tim shouted to Keisha just as Daniel tackled him to the ground.

I took off down the deck steps. I wanted to help Daniel, but I needed to get rid of Keisha first. And if Daniel wasn't fully in control, I could get out and find the others. I was strong, but Tim's recovery from my magic told me I wasn't strong enough to defeat him in my current state, blocked from the others. Once I got to the ground level, I ran across the grassy lawn. I looked

to my right and left. We were in a regular house with woods as our backyard. There were several other houses not too far away from this one, so it wasn't exactly a hide out. That didn't mean there wasn't some sort of cloaking magic over it, so neighbors didn't get too neighborly.

"You're not getting away, bitch!" Keisha yelled behind me.

I turned around and pounded my fists together in front of me, forcing my magic with my movements along with another blasting spell. Keisha flew backwards, hitting the deck stairs. Before she could get up, I tossed a binding spell her way, locking her arms to her side and legs together. "I don't want to have to kill you, but I will."

She shouted out a spell of fire, but I was ready for her, having covered myself in a ward. The ball of fire hit an invisible wall and died down to a spark before disappearing. "Did you really just try to set me on fire? Why do you hate me so much?"

She snarled, glaring up at me. "Are you serious right now?"

"Yes, before I kill you, I want to know why you hate me so much. I thought you wanted to see me in person to see my devastation when I found out Daniel betrayed me. However, now I know it's so he could get you out of being caught. So, what's the real deal with you and me?"

I knew it wasn't great timing, but I figured I wouldn't have another opportunity because I wasn't seeing a way out where she survived. If I was going to kill her, I didn't want any questions left.

She sighed, struggling against her magic bonds and failing. "You are so exhausting. I would kill you right now, but I know Tim doesn't want that. He really thinks you'd be a good mate. Well, more like he just wants your uterus to pump out more demons. Fine. You want the truth? Here it goes. The coven is full of hypocritical assholes who only want to listen to themselves. They make devastating decisions and hide behind their self-righteousness. Your father was one of those people. I'm glad he's dead."

I momentarily lost my mind because the next thing I knew, I was running at her, screaming and punching her in the face. Her head twisted to the side, and she moved her jaw from left to right. I could already see her lip was split from my contact. Good. "You don't talk about my father. He was a good man. He didn't let innocent people get stripped of their powers and killed."

She scoffed. "Oh, please. He did the same shit. The coven has their way of punishment through magic. They sentence people to fates worse than regular human systems. Acting like magic is foolproof. You know now that

isn't true. That magic can be manipulated. My father was put to death by coven leadership, which included your father. He was falsely accused of murdering a child for a dark spell. But he was framed with magic, and no one would believe my mother when she tried to tell them."

I frowned. I vaguely remembered hearing rumors about her father being sentenced for a crime, but I didn't know much of the details. We were in third grade at the time it all went down. Keisha and her mother and brother went away for a while. When she returned, when I was in the seventh grade, her mother was remarried.

"My father was set to become a great leader. He was right up there with your father and Chilli and Brenda and the rest. And someone wanted to remove him from the competition. Maybe it was your father. All I know is that they sentenced him to death and left my family to rot. My mother wasn't a powerful witch. She had low-level magic and was a housewife. We were homeless for a while, staying in scary shelters. Sometimes in our car. She worked as hard as she could as a waitress, but it wasn't enough. I went from living in a large home with a backyard and my own room to a one-bedroom apartment in a horrible neighborhood. Our lives were miserable. Then she had got married to some alcoholic asshole, so we'd be taken care of. Only he was an abusive monster. Our lives were miserable. He beat us for any and everything. Nearly killed my mother. There were nights I had to stay at Angelica's or Natsu's just to get away from it all, especially after my brother left for the army."

I hadn't known any of this. I could very much understand why she hated the coven. If she truly believed her father was innocent, which I wasn't convinced he was based on things I'd heard, then it would make sense she would have this vendetta.

"And there you were," she continued. "Living your best life. Thriving. You had the life I should have had. The covens claim to help other witches in need, but they, your father, never helped us despite knowing we were being abused."

I felt conflicted. I understood her feelings. I had a hard time believing my father would turn his back on her family like that if he knew they were suffering. He'd all but taken Lila in. He was a caring man. I had to believe that he just didn't know. However, despite the injustices she had endured, I also couldn't condone what she'd done as a result of her pain. She hurt innocent people who had nothing to do with her family circumstances. She

was siding with an evil demon who wanted to open the door to all demon-kind. None of that was okay. "I'm sorry you went through all of that."

Her face was now a mask of blazing anger. It was so hate-filled that my insides ran cold. "I don't want your pity. I just want you to die," she shouted.

She broke free of my locking spell and shot up on her feet. I wasn't surprised. Locking spells weren't my specialty, and I was also holding up a ward over myself, so it wasn't strong. I'd been here before. Fighting with a ward up wasn't possible, and we'd reach a stalemate if the wards didn't break. It was a time suck, and I needed to help Daniel.

She began muttering as she walked my way. I really didn't want to kill her. Others would understand it was self-defense, but I hated fighting. I wanted to just subdue her. "Listen, you want me dead, but that demon in there won't let you. So, we have a problem. I can kill you, but you can't kill me. Just turn yourself in. You still have your deal with Brenda, and she can't go back on it."

A brain-wracking dizziness swept over me, my vision doubling. I held out my hands in front of me, stumbling to the side. What the hell was going on? Invisible pressure from all sides brought me to my knees. I felt like I was being sucked into a vacuum, only I wasn't moving. My ears popped, and my breath caught short.

Keisha smiled as she walked in my direction. "I realize you think you're the baddest bitch around because you defeated Chilli, but you never knew too much about me. I sell clothes, but I also have a power that allows me to strip the magic from others. My father had it too, which I'm sure was very threatening to your father. Even your ward won't protect you."

I clutched at my chest. I was weakening by the second. I shouted out the death spell my father taught me. Not just anyone could get the spell to work, and I had much success with it in the past. It had at least damaged Tim. It should have killed Keisha. If it wasn't working now, it was because my powers were too weak. How the hell was she able to get through my ward to weaken me? Was her magic-stripping power that strong?

"Do you think Tim would come all this way for just anyone? I've been helping him gain power," she exclaimed, a crazed look on her face. "I'm the strong one. No one ever bothered to care about us because of my father. They looked down on us like we were useless. They never cared what we could do. They'll learn now."

Panic gripped me. I couldn't be without my power. Sure, I still knew how

to practice medicine without it, but being a witch was part of who I was, and I couldn't let her take that away. I strengthened my ward and stood up; my energy was waning, but not to the point that I couldn't move physically. Even without magic, I was mobile, and I didn't have time to waste.

I ran to the nearest iron patio chair under the deck and picked it up. Taking it with me, I moved in her direction, hurling the chair at her. She was so focused on her spell that she didn't bat or duck from the chair in time, and it hit her in the stomach, stopping her chanting. Wasting no time, I tackled her to the ground and began to pummel her like a woman possessed. She screamed and swung up at me, but I batted her hands away. I needed to do something drastic, knowing it would be my last-ditch effort at taking her down before my powers were totally swiped. I pressed my fingers into her eye sockets and began to push down. She cried with such a loud shriek I thought my eardrums would burst.

A sudden wind lifted me up and tossed me across the yard away from her, landing me on my butt. She'd used an attack spell. Keisha sat up and pushed her hands back out, continuing her spell. I shouted out a fire spell, but only a spark of light lit the ground around her. Damn it, I was tapped out. And if she had my magic, she wouldn't need to keep me alive. I tried again to shout every spell I could.

Standing up, I intended to run at her again, only something blurry appeared behind Keisha, giving me pause. The blurry figure soon became defined and clear until I saw Daniel standing there, blue eyes ablaze in a white-hot fire and what appeared to be a fire poker in his hand. He wasted no time, stabbing the poker into Keisha's back until it came out of her chest. She was magic, but she was not immortal, and that was a fatal wound. He retracted the poker, wringing it of her blood and gore.

She looked down at her now bloody chest, eyes wide with silent surprise. She then looked back up at me and coughed out thick dark blood. "Bitch," she whispered before falling forward, dead.

I looked back to Daniel. He didn't look so great. He held onto his side, and I assumed he had a broken rib. His shirt was slashed and bloodied across the chest and arms. His face was covered in blood and newly forming bruises, and he moved with a limp. Clearly his fight with Tim hadn't been easy but I was hopeful it was all over now.

I began to move toward him, but he lifted a hand to stop me. "Don't come. Leave. I'm still under his control. This is just a break, and it's hard for

me to keep. He's only down for a minute, but he'll recover quickly. You know that," he said in a hoarse voice.

Gloom overtook me. I really wanted that asshole demon to be dead. I shook my head. "I can't leave you."

He sighed. "You have to, princess. And your powers are going to come back now that she's dead. So just go. I can't hold off much longer."

Already I could feel myself strengthening, a tingling coolness tickling every nerve in my body. I could at least heal him. However, I also knew that it would all be for nothing if we couldn't kill Tim, and I needed my boost. I needed my guys.

I gave Daniel a curt nod. "I'm coming back. So don't die."

Daniel gave me a weak smile. "K."

It was hardly reassuring. I felt sick. Every part of me wanted to grab him and take off together, but I knew that wasn't going to work. I had to be smart. Not emotional. So, against the wishes of my aching heart, I turned to run off beyond the wooden fence and hopefully to reinforcements.

CHAPTER 26



BILLIE

*R*unning in the woods, I still had no clue where I was, but I couldn't stop. My heart felt like it was about to burst in my chest, and I cursed myself for not doing more cardio.

And then I felt it.

A tug at the center of my stomach. Irritating. I wanted to scratch at my skin, but I knew that wouldn't help. Suddenly, I was propelled into the air once more, only I was flying backwards to an unknown destination. Fortunately, not into any trees. However, I was beginning to have a clue what was happening. I was being reeled in like a fish back to the memnock demon.

Moments later, I was dropped down on my ass, yet again, onto the backyard grass. I expected to see Tim when I looked up, but to my disappointed surprise, I was now in front of Daniel again, his hand outstretched. His blue eyes had dimmed. He was no longer in control. Tim stood behind him, looking just as banged up as Daniel, and I took only a millisecond of pleasure that Daniel was able to hurt him. However, it hadn't been enough.

"You have everybody doing your dirty work for you, I see!" I shouted.

Tim smirked, blood caked at the corner of his lips. "Why fight when I can move the puppets around? You have been more of a problem than I anticipated. I really wanted to claim you, but I'd rather just subdue you and take your powers. I am not pleased that Keisha's dead, but I have more where she came from. And turns out, I have a window to snatch your powers even if you're dead. It just has to be within five minutes. That's easy, as my demons can teleport here in seconds. You really are more trouble than you're worth." He looked over to Daniel. "While I summon them, Daniel, kill her." He

snapped his fingers, and a jagged dagger appeared in his hand. “With this. I want to see the blood and then your devastated look when you find out you brutally killed your omega. It’s only fair since you killed my witch.”

Daniel obediently took the blade, not seeming conflicted in the slightest. His face was still a dull, blank mask. With my powers returned, I pushed out my magic to stop him. He abruptly stumbled back, as if being slammed into an invisible wall.

He punched his fist into the wall of my ward, and I swear I could see it become translucent and rattle. Damn, he was strong. He was going to break my magical containment. Still, I didn’t want to hurt him. I didn’t want to die either, so I was left in a difficult spot. Running seemed fruitless since apparently, Daniel could snatch me back, and I was still blocked from the guys. I needed to get back into his head.

I looked up to his face, and what I saw shook me. His face was twisted in a look of absolute pain. Tears streamed down his cheeks, brows scrunched, jaw clenched tightly. With each punch against my magic, his breath caught. He didn’t want to do this. He was fighting the control. I could only imagine how much he was suffering internally. If he got through this ward. If he killed me, he would never recover. This much I knew. I also knew that if I had to kill him to survive, it would break me. I wasn’t willing to lose him. He was my rock. My protector. My alpha.

Daniel, you don’t want to hurt me. You don’t want to do any of this. You are strong. You can break his control. I telepathically cried out to him.

He kept pounding at my ward, only slowing slightly. Had I broken through? I touched my ward, pushing my magic through and hoping it would reach out to him. Although, I wasn’t sure since most of the time magic did not break through wards, even protective ones. Still, we had a bond that I was hoping would trump that.

Billie? His voice rang in my head.

Daniel!

A brightness returned to his eyes, a desperate hope covered his face, bringing me to tears. I felt the invisible thread connecting us pull taut. Was he back? I soon had my answer as he quickly spun around and lashed out at Tim, slashing the blade across the demon’s throat.

When he retracted the dagger, he ran his hand over the length of it, and it suddenly became ablaze in white-hot fire. He lashed out again, Tim’s neck already healing. However, Tim was ready and slashed out a clawed hand.

Well, it wasn't exactly a human hand anymore. It was a coal-black shadowed appendage tipped with talons. Daniel jumped back just in time to miss the claws, and he disappeared, reappearing behind Tim and stabbing him with the dagger. He took it out and kicked out a foot into the back of the demon's leg, making him falter.

Tim roared an inhuman sound that raised the hairs on the back of my neck. He then hunched forward and burst into his shadow demon form in barely a blink. This didn't deter Daniel, who brought the blazing knife down again, but it did nothing as the shadow demon dropped into a flattened shapeless mass over the grass.

Damn it, I forgot he was a shadow fucker. How did you kill a shadow? I needed to help. I dropped my ward and faced forward. A thin translucent black wall of some sort rose in front of me and wrapped around me, binding me like a tight bed sheet.

I struggled to move, but it was no use. Had that demon broken off a piece of his shadow self and used it as some type of bonding material? What in the hell? I pushed out my magic to break it, but it didn't budge. All I could do was stare helplessly as Daniel jumped onto the ground with his dagger, stabbing at the shadow. He missed as the shadow demon's shapeless form slid quickly over the grass surface.

The shadow raced around the yard, zig-zagging over the grass. Daniel tried to catch it. Every time he sunk that flaming dagger into the darkened ground, the shadow would still move, as if stabbing it didn't matter. Perhaps it didn't. It wasn't a far-reach to think a shadow couldn't be killed.

The form moved again and encircled Daniel so fast that I could barely catch it with my sight. It stopped behind him, and a large head-shaped mound poked up through the darkened mass. He was going into humanoid creature form.

"Behind you!" I screamed, struggling again against my bindings with my magic. How could this demon hold me and be paying attention to Daniel? I could feel the hold weakening, but I wasn't yet free. Still, I wouldn't give up. I didn't need to move my body; I just needed enough loosening of his magic to get my own out.

Daniel jumped forward and then spun around, but already the shadow demon's form collapsed again. It moved to the trees, closer to me, blending in with the shade. Daniel teleported to my side, still on the other side of the ward. Tim's form suddenly appeared near the trees, a giant shadowed form

with glowing red eyes and sharp white teeth. He blinked in and out of his shadow and human form. And he didn't look good.

In his shadow shape, I could see tears emitting a white glow in his black form. When his body blinked back to human, Tim was a bloody mess. He had deep jagged cuts over his face, arms, chest, and legs. It seemed you *could* hurt a shadow, you just needed to know where to stab to kill him. And that would be no easy feat since his body wasn't exactly human in the shadow form, but at least he was weakening. He couldn't even hold his demon form. I had to assume keeping the binding on me was taking away some of his strength.

Daniel's movement broke my attention to Tim, and I eyed him with fearful hope as my alpha raced forward and forced his dagger into the shadow. However, at that same moment, Tim pushed his dark translucent hand through Daniel's chest.

I screamed in horror as Daniel's body froze, trembling around the shadowy intrusion. His dagger-holding hand paused in the air, aiming down at Tim. Tim's wide maw opened, showing more darkness, but I could see his teeth, and it looked very much like a demonic smile. "I very much want this power. After that omega dies, I'll take yours, too. But I want to see you kill her."

The fact that Daniel wasn't dead after having a hand plunged into his chest meant that this wasn't a physical intrusion but, rather, a magical one. Tim's shadow hand was not solid. That was good. Was it possible that Tim was not a solid form in his demon shape? Could he even cause permanent harm like that? Maybe that was why he had so many others do his work. Control was his real power, not physical strength. At least, that's what I guessed.

I pushed again and again at his binding until I felt something snap. I was free. Now, I just needed Daniel to move out of the way so that I could magically destroy that demon until there was nothing left. I wasn't sure it was possible, but I was willing to die trying.

"Go and kill her, puppet," Tim ordered Daniel, removing his hand from his chest.

Daniel's dagger-holding hand shook as he lowered it away from Tim, and he turned slowly to me. "I'm sorry, Billie," Daniel began in a pained voice. "I can't stop myself."

"Your fight was a good effort, but the games are over," Tim went on. "It

really is too bad. Fortunately, Daniel, you won't have to be sad for long because I'll kill you after."

Daniel looked over to me, and I could see the light draining from his eyes again, Tim's control taking hold. I didn't know how much fight he had left in him. He couldn't keep this up. Just as importantly, I didn't know how to break through to him, nor was there enough time. How could I subdue him without killing him? Tears continued to glisten my eyes as despair sunk into my mind. I couldn't stop this control. I'd have to kill my alpha.

Instead of his face going dead, Daniel smiled at me. However, it brought me no comfort. What was there to smile about? We were losing.

"Kill him, princess," Daniel whispered in an echoing voice before stabbing himself in the heart with the dagger.

My vision worked slowly again, blinking in and out. The only sound around me I could hear were my screams as I watched Daniel slowly collapse to the ground. It felt like minutes passed, but in reality it had to be seconds as I watched him. He didn't move, his eyes wouldn't open. There was no rise and fall of his chest. He couldn't be dead. The man who cared for us put others first. The man who was playful, loving, and protective. That man could not be gone from me.

From somewhere in my peripheral vision, Tim stood laughing, compounding my pain. He said words my brain could not make out. My breath caught in my throat, my chest hurt. I was supposed to do something, but I couldn't think. Couldn't move. All I could do was stare at him, at my alpha. Dead on the ground. He had killed himself. Why?

The fight had left me. He had left me. Tears clouded my vision, and I dropped to my knees. I was free from Tim's bonds, but I didn't care.

Suddenly, voices came tumbling into my head, breaking me out of my trance. Lance, Ty, and Kai. How? No, it was Daniel. He had dropped the blocking, or, upon his death, it had automatically fallen. I didn't want to think about that last possibility. My heart sped up, and I clutched at my chest in pain as the voices bombarded me. But one voice, one final voice, was the loudest of all.

Daniel's last words crashed into my mind, a sharp pain in my frontal lobe. His alpha command was still etched in my head. *Kill him, princess.* Kill Tim. I shook my head, breaking free, if only for a moment, of grief's chokehold. I had to act. Had to make his decision worth something. I would fall apart later. I was strong. I had to be.

Guys, questions later. I need your strength.

They didn't argue with me, and I quickly began to feel energized. My fingertips itched, nerves buzzed with enhanced power. My guys had come through.

Tim, back in his human form, looked down at Daniel, brows raised. He shook his head in mock pity. "Tsk-tsk, I didn't see that coming." He shrugged. "Oh, well. Just means I have to kill you quicker to avoid a double waste."

Tim stalked toward me, but I wouldn't make it easy for him. Daniel had weakened him for me, and my guys were pouring their strength into me. Maybe this would work. I shouted an explosion spell, but he disappeared before my eyes.

I spun around, seeing nothing, and soon I felt a tight hold around my waist. I looked down to see black shadowy arms squeezing me tightly. Tim was back in his demon form. I was raised in the air and then slammed on the ground, landing on my knees and my hands. My right wrist bent wrong upon landing, and I felt a crack. I screamed as a sharp pain shot up my arm. It had to be broken. However, I had no time to focus on the injury as I felt a harsh kick to my side. It felt like I was knocked over by a sledgehammer.

I cried out, clutching my side, but I couldn't wallow in the pain for long. Tim shoved me on my back and quickly wrapped his hands around my throat. The demon pressed hard into my skin, his talons biting into my neck, causing hot pain to blind me for a moment. I wiggled under him and grabbed at my neck to pull him off me. However, it was no use. He was just too strong. My vision darkened, oxygen waning. I felt dizzy, my concentration escaping me.

I pounded at his hands with my fist, but I wasn't trying hard enough. My momentary mental strength had come and gone all too quickly. Images of Daniel's handsome face floated across my mind. My alpha hadn't moved, he wasn't helping me. He really was gone. I didn't even feel the pull of him anymore. I wanted to give up, to crawl over to his body, lay my head on his chest, and die beside him. It was where I belonged. It all but ruled my thoughts. I wanted to be enraged, full of fight, but my mental energy had waned. This was the downside of an omega and alpha bond. If the alpha died, the omega could die of grief or even go insane. I felt myself drifting away already into a black nothingness.

Fight! Shouted what sounded like unified voices in my head. My guys. My pack. My alphas. They weren't giving up. I wasn't alone. I had them. I

had to fight. I couldn't give up. They were waiting for me. Looking for me. Daniel had sacrificed himself so that I could focus on killing Tim. He wanted me to survive this. I wasn't sure I could, but I would at least kill this demon before I died.

Death could wait.

If I couldn't rip this demon off me, I needed to use my magic before I lost consciousness. I tried to shout out a blasting spell, but my voice was only a whisper, my windpipes compromised. It didn't matter, that was all I needed. Tim's body lifted in the air and flew across the grass. With this minor victory, I wasted no time, and I shouted my death word, blasting him in the arm. The black appendage fell to the ground, and Tim shrieked a high-pitched inhuman sound. I shouted it again, and a chunk of his left side broke off. This was it. This is what I had missed in the spa. I had the power. I just needed to keep going. It would take every bit of my energy, but I would give it my all.

The memnock demon lifted his remaining arm in my direction, and I felt my throat constrict again, cutting off my breath so that I couldn't speak. However, maybe I could use my mind to get the spell out. If it was the last thing I did, all my remaining thoughts would be on killing this demon. I just needed to think the word over and over again.

I shouted the magic death word in my mind repeatedly, even as Tim's psychic strangulation increased. I fell to my side, but I didn't let go. I watched in satisfaction as he, too, dropped to the ground, the lower half of his shadowy body blasted away from him. My vision began to blacken around the edges, but I kept going. There wasn't an end time or an amount. I just needed to keep repeating the magic words in my head until I could no longer.

Get the word out. Do it again. And again. Break the demon. Leave him no time to recover or take action.

One more time. Then another time.

And then the demon's head exploded.

Finally.

I shut my eyes, feeling the release of the pressure around my neck. He was dead. I let out a heavy sigh and touched my sore neck, gulping in air and coughing. When I opened my eyes, I was welcomed to the sight of Tim's now human-appearing body splattered all over the yard in bits and pieces, painting the grass red. I hoarsely whispered a spell, setting fire to his remains as I didn't want to take any chances.

I then struggled to my feet, wincing as I put pressure on my broken wrist. I held it close to my chest as I hobbled over to Daniel. I dropped back to my knees and touched my fingers to his neck, checking for a pulse. I felt nothing. I knew it, but it didn't prevent my stomach from dropping in devastation. I leaned forward and listened for a breath. I couldn't feel a thing. Still, I wouldn't give up. I had to at least try. I poured every ounce of healing magic into him that I could.

Nothing.

I wasn't surprised. I was running on empty, having used up my magic to kill Tim. It would return; I needed to rest. But I didn't want fucking rest. I wanted Daniel.

He wasn't gone. I wouldn't accept it. I lifted his upper body in my arms, rocking him as heavy cries escaped my body, shaking us. I couldn't even smell him anymore. His alpha scent was gone. I felt sick, my heart twisted with anguish.

"I need you!" I cried, tears clouding my vision once more. "Please, no. No, no, no."

"We found you!" I heard a voice say behind me.

Ty?

"Fuck," Kai swore.

Lance dropped down beside me. "No. He's not dead. No," his voice cracked, and that only made me cry harder.

A gust of wind shifted my hair, and Ty appeared on the other side of Daniel's lifeless body. "How long?" he asked in a quiet voice, head bowed.

My shoulders shook with the force of my tears. "Maybe ten minutes. I've been trying to heal him, but it's not working," I sobbed like a child.

Kai blew a raspberry and plopped down on my other side. He didn't seem as broken up as the others, which confused me. "We have time."

I shook my head, still in shock. "What?"

He placed his hands on Daniel's arm and closed his eyes. "I'll explain later. Let me save his life first. He needs magic poured in. Lots of it. I got this, kitty cat."

"What about us?" Lance asked. He seemed just as confused as me.

"Wolves and vampires can't pour power in without a bite, and we aren't trying to make him some hybrid monster, so nothing."

I scrunched my face up. A thought entered my mind. "But we are all connected through a bond. Maybe they can help through me."

Kai opened one eye, glancing at me. “Worth a try. Alright boys, and girl, link hands and keep physical contact with Daniel. Let’s bond and heal. We’re gonna save our leader.” His voice sounded less confident than I would have liked. “We’re gonna try, at least,” he whispered.

CHAPTER 27



BILLIE

Daniel was sleeping. At least, that was what I hoped. We'd poured every bit of magic we could into him, and I found the faintest of pulses. However, he didn't wake up. We'd taken him to the hospital, but there was nothing our doctors, magic and non-magic, could do. Kai and the others insisted on caring for him from home since I was a doctor and whatever was happening with him was magic based. Kai explained that Daniel had "died" before and that it could take some time for him to come back. Apparently, this had happened a few times. However, this was the longest he'd been out. Five days.

We were able to locate my grimoire back at the house where the fight took place, and I poured through it for something, anything, to help wake him up. So far, I haven't had any luck. But I wouldn't give up.

I ran my fingers through Daniel's hair. Without him being conscious, he was back to his fae form. I had been combing his hair and braiding it down. His skin seemed to glow, and his breathing was steady. I just needed him to open his eyes. I didn't want to feel hopeless, but with each passing day, the soul-stabbing fear of him no longer returning became more real. Not feeling our bond made it all the worse.

I closed my eyes and breathed a shuddering sigh. Worried exhaustion rooted into my bones. Nearly six months ago, I wasn't even sure I wanted to be around this man. Now, I couldn't stomach the thought of being without him.

"Please tell me you haven't been staring at me sleeping."

I popped open my eyes and gasped.

Daniel looked up at me, a brow cocked.

“You’re back!”

“How long have I been gone?”

I sucked my teeth. “Five days. Don’t ever leave me again.”

He yawned and patted his chest, encouraging me to lay my head down on him. I snuggled close to him on the bed and rested my head on his chest.

I inhaled deeply, basking in the minty scent of him, which was quickly increasing to its normal levels. I wanted to sink my nose in the crook of his neck and never move, but that would be creepy. “Why didn’t you tell me you could come back?”

He kissed the top of my head, wrapping an arm around my waist. “Because I wasn’t sure I could. It’s never guaranteed. It’s something the tribe I come from has been gifted with. However, the gift doesn’t always work, and I’ve used it enough times to know my luck could have run out.”

“Well, I’m glad it didn’t.”

I heard a clearing of the throat at the door across from the bed. I lifted my head slightly to see Kai leaning against the doorframe, his arms crossed and lips twisted. “He’s always so fucking dramatic. One time, he was down for eighteen minutes before I was able to revive him.”

I huffed, glaring down at Daniel. “Don’t ever do that again.”

“I needed to make it safe for the others to find you or at least have them power you up so you could kill him. And if I stayed alive, I risked tainting them through the bond with that demon’s control. I also didn’t want to hurt you or force you to have to kill me. I’m sorry I left you. I’m sorry I betrayed you. I didn’t even realize I was being controlled. I stole the grimoire.” I could hear the agitation in his voice, his eyes squinted in pain.

He didn’t know about the prophecy, but I had updated the others. I was still wrestling with the fake prophecies that Tim had placed in our paths, but this one, the betrayal, seemed true. Only, it didn’t come true. I thought of Lila stating that sometimes seers couldn’t tell you details of how to stop an event from happening. Clearly, there was something we had done that stirred the course of this coming true, and I was beginning to piece together an explanation.

I patted Daniel’s chest lightly, not concerned at all that he would not have my back. He’d made the ultimate sacrifice to protect us. It made me love him more.

“So, I came up here to tell you dinner was ready,” Kai announced. “Got enough energy to make it down?”

Dan sat up, bringing me with him. “Who cooked?” he asked with suspicious eyes.

“Take-out, man.”

Dan gave a curt nod. “Then okay, I can make it down.”

When we were all gathered around the dining table, eating the pizza and wings that the guys ordered, I felt a momentary calm. We were safe. After killing Tim and Keisha, the coven was able to use a necromancer to bring back Keisha and learn the identities of the Ascension group leaders. They were currently hunting down the cells, and now they knew who they were looking for. They already found some of the Maryland followers. It would be easier to take out the threats now.

“So I’ve been thinking a lot about the prophecies,” I began. We had filled Daniel in on everything, and now I was ready to share my thoughts.

Lance grumbled and pushed his chair back. He seemed to take Tim’s revelation the worst of everyone, and I understood the unease it brought. We weren’t fated to be and that left a pit in my stomach. “Do we have to talk about any of what that fucker did?”

Ty shook his head. “He was behind killing Jocelyn and Billie’s father. I wish we could kill him all over again.”

I nodded in understanding. Anything related to Tim enraged me. Knowing how he manipulated and killed for his own goals still messed with my mind. It would be a while until I could fully come to terms with everything and the repercussions. However, for now, I needed to make sense of it. “I know it’s not a fun conversation, but I need to share. We know he faked the prophecies that the coven and you guys received about us being meant for each other.”

“Billie,” Ty began. He was having a hard time accepting it as true. He always seemed so sure of us. Being told that this fated connection we were supposed to have wasn’t real messed with him. Hell, it messed with all of us.

I raised my hand to stop him. “I need to get this out. Those weren’t true, but we know the betrayal one was true. And Daniel, don’t apologize. If Tim had gotten his way, then yes, Daniel’s actions would have led to the possible downfall of our coven. However, it didn’t happen. I think, in some twist of fate, it didn’t happen *because* we are a pack. Actually, because you guys went good. I went back and asked Brenda when she learned about the betrayal. It was decades ago. My father was in his hundreds when he passed, so he definitely knew of this prophecy for a while. We know prophecies can

be altered depending on a simple change of events or paths taken. So, imagine, it was possible that maybe in another path, you guys could have worked alongside Tim to take out my coven.”

Daniel rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “It makes sense. Back in our less savory days, we could have taken on the job to steal the grimoire and fight alongside Tim, especially if there were money and power involved. Which we know Tim could have. And none of us especially loved witches before you due to our pasts.”

I tensed my shoulders, trying not to think of what happened to Daniel and Kai because of witch influence. “Right. But the gag is, the very thing Tim wanted, us becoming a pack, was the very thing that stopped the prophecy from happening. If he didn’t put that fake prophecy in place, we might not have gotten together. If he had left things alone, including not killing Jocelyn, he might have won. I think he believed that he was more powerful than our bond could ever be.”

Kai snorted, looking astonished. “He misjudged how far we would go for each other. Including dying.”

I smiled, looking around the table with a heart so full it felt like it would burst. No one spoke for a moment as we pondered my words. Of course, I was really guessing everything. Tim was dust, so I couldn’t confirm, but it made sense in my mind. It was sad but, in a way, poetic justice.

I let out a breath. “I want to go on a vacation,” I announced. “I think we deserve it. Just a time where we don’t have to worry about fighting demons and traitors. I just want to be absolutely lazy without a care in the world. All of us together.”

I smiled at the guys, but the only one who smiled back was Ty. Had I asked for too much? I thought it was a wonderful suggestion. “What’s the problem? Y’all don’t like fun? Preferably on a beach? I know I just laid a lot on you, but we need a release to be able to heal.”

Kai reached across the table and squeezed my hand. “I’m all for the beach, kitty cat. I just need to kill a few leftover dark mages who summoned me long ago. I think this experience has taught us that having too many loose ends makes us vulnerable. I shouldn’t have ever given up finding them all.”

I pouted. I already knew he was searching, but when would it end? “You can’t take a break?”

“I have a few leads. I’m hopeful that I can join you on a summer vacation. I can’t get comfortable until then.”

Ty shrugged, that dimpled smile still on his face, melting my heart. “I’m game any time, beautiful. First class to wherever you want. How does Bali sound?”

I widened my eyes. “Uh, I was just talking about Miami Beach, but yes, please.” I looked over to Lance, who was busy chomping down a folded piece of meat lover’s pizza. “You in?”

“Don’t even have to ask, baby girl. I got a bunch of leave I can use.” He winked at me, and I beamed at him, wiggling in my seat.

I then turned to Daniel, who was seated off to my right. “You? You definitely need a break.”

Daniel thrummed his fingers on the table, avoiding my eyes. “I do, but it’ll have to wait. Like Kai said, we need to put an end to our threats. I still have the curse, and when I was talking to Xander about my condition, he mentioned that I might be able to find some help in the realm.”

I dropped my shoulders. Once again, I understood, but it didn’t sit right with me. “And how long will that take?”

He ran a hand through his hair and finally looked up at me, his eyes scrunched in a sadness that made my stomach twist. “I don’t know, princess.”

My stomach dropped. Well, that wasn’t good. “Fine. Then I’ll come with you. Visiting the fae sounds fun.”

“You can’t. I need you safe, and I’m not safe right now. I could have killed you. And this could happen again. I don’t want to be vulnerable in that way. And if the realm can’t help me, I’ll keep looking, but it’ll have to be away from the pack.”

I looked around the table in shock. “Are you serious? Yes, you were controlled, but you fought back. You were strong.”

Daniel got up and walked over to me. He crouched down and grabbed my hands. “I was lucky. I had you. I am your alpha. I was supposed to protect you, and I didn’t do that. I didn’t protect the pack.”

My chest felt tight, throat dry. I didn’t want to eat or talk anymore. He wasn’t even gone yet, and I already felt the weight of his absence on my heart. Just when we were back together, and I was fully immersed in this omega and alpha lifestyle. Just when everything was calm, and we could relax without a demon threat over our heads. Just when love came, it had to be ripped away.

“This isn’t because the prophecies weren’t real, right? I know we aren’t fated to be together, but we still have chemistry. I think we’re right for each

other.” I searched his face for an answer, but he lowered his head to my hands. A panicked iciness dripped down my spine.

“Of course, we are,” Ty called.

Lance huffed. “My wolf doesn’t question it, and neither do I, baby girl.”

“Damn right,” Kai added.

I wanted to smile. To feel reassured, but I needed to hear it from Daniel. From our leader.

He finally looked up, his lips quirking up, blue fae eyes full of such love and awe that I wanted to cry. “Princess, that prophecy got us motivated, but seeing you, being with you, learning about you, that’s what got us to pick you. I never questioned it because I never felt dissatisfied. I felt honored you were put on our radar despite everything. Never question that. Never question our love for you. You can rest assured on that.”

I sighed and smiled, feeling happy and sad at the same time. I wanted to be a brat and cry. Tell him that he couldn’t leave us, but I also understood. We couldn’t play stupid. We’d been targets for the last several months. We couldn’t pretend that a threat would never happen again. And we couldn’t be willfully blind to our weaknesses. My father chose them, in part, because they could protect me, regardless of a false prophecy. They had done that very thing, and I wasn’t going to stand in their way of making sure we remained safe.

I would just have a wounded heart until we were whole again.

EPILOGUE



BILLIE

Four Months Later

I walked out of my bedroom one Saturday morning to the smell of burnt toast. I frowned as I walked down the steps to the ground floor. It was quiet in the house. Without Daniel on the top floor with me, it was lonely, but the others took turns sharing my space when I didn't want my bed to myself, which was more of a rarity lately.

Daniel sent updates to us regularly with Lila's visits back to the human realm to check on her store and see us, but it wasn't the same as seeing him. I knew we were separated for our own protection, but it sucked. Especially because there was no end date. Four months was killing me, but it was longer in fae time. For Daniel, he had been without us for 16 months. If we hadn't gotten his regular correspondence, I would have assumed he'd forgotten us. I'd heard that was possible when someone spent too much time in the fae realm, however, that might have been just for humans.

It had been especially quiet the last couple of weeks as Kai was away "vanquishing his foes," as he called it. I hoped this was the last of his missions because he made what I deemed a threat of separating from us, like Daniel, until he could ensure the mages wouldn't come after him.

Until that time, my mind was focused on work, my remaining guys, and the coven. I hadn't forgotten about Keisha's words, as much as I hated her. She was right about some things. Brenda assured me that her father was indeed guilty of his crimes. Still, there were other matters I would no longer passively ignore. Supernatural crime had also gone down a bit after killing

Tim. However, many citizens and congresspeople were now calling for more laws against demons, including shutting down the neutral establishments. I had hopes that wasn't going to happen, but it didn't help with all the recent attacks that the witches weren't able to fully control. In a sense, this was just what Tim wanted, only he was no longer around to reap the rewards.

I was going to run for a position in the coven. Help protect us. And if I wanted change to happen, I was going to have to take action and not just be a passive member. Going to the meetings regularly was just a start. It was time to join committees and give back.

I walked down the hall on the ground floor and entered the kitchen to see Lance sitting at the kitchen island, drinking what I guessed was coffee and scrolling through his phone.

Ty put a plate down on the island and pulled out a stool for me. I sat down and gave him a smile of thanks. "Did you make me breakfast?"

He nodded swiftly with a proud smile on his face, then put a cup of tea next to the plate.

I looked down at the food. Blackened toast and a brownish-looking omelet. I had asked him not to cook before and to just let me do it, but he seemed to enjoy trying. I wished I enjoyed eating it just as much.

Lance looked over to the plate and grimaced. "I wouldn't eat it if I were you."

I pointed to the omelet. "Why is it brown?"

Ty gave a nonchalant shrug. "Oh, it's just a little chargrill."

Lance snorted. "And he did not use the grill to cook it."

I raised my brows before looking back at Ty. "Sweetie, you didn't have to do this. I told you, you don't have to cook."

"More like begged," Lance cracked.

Ty twisted his lips and glared at him. "Really, bruh?"

I raised my hands before they could begin to bicker. They were usually the quiet ones, and I had a suspicion they were overcompensating with Daniel gone and Kai being away. It was also possible that they were maybe a little lost without them. I understood that feeling.

"I don't want to seem unappreciative," I began. "Ty, you cooking, Lance, you washing my car; you guys don't need to do all this."

Lance put his phone down and pinned me with his soul-stealing stare. "You're our omega, and we want to take care of you. Let us show you how we can love you, baby girl."

My insides melted at his words. God, that man could be so sweet when he wanted to be.

Ty sat down beside me. I hoped he wasn't planning to watch me eat because I wasn't planning to ingest this. "Also, we know it's been a tough time. Not only is Dan gone, but so is Lila. I know it can get lonely."

I placed a hand on this thigh. "I'm not lonely. I have you guys. My friends from the hospital. Don't pressure yourselves."

"I just want you to be happy," he replied.

"I already am," I answered before leaning over and kissing him. "Hmm, you taste good." A lot better than the breakfast, I was sure. However, now that I was running my tongue over his lips and sucking on the sweet gingerbread and honey taste of him, I kind of didn't want to stop. I also didn't want the food, so it was possible that I was seducing him.

I jumped off the stool and stood between his legs, pressing my hands on his chest. I got on my toes for another kiss. I moaned into his mouth as his hands touched my back, pressing me tighter to him. I could already feel him growing excited against my stomach. It didn't take much for Ty and me, and I loved that about him.

He brought his mouth down to my neck, titillating the mark he gave me with the tip of his tongue. My body hummed with each brush of the bite with his smooth tongue. I heard a cough behind me. Lance. I blindly reached out a hand, hoping he would know what I was trying to do. I soon heard the movement of the stool behind me and then the heat of him on my back. Without being asked, he kissed his mark on my shoulder, and the double attention to my claiming bites almost had me levitating.

I pressed my hand on Ty's crotch, roughly massaging him through his sweatpants. He growled in my ear, stirring my core. "Are you trying to distract me, beautiful?"

"No." I nodded in playful opposition.

He chuckled and, in one swift move, lifted me up and placed me on the island, not too far away from the offending breakfast. I was wearing a simple green sundress, and I spread my legs for easier access for whatever he was about to do. He pulled my panties down, and I kicked them off. Lance caught them and stuffed them into his jean's pocket, squinting his eyes at me.

Without my panties to collect my slick, I began to drip down my thighs, anticipating their next moves. Ty's eyes glazed over with lust, and he wasted no time sliding his tongue up my thigh, tasting me. His thumb went to my

buzzing clit, and he began to rub it in a circular motion as he continued to lick the slick from my thighs. I curled my toes as the pressure from his ministrations began to cause a growing rush toward an amazing climax. Without warning, I felt the pinch of his incisors sink into my thigh, and soon, a tingling pleasure moved throughout me. I cried out from the mix of pleasure and pain, struggling to remain still in his grasp as he remained seated at the island as if he was feasting on his favorite meal.

Once again, I pushed out a hand to Lance. "Let me touch you," I whined.

He gave me a hooded lid smile. "Where do you want to touch me, baby girl?"

I looked down to his crotch, already seeing the large imprint of his dick through the thick material. "Here, please, and thank you."

He laughed as he unzipped his jeans and pushed them and his briefs down, releasing his large member. As I thought, it was already rigid and leaking precum. I wasted no time and grabbed it, furiously pumping him into a frenzy. He let out a curse word, tossed his head back, and pushed his hips into my hand.

A rapid tongue sliding over the length of my pussy lips until they hit my clit, momentarily broke my rhythm on Lance. I glanced down as Ty wickedly groaned into my mound, noisily smacking. The obscene nature of my position only worked to make me more turned on, and I closed my eyes as I continued to excite Lance with my hand and felt the impending rise of my need from Ty's mouth on me. Seconds later, my legs shook with a burst of excitement as Ty's tongue moved quick fire over my clit with no slowing down. I came hard and messy, squirting my release down the side of the island and into Ty's mouth, who captured my slick greedily.

Barely recovering, I increased my pumping on Lance, requiring him to place a balancing hand on the island as his hips continued to pump urgently to meet my moves. Seconds later, he released a stream of his cum onto my exposed leg and part of my dress. His hot seed and wild orgasm only succeeded in turning me on more despite my recent climax.

"I'm sorry for messing up your dress," he breathed out.

I shook my head, unbothered. "I don't care. I need more."

"Say less, beautiful," Ty replied before picking me up and putting me down on my wobbly legs.

He turned me to the island so that I was resting my upper body there for support. I felt him move his face to my ear. "Mind if we go a little rough and

quick, Ms. Bellamy,” he whispered.

I think my eyes flew back in my head. Something about the way he said my last name always worked me up. “No problem at all, Mr. Asari.”

“Thank you.” And then I felt him thrust into me. He pounded against my ass with the lewd sound of a smack as his balls made contact with me, his knot flirting with my entrance. He grunted with each impale, and I felt my clit pulsing, ready to explode again.

My hard, sensitive nipples pushed against the thin material of the bandeau bra I had on under my dress, brushing against the hard counter and exciting me more. The heated hardness of him inside me brought me over the edge. I grasped at the counter like I could dig my fingers into the granite, which of course, I couldn't. Good sex made you want to do the impossible sometimes.

His next thrust sent stars to my eyes as my body exploded with another release. I shook so hard that he had to clutch me harder to keep me standing up. He came next, pumping so fast I knew I wouldn't be able to see his body move with that vampiric speed of his. Hot release filled me to the brim and seeped out down my thighs, bringing me to another milder orgasm. However, he soon slowed down to a lazy pace, enjoying being inside me as much as I was having him there.

I heard the front door open and then loud stomping. “Hell, who tried to burn the place down and then have sex to cover it up?” Kai shouted.

“Ty tried to cook,” Lance yelled in an exhausted-sounding voice. I didn't see him next to me, but I think he was sitting back at the table behind us.

Kai appeared in the kitchen entrance, waving his hand in front of his face and coughing. He could be so extra. “I thought we banned him from the stove.” Spotting Ty and me still in our entwined position, he raised an intrigued eyebrow. “Well, hello there.”

I gave him a smile and a wave, not bothered by the public display. We'd all done it enough times in front of each other, this was hardly new. Ty kissed my shoulder, not yet moving out of me, and I didn't mind. The feel of him was too exquisite. “I made her breakfast.”

Lance snorted. “He tried to kill Bill with his cooking. Chargrilled omelet and crispy toast.”

Kai nodded in understanding, tilting his head as he observed us, Ty still slowly rocking into me, making my vision blurry. My mouth hung open, and I felt like a fiend who couldn't get enough. “So, you distracted him with sex so you wouldn't have to eat the poison. Smart thinking, kitty cat,” he said

with a wink.

Kai pushed the plate away from me with a finger, his face scrunched in a disgusted frown. “Looks like I came back just in time. How about, Ty, you unplug from our omega, and we go out for a proper brunch, get some drinks, and celebrate? I vanquished my foes.”

Ty finally pulled out of me, and I moaned at the loss of him, eliciting an amused snort from Kai. I stood straight but kept balanced on the island for support because my legs were still finding themselves.

“You vanquished *all* your foes?” Lance asked with skeptical eyes. “I don’t see how that’s possible to do even in your lifetime.”

Kai gave him the middle finger. “The audacity. People love me. And I got every damn member of that group.”

I gave him a teeth-baring smile. “I knew you could do it.” I raised my hands in the air, fully on board with that idea of brunch, and thankful I didn’t have to eat Ty’s breakfast, even though it was a sweet gesture. I was also grateful that Kai was back for good. We were almost a complete house again.

We spent the rest of the day drinking and lounging about. Summer was in full swing, and despite my sadness of missing my bestie and Daniel, things weren’t so bad. We’d gone on that vacation to Bali. Shante and I’d gotten closer. Hell, I’d even gotten closer to Angelica and Natsu. I thought they would hate me for helping to kill Keisha, but her betrayal at allowing Angelica to almost be killed during the HQ attack kind of made them feel differently. I also maybe sort of pushed my friendship on them out of some weird guilt. Shockingly, they were very receptive, and I even let Angelica give me a tattoo on my wrist.

The rest of the weekend and most of the following week was wonderfully uneventful. That Thursday night, I’d worked a particularly long shift and ran off to my bedroom alone. I loved my guys, but I had my own room for a reason and had no guilt when some nights I just wanted some alone time. I spent the evening bingeing a period romance I’d gotten hooked on before passing out with the TV on.

A noise woke me up in the middle of the night. When I opened my eyes, it was dark in my room, but I knew I left my TV on. I blinked my eyes several times, adjusting them to the darkness only slightly lit by the light of the moon peeking through the blinds on my window. Shifting to my side, I glanced over at the nightstand to see that it was only 3:00 am. The witching hour.

What had woken me up, and who had turned off my TV? Flashbacks to when I first met Kai played in my head. He'd done something similar when he broke into my apartment. I looked toward the foot of the bed; my door was closed. I'd left it partially open.

Were the guys messing with me? No, that was stupid, after all we'd been through. Plus, it was so minor that it wasn't going to be much of a joke. Panic seized me again, had another damn demon gotten in? Just when I thought it was getting safer, I was once again reminded not to get too comfortable. Come on, life.

I shifted to sit up, and something threw an arm over my torso, pinning me down. It moved its hand tighter over my stomach and pulled me backwards into a hard body. Before I could struggle, the scent of eucalyptus filled my nostrils, and my body instantly relaxed. More like a flood of relief overwhelmed me.

Daniel.

I didn't turn. I just...cried. He was back. He was here. This wasn't my imagination, right? No dream? I'd had several of those only to wake up to the crushing reality of his absence. But his scent was too strong to be a dream. Still, I was too frightened of being let down to turn. To face whatever or whoever was behind me. If this was a demon playing a trick, I would go into an uncontrollable rage. I was too emotionally unstable in the middle of the night for all of that.

A comforting kiss on the back of my neck stilled my shaking shoulders, stopping my tears. "Shh, princess. It's me."

It was Daniel's voice. Daniel's touch. "You're back for good?"

"Yes. I'm cured."

I shifted, and he loosened his grip, allowing me to turn to face him. I could barely see him in the dark. Sensing my need to lay eyes on him, he snapped his fingers, and one of my bedside table lamps came on. I smiled and reached a hand up to touch his cheek. It certainly felt like my Daniel. "So, the fae helped?"

He moved his face to kiss the palm of my hand, and an instant shiver slid down my spine. Yup, this was my Daniel.

"Yes. I had to go over to a seelie court, but they finally healed me. I'm here for good. I won't leave you again."

I tapped my head to his chest, wanting to just feel him for the moment. "I missed you."

He squeezed me to him again. "I missed you more."

We said no other words for a long moment. I was still heavy with sleep, but I also was afraid to close my eyes and have him disappear when I woke up. When I felt the heaviness of my lids drop, I startled awake.

His chest shook with a chuckle. "It's okay to sleep, princess. I'm not going anywhere."

I stubbornly shook my head like an upset child. I knew what would keep me awake. I moved up to be level with his face and kissed him. At first, it was soft and tender, but that soon turned to a greedy need as our tongues tangled with one another, our scents heightened. My core sizzled for him, already wanting the fullness of him inside of me after being denied him for so many months.

I moved my hand down his chest and broke our kiss to lick and suck on his neck, the minty taste of him making me drool. At the contact, I felt his stomach clench, his hand moving to my ass and squeezing.

Impatient, I yanked at his briefs, which was all that he was wearing. He quickly raised his hips so that I could continue to push them down. "I thought you were sleepy?" he cracked.

"Who said that?" I questioned, possessing his mouth again while at the same time grabbing his length.

He moaned in my mouth as my hand pumped up and down, collecting his already developing precum at the tip as lubrication. He was so stiff in my hand at that moment, and I loved the control of making him grow wild at my grasp, his hips rising to meet my hand to the top of his knot.

I threw a leg over his sculpted thigh and ground my now damp core on him. There was no doubt he could feel my needy pussy lips through the thin fabric of my underwear, they were already soaked. Slick rolled down my inner thigh and onto him as I worked myself at an angle on his thigh that rubbed best against my sensitive bud. I quickened my pumping of his dick, twisting my hand in various directions.

He grasped my ponytail on the top of my head and gently pulled me away from his mouth. "Princess," he growled in a dark, breathless voice, "If you keep this up, I will cum in your hand, and I don't want that. I want to bury myself deep within you and knot you over and over again. I want to lick the slick between your thighs and kiss and suck on my claiming mark, right there, and hear you scream my name." He brushed his hand over the mark he'd given me all those months ago between my legs. "You're going to have

to call out of work tomorrow because you will not be able to walk, and so I'll have to feed you breakfast, lunch, and dinner in bed."

At this point, my panties could have slid down on their own, I was so wet. "Those are some big promises."

He moved his other hand from my ass and dipped a finger inside of me. I clutched onto the digit and whined from the feel of him pushing within me. "You know I'm good for it."

I sure did. "Can I get snacks, too?" I whispered.

He kissed me again. "You can get whatever you want, princess."

And before I could register what was happening, I was on my back and totally naked, and so was he. He moved between my legs and ran a hand down his member, sticking what I presumed was the finger inside of me in his mouth. His eyelids fluttered as he tasted my essence. "Fuck, I missed your taste."

Drip, drip went my kitty at the sight of him. I spread my legs even wider, lifting my pelvis slightly in the air for encouragement.

He gave me his signature cocky grin that I now loved. "Are you ready and wet for me?"

"I'm about to make this a waterbed. Please fuck me, thank you kindly."

He chuckled, and then his eyes grew darker right before he balanced over me and sank the length of him into my drenched opening. He groaned, scrunching his face, as he pushed ever so slowly inside of me. He filled me to the delicious end, his knot teasing my opening.

"Look at me, Billie," he said in a quiet voice.

I opened my eyes and almost gasped at the look on his face. The look of love. I felt love from these men. Their actions, words, touches. However, to see it on their faces. To actually believe it, stole my breath away. He was almost enraptured, his eyes intense on mine. His lips were in a soft smile, head tilted. It was as if he were studying me, captivated by what he was learning.

He slid one of his hands into mine, and I entwined my fingers with his, mesmerized by him just as much as he was of me.

"I love you, my omega," he whispered right before driving into me again and again. He moved at a steady pace. There was no chaos or aggression. Nor was it restrained and slow. The pace was beautifully perfect as he sprinkled my face with languid kisses while whispering sweet nothings in between.

I felt cherished and desired, and I wanted more of him. "Please give me

your knot, alpha.”

He gave a light, playful snort and then pushed deeper inside of me, his knot filling me and locking us in place. He wound his hips, brushing against my inner sensitive spot while his pelvis hit my clit. Within moments, I came, spasming around him in an intense vibration. His fingers tightened around my own, and he, too, came with a long crying grunt.

We paused for a long moment, enjoying the connection. Minutes later, I heard a knock on the bedroom door, three taps. “Hey, kitty cat, everything okay?” Kai’s voice called from the other side.

I huffed, chuckling. He knew very well that things were okay. “Come in, silly boy.”

He opened the door and raised his hands to his cheeks when he spotted Daniel beside me, his long tail swishing left to right like an excited dog. “Daddy’s home.”

Daniel let out a long-suffering breath. “Never call me that again. And I know you aren’t surprised.”

He shrugged, walking over and sitting on the bed. “How could any of us be? Our bonds are wide open, and we all had a nice telepathic orgasm thanks to you. The three of us unpacked that together in the kitchen over whiskey.”

I gritted my teeth and wrinkled my nose. “Oops, forgot to block you guys on that. I kind of got carried away.”

He smiled and patted my leg. “No problem. With Daddy’s surprise return, it’s understandable. I mean, we had to assume it was him and that you weren’t getting dicked down by some new guy in the mix. Because that would be rude.”

Daniel shifted under me, and I moved to lay on my side. I just realized he was still inside of me. Still fairly hard. Damn.

“Kai, I’m going to kick you out of the pack if you call me daddy again. Knock it off,” he growled, but his face was anything but stern.

Kai raised his hands in surrender. “Sorry, Da...nny.”

I knew Kai well enough not to have to wonder why he was there. He missed Daniel. He’d tried to cover his worry, but he wasn’t doing a great job. Without Daniel around, he was in charge, and that wasn’t his thing. It required him to be responsible, and he was no fan of such things.

I lifted the covers behind me. “Come join us.”

Kai looked over to Daniel, who gave a head nod. I forgot the leader was back.

Kai moved toward us and settled in behind me. I could feel his hardness against the crack of my ass, and there was no covering.

“Why are you naked?” I laughed. “You had pajama pants on just a moment ago.”

“I don’t know what happened. It’s weird,” he said in a casual tone.

His fingers brushed over my hip where he’d claimed me. I moaned, my body instantly tightening around Daniel’s member. Although I knew it was to distract me, I didn’t mind as Kai continued to tickle me there. I slowly wound my hips, rubbing against Daniel, and grinding against Kai’s dick with my ass.

“Careful, kitty cat. I might want to play,” he said in a deep voice, void of any playfulness.

“Good,” I whined. “I want to play with you both.”

“Fuck,” Daniel replied, already pumping slowly into me, his cool breath fluttering over my mouth.

I leaned forward and kissed him as Kai moved his fingers over my ass, giving one cheek a playful slap. I wiggled against his dick harder, matching Daniel’s thrust. Kai swiped his tongue over my neck, and then I heard a squelching sound; perhaps him sucking his fingers?

Soon I felt the slow penetration of a finger in my ass. The feeling of the intrusion with Daniel’s blurred my mind. Daniel slowed down his movements as Kai moved another finger within me, and soon, they began a steady seesaw. I felt Kai’s tail wiggle its way up to my leg and sink between Daniel and me. The suede tip fluttered over my clit, and my vision doubled with the new pleasure vibrating through me. I clutched Daniels’s shoulders, digging my nails into his skin. It all felt like too much, but as I relaxed, it was perfect.

“Are you okay, kitty cat?” Kai whispered.

“Yes. I want more.”

He kissed my shoulder, and then I felt the tip of him enter me from the back. It was tight and slightly uncomfortable. Daniel stopped his rocking, but Kai’s tail kept working my clit, calming me. I unclenched, and he began to probe deeper into me. I rested my head on Daniel’s chest, and my body quivered with this different entry that I had never experienced before. Nerves ignited, curling my toes. My vision darkened, and I soon felt him at the base before his knot. He began to vibrate inside me, and I lost my mind, screaming in desire.

Daniel began to move again, and Kai continued the same push-pull pattern as before. Wet fingers gently squeezed my erect nipples as the tail

wrapped around my clit in a back-and-forth motion. I was coming undone, my mouth hanging ajar, eyes too weak to open. Pleasure wrapped around me like the best-scented blanket there was, doused with eucalyptus and Kai's earthy cinnamon. My alphas purred loudly against my chest and back, hypnotizing me in a trance of euphoria.

"You're such a good omega. So strong for us. I'd give you anything, princess," Daniel cooed as he took me.

"I knew you could take me. You're made just for us. I'd want no one else," Kai added in a tight voice as he drove into me.

I preened at the compliments, giving it my all as I accepted the pleasure they gave me.

And then my body snapped, firing off like a live wire as my orgasm shook my very core. My screams echoed through the room, perhaps the whole house. It felt never-ending as wave after wave of soul-snatching, intoxicating pleasure drenched me. At some point, I felt Daniel cum as the heat from him charged my core. Then Kai, the new sensation tickling me and making my toes curl.

I wasn't sure how long we remained connected in a passionate embrace. Both men inside of me, warm and full. However, when I opened my eyes again, I was lying on Daniel's chest with Kai's hard body behind me, pressed against my back. I knew it was daytime because the room was flooded with light without my curtains closed, the blinds doing little to stop the summer brightness.

My heart lifted, fluttering confusingly in my chest. What was this? I tapped my chest, massaging it. The corners of my mouth lifted in a smile. Was this happiness? I felt overjoyed.

We'd fought, been at our lowest and most difficult in front of each other, and still made it out. Stronger than before. Not to mention, for the first time in almost ten months, things were calm. No demons after me, no terrorist mage group out to destroy the coven. I wasn't so naïve to think life would be simple forever.

Still, I now had faith we could survive it. We were strong. We had our bonds. And our love. As long as we were together.

This was happiness.

The End

But don't worry, I have more tales to tell in the Love and Bonds omegaverse. Although, this may be the last why-choose romance for a while. I plan to next explore romance for Billie's fellow doctor, Shante, and share a little more about the demon world and the human realm restrictions on their kind. So, yeah, her love interest will be a demon alpha. And let's not forget Milena from *Love and Magic*. The end of the fae civil war came with some concessions, and she's about to find romance where she least expected it or wanted it.

If you liked this book, I'd really appreciate it if you could leave a review and rating at your favorite bookseller or book review site.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liz is a lover of all things romance. She's a K-drama addict, an avid paranormal romance book devourer and she is keeping the Hallmark and Lifetime Christmas romance movies alive and well every year with her devoted viewership. If there is romance in it, she'll watch it. Especially if it's supernatural. Afterall, Bram Stoker's Dracula is her favorite paranormal romance. When she can tear herself away from books and work, she's traveling the world for inspiration and joy.

For more on Liz, check out the following:



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Mystic Souls

Paranormal Times Series

Mystic Memories/Dark Memories: A Novella

Dark Hauntings

Paranormal Lands Standalone Series

Mystic Realms: A Novella

Lightning and Curses

Paranormal Rising Series

Deathly Touch

Deathly Dreams

Standalone Novels

Girls of Might and Magic Anthology

The Mission