

BLOOD ANGEL CHRONICLES

BOOK FIVE

A book cover for 'Cain' from the 'Blood Angel Chronicles' series. The central image shows a man with long, wavy brown hair and a light beard, looking upwards with a serious expression. He is shirtless and wears a thin, metallic chain necklace. Behind him is a large, bright full moon in a dark, cloudy sky. In the lower-left foreground, a dark-furred wolf is shown in profile, howling upwards towards the moon. The overall mood is mysterious and dramatic.

CAIN

JENNIFER FIELD

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CAIN

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*This book is dedicated to my friends, family, and readers who
have made this crazy journey possible.*

*Hugs,
Jennifer*

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PROLOGUE

CAIN

(Approximately 1000 BV, give or take a few centuries)

“Ahhhhrrrgggg!” I scream at the massive demon with horns and tusks as he steps into the pit with me. He’s more than twice my size, but in my current state, size doesn’t matter.

I’m covered in blood when I look down at my naked body. It’s not mine. I know this because the remains of my last challenger are strewn all over the sand floor of the pit. I can hear the spectators above me shouting my name as they place their bets on the next match.

Most of the crowd at the Firehouse have never seen a full Enoch demon in heat. We are few and far between and only have two options when our mating heat overtakes us—fuck or fight. And since I don’t have a mate or a female Enoch, I opted to fight.

I’m lucky that Alastor is a friend—or at least not an enemy—and has agreed to let me serve out my mating heat here instead of being chained to the dungeon wall.

Thankfully, I’m not entirely mindless, at least not yet. And in a moment of clarity, I can see Asher pacing the length of the ring

above. He didn't want me to come to fight, especially since there is only one way out of the Firehouse fighting pits. You must win or die.

The creature now lumbering towards me is a prisoner from Treachery. If he wins three in a row, he earns his freedom.

So, I better pay attention to make sure that I'm not win number one for him.

When the giant is within arm's reach, I swipe my clawed hand across his chest. Black goo oozes from the four gaping wounds now marring his chest. He lets out a howl of pain as he lunges for me.

I am not a small man by human standards, but in comparison to this behemoth, I'm childlike. But with my smaller size comes a nimbleness he can't even comprehend. In three quick moves, I'm on his back and have my razor-sharp claw extended and slicing across his throat before he even has time to think about throwing me.

My opponent takes a few shaky steps forward before his knees give way from the blood loss and he tumbles forward. He's gasping for breath when I grab him by the horns and twist. The unnatural popping of bones, tendons and cartilage only fuels my fire. With a final twist, I sever his head from his body and toss it aside. The dismembered body barely hits the floor before I'm collapsing in a heap next to the twitching pile of demon flesh.

~~*

Every muscle in my body aches and screams as I attempt to roll over. When I crack my eyes open, it takes me a minute to realize I'm not in the pit any longer but in one of the many lower rooms of the Firehouse.

My body is still caked in dried blood, and I smell like week-old meat that was left in the sun to rot. But Asher is sitting in the corner, watching me with a scowl on his face.

"You couldn't have cleaned me up a bit before dumping me in bed?" I chastise, though I'm glad the fighting helped regain some of my sanity, at least for a little while.

"Just be lucky I dragged you out when I did. Your next opponent was eyeing you as if you were his bride, and I don't think he cared that you were unconscious."

I let out a bitter laugh at his attempt to lighten the mood.

“Val has checked in on you and reported back to your sister about how stupid you are. Have you ever considered getting a mate instead of going all berserker?”

That makes me laugh. “The thought of binding myself with one woman for all eternity doesn’t even sound remotely appealing. Why would I deny the rest of the female population all this?” I hold up my arms, or at least attempt to, but the pain only allows me to lift them about an inch above my body.

“I hate to break it to you, but you don’t look or smell all that appealing right about now,” Asher reminds me.

“I’ll sacrifice my flesh for a few months every thousand years to avoid being any woman’s property, thanks.”

Asher has no idea what mating encompasses for an Enoch demon. Why would he? We are one of the rarest demon breeds ever to exist. Not to mention the fact that the ratio of females to male demons is vastly uneven.

With a groan, I swing my legs over the side of the bed. “Alastor is going to have to burn this room to get it clean,” I mutter as I look at the disgusting mess my body left. “Seriously, would it have killed you to throw some water on me?”

Asher is probably my oldest friend. This is the first time he’s seen me go through this. Hell, it’s only the second time for me.

“How long will this last fight give you?” Asher asks as he helps me to my feet. “Gods, you smell.”

The fighting helps to release the mating hormone and gives me a slight reprieve from the mindless need to kill. The more intense the battle, the longer I seem to get. “A few days, maybe a week. Not long enough to go back out into society, that’s for sure. I’ll have to beg Alastor to stay here for the next few months until it passes. At least I’ll bring him in some coin while I fight.”

Ash gives me a side-eye as he helps me into the shower area. “Yeah, until one of these guys rips your head off.”

“Just one more reason to never have a mate. She would become my greatest weakness; without her, I would die.”

CHAPTER ONE

CAIN

“**You have got to** be shitting me,” I say as I pace the room and run my hands through my hair in frustration.

“Don’t be so dramatic. All I need you to do is go up to this Timber Cove place and look at a few parcels of land for a new Black Door location. You know I’d go myself, but Sloane is about to pop,” Ash adds with a devilish smile.

He has me between a rock and a pregnant woman, and he knows it. “That’s playing dirty, using your pregnant wife against me,” I grumble.

“It’s not like I’m sending you to fucking Siberia, it’s NorCal, the North Coast of California. Redwoods and spotty wine country, for fuck’s sake. Three days tops, go in, check out the properties and leave. Besides, you and I both know you need time away from the club.”

That had me stopping in my tracks and glaring over at him.

There aren’t very many people who know me the way Asher does. He and I were friends for nearly a millennia and business partners for nearly as long, so he is well aware of the rage and desire to mate beginning to boil within me. It isn’t as if I can control my biology. I tried to avoid what I am for the last thousand years by maintaining my human appearance, even within the protective doors of the Black Door Clubs.

But like anything, I can no more control myself going into heat every thousand years than I can the rise and fall of the sun. Asher must have caught onto my thoughts about traveling so close to my... deadline.

“How long do you have?”

I let out a sigh. “A month, more or less.” It isn’t as if I can set my watch by it. When your species only mates every

thousand years, you can lose track of the exact time frame. But I can feel the need building with every passing day.

This will be my third heat, and with each one that I didn't find my true mate, I lost a little more of my *civility* during the mating year. As it is, the mating year will send me into a mindless rage, where my every thought is consumed by the need to reproduce. The plan for the next year is to remain chained to a specially constructed wall Ash and I built.

I am not looking forward to it.

But the harsh reality is that there aren't many of my kind left, and even fewer females, so the hope of finding a mate is ... slim to none.

In my younger years, I was able to bide my time in the fighting pits of the Firehouse. *People* would bet obscene amounts of coin to watch a mature Enoch demon rip apart unwilling participants. *Not one of my finest moments.*

"Maybe the fresh sea air will do you some good," Ash adds with a chuckle, knowing damn well that fresh air isn't what I need.

"In case you forgot, I was reared in the Underworld, where the stench of sulfur and rot permeate the atmosphere, so I'm not exactly a fresh air kinda guy," I lie. Ash knows I love the outdoors. It makes me forget where I came from, which will be impossible when the mating heat overtakes me. Truth be told, I'm in a foul mood, and trekking up to Northern California seems like a giant pain in the ass.

"Well, it's not like you can stay here. Half the Las Vegas police department is looking for you after that little stunt you pulled the other night."

That puts a smile on my face. The bikers who thought Vegas would be their personal playground were surprised when they tried to muscle their way into the Black Door after sunset. I don't usually handle the door, but the ruckus got my attention, and I was looking for any reason to let out some aggression.

“Fine,” I acquiesce. “But you’re going to owe me,” I add before turning to leave. I’m halfway to the door when Ash speaks again.

“Oh, hang on, there is one more thing,” Ash adds.

I stop dead in my tracks. I just know that it’s not going to be something good.

“Some wolf pack owns the land there, so play nice.”

“It’s pack land I’m looking at,” I reiterate as I shake my head. “You want me to try and negotiate for fucking pack land? Are you out of your mind?” I hold up my hands. “You know what, don’t answer that. I’ll be back in a few days. Then we’ll look at some land on the moon. At least that, we might have a shot of acquiring.”

I don’t bother to wait for his response. He knows as well as I do that there is no way we will ever get our hands on land owned by any pack, wolf or otherwise.

It doesn’t take me very long to grab what I need and toss it into my duffle. I’m a man of few requirements.

I’m in the parking garage tightening my bag to my bike when Sloane waddles over to me.

I can’t help but smile at her as she rubs her enormous, pregnant belly.

“You know this trip is complete bullshit, right?”

She smiles and hands me a bag of freshly baked cookies for the road. “Of course, I do. It was my idea. You need a distraction, and Las Vegas isn’t it.”

“A distraction? Is that what the kids are calling what I need these days,” I tease. “Thanks for these,” I add, holding up the bag of cookies. “Don’t go having that baby before I get back.”

I pull her in for a hug and kiss her forehead before placing her delicious gift in my saddlebag for safekeeping. Stradling my bike, I give her a friendly wink.

“Be careful,” she adds, patting me on the back before she leaves me alone again.

~~*

I opt to take the Pacific Coast Highway, but since it is a much more scenic route it also adds a few hours. Not that I need the added time crunch, but the feel of the ocean air against my skin gives me peace for the first time in weeks. Sloane was right... I needed this. Her intuition and caring nature are going to make her a fantastic mother. After all, she was able to keep us in line this past year.

It's just after midnight when I roll into Timber Cove. The last part of the ride was a bitch. Rain and wind nearly caused me to have to stop, but I pressed on, and the vicious storm subsided about an hour outside my destination. Even though it's late, I take a short ride around and opt to stay in the next town over. If what Asher said is correct and this is pack land, the city is probably also under the packs' jurisdiction, which I have no intention of getting involved in. Besides, the stench of wet dog always makes my stomach churn.

Over the Timber Cove line is a run-down-looking bar with various bikes parked outside. The neon sign flickering above reads The Drop Off.

I take the stairs two at a time and chuckle at the wooden sign on the door that reads Trader Vic's. It looks as good a place as any to stop and figure out where the nearest hotel is and maybe get a drink and a bite to eat. That is, until the moment I step through the door. As if I am the villain in a cowboy movie, everyone stops what they are doing, and all eyes are on me. The only thing missing is the scratch of a record as the music abruptly stops playing.

Clearly, this establishment doesn't take kindly to strangers, but it's too late to turn and leave, so I square my shoulders and make my way over to the bar. True to form,

every eye in the place follows my every move until I sit down at the bar.

I can smell that the place is full of wolf shifters, not a human among them.

“I’m just rolling through here for a beer and a bite to eat,” I say, holding up my hands in a futile gesture of peace.

The air in the place crackles with malice directed straight at me. Luckily, I’m not the type of guy to back down... ever. I watch as they all seem to scent the air, wondering if I am human. A silent look seems to make its way around the bar until they all return to what they were doing before I walked in. *A wise move.*

The interaction keeps my senses on high alert as I sit at the bar. It isn’t until I see the pretty brunette making her way over to me that I relax. She’s tall, likely just over six feet, which for a demon isn’t unusual, but for a human or shifter, she stands out.

When she walks, her hips sway, and the t-shirt she wears leaves little to the imagination. But her waist-length chestnut hair that falls to the small of her back makes me want to run my hands through it and pull her to me. The carnal thought is just another warning that I need to make my business in Timber Cove quick.

I watch her nostrils flare as she scents the air, trying to catch a whiff of what I am. Good luck to her with that. Most of my kind don’t venture topside, and even when they do, their only purpose is destruction. There aren’t many living that can identify me by scent alone, especially in human form.

CHAPTER TWO

KATRAZYNA

I hate this night with a passion.

It's the only night of the year I dread being Victor Lykos' granddaughter. Tonight, marks the tenth anniversary of his death, and all the remaining members of the Big Mountain pack will come to The Drop Off, a bar on the outskirts of Timber Cove pack lands, and pay their respects. Our pack was once strong in numbers and a force to be reckoned with.

There is no need to close the bar off to outsiders for this night or any other night. Any human that finds himself lost or just passing through will instinctively know better than to stop, which is probably why all eyes, including mine, are on the tall stranger who just happened to walk in. He pauses for only the briefest of moments, more than likely feeling the energy in the room.

When I lay eyes on him, my wolf hums with glee and wants out, which is a pleasant and unexpected surprise. I can feel her stirring under my skin, and is she aroused? That can't be possible. It shouldn't be. The man, or whatever he is sitting like he owns the place, isn't a wolf. At least, I don't think he is.

I attempt to get a scent from him as I make my way to where he's sitting. Nothing but manly spice and the sweet smell of nature coming from him. My guess is biker by the look of the leather jacket he's wearing and the *fuck you* attitude. It would explain why he thinks this is an excellent place to stop. Everyone here has their ride parked out front.

Yet as I get closer, something else tickles my nose, something otherworldly and malevolent. I'm not exactly sure what the hell he is, aside from strikingly handsome with an air of danger that wafts off him like cheap cologne.

"Don't mind them, they're all still salty about the town's leash laws," I joke, smiling. "So, what brings you to the area,

because we don't get many visitors.”

“As I said, I'm just passing through, looking for a place to stay and a bite to eat.”

I don't miss the way his eyes roam over my body, and if I didn't know better, I'd swear I could feel my wolf rub against every place he looks, like a little bitch in heat.

“I own this place, and I don't want any trouble,” I whisper only loud enough for him to hear. Before he can argue or assure me, I continue, “I've got enough issues with the Timber Cove pack. I don't need another issue with you.”

My words are a shock even to me. I am never one to divulge anything to even my closest friends, yet I find myself confiding in this total stranger.

“So, you must be Vic?” he asks, shooting me a panty-dropping smile

His voice has a deep timbre that has me melting and forgetting everyone around me. It takes me a full minute of staring at him before the fog in my brain clears enough to answer. “No, I'm Katrazyna, but everyone calls me Kat.”

He gives me raised eyebrow. “A cat in a wolf's den,” he teases. “So why not call it Trader Kat's?”

“Because that wouldn't have been funny,” I answer with a wink as I pour him a beer without him asking. Trader Vic's hasn't been used since my grandfather changed the establishment's name to The Drop Off years ago when he handed the place over to me.

“Touché.” He smiles as he sips his beer.

Trying my best not to smile back at him, I toss a menu down on the bar. “The kitchen is open until three. They only do rare, so if you don't like your burger bloody, order the soup.”

“Blood doesn't bother me. I'll do a burger and fries,” he says without taking his eyes from mine. “Is there a Holiday

Inn or Motel 6 around here? Someplace I can crash for a few days.”

“I thought you said you were just passing through for a bite and a beer. Neither of those things requires a hotel.” As much as I want to toss this guy out on his perfectly sculpted ass, my wolf seems to be begging me to let him stay, and she never likes strangers.

“I have some business in Timber Cove.”

His answer has my hackles rising and before I can stop myself, I let out a low growl. The only business anyone ever has in Timber Cove is with the pack whose territory it is. And their only business is to persuade everyone who doesn't fall in line with them to move on. My grandfather was an aging Alpha and pack leader of the Big Mountain clan. Another pack in the area, the Silver Bend Pack, wanted his land and submission. When he wouldn't hand it over to them, they took it or *absorbed* it, as they like to say. Now that land belongs to the TC wolves who absorbed the Silver Bend pack.

The Timber Cove Alpha and pack master, Acheron, is a ruthless son-of-a-bitch who doesn't do deals with outsiders, so the stranger is either lying or stupid. Neither will bode very well for him.

With a glance around the bar, I watch as the men within earshot of the stranger come to attention, ready to pounce. Anyone who has *business* with the Timber Cove pack tonight has no right to be sitting in my bar. The only wolves in attendance are the ones who held their allegiance to my grandfather. The very mention puts everyone on edge, including me.

The patrons who frequent my establishment aren't usually part of the Timber Cove pack. Most try to stay clear of them when they roll through town. Every wolf in this place tonight held their allegiance to my grandfather and will fight anyone to the death who crosses me.

“Business?” I question trying to figure out why he’s here. “Look, whoever you are—”

“Cain,” He cuts me off mid-sentence. “My name is Cain.”

“Okay, Cain,” His name rolls off my tongue as if I’ve said it a million times before. “No one here wants anything to do with Timber Cove or their business associates, so you should probably just move along before the trouble you don’t want finds you.”

He holds his hands up in surrender. “Look, I’m not a business associate of theirs, I’m just here to look at a few parcels of land.”

“Then you should have saved yourself a trip. The Timber Cove pack doesn’t sell land to outsiders,” I blurt out, years of anger resurfacing.

“Then I guess I can use all the help I can get. I have a meeting set up for tomorrow. Any advice?” Cain asks with a devilish grin.

My insides turn to molten liquid. I let out what I can only describe as an unattractive snort. “Yeah. Don’t go.”

“That’s not an option, but honestly, between you and me,” he says as he leans over the bar to whisper in my ear, “I don’t give a shit about the land or who owns it.”

The feel of his hot breath against my skin has every female instinct in me wanting to take this man upstairs and never let him out of my bed. Again, shocking because no male has ever stirred the dreaded mating need inside me. It shouldn’t even be a possibility with someone who isn’t at very least a wolf.

“What are you?” I whisper back, my voice far breathier and more seductive than anticipated. Taking a few steps back, I clear my throat and try to regain my composure. “I’m sorry, I ...” My mind is just a blur of images and thoughts of what my wolf wants to do to this man. Glancing around the bar, I hope

no one notices our interaction. Unfortunately, the glares and flaring nostrils tell me otherwise.

“I’ll go put in your order.” I back my way out from behind the bar while our eyes remain locked.

As I make my way to the kitchen, I notice the whole of the female wait staff following behind.

“Who the hell is that fine piece of meat that just sauntered in here?” I hear Angie, one of the older waitresses, ask before anyone else has a chance. “Because I call dibs.”

The rest of the staff chuckles at her boldness. Angie could be considered a den mother to the rest of us. She’s at least twenty years older than me and most of the staff.

Her mate was also killed when he stood with my grandfather and refused to let the Silver Bend pack take our lands. Tonight is as much for him as for my grandfather, which makes her comment that much more inappropriate. She’s searching for a mate as much as I am.

“No one gets dibs,” I let them know as I hand Cain’s order over to the cook. “He’s just passing through.” *I’ve already called dibs.* I keep that last part to myself. Everyone in this room is aware of the she-wolf curse that’s plagued the Northern California packs for decades and that I’ll be twenty-seven on my next birthday. *A death sentence to any female who hasn’t become pregnant by that looming date.*

The women continue to chat and ogle Cain through the kitchen door as if he were that last available male in the Northern territories.

“I’m sure you all have better things to be doing,” I chastise. As Angie turns to leave, I grab her arm, stopping her, and she gives me a curious look.

“Wait a minute,” I whisper, and she gives me a raised eyebrow in response. When everyone except us and the cook, who isn’t paying attention, is gone, I give her a sheepish smile.

“It’s my wolf,” I say, leaning in so only she can hear.

She and my grandfather were the only two people who knew my secrets. While all the other young pups in my Canadian Pack began to learn to shift, my wolf remained silent. A young wolf who can only partially shift is a pack liability. It's why my mother sent me to Big Mountain to live with my grandfather. No one would question the ability of an Alpha's granddaughter. By the time my first full shift happened, I was well into my teens, a full decade past the learning curve.

"She wants him. I can feel her," I admit, holding my hands clasped against my chest.

"What does it mean? I know he's not a wolf. I don't think he's a shifter of any kind."

She gives me a big, genuine smile before pulling me into a tight embrace. "I don't know what it means, honey. But I'll tell you one thing—I don't think it's a coincidence that he showed up here tonight. Your grandfather is still watching over you."

Her sentiment brings a tear to my eyes. If he's here tonight, there's a reason. I can feel it in my gut. I give her a tight smile. "You should get back out there too, before the troops start to revolt," I tease.

I pace the confines of the kitchen until Cain's food is steaming and bloody.

"Order up!" the cook yells as he places Cain's burger and fries on the counter.

I grab the hot plate and head back out with a deep breath. The moment my gaze lands on Cain sitting talking to Angie, my wolf perks up as if to say... *he's ours*.

CHAPTER THREE

CAIN

The woman standing next to me, Angie, I think she said her name is, continues to chat about some pipeline and the Timber Cove pack. She spews out words like conspiracy and mentions some rival MC from Sacramento. In all honesty, I'm only half paying attention, giving her the customary "*oh yeah*" and "*no kidding*" in the appropriate places. I even tried to mind my own business by scrolling through my phone, but being here in the middle of no-man's-land, there is no signal.

It isn't until Kat stands directly in front of me with a heaping plate of food that Angie scampers off.

"I hope she didn't talk your ear off too much. She means well." She smiles nervously. "As I said, we don't get many visitors."

I have a growing list of questions regarding what I'll be walking into tomorrow. Ash and I brokered plenty of land deals before, even a few with various shifter packs worldwide. But it seems as if whatever I unwittingly walked into here is something else.

"So, who are you meeting with tomorrow?"

Her question seems innocent enough, but the vibe I'm getting from her body language tells me she's fishing for answers, something I can respect.

"I'm supposed to meet with a realtor named Leshia Kincaide. She has a few properties we're interested in." The color from her face drains as if I said I was meeting with Satan himself. "What? Do you know her?"

"Umm, yeah, a little bit. Leshia isn't part of the Timber Cove pack. They *absorbed* the Silver Bend pack a few years ago. It was also right around then that her mate disappeared under suspicious circumstances. The rumor was that it had something to do with the pipeline and a bad deal with the

company he worked for. But you don't end up at the bottom of a ravine over a bad business deal unless you're dealing involved with the wrong peeps. It was big news in these parts."

I let out a low growl of frustration. I could kill Asher for sending me up here without any warning about what I was walking into. As if it isn't bad enough that a shifter pack owns the land he wants, it has to be a pack that seems to have their paws in all sorts of questionable business deals. In my experience, those types of people only respond to a heavy hand, and here I thought I could relax before my heat took over.

Grabbing my burger, I take a few bites, more to buy me a few minutes to think than satiate my stomach's hunger.

"Poor thing. She also has a young daughter."

That little tidbit breaks my heart and makes me angry. While my species thrives on destruction, we also value family, not unlike a pack. We protect our own with a vengeance and destroy those who get in our way. Again, not unlike a pack. I may have lived among the humans for the last thousand years, but it will never change who I am at my core.

Swallowing down my burger and anger, I work to compose myself. This is not my fight, nor do I want it to be. Every instinct says to leave, except that one part of me that is captivated by the woman before me. I can feel her pain as she speaks as if it were my own, and that alone has me staying where I am. Never in all my life have I felt the kind of connection that this chance meeting is giving me.

The sane and rational part of me wants to dismiss it as nothing more than emotional empathy for Kat, but I know that isn't the case. Something awakened in me when I laid eyes on her. Something deep and primal that recognizes her as the one woman who can tame the beast inside me. Whoever her ancestors are, they had dealings with my people, and my demon knows it.

“What time do you close?” I question as I look around at the nearly full bar.

Kat glances down at her watch and grimaces. “Not for another few hours. Usually, at about 3:30 I kick everyone out.”

I’m about to ask about a hotel when she continues, “There’s a small apartment upstairs if you want to crash there. The closest hotel is about an hour’s drive, but it’s a human-only establishment.”

“As opposed too?” I ask, not exactly sure what kind of hotel would advertise as being *‘human only’*.

She narrows her eyes at me. “You’re funny. Anyway, I usually rent it out, but it’s currently vacant.”

“That would be great.” The thought of being able to see her again puts a genuine smile on my face. “I don’t think I have another hour’s drive in me tonight.”

“Well, it’s either you or Lu over there.” She points to an older man passed out at the end of the bar. “It’s three hundred for the week, cash up-front. Or a work trade. Do you know your way around a bar?”

I get up and lean over the bar to look at Lu. “I don’t know. He looks like he needs a place to stay more than I do.”

“I’ll call his wife, and if she doesn’t want to come to get him, I’ll lock up with him here.

He’ll be fine till morning.”

Sitting back down, I grab my wallet and thumb through the bills. “Three hundred a week, that’s pretty steep,” I say, shaking my head. “Does it come with turndown service, Wi-Fi, or a mint on the pillow?”

Kat glares at me. “Wow, I haven’t heard that one before,” she mocks. “Better make up your mind before I raise the price *and* make you work the bar.”

Taking out seven one-hundred-dollar bills, I place them on the bar. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll rent it for two weeks, and

I'll help you out at night down here."

She looks down at the money on the bar and grabs only three bills. "How about you rent it for one week, and we see how it goes." She tosses a dishrag at me.

I catch it without missing a beat.

"Break's over. You can start with clearing the tables." She winks and places a bussing bucket on the bar.

All I can do is laugh and shake my head in disbelief. Working as a busboy is not how I envisioned this negotiation ending. "Can you stow this behind the bar?" I ask, holding up my leather jacket. "And just for the record, my bar talents are being wasted as a busboy."

"Well, ladies' night is Thursday, so maybe I'll use your *talents* then."

I find many things attractive about women, but the hottest quality is one who can stand on her own. A no-bullshit kind of woman who isn't afraid to put me in my place. She takes my jacket, and I grab the bucket and get to work.

I bus tables and break up a few minor skirmishes for nearly two hours, all the while keeping my eye on Kat behind the bar. At just after three, the only person left in the bar besides Kat and me is Lu. He hasn't so much as moved in the last few hours.

"What are we going to do with him?" I ask as I nonchalantly feel his neck for a pulse.

The last thing I need tonight is for a guy to die.

"His mate should be here any minute. Would you mind using some of that muscle to carry him out?"

"He's not the first drunk I've carried out of a bar, and I doubt he'll be the last," I say as I hoist him up and over my shoulder. A bright red Ford F-250 pulls into the lot just as I exit the bar with Lu over my shoulder. An older woman in a housecoat and rain boots exits the vehicle and looks me up and

down. “Does this belong to you?” I ask, trying to be friendly as I turn, so she can see Lu’s face.

She’s wary of a stranger hauling her unconscious mate out of a bar, and it isn’t until I hear footsteps behind me that her demeanor relaxes.

“He only looks scary,” Kat says as she walks past me and down the few steps into the lot to meet the woman. She gives her a brief hug. “This is Aunt Bea, Lu’s mate. Bea, this is Cain, my hired muscle for the week.”

“Ma’am,” I say as I bring her husband over. “Where would you like him?”

The woman, who still hasn’t said a word looks at Kat, then at me, then back to Kat. She wasn’t kidding when she said they don’t get people passing through very often. This woman looks terrified at my presence.

Aunt Bea opens the tailgate without a word, and I lay Lu down as gently as I can manage. The woman backs away, still staring at me. It isn’t until she crosses herself that I realize she must feel my demonic presence despite my human form. It’s not something I’m used to, but I haven’t met many shifter wolves.

“That was weird,” Kat says as we stand and watch the truck speed out of the lot.

“Is she a biological aunt?” I tease, amazed at how easy and natural our banter is.

Kat lets out a laugh. “No. Come on, I’ll show you the apartment.” She tugs at my t-shirt to follow her. I do so willingly after grabbing my pack off my bike.

Once back inside, she tosses a glance my way. “You never did mention what kind of business you’re in. I’m not going to be harboring a fugitive, am I?”

“No, you’re not,” I answer as we make our way through the empty bar. “But for future renters, that might want to be a question you ask first.”

“Noted. So, what is it you do Cain, because you seem to know your way around a bar pretty well?”

I let out a laugh. “You could say that. Ever hear of the Black Door Clubs?” I ask as I continue to follow her up a narrow set of stairs off the kitchen.

“Nope. Are they strip clubs or something?” she asks turning to give me a playful eyebrow wiggle.

“Now, why would you go immediately to a strip club? Do I look like the kind of guy who owns strip clubs?”

She turns to stare down at me from the top step with her arms crossed and a skeptical expression across her face. “Well, you don’t *not* look like a guy who could own strip clubs.”

I give her a raised eyebrow. “They’re vampire clubs and a sanctuary for those in need.”

“Oh, wow, that’s so much better. Let me get the zoning papers now.” She laughs. “Besides, The Timber Cove Wolves already own Fur & Fangs, so, I can’t imagine they’re going to welcome a vamp club in town.”

I give her a shrug because, honestly, I couldn’t give a shit about the club location at this moment. It’s the first time I’m able to take a good look at her in full light. Her skin is a tawny bronze, and her eyes are the color of sparkling emeralds. She’s stunning, and it takes everything in me not to reach for her and pull her down so I can kiss those lush, full lips of hers.

There is a definite crackle of energy between us as her gaze wanders the length of my body. I notice the slight hitch of her breath and the dilation of her pupils as she unabashedly takes me in.

I’m never one to pass up an opportunity. I take a step up so that I’m less than an arm’s reach away. “Do you like what you see?”

“Are you a vampire?” she boldly asks.

Shaking my head, I give her a full, toothy smile. “No, not even a little.” I take the last step up to stand eye to eye. “Don’t get me wrong, I’ve been known to nibble. But I don’t have any fangs.”

When she reaches up and runs her fingers through my hair, I can’t help but close my eyes and lean into her caress. I want someone to see me as I am for the first time. I want to feel her fingers slide against the curve of my horns as she kisses me.

“You’re not a wolf,” she whispers as she studies a few locks of my hair that she has twisted through her fingers. “And you’re not... this, either,” she adds, dropping the strands.

Her revelation startles me. My appearance is flawless and has never once raised a question. I even been taken to a human hospital after an unfortunate accident. Not even the doctors there suspected I am anything but human. Not until now. I want to answer her and tell her what I am. As a wolf shifter, she understands humans are not the only ones living on this planet and that they aren’t even close to the top of the food chain.

But I can’t bring myself to be truthful.

“You call to my wolf, like no man ever has. Why?”

I give her the only answer I can. “I don’t know.”

CHAPTER FOUR

KATRAZYNA

My body and wolf are alive for this man, but I can tell he isn't what he pretends to be. I don't know how deep his deception goes. He isn't a shifter, at least not in the sense that I am.

But he most certainly isn't the human he appears to be.

Is his name Cain?

Is he here to look at land, or is there a piece that I'm missing?

Sliding my hands down, I glide my thumb over his sharp jaw and a few days of stubble. "Is this your face?" I ask what sounds like a ridiculous question.

"More or less."

His answer does nothing to alleviate my curiosity. When his hands brush over my hips, I pull back and hold up the key to the apartment. "Let me show you your accommodations for the week."

The moment his hands drop away, I want them back but I'm not a fool. This man might say all the right things and might have a smile that can drop panties for a mile, but I have no doubt he's dangerous. Anyone willing to negotiate with the Timber Cove pack must be just as threatening. I just don't know how yet.

I swallow down the lump in my throat, slide the key into the lock, and step inside. Flipping on the light, I take a deep breath and try to wrangle in my thoughts and growing desire for Cain. I walk quickly in, trying to put some distance between us. Cain doesn't follow, and he just stands silently inside the door.

When I finally turn around to look at him, I'm amazed at his size, which is emphasized by the tiny apartment and

steeped ceiling.

“It’s small but clean and functional. I had it renovated just last year when I wasn’t sure if I’d need a place to stay,” I confess, remembering how Acheron made a point of buying up everything that surrounded the plot of land that once belonged to my grandfather before it was stolen by Silver Bend. I’m lucky Acheron took pity on me and leased the bar to me, indefinitely.

Before Cain can ask any questions, I flick on the light to a galley kitchen just off the main living area. “Kitchen with all the usual stuff. There’s a full bath off the bedroom.”

He murmurs his appreciation.

I point to the darkened room on the other side and toss him the keys. He catches them without looking. His reflexes are just another layer to his mystery. “If you need anything, you can just call me,” I add as I scribble my number down on the small whiteboard I put on the fridge.

A long yawn escapes me as I turn to leave. This day was long and emotionally draining. Cain still hasn’t moved from his spot just inside the door, but as another wave of fatigue overtakes me, he walks another few steps in.

“You’re exhausted. Why don’t you stay here?”

I give him a huff. “I’m not sleeping with you,” I blurt out before I can think better of it. In my experience, men who look like Cain are opportunists. The “come on over for Netflix and chill” kind of guys. Not to mention the unbearable sexual tension that is brewing between us.

“Have I made even the smallest moves on you, Kat?” he asks.

I can hear the hurt in his voice. “No, but…” I trail off as he holds up his hand.

“You’re tired, and if I have to guess, I’ll say your original plan was to stay up here tonight. I can take the couch,

or hell, I'll even go down to that bar and sleep on a pool table. I just don't think you should be driving this late."

I ponder his offer. He's correct in assuming that I planned on crashing up here. I often do after a long night, and truth be told, I didn't want to go back to my empty house. There are too many memories of my grandfather there this night.

"I swear, I won't make a move. I'll even stand right here until you're asleep." He stomps both his feet in place, emphasizing his point. His childlike gesture makes me smile and relaxes me ever so slightly.

Looking at the couch, which is more of a love seat, I size him up. It won't be comfortable for me to sleep on being just over six feet tall, and he has at least seven inches on my height. "You won't fit on the couch."

"I can fit into all sorts of tight spaces," he answers with a wicked smile.

I choose to ignore his blatant double entendre.

"I'll sleep on the floor," he counters.

Another yawn escapes my lips despite my effort to hold it in. "Fine, but I can't have you sleeping on the floor. You can sleep in the bed. It's a California King, so there's plenty of room."

I watch as he gives me that irresistible smile and a raised eyebrow. "I'll sleep in the bed *only* if you promise not to attack me *and* stay on your side. I also have to sleep on the left," he adds before walking straight to the bedroom.

Shaking my head at my stupidity, I follow behind. "You drive a hard bargain. But I should be able to control my—"

My words are cut off as I watch him pull his t-shirt up over his head and sit on the left side of the bed. The t-shirt he had been wearing made it easy to tell he has a chiseled body underneath, but I never expected the level of perfection that is now sitting half-naked on the bed. I stand transfixed as the

muscles of his back flex, moving like a well-oiled machine as he bends to unlace his boots.

“What are you doing?” I ask as he tosses one boot into the corner, then the other.

“I’m getting ready for bed. I’m not going to wear my dirty clothes and boots to sleep.”

His answer is so obvious it’s painful. I just didn’t think through the logistics of what he or I would be sleeping in when I agreed. I stare at him as he stands, unbuttons his jeans and tosses them into the same corner as his boots, leaving him in nothing but his black boxer briefs.

I’m frozen in place, mesmerized by him. Without a word, he pulls down the comforter and slides between the sheets, all while I stand watching him like a fool.

“Are you coming to bed?”

I debate my answer as I try to think about my underwear selection this morning. The longer I stand not moving, the more awkward my silence becomes. As a wolf, I’m not shy about my body in the least. Nudity is part of shifting if we don’t want to ruin everything we own. But that teenage girl who was never good enough wants Cain to find her attractive. *Needs* Cain to see her as a woman.

Without another thought, I quickly undress and practically dive into the bed on the opposite side of him. I feel the mattress shake as he stifles a laugh.

“That was smooth,” he whispers and turns off the bedside lamp.

“Go to sleep,” I snap back as I wrap the covers around me and turn on my side away from him. My mind and body are now wide awake, and I stare off into the darkness, waiting for sleep to claim me.

The bed moves and dips, and before I can even process what Cain is doing, I feel his hard chest against my back and his arm drape over me. My wolf practically hums with

excitement at his touch. “You’re not on your side,” I inform, even as I snuggle myself against his warmth.

“Well, I didn’t know you were a cover hog when I made the deal,” he whispers as he nuzzles his face into my hair and pulls me flush against him. “Now, go to sleep.”

Within minutes, I feel his breathing change as sleep quickly claims him. Closing my eyes, I feel calm contentment that I have never felt in my life. My wolf is happy and peaceful, having already claimed him as ours, and with his arms wrapped around me, I feel safe for the first time in a decade.

~~*

Rolling over, I stretch and let the morning light warm my face. Last night was the best night’s sleep I ever had. Usually, nightmares intrude on my sleep, making me restless and my wolf agitated. But not last night. Wrapped in Cain’s protective, strong arms, my dreams were peaceful, and my wolf content.

Swinging my legs out from under the covers, I sit and look around the empty room. I was so soundly asleep that I didn’t feel Cain leave. It only takes me a moment to realize he didn’t go far. The smell of bacon and eggs permeates the air, and my stomach growls with hunger. *Please tell me a man as good-looking as him can’t cook.*

Grabbing Cain’s t-shirt from the floor, I head out towards the delicious aroma coming from the kitchen. The sight of him cooking in nothing but a pair of jeans riding low on his hips makes my mouth water for more than just food, and when he looks up and smiles at me, all I can think about is pulling him back into bed.

CHAPTER FIVE

CAIN

“Morning,” I say as Kat exits the bedroom. Her hair is haphazardly falling around her shoulders and sticking up in more directions than I’m sure she’d be comfortable with. She looks adorable. But it’s the sight of her wearing nothing but my t-shirt that hangs just past those lacy panties she thought I didn’t catch sight of last night that has every primal instinct to claim her clawing to the surface.

Clearing my throat, I motion toward the stove more to clear my head. “I hope you don’t mind I went downstairs and let myself into the kitchen to get some food for breakfast.”

“I’ll add it to your growing tab.”

Nodding my head, I’m thankful for the counter between us because at this moment, it’s not my growing tab I’m worried about her seeing. I take a plate and pile on some eggs, bacon, and toast and place it on the counter for her.

“What time is it?” She sits, grabs a piece of bacon from her plate, and nibbles on the crispy end.

Guess I need to find my charger before the big man sends the troops after me. “Well, my phone is dead, so if the clock on the microwave is to be believed, it’s just after nine.”

“What time is your appointment with Leshia?”

“Not until two.” Plenty of time to get to know Kat better. A drive that’s completely out of my character. I’ve always been a love them and leave them type of guy, it’s always been better that way.

Leaning against the sink, I balance my plate and dig in. The food is tasteless as it touches my tongue. The eggs don’t have a hope of alleviating the gnawing hunger to mate brewing inside of me. I need to contact Ash or Jax and have one of them send the jet to get me out of here, and soon. I can feel my need already starting, and without a female demon to

keep me sane, I'll be a danger to everyone, including the beautiful Kat.

"I probably won't need the apartment for the entire week," I inform her. When she looks up from her plate, there is no mistaking the look of disappointment marring her face. I hate seeing it, and any other time I would stay, pull her into the bedroom and show her why I'm the best man for her. "But, I'll still pay for the week," I quickly add, thinking perhaps her disappointment is more about the money than me.

"No, no way. But I will hold you to at least one shift at the bar. Just to see what you've got."

Oh, I want to show her what I've got. I swallow down the thought, but when she gets up to bring her plate to the sink, the sight of her in my t-shirt has every possessive instinct in me clawing to get out. I grip the stoneware in my hand so hard I hear it crack. The tension in the small space amplifies as she brushes my side to set the dish into the sink behind me. I take a deep breath, trying to be a gentleman as she pauses and slowly pulls her arm back. Her fingers brush my flesh at the side, and a low primal growl resonates in my throat.

The sweet smell of her desire hits my nose, and it takes everything in me to stand still as she slowly glides her fingers across my abs. Putting my plate to the side, I grip the counter behind me and let her continue her exploration. I may be about to lose my mind with need, but I'm no animal. Or maybe I'm as feral as she's proving she is.

I can feel my blood rushing through my veins, my heart pounding, and my cock is so hard it's practically painful. But I don't move, not even when she stands in front of me and hooks her fingers into the loose waistband of my jeans just above my cock. If this is going to go any further, it will be me following her lead.

"I want you so badly," Kat whispers, her voice raw with desire. "Even my wolf wants you."

When she looks up at me, there is a flicker of gold in her emerald eyes. I haven't known many wolf shifters, but I know where they are concerned, it takes at least three to tango, her, her she-wolf, and me. It would seem as if her wolf agrees, so who am I to argue.

Gripping the counter harder, I lean down and brush my lips against hers. The wisp of contact is like pouring gasoline on a fire, igniting my mating heat into a raging inferno. My last resolve melts away when Kat glides her hands up my chest and clasps them around my neck.

Pulling my head down, our lips crash together in a passion-filled kiss.

The only sound is the crack and crumbling of granite as my grasp snaps off two pieces of her countertop.

"I'll replace that," I say, dropping the stone shards to the ground and clutching her bare hips. She lets out a squeal as I pull her against me. My rock-hard cock strains against the denim that is pressed firmly against her panties.

The rich, musky aroma of her desire tickles my senses. With a flick of a razor-sharp claw, I sever the lacy material from around her hips and let her panties fall to the floor. Gliding my hands up the gentle swell of her hips, I snake them around until I can knead her lush, firm ass.

Kat arches into my hold as she nips at my shoulder. The moment her teeth scratch across my skin in a show of acceptance, I tighten my grip on her.

Before I can think better of it, I'm spinning her around and pushing her toward the counter. Lifting my t-shirt over her hips, I expose the smooth flesh of her perfectly rounded ass and kiss the base of her neck.

"What do you want?" I ask as I grind my hips against her bare behind. She lets out a moan that goes straight to my cock. "Are you sure this is what you want?" I growl out as I place her hand on my zipper so she can feel how hard I am for her.

Kat glides her hand down and back before giving me a light squeeze. “Oh, yes, I’m sure,” she purrs.

“Good, because the scent of your heat is driving me insane,” I whisper as I nibble at her earlobe and slide my fingers between her legs. She’s blazing and so wet. My fingers are slick as they circle her clit.

A slight whimper escapes her as she rocks her body against my fingers.

Just before she’s about to scream out, I slide them deep into her. Kat’s body is tight around my fingers as I glide them in and out of her while she rides out her first orgasm.

Unclasping my jeans, I pull out my cock and stroke it once before guiding it between her legs. She’s so wet that my dick glistens with her need as I tease her entrance. “Is this what you want, Kat? My cock?”

“Yes,” she breathes out as she pushes back against me, allowing the tip of my cock to breach her tight entrance.

We both let out a satisfied groan.

I know that having sex this close to my mating heat is a dangerous game, especially with a woman who isn’t a demon. Yet for the first time, I feel more than just a physical pull guiding me. Something soul deep within me wants the woman writhing under my touch. I slowly push myself into her slick heat. I give her a moment to adjust to my girth before gripping her hair then pulling her back until she’s flush against my chest.

“I’m going to fuck you hard and fast until you’re begging me to let you come.” My voice is primal and deep as I rock my hips giving her a taste of what’s to come.

“Promises, promises,” she teases as she tightens her muscles around my length. “We’ll see who begs first. Now fuck me like you mean it.”

She can’t see the wicked smile that spreads across my face at her challenge. I’m on the brink of a thousand-year

mating heat, and there aren't many women who can take on a fully mature Enoch demon. Would she even give me that challenge if she knew what I was? My only regret is that once my heat takes over, only my mate will be able to calm me. And even though I can't explain the cardinal need for Kat, she's not a demon.

I tease her by rocking my hips and circling her clit with my fingers, pulling out slowly until I nearly exit her warmth.

"Don't tease me," she pants. "Give me what you've got. I can take it."

Always challenging me, I slam into her body hard and fast without warning, entering her completely.

She moans out but meets my relentless pace.

And I claim her body as *mine*. Wadding my t-shirt covering far too much of her skin, I tear it down the back and let the scraps of material fall down her arms. I want to stop and carry her to the bedroom, where I would make love to her for hours.

But the need to claim her here and now is too strong.

I can feel her orgasm building with each thrust as I bury myself in her. But my own is beginning to crest. Who is going to beg first? When I feel the first quiver of her muscles around my shaft, I give in.

"I'm going to come in you, Kat," I growl into her ear, hoping that my words aren't just a jumble of incoherent grunts.

"Please," she whimpers.

Seizing her hips, I pull her body against mine repeatedly until we're both panting and begging. Our orgasms collide together. I spill myself into her and bite down hard on her shoulder. I can practically hear her wolf submit to me as I dominate and claim her, but it's the unfamiliar sensation of my mating ring expanding at the base of my cock, locking us together, that pulls me back to reality.

She lets out another pleasure-filled moan as it stretches and fills her. The feeling is something I have never experienced and was sure I never would. The mating ring only appears with an Enoch demon's mate during a heat.

"What...what is that?" Kat pants as another more powerful orgasm rushes through her.

The feeling of her muscles milking my cock has me coming a second time, locked inside her. "Fuck, Kat," I groan out as the most intensely pleasurable sensation courses through my body. For a moment, I think I may pass out from its pleasure.

It's a full ten minutes before we both catch our breath, but I am still stone inside her, and we are still fused together.

"I bruised your neck," I confess as I run my fingers over the mark already beginning to form. Enoch demons don't mark their mates, but wolves do, and some primal instinct inside me knew to mark her.

"Are we..." Her voice trails off as she tries to move forward and pulls me with her. "Are we stuck together?"

Her slight movement has me on the brink of pleasure. Grabbing her hips, I stop her from moving further.

Kat pauses and leans her elbows on the counter, pushing her ass against me.

"Not helping," I sputter as another wave of pleasure washes through me.

Kat chuckles at my words.

I bury my face in her hair while pressing my chest to her back to stop her movement. "I need you to be still, please," I beg. My breathing is ragged and sweat still peppers my forehead as I try to calm my mind and body.

"You're serious," she replies.

"Very."

We stay locked together in still silence for what seems like an eternity. My mind is still trying to figure out how this is possible. Kat is not a female Enoch demon, nor do I have any shifter in me, yet there is no denying my body's physical reaction to her. It recognizes her as the one woman who can soothe my madness and carry my young.

Finally, I feel the pressure around my shaft dissipate, allowing me to back up and pull my still semi-erect length from her. I don't even have time to tuck myself back into my jeans before Kat spins and glares at me.

"Explain," she demands.

But I'm distracted by her naked body in my current state. She makes a feeble attempt to cover herself with a scrap of material that used to be my t-shirt. It does nothing but make her look adorable in the effort.

"I don't know. It's never happened before," I admit, although the statement omits the truth. I *do* know what happened, I just can't explain why.

She laughs, but it comes out as more of a snort. "So, you want me to believe you were a virgin."

"No," I shake my head at the absurdity. "The... expansion of my." I pause at a loss for words. I don't want to scare her by calling it my mating ring, so I opt again for a half-truth. "My ring has never done that before."

"So why now?" she demands.

Running my hands through my hair in frustration, I let out a long sigh. "Can we get dressed first? You're far too distracting for me to have this conversation with as you are."

She glances down as if she's only now aware of her current state of undress. "Fine, but I need to jump in the shower first." She huffs out a sigh as she walks by me.

I don't move until I hear the water from the shower turn on, then I quickly clean myself up and grab my phone from

the counter. I need to text Ash and get the fuck out of here as soon as possible.

ME: I'm going to look for the closest Dimmu gate. Have the cell ready for me when I get there.

~Undeliverable

“What the fuck,”

Sliding my thumb over Ash's name, I hit the dial button. A strange tone comes through the speaker. “Ash?” Nothing but garbled static comes from the other end. “Son-of-a-bitch,” I groan out and toss my phone onto the counter.

Finding my pack from where I put it last night, I dig through it and retrieve a fresh t-shirt. The only thing I can do is sit and wait for Kat to emerge from her shower. The need to get up and join her is almost unbearable. Despite having washed off the remnants of our encounter, I can still smell her sweet, feminine scent. I'm about to get up and join her when I hear the water turn off. A moment later, Kat comes into the living room.

Her hair is up in a towel, and she has on her jeans and t-shirt from last night. The fact that I know she has no panties on has my dick hard and my nails digging into the couch. Without a word, she takes the seat across from me.

“Maybe you should start by telling me exactly what you are and why you're here.” Kat's voice is soft and calm, which in my experience means she's furious.

Leaning forward, I rest my elbows on my knees and let out a long sigh. “I already told you why I'm here. I'm looking at land. I didn't come here for any other reason, and I certainly didn't expect to find you,” I confess as I stare into her beautiful, green eyes. “As for what I am,” I swallow down my trepidation. “I'm an Enoch demon.” I wait for her backlash.

The word demon always has a negative connotation. But I know from personal experience that fucking angels aren't much better. I glance up when she remains silent. She has a confused look on her face, so I continue, “We go into heat

every thousand years. The mating ring only appears with our one true mate, no one else.”

Kat is silent for a few minutes, clearly processing everything I just told her. Either that or the shock has sent her into a catatonic state, in which case I’m fucked.

“Kat,” I whisper as I reach out to touch her leg. When she doesn’t recoil in disgust, I move to kneel in front of her. “Sorry I’m not better looking,” I tease, trying to get a reaction from her.

A slight smile spreads across her lips, and she moves her hand to rub over the spot on her neck that I bit. “Well, my wolf seems to be purring in contentment, so you can’t be all that bad.”

When she reaches out and touches my face, I brace myself for her next question.

She blinks up at me. “You said this is you, more or less. So, what do you look like?”

Leaning back, I stare at her for a moment. “Just your average demon.” I give her a wink before continuing, “Maybe we should save some mystery for our second date.”

“I don’t know. You’re the one spouting the word *mate* to a wolf. You do realize we take that word very seriously.”

I give her a curt nod. “Oh, I know, and it’s also not a word I thought I would ever say. There aren’t very many females of my species left. Most died from a disease that plagued my kind a few hundred years ago, including my sister.” Even after all the time that passed, the memory of my sister, Awan, still tugs at my heart.

“I’m sorry,” Kat says in a soft voice.

Changing the subject, I brush off Kat’s condolences. “Will you be at the bar tonight?” I ask as I stand still, trying to wrap my head around this bizarre morning.

“We open at four. I’ll be there,” she says as she jumps up off the chair and heads for the door. “I’m going to head home.

Thanks for breakfast and the mating,” she jokes.

“I’ll come by tonight and dazzle you with my bar skills.”

She gives me a smile and a nod before she’s out the door.

“I am so fucking stupid,” I mumble to myself as I make my way back into the bedroom. The scent of Kat still lingers in the air, and even after a cold shower, I can still smell her on my skin.

CHAPTER SIX

CAIN

I tried everything I could to contact Asher or Jaxon. I wasn't even sure why anymore. What would I have said had either of them answered?

“Hey, thanks for sending me up here. Oh, by the way, the impossible happened, and I found a mate.”

Yeah, that would go over like a ton of bricks.

Or better yet, I found a mate, now get me the hell out of here. Neither sounds like something I should do. But the fact remains that not even after two cold showers and jerking off three times does the need for Kat subside. As impossible as the scenario may be, Katrazyna is my mate. She will be the only woman my body will ever crave and the only one who can soothe the mindless rages associated with an Enoch demon's heat.

There is no way I can leave her, not at least without an explanation.

She has no idea what being my mate means, especially during my heat. An Enoch demon in heat thinks of one thing and one thing only. Well, two things. If the first isn't met, then I'll turn into a mindless killing machine.

One thing is sure... I need to get out of this apartment. Kat's scent and the scent of us together is everywhere. And the longer I stay, the more going after her sounds like the best plan of action.

Glancing at the time, I have just over an hour before I need to meet with Leshia Kincaide at our first property. The best thing I can do is let the Northern California air clear my head.

Without a second thought, I grab my leather jacket and head downstairs.

Passing the entrance to the kitchen, I can't help but look at the deserted bar. What are the odds that I'd ride into this unknown town and right into my mate's arms, a wolf shifter? As I head out, a photo behind the bar catches my eye. It's Kat smiling while standing on the steps of Vic's...er, rather The Drop Off, surrounded by what looks to be an MC. I can't read their patches, and if I have to guess, I'd say the photo was close to at least five years old.

The possessive and primal part of me wants to smash the photo but I refrain and gently place it back on the shelf behind the bar.

Walking outside, I squint when the bright sunlight hits my face. I slept well with Kat in my arms, but the ride yesterday was plagued with traffic and bad weather up the coast, and I'm still feeling the strain. My bike is where I parked it last night, except now it's the lone vehicle in the lot.

Fishing my Ray Bans out of the saddlebag, I swing my leg over my beauty and back her out of the spot. The air is crisp, and the sun is shining when I head off toward Highway 1. Nothing can ruin the mood I'm currently in, not even the thought of having to leave this place. Not when I know I have at least one more night with Kat.

I take a leisurely ride through Timber Cove and around the surrounding area. While it is a beautiful area, I don't understand Ash's desire to have a club here, especially if the pack already owns a similar establishment. When I turn my bike into the gravel road to the property, I suddenly realize the appeal.

The spot is secluded and picturesque, with ocean views and no neighbors, an ideal place for a vampire bar. Grabbing my phone, I take a few pictures and send them via email to Asher. Within a second, the bar reads *Message failed*.

"What the fuck," I groan, ready to toss my cell into the ravine. Instead, I pocket it and lean against the fence to wait for Leshia.

Glancing at my watch, I shake my head in annoyance. She's late. I'm just about to leave when a Ford F-150 pickup speeds up the gravel road. The tires spin, throwing dust and gravel in its wake. When the driver slams on the brakes and skids to within a yard of me, I take a few steps back. If this is Leshia, she should reconsider her career choice and pursue something in NASCAR.

The truck sits idling before me and as I take a step forward, the driver revs the engine. The side windows are tinted dark, and the glare from the sun blocks my view of the driver, but I have a feeling this isn't Leshia.

"Hello!" I yell out. "Leshia?" The driver revs the engine again. Crossing my arms, I stand my ground in front of the vehicle. "What's your fucking problem?" I yell out.

When the driver's side door opens, I'm not surprised it isn't Leshia who steps out. I have no idea who the guy is that's walking toward me with a pissed-off look on his face.

"You have some fucking nerve showing your face around here." He spits as he stops to look me up and down. The first thought that races through my head is that this guy is a relative, or gods help him, a boyfriend of Kat's. But at far as I can recall, I never told her exactly where the land is that I'm looking at, so this guy most likely isn't either.

I watch as he scents the air, and whatever he catches a scent of does nothing to improve his mood. "You son-of-a-bitch. I hoped you were fucking dead before."

"Look, dude, I don't know who the fuck you think I am, but I suggest you get back in that truck of yours and go back to wherever the fuck you came from," I grit out, standing my ground, though readying myself for a fight.

The guy takes another step forward, closing the distance between us. I've never been one to back down, so I stare him down. I can sense he's a shifter, my guess would be one of the Timber Cove Wolf pack members here to try to intimidate me away from pack land.

“You know when Leshia said she had another appointment with you, I thought she had to be fucking kidding. No one could be that fucking stupid,” he hisses.

Shaking my head, I try to understand just what he’s saying, but he’s not making any sense. “Obviously you have me confused with someone else, so I suggest you get the hell out of here. I don’t have time for your bullshit.”

The guy dares to laugh. “What? Do you think if you show up here without the three-thousand-dollar suit and your fancy car, no one will fucking recognize you, Cain?”

My head is still trying to wrap around what he’s saying when his fist collides with my jaw. The blow is powerful and knocks me back a few feet. I barely have time to right myself when he lands a second punch to my gut.

“The name is Axzel Salvador. Do you fucking remember me now, you piece of shit?”

I’m about to let loose a punch when two other men exit the truck one is wearing some sort of police uniform and the other just looks as if he wants to kill me.

Axzel steps back and motions for his friends. Before I can protest, I’m being arrested, and a Solano County Sheriff’s car is pulling up the road.

“What the fuck!” I yell as something hard is bashed against the back of my legs, causing me to fall to my knees. Before I can protest further, a heavy boot is pressed against my back and the next thing I know, my face is in the gravel and my arms are being cuffed behind my back.

“I told my brother we shouldn’t have assumed you were dead when we tossed your body into the river. This time we won’t make that mistake of disposing of you the way we disposed of the other demons,” the cop behind me growls in my ear as he drags me to my feet.

WTF is going on? Other demons? “I’ve never seen you before in my life.”

“Save it. You’re nothing but a worthless piece of shit, and a stupid one at that.” The cop shoves me into the back of the squad car, only missing a few times as my face and head are bashed against the doorframe.

At the station, I’m tossed into a cell. I know better than to bitch about my lack of Miranda Rights. This is pack territory, and if they think I’m guilty then I am.

It’s hours before I’m dragged back out of my cell and into an interrogation room. They cuff me to a metal table and shackle my ankles to the ground. I’m not sure if the metal will hold me, most likely not, but I’m not stupid enough to try to escape with a precinct full of Axzel’s brother and his cop buddies guarding the door.

Another hour passes as I sit and wait. The clock hanging above the door says it’s just about seven when Axzel Salvador walks into the room and takes the seat across from me.

“Why’d you come back?”

I stare at him, refusing to answer any of his ridiculous questions.

“What were you going to do to Leshia when she got there? Were you going to make good on your threats and leave her pup motherless?” His face turns crimson.

I clench my teeth together so hard I’m surprised I don’t hear them crack. “I would never hurt a woman or a child,” I sneer back at him.

“But you’d kill her husband? You’d break into her home and scare the fuck out of her? You’d get yourself killed, piss off the wrong vampires, then ghost your arraignment?”

Fuck, this is bad. I have no idea what arrest they’re talking about let alone me working with the *wrong* vamps and ghosting my arraignment for a murder charge. “If you’re accusing me of murder, can I at least make a fucking phone call?” I snap.

“I didn’t say I was accusing you of anything.”

“Then why the fuck am I here?” I growl out as I try to resist the urge to snap the chains around my wrists and ankles. Killing the man in front of me in cold blood wouldn’t end well for either of us.

“That’s a great question, Cain. What *are* you doing back in Timber Cove? I’ll be honest, I thought after I hunted you down and took care of you a year ago, you’d stay dead. Then again, we never really did know what the fuck you were. Not until we came up against the leader of the pipeline and took care of him and your kind.”

I stare at him for what seems like an eternity as I let his words sink in. *Back* in Timber

Cove? Stay dead? My kind?

“Look, I rode in last night. I got in just after midnight. Other than that, I’ve never even heard of fucking Timber Cove before two days ago. I don’t know who you think I am, but you’ve got me confused with someone else.”

Axzel pushes his chair back and stands, glaring down at me while a detective with a familial look and a detective badge shadows him. “We’ll see about that,” he says as he motions toward the door. A moment later, the two guards come in to escort me out.

“Let Mr. Cain make his phone call. Then he can get reacquainted with his cell,” the detective instructs them before he leaves.

The guards lead me through the station like a dog on a leash, pulling and tugging as if I’m giving them a reason. When we stop, they push me down into a chair and turn the old desk phone toward me.

“Make it quick,” the guard snaps.

Grabbing the receiver, I dial Asher’s number and hope he answers. After two rings, I hear a woman’s voice on the other end.

“Hello.”

“Sloane?” I ask, not recognizing the voice.

“No. Who is this?” she asks.

“This is Cain. Is Asher in?” I ask, wondering why anyone has Asher’s phone.

“You have the wrong number,” the woman on the other end says before disconnecting.

The guard smirks at me. “Tough luck.” He laughs.

“Can I make one more call? It was a wrong number.” I nearly beg, hoping that the asshole will show some compassion.

The guard looks around and then nods to the phone.

“Make it quick.”

“Thanks,” I say in relief as I try to remember the number Kat scribbled on the whiteboard. I dial what I hope is the correct sequence of numbers and hold my breath.

“This is Kat,” I hear her say.

“Kat, it’s Cain... I don’t have a lot of time. But I kind of need your help...”

“As long as it’s not bail,” she jokes.

I inwardly cringe. I want more than anything to explain why I’m sitting here, but fuck if I know. None of what has happened in the last twelve hours makes any sense. Kat shouldn’t be my mate and I shouldn’t be sitting in jail for a murder I didn’t commit.

“There’s been a misunderstanding, and I *am* in jail.”

“Goodbye,” she says in an angry huff.

“Wait, Kat, please!” I yell into the phone, desperate for someone to help me out of this insane situation.

“What?” she snaps.

I physically cringe at the anger emanating from the receiver. “Can you get hold of two people for me?”

There’s a long silence on the other end, and the guard clears his throat for me to hurry.

“Kat, please, I don’t have a lot of time,” I beg.

I hear her sigh.

A wave of relief washes over me.

“Fine, who do you want me to call?”

I give her both Asher and Jaxon’s contact information, including both businesses’ information. “Please call them as soon as possible,” I add, but she’s already hung up. Replacing the receiver back onto the phone I stand and look over at the guard.

“Sounds like you’re pretty fucked.” The guard laughs as he grabs the chain from around my wrists and leads me back to my holding cell.

When he pushes me inside, I don’t even bother to protest. The best thing I can do is sit and wait for Kat to contact Asher or Jaxon. Whatever it is I’m being accused of, I didn’t do it. But if the Timber Cove Wolves think I did, then I’m as good as fucked.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KATRAZYNA

“Problems in paradise?” Angie asks as she watches me toss my phone halfway across the bar in anger and frustration. “And here I thought you were walking on cloud nine when you came in tonight.”

I let out a huff because she was right. I was on cloud nine right up until Cain mentioned he was in jail. Who the hell ends up in jail after looking at a piece of land? Unless that wasn't the only piece he tried to look at.

“Yeah, well, that was before he landed himself in Timber Cove's exclusive criminal hotel.”

“He's in jail?” Angie laughs. “Why did he call you?”

I don't really want to explain to Angie at this moment the entire *mate* fiasco. Nor do I want to out Cain as a demon. Honestly, I'm not even sure how I feel about that myself. My wolf, however, seems perfectly happy to jump snout first. Explaining anything to anyone at this point is useless, mostly because I know there will be questions that I have no way of answering.

Like, *who the fuck is Cain?*

Looking down at the napkin that I jotted down the numbers Cain gave me, I give Ang a shrug. “I don't fucking know. He gave

me some numbers to call for him. I guess he couldn't get hold of anyone else."

"Ahhh, you know it's true love when they call to have you bail them out," she jokes as she does a little pitter-patter over her heart.

"Yeah, well, I'm not doing it," I say as I crumple up the napkin and toss it into the bin. "He can go rot in hell for all I care."

The moment the note is out of my hand my wolf growls, and I can feel her concern as she scratches and howls her frustration beneath my skin. "Fine," I say through gritted teeth as I pick the crumpled napkin out of the trash and shove it into my pocket. The action seems to appease my she-wolf for the time being, however, I still have no intention of calling either number or bailing his ass out of jail.

I'm just about to head into the kitchen when a familiar face enters the bar. It's one I never thought I would see again, but there is no denying the arrogance of Axxel Salvador when he struts through, almost daring someone to stop him.

"Why are you here," I sneer as he leans against the bar.

He ignores my disapproval of his presence in my establishment. I'm about to have him escorted out when he grabs a glass and holds it under the beer tap. "One of the deputies told me one of their guests called you, so I figured I would stop by and make sure you were all right." He shakes his empty glass.

Pulling the tap lever, I fill his mug, making sure a fair amount of foam tops his beer. Without a word, he tips his glass and swigs back the lousy pour. "So why would Cain call you?"

"How should I know? Lots of people call the bar. Maybe he saw my number on a take-out menu," I say as I grab a few dirty glasses to busy myself. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Axxel scent the bar. It's just bad luck, pure and simple, that he's standing exactly where Cain sat last night. I clear my throat and take a step back. Despite my shower this morning, I have no doubt that he can smell Cain lingering on my skin.

"I didn't say he called the bar, I said he called *you*." As if he's a detective on a crime show instead of a lawyer, he takes out a small notepad, flips it open, and proceeds to read me my phone number. "That's you, isn't it?"

“So?”

“Kat, I’m not the bad guy here. Why did this guy have your number? And why did he call you?”

Letting out a long sigh, I figure the only way to get him out of here so I can do my work is to give him a reason. “He’s renting the apartment upstairs. Happy?” The look he gives me tells me he’s anything but happy.

“Can I take a look around upstairs?” he asks, and I can’t help the laugh that bursts from me.

“Are you kidding me? No, you can’t. So, I suggest you leave and go bother someone else,” I snap as I turn my back to him and smile at Lu sitting at his usual spot.

“I don’t need a search warrant, Kat. You know that.”

His words have the anger in me boiling to the surface. My wolf wants to shift just to rip him apart. Not that I’d win that fight. Axzel is a powerful Alpha of his family. How I manage to keep her at bay, I have no idea. But I’m pleased I rein my wolf. I’m standing in front of him in a heartbeat, grabbing the pint glass from his hand and slamming it down on the bar. “This is not Timber Cove, so you and your brothers and your packmaster have no jurisdiction in this bar. If you want to look around upstairs, then you best come back with that warrant you think you don’t need. Now get the fuck out of my bar.”

Silently, he backs up and turns to leave. I’m thankful that he didn’t push the issue until he turns back. “Maybe I’ll talk to a few people in the bar. I’m sure someone besides you spoke with him last night. Or was he busy?” His tone tells me that he scented Cain in the bar and on me.

Shaking my head, I round the bar and pat Lu on the shoulder as I pass him. Angie watches as I motion for Axzel to follow me.

The moment I open the door to the apartment, the scent of Cain mixed with raw sex invades my senses. Axzel gives me a raised eyebrow as he enters. “Interesting.”

“Get on with whatever you’re looking for. And don’t for one minute think that I don’t know this is highly illegal,” I say as I lean back against the wall with my arms crossed and watch him open drawers and poke around the small space. I see Cain’s backpack

leaning against the couch from the corner of my eye. I don't dare move to retrieve it until Axzel goes into the bedroom.

"Smells like the two of you got very acquainted last night!" he yells from the bedroom as I scan the room for a spot to hide the backpack. The best I can come up with in the short amount of time is to toss it into the trash, which is mostly empty except for a few eggshells. When he comes back into the room, I'm standing exactly where I was when he left.

"Did you find whatever you were looking for?"

He smiles and dangles a torn piece of black lace from his finger. "You two had quite a night. I take it it's not the first time he's been here."

I give him a raised eyebrow as I grab what's left of my panties from his finger. "That's none of your business, now, is it?"

"He's a dangerous man, Kat. Not someone you need to be... *associating* with."

I move to the open door. "Who I associate with isn't any of your business or the business of anyone in the Timber Cove pack. This bar is neutral ground, and I will not have you in here again flexing your Alpha's muscle."

He gives me a huff as he passes me. "If you won't listen to me, at least listen to Leshia. Cain is more dangerous than you realize."

"Thanks," I say, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

When he's gone, I let out a long, frustrated breath and dig the crumpled napkin out of my pocket as well as Cain's backpack from the trash. I'm about to grab my phone from my pocket when I remember that I threw it in anger at Cain's call. Locking the door behind me, I head back down to the bar where Ang took over for me, pouring drinks.

I try to nonchalantly look for my phone, which is probably broken. But Angie doesn't miss a beat. "Looking for this?" she asks, pulling my phone from her apron pocket and waving it in the air.

I grab it before anyone has a chance to ask any more questions. "Is he gone?" I scan the bar looking for Axzel Salvador.

"Oh, yeah, he's gone. He tried to ask a few questions, but Lu wasn't having it, so he asked him nicely to move along," She laughs,

and I look at Lu, who doesn't seem to have moved since I left.

"Lu? Are you sure?"

Angie gives me a wide smile. "Lu said this bar is still the property of the Big Mountain Pack and as your grandfather's second, he was well within his right to kill him for not respecting his Alpha's family."

A lump forms in my throat at the thought of the old man standing up to Azzel, who is probably fifty years his junior. "Ahh, Lu. Thanks." He gives a grunt and continues his nightly ritual of drinking until he passes out.

"Are you going to call those numbers he gave you?" Ang whispers.

Shaking my head, I try to concentrate on anything besides the napkin burning a hole in my pocket. "No. No way. What's the point?" I ask, and even I hear the disbelief in my voice. "Besides, he's in jail for a reason." Although, I'm not exactly sure why. All Cain could say was that there was a misunderstanding.

I let out a snort at the possibility of a misunderstanding at the Timber Cove Sheriff's Department.

"Earth to Kat," I finally hear Angie say as she taps me on the shoulder. "Go make the call before you drive yourself and me crazy."

As much as I know she's right, a part of me is still furious that Cain wound up in jail after going to look at the land. Who does that? Without thinking, I smack myself on the forehead, remembering my stupidity last night.

"Don't beat yourself up, we're all jealous." Ang snickers. "If I were ten years younger, I would be all over that man," she continues with her swooning.

"It just doesn't make any sense. The guy who was here helping lug Lu to the truck is not the kind of guy who gets arrested in the middle of the day. That's science," I joke, trying to make light of the situation as much as I can.

"Go make the call. You know you're going to anyway. Besides, it's dead here," she points out in an attempt to make me feel better about leaving. But she's right. I'm just going to obsess over this until I call and get Cain the help he wants from his friends. Then

I'm finished. I hear my wolf growl at the thought of letting Cain go, but I've had my fair share of bad boys, and I'm done with them. They are nothing but heartbreak, no matter how good their intentions are.

With a sigh, I give Ang a nod and head to the back office to make my calls and end this before it's my heart that gets crushed.

Flopping down on my well-worn desk chair, I stare at my phone sitting next to the napkin for a good ten minutes before I work up the courage to dial the first number.

"Okay, Mr. Jaxon," I mumble as I dial his numbers and place the phone on speaker. An odd ring echoes from my device a moment before it disconnects.

"Seriously?" I grumble as I check the number and dial it again. The same strange ring sounds and I'm about to hang up when a muffled voice comes through the speaker. At least I think it's a voice.

"Hello, Jaxon!" I yell into the phone, unsure if the bad connection is on both our ends. "I'm calling for Cain," I continue. And even though I can hear what I think is someone speaking on the other end, I can't make out any words. "He's in jail in..." The call disconnects before I can continue.

"Ugh! What the hell?" Grabbing my phone, I redial the number but all I get this time is the strange ring before the call just ends. I move on to the second number for Jaxon, apparently his company's direct number. The same ring comes through the speaker before disconnecting. I let out another sigh before trying Asher's numbers

The phone rings twice before a woman picks up. "Hello," A soft feminine voice says from the other end.

"Um, Hi Asher?" I ask, having assumed that Asher is a man. A surge of jealousy rushes through me at the thought that I might be calling his girlfriend.

"No," she snaps. "I don't know who you're trying to get hold of, but you have the wrong number," she chastises angrily. "So please stop calling."

"Wait!" I yell, hoping she doesn't immediately hang up.

"What?" she says with a deep sigh.

“Are you in Las Vegas?”

“Yeah, and there is no Asher here. So please...”

I cut her off before she can dismiss me and hang up. “Wait, one more question.” There’s a long pause and I look to see if the call is still connected. “Please,” I beg and hold my breath, waiting for her to answer.

“Fine. What?”

“Do you know where the Black Door Club is in Vegas?”

“The what?” she asks and my heart sinks a bit in my chest.

“The Black Door Club,” I repeat, though I don’t know why. My gut is already telling me the answer before she says it.

“I’ve never heard of it.” She confirms my feeling.

“Okay, well, thank you for your time. I’m very sorry to have bothered you,” I say quickly before disconnecting the call.

A plethora of emotions flood through me – but mostly it’s the anger I feel towards Cain for lying to me and making me question my decision to trust him.

Grabbing my laptop, I flip it open and search for The Black Door Club. “If it’s so popular, I’m sure it has a web page,” I say out loud, even though no one is here to watch my descent into crazy town.

Nothing comes up beside a barrage of photos of black doors.

“How about, vampire club Las Vegas?” I mutter as I type it into the search. Several come up including a Fur & Fang that is due to open next spring. But no mention of The Black Door Club. My curiosity begins to get the better of me as I search for Asher Barachiel. The only reference that populates has to do with an Archangel. “Not exactly someone a demon would associate with,” I mumble as I continue my scrolling down, hoping to get something.

My second search for Jaxon Krieger or JDL International also comes up empty. But now it’s too late to turn around and I’m lost in the rabbit hole of the internet, trying to find some connection to Cain.

I lose complete track of time until Ang pops her head into the office. “I’m going to lock up. Are you all set in here?”

“What? Oh my God, what time is it?” I ask as I squint at the clock on the bottom of my screen.

“It’s time to lock up. Are you good?”

“Yeah, I’m just... finishing up some bookkeeping,” I lie, not wanting to admit the strange searches I was doing all night. Or maybe it’s the fact that all of them came up empty that I don’t want to share.

“Well, I’ll lock up then, as long as you’re okay.”

“I’m fine, Ang. Thanks for taking care of things for me tonight.”

“Anytime.” She gives me a wink and shuts the office door.

I pretty much exhausted my searches... all except for one. My last search brings me to the Paranormal Registration sight, where all non-human species are required to register. This is the human populations’ way of thinking they still hold the upper hand. Force every species to register with their abilities and weaknesses listed in alphabetical order.

Running my hands through my hair in frustration, I try to remember what Cain said he was. “Eggnog.” I let out a laugh at my stupidity. “Enoch!” I yell out as if I am yelling Yahtzee on game night. My fingers are typing in *Enoch Demon* as fast as they can before hitting enter.

I read the “*No Classification was found*” displayed under the search bar aloud.

Mentally exhausted and with nowhere else to turn, I decided to again stay in the upstairs apartment. *Cain’s apartment*, I remind myself.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CAIN

“Wake up, asshole.” I hear a stern voice say as the door to my cell is unlocked and pushed open. “Mr. Salvador is here to see you.”

Standing up, I stretch and try to work the kinks out of my spine from leaning against the concrete wall all night. Sleep eluded me as I tried to understand how I ended up here. The *conversation* yesterday with Axzel was... bizarre, to say the least. He surely confused me with someone else, yet he knew my name and that I was something he never saw before.

“Hands,” the guard commands, and I hold my hands out in front of me so that he can put the cuffs on again. I follow behind as he leads me back into the same interrogation room I was in when they brought me here. This time, however, Axzel sits with his arms crossed, wearing a suit and tie, looking a bit more civilized than I saw him last night.

“What, no ambush?” I ask as I kick the chair out from under the table and sit down.

A thick manilla file sits in front of Axzel with a name scrawled across it, a name I know well. Cain Belial, my name. My first thought is that I was in this town for less than twenty-four hours and have a case file an inch thick.

“This should be interesting,” I say as I lean back in the chair, my cuffed hands resting on my lap.

“I went and saw Kat last night,” Axzel starts in.

I immediately want to wrap my fingers around his throat and strangle him. But that wouldn't help the thickness of my file one bit. Just the opposite, in fact.

“And?” I reply, not wanting to give anything away with the emotions boiling inside me. The last thing I need right now is for my mating heat to take over to protect Kat. If that happens, nothing will be left of this gods' forsaken town.

He gives me a smirk. “She didn't have much to say.”

He pauses for what I can only assume is dramatic effect. In that way, he reminds me so much of Jaxon. His words ring clear in my head. “*Whoever speaks first in a negotiation has already lost.*” So, I decide to keep my mouth shut and listen for once.

It's a full minute before he continues, “But... it was more what she *didn't* say that I found so interesting.”

And there it is.

I ball my hands into fists as I try to tamp down my anger. It isn't easy when I start to feel my claws digging into my flesh. I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, a technique I learned during the one Lamaze class I attended with Sloane when Ash was away on business. It helps a little, but I'm still about to birth a case of whoop-ass on this guy if he mentions her name again. I don't say a word, just staring at him, daring him to continue.

To my shock, he must see that any conversation about Kat is off-limits, at least right now when I'm barely holding myself together. Instead, he flips open the file and spreads out its contents. A barrage of crime scene photos spills out across the metal table. Slowly and methodically, he turns each one toward me.

“Do they bring back fond memories?”

In my long existence, I have seen unspeakable violence, I even killed in the fighting pits of the Firehouse. But I never mutilated someone so bad that they were almost unidentifiable as human, or in this case shifter.

“No,” I reply and watch as he throws down more pictures, this time of a woman and a child dressed in black at a funeral.

“You don’t recall telling this woman that she better be careful, or she would end up like her husband?” Axzel yells as he slams down a few more pictures.

“I have no idea who that is,” I answer, keeping my voice monotone.

“You have no idea. Just like you have no idea who I am, and you’ve never been here before,” Axzel continues.

“That’s right.”

I watch as he grabs the last photo from the file and slams it down in front of me. The force of the strike has pictures and papers scattering to the ground. “And I suppose this isn’t you,” he deadpans as he lifts his hand off the photo.

For the first time in my life, I am stunned silent as I look down at a picture that is undeniably me. My hair is long and maybe a bit darker in the photo, which appears to be a mugshot dated last year. But there is no way I can deny that it is me.

“Tell me that’s not you. Go ahead, lie to my fucking face.”

With my hands still cuffed, I grab the picture and hold it up so I can get a closer look. I know it’s not me, yet I can’t deny the uncanny resemblance. It’s like looking into a mirror right down to the small scar above my right eye. I have no idea what is going on, but I do know is that this is bad. Very, very bad. “I already told you. I came into town yesterday. I’ve never been to Timber Cove before ___”

“And yet,” he cuts me off. “I have a picture of you!” Axzel yells as he snatches the photo from my hand and holds it an inch from my face. “Tell me this isn’t you.”

“It’s not me,” I assure him. Although, at this point, I’m not even sure. “Can you at least for one minute entertain the idea that there are things beyond basic explanation in this world?”

Axzel gives a snort. “Yeah, I’m looking at one,” he jests.

I grit my teeth, not wanting to make my already dismal situation worse. “You’re a shifter, for fucks sake,” I continue,

unfazed by his comment. “What do you think the human population would do if they knew that?”

Axzel’s face changes from anger to confusion.

“I’ll admit, I can’t explain the resemblance and it’s... beyond unsettling. But I’m willing to bet that both you and I have seen some unexplainable shit in our lives.”

Axzel relaxes back in his seat for a moment, studying *my* mugshot. “What I don’t understand is why would you go directly to The Drop Off?”

The level of frustration that is coursing through me at having to answer the same stupid questions over and over is about to hit its breaking point. As much as I tried to curb my frustration to not make my situation worse, I’ve had enough. “I already told you several times. I rode in, was hungry and tired, and saw a place to stop.”

“So, you figured you’d stop at your girlfriend’s before attacking Leshia?”

“Attacking Leshia?” I yell, my anger bubbling over. “You and your buddies are the ones who attacked me. I was just there to look at the fucking property.”

“A property you looked at a year ago.”

“I’m done answering your fucking questions until I get a lawyer here,” I say, leaning back against the metal chair.

Axzel has the audacity to laugh at my request as he shakes his head. “Do you think this is a human system of law? You’ll be brought before the Timber Cove Alpha and subject to pack justice... This time.”

“Are you a cop, detective, or just a curious party?” I ask, because I have no idea what his role is. He doesn’t say anything, so I continue, “Leshia’s boyfriend?”

Axzel lets out a growl and raises his lip in a sneer. “Husband. True mate. But she is no concern of yours. And to answer your question, I’m *your* court-appointed public defender.”

“Fuck, no, you’re not!” I bellow at the absurdity of his statement. “I’ll get my own lawyer, thanks. You know, one who doesn’t want me dead.”

“Do you honestly think I want to represent you? It’s not an option—for either one of us. You need paranormal representation.”

I’m about to protest further at the clear conflict of interest in having the man who sucker-punched me as my representation to the Timber Cove Alpha when the deputy who was with him enters the room. I didn’t get a good look at him before, but now the resemblance between the two men leaves no doubt that they are brothers. “Just what I need,” I mumble as they both look over at me.

First, I’m familiar with what they like to call *pack justice*, and, in my opinion, it isn’t something I need representation for. Not unless it’s his job to notify my next of kin. Good luck with that one.

Detective Salvador or Deputy Dag as I’ve come to call him, gives me the same sneer his brother did when I asked about Leshia, and he also leaves the door open. Not that I have any intention of bolting, at least, not yet. But it’s the sweet scent that hits my nose that calms me. It’s Kat. She’s here. Knowing this puts me at ease because if she’s here, then Jaxon or Ash can’t be far behind.

I’m never one to run from I create. But this is a whole other level of crazy. The picture of me still sits on the table and I can’t help staring at the face I looked at for centuries, yet have no plausible reason for it to exist.

“Katracyna Lycos is here,” the detective whispers to Axzel.

“You realize my hearing is as good if not better than yours,” I say with an arrogant smile plastered across my face.

“Your little girlfriend is here. Maybe I should dump her in the cell right next to yours. She’s probably involved!” the detective yells as if to make his point.

My reaction is to jump up out of my seat, which skids across the small room. With hands still cuffed, I challenge him for daring to threaten Kat. “She has nothing to do with any of this bullshit. You know that as well as I do.”

“Sit the fuck down,” Axzel says as he picks up the metal chair and pushes me back down into it. “I’ll go talk with Kat and see if she’s finally come to her senses.”

They both leave but not before the deputy gives me the dual finger salute on his way out. Trying to remain on my best behavior, I smile and return the gesture.

Thankfully, my ankles aren't chained this time and as I watch the clock on the wall tick away, the only thing I can do is pace. My body is aware that its mate is nearby, and I can feel the urge to go to her clawing at me. In another few days, I won't be able to be away from her for long, and if I am, no prison cell will hold me. It's one thing to go into heat without a mate, but when one is found, nothing but her will slake the need.

I'm about to go out of my fucking mind when Axzel, my *lawyer*, comes back into the room. He's carrying a thin laptop and places it on the metal table before turning back to me.

"Where's Kat? I need to talk to her."

Axzel just stares at me for a moment before pulling a key from his pocket. "Let me see your hands," he says far too calmly for my liking. He uncuffs me and motions for me to have a seat. I'm not sure what brought on his sudden change in attitude, but it's making me uneasy.

"Is Kat okay?" I ask as he moves all the crime scene and mugshot photos from the table and returns them to their manilla folder. All I can do is watch him, he's calmed, too calm, for my liking. When he sits, I do the same.

Reaching into his pocket, Axzel pulls out a Black Door business card and places it on the table. I don't recall having any on me when he and his friends jumped me, but maybe there was one stuck in my wallet. However, my backpack usually has a few, especially since my intention was to scout out the land. Of course, it's still sitting in the apartment that I'm renting from Kat. A knot tightens in my stomach that maybe Axzel and his buddies got to her, and she now believes I'm the criminal they're claiming I am.

"Is this the club you were looking at the land for?" Axzel asks as he taps the black and gold embossed card.

"It is," I reply, still unsure what led to his change in demeanor.

"How many clubs are there?"

Leaning back, I cross my arms over my chest and stare at him for a full minute. "Why the sudden interest?" I ask in a tone probably a bit more defensive than I anticipated. But given the circumstances, I find myself in, not unwarranted.

"Humor me," he replies, his voice still calm.

I let out a sigh. “Worldwide, three hundred, give or take. Now can I talk to Kat?”

“In a minute.”

That gives me a little relief, just knowing that I’ll be able to see her.

Opening the laptop, Axzel turns it toward me. On the screen is the website for Fur & Fang, a Shifter club owned by the Timber Cove pack.

“Does the Black Door have a website?”

“Sure,” I deadpan.

He pushes the computer toward me. “Can you pull it up?”

Humoring his request, I type the website info and hit enter. Several things come up listing The Black Door. I scroll down the page, and none of the sites are ours. Clearing out the search I type in The Black Door Club Las Vegas. Since it’s a semi-public club until sunset, Sloane had us launch a special site just for it.

Again, the search comes up blank. I look up at Axzel, who gives me a raised eyebrow. Grabbing the computer, he types in a few things and turns it back to me. It’s the site for the Holiday Inn in Petaluma, but what gets my attention is the bold lettering stating that the location is human only. The conversation that Kat and I had about a place to stay comes to mind. She mentioned that the closest hotels were an hour’s drive, but they were *human only*. I thought she was joking, but apparently not. “I don’t get it.”

Axzel lets out a laugh and runs his hands down his face. “Yeah, I don’t either, truthfully, I think it’s way above my pay grade,” he adds as he rubs his temples. “I can’t believe I’m about to say this.” He pulls out the mugshot and studies it for a moment before placing it down on the table. “I don’t think that’s you. I mean it is, but...” He trails off. “But it’s not you.” He adds pointing his finger in my face.

I look around the room, waiting for the punchline, or at least the deputy to come in to drag me back to the holding cell. “You’ve lost me.”

“Join the club,” he says as he closes the laptop and gets up. “I’m letting you go. For now,” he clarifies. “Kat will explain what she told me. I’m going to suggest you don’t leave the area until I get

this sorted out. I'll be in contact with you or with Kat in the next few days. But I mean it when I say don't leave the area. You're not out of the fire yet."

Axzel opens the door and I follow him out. "I don't understand. An hour ago, you were accusing me of being a murderer and now you're letting me go. What the fuck kind of twisted game is this?" I question after him.

He stops and turns on me. "I don't fucking know!" Axzel yells back.

Several officers file into the hall, their hands on their guns, ready to see what the commotion is.

"I don't know how you got here or why you're here..." He shakes his head and turns, continuing to lead us down the hall, pointing to a glass door. "Just go."

Through the small glass window, I can see Kat standing in a waiting area.

I don't bother to thank him or even ask where my bike was impounded. I just want to get the fuck out of here.

When I step through the door and into the waiting area, Kat runs over to me and throws her arms around my neck.

"Thank you," I whisper as I nuzzle my nose into her hair and breathe her in. "Whatever you did, thank you."

CHAPTER NINE

KATRAZYNA

I wasn't sure if coming here to speak with Axzel was a good idea or not. There isn't any love lost between his pack and my family. But I hope he will, as a lawyer, listen to what I have to say. The idea of what I suggested sounds crazier the longer I think about it. Yet, there is no denying the more I investigated Cain and his friends, the less I found.

At first, Axzel looked at me as if I were insane, and I can't say I blamed him. It wasn't until I threatened to go to the Timber Cove Alpha that he knew I was serious.

I couldn't help but run to him when Cain walked into the waiting room. It was only a day since I saw him last and another since we met. But there is no denying that I am his, and he is mine. I never understood the whole meaning of what being a true mate meant. Not until the possibility of never seeing the one man who called to both my wolf and woman became a real possibility.

"Thank you," Cain repeatedly says as he holds me tightly in his arms. Glancing over, I see Axzel and his brother, Jaxson, leaning against the wall, staring out through the glass partition, watching us.

"We should go." Grabbing his hand, I pull him out of the station and into the mid-day sun. My heart is threatening to beat out

of my chest not because of what I just convinced Axzel of. But somehow, I know that will not be the most challenging part of my day. It's going to be telling Cain what I suspect, that will be the most difficult.

“Are you hungry? I'm starving.” I answer my question before he even has a chance to open his mouth. “There's a café just down the street, or we could...” I'm babbling on, and Cain is just staring at me.

“What's going on, Kat?” he asks as he looks back at the station where Axzel and his brother are now watching us through the door. “What am I missing?”

It takes me a minute to gather my thoughts, and the last thing I want is to be out in the open with Cain. While Axzel may have let him go, there are sheep in wolves' clothing still lurking in this town. “Come on,” I say as I tug at Cain's arm and lead him across the street.

I grab his hand when we're out of sight of the station. We walk in silence through the center of town as my mind races with what to say. I'm not thrilled about being in Timber Cove, but Axzel assured me we won't be bothered.

The café is small and crowded, but thankfully it seems to be pack free when we enter. I spot an empty booth toward the back and make a beeline for it before the waitress can even ask where we want to sit. I probably hate being in this town more than Cain does at this point.

Yet here I am, bailing his ass out of jail. Well, not precisely bailing, but I convinced Axzel's brother to let him go, at least for the time being.

Sliding into the booth, I sit with my back to the door. Not because I want to, but I know instinctively that Cain won't want anyone to be able to approach from behind. Alpha males are all the same regardless of their species and having been raised by one, I know their tendencies.

When the waitress brings us a couple of menus, I grab mine and hold it up to look at it. A sizeable masculine finger comes over the top and pulls it down until I'm staring into his soft blue eyes.

“What the hell is going on, Kat?” Cain whispers as his eyes dart around the restaurant.

Letting out a sigh, I nervously bite at my thumbnail to buy myself some time. This only proves to frustrate Cain, which I can completely understand.

“Kat,” he repeats as if I didn’t hear him the first time.

“Fine. But you need to know that what I’m about to say sounds crazy, and it doesn’t sound any less crazy the more I say it.”

Cain gives me a raised eyebrow. “In the last twenty-four hours, I was arrested, accused of murder, and shown a mugshot of myself from a year ago. A picture that I know isn’t me, but it is. So, I’m open to suggestions.”

The moment I open my mouth to speak, the waitress comes by to take our order. Without missing a beat, Cain orders two burgers and two sodas while keeping his eyes pinned to me. Usually, I’d be a bit put off by someone taking that much control, but where Cain is concerned, I find it endearing.

The waitress, whose name I didn’t even hear when she said it, was barely gone when Cain smiles. “Spill it, Kat. Nothing is going to surprise me at this point.”

I let the words spill forth without a second thought because the more I think about it, the crazier it gets. “I don’t think you belong here,” I whisper as if I’m telling him some top-secret military code and being as vague as possible.

Cain stares at me with a blank expression on his face and for a moment, I think I might pass out from his intensity.

“You don’t think I belong here,” he repeats, pointing at the table. “As in Timber Cove?”

“No, as in here in this world,” I whisper back and look around to make sure no one else heard me.

I can see the confusion on his face as he tries to figure out what I’m saying. Because honestly, I didn’t rehearse telling him and I’m not doing a very good job of it.

“I looked for Jaxon and Asher all night. I searched the web for The Black Door clubs and JDL International. They don’t exist. So, either you’re crazy, or I am. I even searched on the Paranormal Registration site for Enoch demon. The species was never registered,” I spew out as quickly as possible.

I watch as Cain squints his eyes at me, and I ready myself for his laughter or his dismissal of what I just said. When he doesn't say anything, I continue, "I didn't believe it myself, not totally, at least. Not until I went to Axzel this morning and told him what I suspected. He did laugh, by the way."

Cain doesn't say a word as I talk, he just rests his elbows on the table and clasps his hands, resting his chin on them.

"When I called Jaxon, I got some strange sound and when I called Asher, some woman answered, and she had also never heard of The Black Door Club. So, then I went down this rabbit hole of information and the next thing I knew, I was calling Axzel."

We sit in silence for what seems like an eternity as I watch Cain process what I not so eloquently just dumped on him. Regret starts to seep into my veins as the time ticks away and Cain says nothing.

"Say something," I urge, but it comes out more like begging.

I can only watch as he sits back and lets out a long sigh as he runs his hands down his face that now has a day's worth of stubble on it. "I'm still confused as to what you're getting at, Kat. It sounds like you couldn't get hold of anyone with the numbers I gave you. So, the most logical explanation is that I don't belong here?" he questions, and suddenly I feel stupid for even suggesting such a thing.

"Sort of," I squeak out wishing I had more concrete evidence.

"Okay, well let's say for a minute that I *don't belong here*." He air quotes and I want to punch him, but I refrain. "Where is here?"

"Here?" I repeat. "Well, it's not where you come from, I don't think."

Sitting back, I watch as Cain's confusion morphs into something closer to anger. I know I'm doing a poor job at explaining what I suspect, probably because he's right. I have no proof of my suspicion, just a gut feeling.

"Look I know this sounds like something out of a movie. But I can prove you don't belong here," I spout out.

He gives me that raised eyebrow again and even though I find it adorable, I also know he's not believing what I'm saying.

“How?”

“When you first came into the bar you asked about the closest hotel.”

“And?”

“And do you remember what I told you?”

Cain gives me an agitated shrug, so I continue, “I told you it was an hour away and *human only*. And you asked what else could it be.”

Cain sighs and I know he’s not ready to believe what I’m telling him. Hell, neither am I. When our food comes, we sit and eat in awkward silence. I’m not sure if I should continue or just wait until he works through whatever it is he’s thinking. Either way, I feel as though anything I say is going to sound condescending.

So, I wait out his silence.

“Can I see your phone?” he finally asks, holding out his hand.

Grabbing it out of my pocket, I unlock it and hand it over to him. I watch as he types away. He must find what he’s searching for because he turns the phone to face me. It’s a video of a concert and when he turns the volume up, I recognize the song and the band. It’s Destined to Fall performing at their latest show in Seattle.

“Okay,” I say taking the phone from him. “What does the band Destined to Fall have to do with you?”

He grabs the phone from my hand and pauses the video. Handing it back I see the still image of the band’s lead singer, Zachriel Seal. “Zach’s a friend of mine and clearly someone we can find.”

I let out a laugh at the absurdity of his statement. “Are you telling me you want to call up the biggest rock star on the planet and ask him... what?”

“Not me. You,” Cain says with a smile as he grabs one of the last fries off my plate and pops it into his mouth. “And you’ll ask him to come here.”

“Clearly, you’re delusional.”

Leaning back, he pegs me with the sexiest stare on the planet. It’s amazing that in the short amount of time that we have known each other he’s able to sway my thinking with just a look. I glance

away, trying to not be swayed by the evil, voodoo demon magic that he clearly possesses. But despite my best effort, my stomach does a little flip, and I can feel my cheeks heat under his stare.

Taking my phone again, he searches for something else. With a wide, Cheshire Cat grin, he slides the device across the table.

“You want to go see a show?” I ask as I look down at the Destined to Fall website and concert schedule.

“No. But, they are playing in Sacramento this weekend,” he says with a smile. “Might be easier than trying to call him.”

Leaning back in my seat, I stare at him, trying to figure out whether he’s comprehending what I told him or if he’s just in shock. It’s evident that he isn’t either, since he’s not freaking out or even questioning the possibility of interdimensional travel. Just the thought makes me cringe at the absurdity of it.

“Do you understand what I told you?” I question, hoping to veer the conversation away from rock stars and concerts and back to reality, as ridiculous as it may be.

“Yeah,” Cain replies nonchalantly with a nod and shrug of his shoulders. “I get it. This isn’t my timeline or world or whatever. I came to the same theory when I saw the mugshot of myself from a year ago.”

Okay, that is a surprise to hear that he does understand what I told him. “Great. So maybe you can explain it to me, because I’m not sure how you’re not freaking out. I’m still trying to grasp the concept, never mind the how,” I blurt out, then look around to make sure no one heard my crazy. The one thing about Timber Cove is it has ears, and the last thing I need is someone spreading the word that I’m crazy, or crazier, depending on whom you ask.

“Kat, I’m thousands of years old. This doesn’t even touch the top ten of the freaky-ass shit I’ve seen. Is it weird? You bet, but I could tell you stories that would make you question everything you know to be true.”

I let his words sink in for a moment.

There are so many things I want to ask him, and I want to hear every freaky story. But I’m only able to concentrate on one thing. As a wolf shifter, my life expectancy is nearly double that of a human,

which apparently is nothing compared to Cain. I can't help thinking what that means for someone who is supposed to be *his mate*.

My hand goes to the mark on my neck that I am currently hiding under a cotton scarf, although I don't know why. The moment I walked into the station to talk with Axzel, every male in the place knew that I was already claimed. Fucking men. I can feel my wolf prancing around, just waiting to jump out and show off her new mark.

"*Down, girl,*" I silently tell her, but she is so happy to have Cain free, I'm barely able to hold myself together. I'm shocked she's allowed me to sit this long without shifting and nuzzling him to death.

"You're thousands of years old," I whisper, not even sure if he can hear me, or if I want him to. The sudden realization that I'll be long gone and he'll have to move on hits me like a speeding truck. For a solid minute, I can barely breathe through the lump forming in my throat.

Cain gives me a quizzical look, probably wondering why I'm about to have a full-on panic attack just sitting here.

"Give or take a few centuries, but yeah," he answers while grabbing my hand. "Did I say something to upset you?"

I want to say no. In fact, I should say no. But as he stares at me waiting for my answer, I do the one thing that is so out of character for me. I start to cry. Big, fat, ugly tears begin to stream down my face. All at once, I'm mortified and overwhelmed with a sadness I can't even begin to explain.

Before I know what Cain is doing, he lets go of my hand, gets up, and for a split second, I fear he's going to leave. But he doesn't. Instead, he slides in next to me and wraps his arm around my shoulders and pulls me against him. Leaning into him, I bury my face against his massive chest and sob.

"Shhhh, it's okay," he mutters as he kisses the top of my head and holds me tight against him. In the sweetest gesture, he just lets me cry for what seems like forever. I hear the waitress come over and ask if I'm okay and Cain just gives her a nod and asks for the check.

"No, it's not okay," I sputter into his chest without lifting my head. "I'm not the kind of woman who just bursts into tears." I sniff

and without thinking, use his shirt to wipe my eyes dry. “I hate those women.”

“Why are you crying?” Cain whispers, then kisses the top of my head.

Without thinking I blurt out, “Because you’re old.”

I can feel his chest vibrate as he laughs at my not-so-eloquent declaration. I’m about to explain when I hear Axzel speak.

“Out of jail less than an hour and you already have a woman in tears. That doesn’t look too good for you.”

I can feel Cain’s spine stiffen at the sound of Axzel Salvador’s voice. When I look up, Axzel is sliding into the opposite seat and handing Cain a manilla envelope. I do my best to wipe the tears and snot from my face. I’m about to ask him to leave, but Cain’s grip tightens around my shoulder, and I just know that he wants to hear what Axzel has to say.

“You left without the stuff you came in with the other night—wallet, cell, and the keys to your bike. I’m not going to lie, I went through all of it and rode your bike back down to the station. That’s a sweet ride,” he states as he waves over the waitress.

“We were just leaving,” I inform as I attempt to push Cain out of the booth. Even though I’m strong, even for a shifter my strength is no match for Cain’s. His massive form doesn’t even budge.

“Stay, lunch is on me,” he offers with a smile as the waitress takes his order and he hands her back the check she placed on the table earlier.

“We already ate,” Cain retorts, his voice far calmer than I would have ever thought possible given the circumstances.

“Call it a lawyer-client lunch.”

CHAPTER TEN

CAIN

I let out a loud laugh at Axzel's declaration. "So, you're my lawyer now? That doesn't seem like a conflict of interest at all." Honestly, I'm not sure what I'm more annoyed over. The fact that he thinks he's my lawyer or the fact he rode my fucking bike. "And why the fuck would you sit your mangy ass on my bike? You should have had it towed. You don't ride another man's bike without his permission," I reiterate.

"In my defense, you were in jail."

Axzel gives me a cocky smirk and it takes everything in me not to knock him into next week. But I refrain, more because I don't want to end up back in my cozy cell than the fact that he doesn't deserve it.

"Where you fucking put me," I mumble more out of spite than anything.

After seeing my mugshot from a year ago, I can't really blame him for tossing my ass in jail. I would have done the same thing if I were him. I do, however, hold it against him that he and his brother took some cheap shots at me in the parking lot, catching me off guard. I would rather they gave me the opportunity for a fair fight.

“And, what—you’re not even going to thank me for letting you go? I’m going to get a lot of flak for that. My pack, fuck my Alpha considers you a wanted man.”

I scoff at that. “I thought you said your pack considered me a dead man.”

Axzel gives me a raised eyebrow. “Oh, they did, don’t get me wrong. But word spreads quickly around here.” He seems to consider something for a moment before continuing, “Perhaps letting you go was a decision I made in haste.” He smiles and if I wasn’t certain he is bating me into hitting him, I’d get in my own cheap shot and wipe that smile off his face with my fist.

His passive-aggressive threat does nothing to improve my opinion of him. “Thanks for my shit,” I growl out as I stand, and Kat slides out after me without a word.

“You still have to stand before the Timber Cove Alpha, so don’t go far,” Axzel reminds me. The very notion that I can possibly forget irritates me. Realistically, every time he opens his mouth, I’m irritated.

“Your ride is out front. I figured I’d get in one last tool around town before handing it over.” He adds with a cocky grin.

I can feel the tick in my jaw as he once again deliberately tries my patience. “Thanks for lunch and the comic relief of you being my representation. But like I said, I’ll get my own. Someone who has my best interest in mind, not just a dog with a bone.” I get in one last cheap shot, and I don’t bother to wait for his reply.

Holding out my hand for Kat to take we walk out of the restaurant. As promised, my bike is sitting outside with my helmet hanging precisely as I hung it when I got off it a few days ago to meet Leshia Kincaide.

“Care for a ride?” I ask Kat with a smile as I swing my leg over the black leather seat of my vintage 1997 Valkyrie. I take a moment to look her over as I slide my hand down her shiny black gas tank. I let out a small chuckle at the memory of Val, an actual Valkyrie, being insulted when I purchased her in 1997.

Kats face lights up at the prospect of a ride, at least for a moment before it falls. “No helmet.” She pouts, tapping her head. Digging my keys out of the envelope, I unlock one of the saddle bags and grab my spare skully helmet and hand it over. Kat gives me

a quizzical look and almost sneers at the helmet dangling from my finger.

“I’m not wearing some other chick’s ugly helmet,” she snaps as she crosses her arms over her chest and waits for my reply. Normally, I would fuck with her, tell her it belongs to a woman I picked up on my way to Timber Cove. But something in me, on a deep primal level, doesn’t want any part of her to doubt me in any way, not even for a moment. “No one has worn this helmet but me. Once. It’s my emergency helmet.”

Skeptical doesn’t even begin to describe the look strewn across her face.

“What the hell is an emergency helmet?”

I’m about to tell her when Axzel comes out of the diner and stands next to Kat.

“It’s a helmet you keep in your saddle bag in case some asshole takes yours while you’re parked,” Axzel informs her while looking me square in the eye.

“Why?” Kat asks.

Again Axzel speaks before I can. “So he doesn’t break any helmet laws.”

I give a shoulder shrug because he’s correct. Watching Axzel, I can clearly see the look of contemplation on his face as he realizes I’m not the law-breaking ass he thought I was. Not that I haven’t broken my fair share of laws when the need arises, I just don’t make a habit of it.

Kat finally takes the helmet from my finger and puts it on. I tighten the strap under her chin and give her a tap on the head.

“Adorable.”

When she gets on behind me and wraps her arms around my waist, I give her hands a squeeze. The contact of her nestled behind me feels right.

But if this isn’t where I belong, how is it possible?

I give Axzel a two-finger salute before starting the bike and pulling out into the street. I’m not exactly sure where I’m going, but I need to feel the freedom of the open road to figure out what the hell I’m going to do. I know one thing... I’m going to have to go to

Vegas and see what the fuck is going on. I also need to find out if there is a Dimmu gate anywhere here, or if they ever even heard of one.

My mind is wandering as we ride out of town and head north. As I get lost in the splendor of the open road, I can't help but think about how this happened. How is it possible that this isn't where I'm supposed to be? The concept alone is enough to drive me insane.

I have no destination in mind, but after aimlessly riding through the mountains, Kat taps me on the shoulder and points to a road up ahead. We are a few hours north of Timber Cove and high enough up in elevation that the air is cool and refreshing.

Parking the bike, I take off my helmet and stare out over the drop-off. The view is breathtaking. The cliff overhang is abutted by a lush forest as far as the eye can see.

"What is this place?" I ask as I hold out my hand so she can get off the bike. The moment her hand touches mine I can feel the stir of energy deep within me. It's as if my entire body was hit with a bolt of lightning, and each cell is alive. When she's standing on solid ground, instead of letting her go and getting off the bike myself, I tighten my grip.

"It's the Salt Point lookout. My grandfather used to take me up here to practice shifting. I was a late shifter," Kat says with a shy smile as she looks down at her feet. "Most of my pack in Vancouver, where I'm from, are born in their wolf form. I was not, nor was my mother. So, I had to learn to shift, and then practice at it."

Pulling her closer, I run my fingers down her cheek. She is so beautiful, I can't even fathom what she would see in anyone like me.

Is it just the mating heat making both of us feel things we normally wouldn't?

Or is it something else?

"I would very much like to meet your wolf," I whisper as I run my thumb over her plump lower lip.

"And I'd like to tame your demon," Kat replies.

Without a single shred of hesitation, I drop the human façade I have become so accustomed to. Instantly, my skin lightens to the color of ash and my hair becomes the color of newly fallen snow.

But it's the appearance of two large horns curling back from the top of my head that makes the most profound change.

I watch as a devilish smile spreads across her lips as she takes in the sight of me as I truly am. It's only then that I realize I haven't taken a single breath as she peruses my appearance.

"Well?" I finally manage to ask.

For a moment, I'm not sure what she's thinking. Not until she grabs hold of my horns and pulls forward until our lips brush against each other.

"These are going to come in very handy," Kat adds as she runs her hands down the curling length of each horn. The sensation is unimaginably pleasurable and has me growing hard at the thought of what she'd use them to control.

"They do have their advantages."

"Why hide who you are? We're free to..." Her words cut off as the realization of what she's about to say settles in. "You're not, are you?"

The concept that the entire world knows about shifters, vampires, and any other number of non-humans is astounding to me. Asher and I go to great lengths to conceal the true nature of our clubs. While speculation is still there, no one really knows the true meaning of what we are.

"Is it a good thing, having humans know what you are?" I question it because the concept is so foreign to me. I've lived in hiding all my life where humans are concerned. The few rare times I was revealed, I was immediately vilified for what I am.

"It's been a challenge. At first, they thought us the monsters of their nightmares." Kat lets out a giggle as she again caresses the spiral of my horns. "I don't know what they would think of you. But I know what I think," she adds with a wicked smile.

"I think I've shown you mine, now it's time for you to show me yours," I tease as I lean over and give her a gentle kiss on the lips.

"I didn't realize this was tit-for-tat."

Standing up, I swing my leg over the bike so I can fully pull her against me. "Well, I didn't realize tit was on the table. Those

change things,” I add while wiggling my eyebrows and staring at her perfect set.

Kat gives me a playful smack on my chest. It amazes me that in the short time we’ve known each other there is a level of comfort that I never experienced with another person.

“Oh, yeah? Well, I don’t consort with criminals,” Kat taunts as she takes a few steps back.

I’m about to follow when she reaches for the hem of her t-shirt and pulls it over her head. The sight of her in a lace bra and jeans has my body coming alive and needing to claim her in my true form. I take a step forward when she holds up her hand.

“Nope. You wanted to play this ‘you show me yours I’ll show you mine’ game. Now you’ll just have to wait.”

Again, she taunts me as she slowly unbuttons her jeans and shimmies them down her legs. I let out a low, carnal growl at the sight of her standing in nothing but a bra and matching lace panty.

“I’ll tell you what,” she says as she reaches behind her back and unclasps her bra, tantalizing me by letting it fall to her feet. “If you can catch me,” she continues as she slides her panties down her long legs. “You can have me.”

Taking a step forward, I barely have time to comprehend what she means before she turns and runs naked toward the woods. In a flash, I take off after her. She’s tall and lean and has a long stride, but I have a good six inches on her. Catching her shouldn’t be a problem.

I’m fast and come to within a few feet of her quickly, but apparently, I’m no match for Kat. In less than a heartbeat, she morphs mid-stride into a beautiful, gray wolf. The majestic creature pauses a few yards from me. She is breathtaking. Bright green eyes stare back at me, and if I didn’t know better, I’d swear I can see her playful smile as she turns and runs.

I take chase, even though I know I won’t be able to catch her like this. By the ease with which she moves through the dense forest, it’s obvious she knows her way around. And as a low branch smacks me in the face, it’s obvious I don’t.

We run, me playing a losing game of chase for what seems like hours. Kat’s wolf is fast and nimble as she toys with me. I’m smiling

and laughing like a child playing. She brings out so many unfamiliar emotions in me. As I round a large tree, I see her a few yards away. She's on guard, scenting the air and peering around her.

I take a moment to watch her and marvel at her beauty. There is no doubt in my mind that she knows I'm watching her. She swivels her head and ears in every direction except for where I'm hiding. Her playfulness makes me smile as I try to sneak up behind her, but as my hand reaches out to brush against her fur, she darts off and evades.

Stopping, she stands and turns a few steps away and gives me a vicious growl. I can see the sharp points of her teeth as she snarls. For the briefest of moments, I wonder if during our game I didn't start chasing a different wolf. But then I see the green glint in the beast's eyes, and I know it's Kat reveling in the win.

"I give up," I concede as I kneel, raising my hands in surrender. "You win." I pant as I catch what's left of my breath.

The moment I'm down, the ferocious wolf leaps in the air toward me, a set of massive paws landing square on my shoulders, pushing me to the ground. She stands over me and it's only then I realize her massive size. Raising my hand, I run it along her side, feeling the soft pelt of her fur.

"Who's a good girl?" I tease as I rub her ears. She snaps at my hand and then lays her entire body on mine. With a huff, she nuzzles her head against my neck and her cold, wet nose tickles my skin.

Closing my eyes, I glide my fingers down her back and before I can make a second pass, her naked, smooth skin is under my fingers. Resting my hand over the swell of her ass, I give it a small squeeze.

"Your wolf is beautiful," I whisper. "Thank you for sharing her with me."

Straddling my hips, Kat sits up and I drop my hands to her thighs. I'm already growing hard as she snakes her fingers under my shirt and tickles my skin with her feather-light touch.

"I thought you were handsome before, but like this, I find you irresistible."

I give her a fang-toothed smile.

“Do you have any other sexy appendages hidden under there?” she asks as she unbuttons my jeans.

“Sorry to disappoint. I just have the one,” I reply as I open my eyes to take in her natural beauty.

The sun is low in the sky and casts orange and brown shadows through the forest canopy. The shadows dance across Kat’s skin, making her look ethereal. Our one and only coupling was an explosion of mutual passion, both of us racing to feel the other.

But here in the open wilderness, surrounded by nothing but nature, I want to take my time with her. I want to explore every curve of her body and taste every inch of her. Wrapping my arms around her, I sit up so that her legs can wrap around my waist. I can feel the wet heat of her sex pressed against my stomach as she tightens her legs behind me.

Without a word, I claim her lips in a deep kiss.

Of all the cruel jokes the fates could play, knowing that I’ll have to leave her is the most malicious of all. Wiping the thought from my mind, I concentrate on the woman in my arms. On clumsy legs, I stand and take a few steps back until my spine rests against the trunk of a towering tree.

Lowering myself to the ground again, I lean back and let Kat take charge. She’s slow and methodical as she pulls my t-shirt over my head. Her breath catches as her gaze travels down the length of my chest.

“What are these?” she whispers as she traces the intricate pattern of dark red lines and symbols that traverse down both my sides and up over my shoulders. “Are they tattoos? Did you have these in human form? They’re beautiful.”

“No, they aren’t tattoos, and they conceal when I do.” I shake my head. “They’re a sort of lineage pattern. Mine is a combination of my mother’s and my father’s, as were theirs.”

“And your children? Will they have them too?”

I give her a smile as I caress her cheek, then I let my hand fall to the swell of her breast and trace the outline of her nipple with my thumb. “I don’t know. My mate is a wolf shifter. She’s the only one that I can impregnate when I’m in full heat.”

The thought of Kat's belly round with my child stirs a deep-seated need inside me. Never have I ever imagined the possibility. A look of sadness crosses her face. It's brief, and I know she must be thinking the same thing I am. "We'll find a way," I affirm as I run my hand over her flat belly and down between her legs.

She lets out a moan of pleasure as my finger separates her sex and circles her clit. Kat's fingers are fumbling with the zipper of my jeans. The best I can do is lend her a hand and shimmy the denim down my legs, freeing my cock. Leaning back against the bark of the tree, I watch as she grips my length in her palm and slides down my shaft.

"Fuck," I breathe out as she tightens her grasp and pumps my impossibly hard dick. The sweet scent of her arousal permeates the air as it mingles with the scent of pine and earth. "Put me out of my misery." I groan as she slides the thick head of my cock through her wetness, coating me with her arousal.

Her moves are painstakingly slow as she aligns my tip with her opening. We both let out a pleasure-filled moan as she slowly takes every inch of me inside her.

I must fight the urge to thrust up and fuck her. My clawed hands tighten around her hips as she gently rocks back and forth. When her hands come up and grip my horns for leverage, I nearly lose the battle as she glides up and down my length.

"Yeah, these come in very handy," Kat pants and she quickens her pace.

Sweat covers my body, and I can feel the skin on my back being flayed by the rough texture of the tree bark. But I'll be damned if I care. Watching Kat take pleasure from me as she looks down at me in my true form has my mating ring expanding and locking us together.

Kat's mouth opens in a silent moan as I stretch her to the point of blissful pain. I watch in amazement as a partial shift comes over her. She's more woman than beast as she throws her head back and lets out a blood-curdling howl. Her body tightens around me as I release into her, filling her, and claiming her as mine.

We ride out our combined orgasm together. I'm so tightly locked inside her there is barely a breath between the end of one and the peak of another. When her green eyes lock on mine, I pull her

against my chest and bite down on her shoulder where my mark still resides. I lose track of all sense of time as our bodies morph together too many times to count.

When we are both spent, I lean back, close my eyes and hold her tightly. "I'm never letting you go," I whisper into her ear as physical exhaustion claims us both.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CAIN

The howl of a wolf in the distance wakes me from my otherwise blissful sleep. Kat is still nestled naked in my arms as a second wolf joins the chorus. Nudging her awake, I realize that her clothing is still scattered near my bike, which is now miles away.

“Sounds like we’re not alone,” I say as I reach for my nearby shirt and hand it to her.

The moment Kat sits up, her body rubs against mine and I must fight the urge to take her again. But since the howls in the distance seem to be getting closer, it would be in everyone’s best interest if we continued this back home or at the very least a nearby hotel.

“Do you recognize them?” I ask, not sure if she can differentiate between them in human form or not, probably something I should know.

Kat shakes her head. “They aren’t wolves,” She listens again, tilting her head back and forth as if to get better reception. “They sound like coyotes.”

For a moment, I let myself relax. But then what I thought were two or three animals suddenly explodes into a multitude of howls.

“These lands are protected for miles, so it could be just a few shifters out looking to run free.” Even as Kat speaks, I can see and feel the unease in her body as more join in.

“I don’t like it,” I protest. My gut is telling me that they are up here looking for us, or at least me. “Are you sure you don’t recognize them? Do Axzel and his brothers run with coyotes?”

The very notion makes Kat laugh. “No, never.”

She stands and pulls my t-shirt over her head. “I’d recognize them. These are all coyotes. No one from Timber Cove or Big Mountain. We should probably go,” she adds as she grabs my hand and gives me a tug.

Standing my ground, I can see that whoever they are, Kat is nervous and itching to run. “You should shift and run to the bike. I’ll be right behind you. Your wolf will be faster.” In truth, there is no way for me to keep up with her once she’s shifted and I want her as far from here as she can get.

Another screech echoes through the night. This one is much closer than the others. More than likely it already has our scent and is closing in on our location.

“I’ll stay with you. We’ll face whomever this is together.”

Wrapping my hand around her head, I pull her in for a kiss. “I appreciate your bravery, but you’re practically naked. If anyone so much as looks at you, I’ll rip their throat out. So, I need you to be a safe distance away.”

“But...”

“Go,” I growl out. This time she doesn’t hesitate before shifting. “There’s a secure key box under the right saddle bag, 0-6-2-3. It holds a key to the bike.” Her wolf gives me a nod of understanding.

Even in wolf form, she begins to protest, nipping at my hand. I hear the snap of dried branches from behind us. “Go,” I growl out.

Kat must hear the movement as well because she gives my hand a last nudge before she takes off running toward the bike in her wolf form.

Without much thought, I revert to my human appearance. No one here needs to know my true form other than my mate. The pack

of coyotes draws closer, and I can now hear the lone scout just beyond the trees.

Before I can say anything, a lanky man steps out from behind the same tree where Kat and I were sleeping. His features are gaunt and wiry as he stalks closer.

He scents the air, more like an animal than a man. “We all thought you were dead,” he says as he eyes me up and down. “You don’t look dead.”

It occurs to me that he must be referring to the Cain from the mugshot. The one that by Axzel’s words, most certainly would appear to be dead.

“Well, looks can be deceiving,” I respond as I watch him sniff into the air again. The action has me hoping that Kat is long gone and didn’t decide to linger. It may be only a few days, but there is no denying that my mate is strong-willed and doesn’t back down from a fight. My only hope is that this time she continued to run to safety.

“You smell like a she-wolf.”

“And you smell like shit,” I return. “Where’re your friends?”

“Don’t worry, they’ll be here soon enough.” I watch as he twitches and looks around the area for anyone I may be with.

I give him a condescending laugh. “Makes sense to send out the most expendable member of the pack.”

The twitch in his eye worsens at my taunt, and when I take a step forward, he nervously backs up. It’s an unconscious decision, one made on instinct when a member higher up on the food chain stands his ground.

“Shows you what you know, demon,” he continues, his jittery nature almost becoming comical. “You should have stayed dead.”

His words have me second-guessing the role that Cain from the mugshot played. I wouldn’t have thought that an alternate me could have such a vastly different moral compass, but the evidence seems to be piling up to the contrary.

The twitchy coyote shifter mills around the small clearing we’re standing in, as if waiting for his handler to appear out of the darkness. I let my gaze follow his every move as we wait. The yips and howls that seemed miles away quickly surround us. I can feel

the hum of energy and mystical magic as the men shift and step out from the shadows.

Eight men surround us in the small forest clearing. They are much bulkier than the twitchy scout, but I don't think I would have an issue besting all of them in a fair fight. *Fair being the operative word.*

"Cain, Cain, Cain." I hear a familiar voice chant from behind me. "And here I thought you were dead. What a pity."

The familiar voice grates on every nerve I have. "Azazel," I say flatly as he moves into my line of sight.

He takes a moment to eye me up and down. When he stares into my eyes, my gut tells me he knows I'm not the same Cain from a year ago and I wonder if he's the same Azazel I loathe.

"Azazel? Why so formal?" He snickers. "We're all friends here," he says as he comes over and pats me on the shoulder. "Where have you been hiding, *friend*?"

His emphasis on the word *friend* makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand on edge. Azazel was never a friend of mine, not in this life or any other. So, his familiarity has me on edge. I don't know enough about the other Cain to pull this charade off, at least with any level of success. The best thing I can do is keep my mouth shut and my answers as vague as possible until I know a bit more.

"Where's the bitch you were here with?" he asks as he sniffs the air. "Smells like you two had a good fucking time. Or was it just a good time fucking?"

I do my best to stifle the low growl that emanates from deep within me. This *man* has little to no moral compass and any reason he would be interested in Kat isn't a good one. If ever there is a time for my mating heat to send me into a mindless rage, right about now would be good.

"She's long gone. We heard your scouts coming, so I sent the slut on her merry way." It kills my soul to degrade Kat in any way. But for Azazel to believe that I'm the Cain he knows, I must be ruthless and demonic in my behavior. From the little I know about him, he is a man that has no problem using women and children to get his point across.

Azazel turns to one of the men. “Go after her. She’s probably heading back to that shit-hole bar of hers.”

My spine stiffens at his instructions to the coyote shifter. I can only hope that she took my bike and is speeding down the highway. She’s a smart woman. Hopefully, she goes directly to Axzel. At least he may offer her some protection from whatever fuckery I got us into. I take a good long look at the man who is about to track down my mate and memorize his face and features. If a single hair on her body is harmed, he’ll be the first one to die.

“So where were you hiding over the past year?” Azazel questions as he stalks around me. “I saw your broken and dead body,” he whispers in my ear. “I didn’t know you could come back from the dead.”

“There’s a lot about me you don’t know. So why don’t you ask the question you really want to ask,” I snap back before I can think better of it.

The maniacal laugh that resonates from him is one that will haunt my nightmares for as long as I live. Azazel resides in a level of evil that resonates with everything he does, and we have searched for him ever since he kidnapped Asher’s wife, Sloane. A handful of others and I also believe he is at least partially responsible for the distribution of Blue Dragon. The vampire drug is guilty of turning them into mindless killing machines. It’s also the drug that nearly killed Zachriel.

My gut is telling me that this man isn’t an alternate Azazel, but like me, he doesn’t belong here. And it would explain why we haven’t been unable to locate him anywhere.

“Well, there are lots of people eager to see you again and hear all about what you’ve been up to,” he adds as he wraps his arm around my shoulder as if we are long-time friends.

On instinct, I nudge his hand from my body and try to curb my disdain for the fallen angel turned devil who wreaks mayhem wherever he is.

I watch as the men around us shift back to their coyote form, growling and baring their teeth at us. The animals are big but still smaller than Kat in her wolf form. Slowly, they begin to circle us, or more likely, me. Before I have time to realize what their plan is, Azazel steps back as the largest of the shifters leaps in the air, teeth

bared and paws out. I put up my arm to shield myself, but it's too late. The animal is on me and bites down on my shoulder. I can feel his teeth sinking into my flesh and the blood flowing from the wound.

I'm stronger and much more deadly in my demon form but I don't dare transform, so I fight off my attackers as I am. They work as a group, attacking me from the front and the back. Their claws and teeth are no match for my flesh. Each time I manage to toss one from my body, another takes its place.

There is no doubt that I would annihilate them all in my true form. My claws can rip through even the toughest of hides. But as a man, I'm limited to my own strength and speed, both of which are waning as the fight wears on.

With each vicious bite, I can hear Azazel laugh from the sideline. "All right, all right, all right," he chokes out through his own laughter. "I think he's had enough."

Kneeling on the ground, I sit back on my haunches and take in my bloody body. The majority of the blood staining my clothes belongs to me. Most, not all.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" I yell out at Azazel as I spit blood from my mouth.

The pack of coyote shifters takes off into the woods at a full gait, leaving just the two of us in the clearing. Painstakingly slow, I manage to get to my feet. Azazel and I stand motionless for a moment, and I wonder if he's going to continue this pretense, we both have going on.

"I'm not exactly sure who the fuck you are." He sneers as he takes a few steps back and eyes me up and down again. "But they..." He motions toward the woods where the shifters ran. "They don't need to know that. When word came to me that Cain was alive and back in Timber Cove, I had to come to see for myself. I'll admit I didn't believe it, considering I dragged your dead body and tossed it into the Phlegethon myself. So, who the fuck are you?"

Spitting out more blood than saliva from my mouth I give him a laugh and a smile through bloody teeth. "I'm the same Cain I've always been," I answer honestly. "So, who the fuck are you?"

"Evidently not the only one who ended up where he doesn't belong. But I think we can use that to our advantage, don't you?"

There is little doubt in my mind that he at very least suspects that I am not the same Cain from a year ago. But I need to make certain, because he's right, we can use this to our advantage.

“And what makes you say that?”

“Easy,” he says as he steps to within an arm's reach. “The Cain I knew wouldn't think twice about showing that pack of dogs who he really was. Nor would he show them any mercy, he would just rip them apart after the first bite. And as a bonus, you don't have to hide who you are here.”

I let the glamor of my human appearance fall away. “That is an upside.”

“Cain was trying to get his claws into the Timber Cove pack. Looks like you found a way.”

The twitch in my face is immediate as soon as he insinuates that my relationship, if it even is one yet, can be used to his advantage.

“Well, then, perhaps you should fill me in,” I add as I pat him on the shoulder. “Yesterday's enemy is today's alliance.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

KATRAZYNA

I can hear the howls of the coyotes as I speed through the familiar terrain. With every fiber of my being, I hate that I left Cain alone. I'm not sure how many shifters were closing in on us, but I know it's more than he can handle alone.

Pausing, I pant and listen to the forest around me.

Why did I listen to him?

I take a few steps forward. I'm about to take off and backtrack when I hear the faint sound of paws hitting the forest floor.

"Shit," I say to myself. It didn't occur to me that one of the coyote shifters would follow me. But then again, why would it? I'm not usually in situations where I'm being chased.

With a huff, I turn tail and run as fast as I can to the road where Cain parked the bike. I didn't realize that we ran so far into the woods with our impromptu game of chase, but we were miles from where we started.

The moment the bike comes into view I shift back to my human form. Thankfully, Cain took my clothes and tossed them onto the handlebars for safekeeping. The last thing I want to do is ride down Highway 1 au naturel. I don't bother with my bra and panties,

and my jeans aren't even buttoned when I'm nervously putting in the simple, four-digit code.

"0-6...fuck!" I yell in frustration. My hands are shaking so badly as I try to remember the simple, fucking, four-digit number Cain gave me. I know the first two are correct. "Great. Only ninety-nine other number combinations it could be."

Despite my hearing not being quite as good as it is when I'm a wolf, I can still hear the quick trot of the coyote who is following me. He's way too close for comfort.

"0-6..." I pause, trying to remember the last two numbers. "2-3." I let out a squeal of excitement as the lock pops and the small key releases into my waiting hand.

Swinging my leg over the seat, I watch as the mangy coyote that was tracking me stalks from the brush.

"Fuck you!" I yell as I start the bike.

Thankfully, my grandfather was a motorcycle enthusiast and taught me to ride. Otherwise, this plan would die along with me. I started at twelve with dirt bikes and moved on to the sleek touring bikes he loved so much. I often wondered if he didn't wish he had a grandson to look after instead of me.

Cain's bike is a beast of a machine and probably a bit more power than I'm used to. But my options are limited, and I kick her into gear and lunge forward. As if on cue, the coyote leaps in the air with one last ditch effort to stop me. But the Valkyrie has more horsepower than my truck and the moment I open her up, I'm speeding down the road away from him, and away from Cain.

It isn't until I see a small, scenic rest stop a few miles down the highway that I pull over. My hands and body are still shaking as I look back up the road, hoping to see Cain. But there is nothing other than oncoming traffic to be seen for miles in either direction.

"Fuck!" I holler out over the vastness of the lookout as I begin to pace the length of the rest stop.

I don't even know what time it is. By the looks of the sun hanging so low it's kissing the ocean, it must be late in the day. Timber Cove and the relative safety of my bar is at least a half day's ride south.

Taking a moment, I grab the key and unlock both the saddle bags. In my haste to escape the coyote shifter, I didn't bother to put on a helmet, which in California will get me a hefty fine if I'm pulled over. Probably the least of my current problems, but a ticket is the last thing I need today.

The moment I grab the small skully helmet from the saddle bag my heart does a small leap with joy as I see my cell phone laying at the bottom.

I didn't remember putting it in there but clearly, Cain was thinking when we stopped.

Sliding my finger across the screen, I unlock my phone. There are a few missed messages from Angie wondering if I am coming in tonight. And a few from Axzel, reminding me that Cain cannot leave the area. *Oops*. I don't exactly want to call Axzel and tell him that Cain and I took off and are now a few hundred miles away. Because if I do that then I will have to explain that we are now being chased down by a pack of coyote shifters and, oh yeah, Cain is potentially gone.

Instead, I text Angie. She's much less apt to send out a search party and have half the state of California looking for us.

ME: Hey girl, I'm not going to be in tonight. Can you hold down the fort?

I impatiently watch as the dots jump around, then stop, then jump around again, all the while keeping a watchful eye out for Cain or the coyote shifter. I'm miles away, so the likelihood of seeing either is slim to none. But it doesn't stop me from looking.

ANGIE: Not a problem. But... Where are you?

"Hmm." I muse while I contemplate how to answer. It's not like Angie to ask where I am when I'm not able to work. So, I decided to keep it vague. Very vague.

ME: ???

The dots jump then stop and a moment later my cell rings with her face peering at me. I consider for a moment not answering it. But Angie is like a dog with a bone, and she'll call relentlessly until I answer. And it's not like I can say I didn't have my phone on me since I was just texting her.

With an audible groan, I answer, "Hey, Ang, what's up?" I'm doing my best to disguise my dismay with as much of an upbeat attitude as I can muster.

"You tell me," she snaps back, and I visibly pull the phone from my ear and look at it.

"I'm just not feeling all that great tonight, so I figured..."

She cuts me off mid-lie. "Nice try, but I can hear the traffic and I have Axzel Salvador sitting at the bar. Presumably waiting for you and Mr. Hot-to-trot. So, where the hell are you?" she whispers.

"I think we're in trouble," I whisper back, although I don't know why. I'm at a rest stop in the middle of nowhere with no one around to hear me.

"No shit, Sherlock. What am I supposed to tell Axzel if he asks? And he will ask."

"Ang, I mean, I think we are in *real* trouble. There was a pack of coyote shifters that tracked us down. I don't know how or why," I spill out. I can feel my throat start to tighten as the threat of tears creeps in and my voice warbles at the end. "I don't know what's happened to Cain," I squeak out before the tears start to flow.

Normally I am not a crier. Up until a few days ago I could count the number of times that I cried in the last decade on one hand. Now I find myself bursting into tears at the drop of a hat where Cain is concerned, and it's pissing me off.

"Okay, okay, calm down," Ang reassures me. "Where are you?"

"Salt Point lookout," I whisper and then cringe as I wait for her reaction.

"Oh, my fucking God! Are you kidding me right now?" she chastises and I can picture her pacing the length of the kitchen as she talks into her outdated cell phone.

“You can’t be in here,” I hear her say to someone. Her hand must cover the phone because the sounds of voices are muffled and then a moment later, she must remove her hand because I can hear the noise of the kitchen perfectly.

“Ang, is everything okay?” I ask.

“Hello, Katrazyna.” Axzel’s deep voice comes through Angie’s phone.

My head drops in frustration, and I hope that no Good Samaritan driving by decides to stop. The last thing I need is some stranger thinking I’m a chick in distress on the side of the road. That would just make this night complete.

“Hey, Axzel,” I say with a sigh. “What can I help you with?”

“Well, you can start by telling me where you and Cain are because you are *not* here,” he snaps and again I visibly cringe at his harshness.

“Umm.” I pause, hoping for some magical wisdom to pop into this conversation. Or at this point a tractor-trailer to pull into the rest area and run me over.

“Look, obviously the two of you are someplace. I just need to know where.” He pauses then continues, “You’re not in any trouble. I just want to make sure you’re okay,” he says in a calm and reassuring voice. One I almost believe, then I remember that he’s a lawyer and a Salvador. Sweet talking you into shit is second nature to that family.

“*Just tell him!*” I hear Ang yell and I want to kill her for trying to do what she thinks is best for me.

“Clearly, your friend thinks you need to tell me something. So why don’t you just spill it? That way I can get to helping you out and then I can go home to Leshia.”

I let out another sigh, this time it’s one of defeat. “Fine, I’m about twenty miles south of Salt Point lookout.” I hear the clank of cutlery being thrown through the speaker. I can only assume that Axzel grabbed whatever was close by and threw it across the kitchen in frustration.

“What the hell were the two of you thinking?” he scolds. “When I said don’t leave town, I didn’t realize I needed to be more specific with you. Let me talk to Cain.”

Looking around the empty rest stop, I grimace at the thought of telling him Cain is gone. “He’s...” I try to think of anything to stall but nothing comes to mind as I look out over the embankment at the ocean. “Umm...”

“He’s not with you, is he?” It’s not so much a question as a statement of fact.

“No.” I grimace.

I take a brief moment to explain what happened in the woods. I leave out the more intimate parts, *of course*, but I end with me being chased by the coyote, taking Cain’s bike, and now waiting here. Throughout the entire one-sided conversation, I can hear Axzel groan in annoyance.

“And what makes you think that this wasn’t his plan all along?” I can hear the anger in his voice as he tries to stop himself from yelling into the phone. Most likely because he is still in the kitchen of the bar.

“The stop at the Salt Point lookout was my idea, we were just —”

Axzel cuts me off. “You’re all the way up at Salt Point. What the hell were you thinking?” This time he does yell, and I must hold the phone away from my ear.

“I thought that it would be a nice getaway, run free...” I trail off because the more I say, the more I realize perhaps it was a bad idea. Not because I think in any way Cain isn’t who he says, rather if word gets out that he is here. I palm my forehead. How could I be so stupid?

“Should I go back?” I ask him because I’m not sure. It isn’t as if Cain and I had a contingency plan in case we were hunted down by a pack of wild coyotes.

“No.” He’s adamant. “Definitely not, at least not alone.”

His advice is less than helpful, considering there was no such thing as back-up for our excursion. I have an uncomfortable knot in my stomach that tells me Cain is in some sort of trouble. I don’t want to leave him, but I suspect I would be more of a liability if I went back, and it’s not as if he has friends... I stop myself mid-thought. “I might have an idea. But it’s in Sacramento.”

“Kat, I don’t know what you’re thinking, but you need to come back to Timber Cove.” It’s not a question, it’s a demand from Axzel.

“I think that’s a bad idea. Like a *really* bad idea. They sent a coyote after me, and I barely got away. If they know who I am, then they will be looking for me, and The Drop Off is the first place they’ll look.” Panic immediately sets in as soon as the words are out of my mouth. “I need to talk to Ang.”

“You need—”

I don’t let Axzel finish. “Let me talk to Angie!” I scream.

“Hey, honey,” Angie’s sweet voice resonates through the phone. “What’s wrong? It looks as if you just told Axzel his pet goldfish died and then you ate it.” Her wit makes me smile. Ang has always had a way with words.

“I need you to close the bar, like now. Tonight,” I demand.

“Hon, it’s Thursday night, we’re going to be packed I can’t just—”

“You don’t have a choice!” I snap, pulling the boss card on her. I’m not usually one to make demands on the staff, but this is different. “I don’t think you’re safe there.”

The laughter that comes through the speaker is unexpected. “I’m in a bar full of the meanest, most badass wolf shifters anyone has ever seen. Do you really think some pack of coyotes is going to be able to just waltz right in here and start making demands?”

She has a valid point. Anyone in that bar would most likely protect both me and it with their lives. But I don’t want to take that chance.

With a deep sigh, I repeat, “You need to close tonight. I just have a gut feeling that something really bad is going to happen, and I don’t want you caught up in the middle. Tell Axzel to have his brothers keep an eye out, and maybe patrol the bar.”

“But...” she starts then pauses as if letting what I’ve just told her sink in. “Fine, but I need you to come back. Tonight.”

“I’m going to stay here for a bit and see if Cain comes.” As I say the words, I realize that it’s a long shot and I feel terrible about leaving him. “And if he doesn’t, I’m going to head down to Sacramento.”

“Sacramento!” she squeals. “What the hell is in Sacramento that you need to go there now?”

There is no doubt in my mind that I should just make up some halfway believable answer because the reality is so far-fetched I can’t believe I’m considering it. “You wouldn’t believe me even if I told you.”

“Try me.”

“Oh, God,” I groan out. “It’s going to sound ridiculous.”

“More far-fetched than a pack of coyotes descending on a wolf bar? Try me,” she goads.

A huge smile spreads across my face. That’s what I love about Angie—she can make me smile and laugh even when everything around me is falling apart.

“I need to see if I can get into the Destined to Fall concert.” I wait and then realize that that part of the plan doesn’t sound so crazy. A wildly inappropriate time to go see a show, but not outwardly crazy.

“I don’t get it.”

I close my eyes and tell her the rest. “I need to get into the show so that I can talk with Zachriel Seal.” I wait for her reaction because the half-hatched plan of mine doesn’t sound any less insane when I say it out loud. In fact, it might even sound crazier than I originally anticipated.

The line is dead silent and for a moment I wonder if our connection was lost. But then I hear Axzel’s voice spouting profanity, and I realize she must have told him what my plan was.

“Under no circumstances are you to even attempt to go to Sacramento!” Axzel shouts. He must have grabbed the phone away from Angie, or she handed it to him to try to talk some sense into me. “You are not going to Sacramento,” he says, this time directly into the phone.

I roll my eyes at his decree. “Well, it’s a good thing I’m allowed to do whatever I want then isn’t it?”

“Has it even occurred to you that you could be in serious danger?”

His question has me snort-laughing. “I’m currently sitting on the side of the highway after being chased down by a coyote shifter. So, yes!” I shout. “It has occurred to me. However, Zachriel Seal might be the only person here that knows Cain and can possibly help him. In case you forgot, he doesn’t have very many people on his side.”

That must make him think because the line is eerily silent again. “I’m not against him, not totally. I’m just not a hundred percent sure about him, and I need to do what I have to, in order to protect my family.” Axzel remarks.

“So do I,” I whisper, because the realization that Cain is my family now hits me hard. “So, I’m going to Sacramento. Please keep Angie safe for me and I’ll contact you as soon as I know more.”

“Can I at least have someone meet you in Sacramento?” He tries to bargain.

“You’ve met the other Cain,” I remind him. “Do you think that whatever he was doing isn’t going to come full circle and head straight into Timber Cove? If whoever chased us thinks Cain—my Cain—is the man you arrested last year, they will come to town. Maybe it’s about time we worked together instead of apart.”

“Your grandfather would be so proud of the woman you’ve become.” I can hear the pride in his voice when he speaks of my grandfather. “Call me when you get to Sacramento and keep me posted if you hear from Cain.”

“I will. And, Axzel?”

“Yeah?”

“Promise me you’ll keep Angie safe.”

“I promise.”

I disconnect the call and sit back on the retaining wall. The sun is just about to set, and the sky is a cornucopia of orange and purple clouds. I watch as the last rays of daylight sink into the ocean.

“Where the fuck are you, Cain?” I whisper to myself.

I don’t want to head south without making sure that Cain isn’t hurt, or even worse. So, I do what I was thinking about doing since I pulled into this place. I get on Cain’s bike and head back up to Salt Point. The entire ride back, I scan the sides of the freeway, hoping to

see Cain walking along the darkened road. But there is no sign of him or the coyote shifter.

The Salt point lookout is pitch black and deserted by the time I pull in.

“Cain!” I yell. Nothing but crickets answer me. There is no doubt that I must shift and go back to where we were. And for the first time, I’m scared, but my wolf can see and scent far better than I can. “If you’re dead, I swear to God I will kill you,” I mumble as I lock my clothes in the saddle bags before I take off into the woods.

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The clearing where we were is easy to find. All I needed to do was follow my own scent back. I contemplate for a moment shifting, but I’m faster and more alert as I am. Sniffing around, I catch the scent of blood and my heart drops.

There are signs of a fight. Some of the blood is that of the coyotes, but some must be Cain’s because I don’t recognize it as human or animal. Thankfully, it’s not enough to be fatal. Perhaps they just ambushed him, and he fought back.

It isn’t until I pick up a third scent that I begin to get concerned, it isn’t human or animal either. And when I follow, it mingles with Cain’s scent as if they left together.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CAIN

I was very reluctant to go anywhere with Azazel. But the moment the coyote shifter that went after Kat returned and said she had gotten away, I had no other reason to stay and fight. She was safe, and that's all that mattered. I could only hope that she took my bike and was miles away from here by now.

We weren't more than a few yards from where Kat and I were before I had to ask the obvious question. "Where are we going?" *And how are we going to get there?* I keep the last part to myself. There's no need to give Azazel more information than he needs.

Since getting to wherever the fuck I am, I haven't been able to feel the presence of any Dimmu gates. Which, in retrospect should have been my first clue that I somehow slipped down the rabbit hole. But that first night, I was far too preoccupied with the sexy brunette bartender to care. But the next day when I went to meet up with Leshia, my realtor, I should have known that something was different. That's entirely on me.

Now, I'm here in the middle of nowhere, California with fucking Azazel of all people.

He stops and looks at me. "Well, we're going through the gate." He points to a random section of the woods. Woods, I should

be able to feel a gate in, but I don't.

“Our coyote friends... I have no idea where they're going. Home, I presume. Out to do someone else's bidding. I don't know. They served their purpose with me, so they are free to go. Except, of course, the one who went after your wolf. He'll be in my... *employ* for a bit longer.”

I give him a raised eyebrow at the realization that they may not have been with him willingly. Azazel is one of the oldest fallen angels and evil to his core. I don't even think he could be classified as fallen anymore, just evil. And if I paid closer attention when Asher spoke about him, I would probably be in a better position to bargain with him. But as it turns out, I didn't.

However, there is no way in hell that I will admit that I can't see or feel the gate he pointed to. That would give him the last bit of evidence he needed to know I wasn't the Cain from a year ago.

We take another few steps into the woods when I feel a vibration in my jeans pocket. No one I know can reach me here, so there are only two people it could be. Axzel Salvador or Kat. I'd want it to be the latter in any other circumstances, but here, I want as little connection to Kat as possible. The further she is from this, the better.

Pulling the device from my pocket I glance down at Axzel's name. I let out a deep sigh of relief, which Azazel must hear because he stops and turns back to look at me.

“I'm sorry, do you have something better to be doing? Or someone more important to be talking to? Should I wait?” His voice drips with sarcasm.

His tone has my fists balling at my sides. I would love nothing more than to beat him to a pulp, but I need him. He may have some of the answers I'm looking for, or at least I'm hoping he does. Azazel was always an arrogant asshole whose sanity lay somewhere just this side of questionable.

“No,” I answer, placing my phone back in my pocket. Axzel's voicemail can wait. Right now, all I want to do is figure out how I'm supposed to get through the gate I can't see.

Azazel stops next to two large pine trees whose peaks intersect. And, yes, it does look like the entrance to many a Dimmu

gate, but it doesn't change the fact that I can't see the actual gate or feel its magic.

The two of us have a stare-off as I stand, waiting for him to make a move. I know how the gates work in my world. If I want to take someone through who can't see or feel them, I need to be touching them to be able to have them enter. I can only imagine that here is the same way... or at least, I hope it is. The only plan I have to enter is to somehow touch Azazel as he enters and follow him through.

"After you," I gesture, holding out my hand as if I were just being polite, when all I'm doing is hoping to be able to tag along after him.

He lets out a maniacal laugh. "You can't see the gate, can you?"

Sadly, this is about as far as this bluff will take me. I can't very well walk between the two trees and hope for the best.

"I don't know where we're going. So, for once, I'll have to follow," I bluff.

Azazel takes a moment to ponder my ruse. But I stand firm, glaring at him as I wait. It feels like the longest game of chicken I've ever played. But finally, he must realize I'm not about to give in, so without a word, he turns and begins to walk between the two towering pines.

I feel nothing as he steps between them, but I reach my hand out and as lightly as I can, place it on his back. If he feels the contact, he doesn't acknowledge it as we pass through the gate and step into an all too familiar setting.

The smell of sulfur and decay permeates my senses. I'm home. Or at least, I'm in some version of it. I know without even having to look at myself that I am me, horns and all because there is no glamor here. It's a *come as you really are* type of place.

My first thought is to make my way to The Firehouse and see if Val is there. But then I realize the company I'm with and decide that the best course of action is to play along and see where this shit-show takes me.

"I wasn't sure if you'd make it through," he scoffs as he takes in my appearance. "They don't work the same. Sometimes poof." He

makes an exploding gesture with his hands, and I inwardly cringe.

I'm still not ready to show my entire hand so I just nod my agreement. "So, what is it you want from me? There must be something or you wouldn't have hunted me down."

"You say hunt. I say stroke of fucking luck."

"Explain," I say without any emotion as I walk with him through the desolate, burned-out landscape. If you look at it right, the Underworld can be beautiful, but you have to know how to appreciate its unique beauty. Otherwise, it will eat you alive—literally.

He again looks me up and down as if assessing my validity. I give him a low growl because I am growing tired of his games.

"When Cain." He looks at me again. "The other Cain," he continues on the assumption that I am not him, which, of course, I'm not. "When he came to me last year looking for assistance with the purveyor running a pipeline through Timber Cove, I couldn't resist. The land all along the coast is ripe for the taking. Except for the pack of wolves who 'protect it'." He air quotes, and I don't know why but that makes me laugh.

"Sounds political," I snicker because of all the things it could be, a pipeline wasn't my first choice. But then I remember what Axzel said. Cain was trying to strong-arm the sale of their land. I can only imagine that they were using some loopholes to even be considered. Probably the same ones we were using in order to get a meeting, although our use of them is far less nefarious.

Again, I keep my mouth shut. How's that old saying go? *Loose lips sink ships*. I'll let Azazel be the anchor. Hopefully, whatever he divulges I'll be able to use to my advantage, and maybe even help Axzel and his pack in the process. After all, Kat lives here, and I'll do whatever I can to make her life better.

"The Vamps looking to build the pipeline don't know what we know." He motions back and forth between us as if somehow, *we* are in this together.

I'm not following anything he's saying... vampires, pipelines, pack land. I still don't understand what this has to do with him or me. Then it dawns on me. I need a fucking history lesson. Clearly, there are some insurmountable differences between my reality and this one. I'm not even going to think about the fact that humans

know about shifters and vampires. My concern is that the person known here as Cain is an evil son-of-a-bitch and has poor taste in friends apparently.

“And that is?” I ask because all of this has my head spinning.

“That you aren’t dead.”

“Clearly,”

Azazel gives me a sneer. “Let’s cut the bullshit. I know you aren’t the same Cain, so you can drop the poorly acted antics. Like I said before, I dragged his body down here and tossed him in the river of fire myself, so I know you aren’t him. You’re stuck here just like I am.”

I don’t dare acknowledge his claim, I just listen as he continues, hoping to get more information.

“Just be glad you didn’t have to kill the other version of yourself as I did. Fighting someone who knows all your best moves is a huge disadvantage. Oh, and there is no Firehouse here, just in case you were hoping to go see your pal, Alastor.” He sneers.

“So, what’s the plan?” I ask as we turn and make our way toward a burned-out fortress. It brings back memories of Reaver telling me he stayed in Azazel’s fortress after winning his freedom from Treachery Prison. It was also where Sloane was taken and held captive, so I wasn’t unfamiliar with it.

“We’re going to meet up with a den of vampires in Vancouver. It was going to be Cain’s next stop after Timber Cove.”

“What do vampires want with oil?” I ask, my curiosity getting the best of me.

His laugh is haunting as we enter his fortress, and it echoes off the stone walls of the cavernous space. “They don’t want oil. The pipeline is for blood.”

The concept of a blood pipeline snaking its way through the world makes my own blood run cold. The amount of blood needed to make such a thing viable would decimate the human population in a matter of years.

“And where do you come in? I can bargain with them without you and are any of the Blood Angels involved?” I ask and immediately regret my question.

Another cackle escapes him. “As far as I can tell, they don’t exist,” he explains with a wide smile. “They didn’t spawn the vampire race it just... is... like you or me.”

Well, that bit of knowledge puts a damper on my plan of reaching out to Zachriel in hopes that he can help. If the Blood Angels aren’t a thing, then perhaps Asher, Jaxon, and Michael never fell, and maybe Zachriel is just a man in a band. Shit, I have a lot to learn and the only person who seems to be able to help is the asshole in front of me.

“As for me, well, I’m an opportunist and this is an opportunity I can’t pass up.”

Something in the way he curls his upper lip when he smiles tells me this isn’t going to be something I’ll want to be a part of.

The fortress is devoid of any life at all. The only thing I can hear is the echo of our footsteps as we wind our way through a maze of corridors. It isn’t until he opens a large wooden door that my heart stops.

I take a moment to compose myself as I look around. It’s a crude laboratory by modern standards. My attention isn’t on the equipment but on the blue liquid bubbling in beakers and stored in vials along the shelves.

“Blue Dragon,” I breathe out on a sigh, my voice barely above a whisper. “Fuck.”

I don’t have to be a genius to figure out why he’s so interested in a blood pipeline, not with this shit. There is enough of the drug to make the entire vampire population nothing but mindless killing machines. And with a pipeline as the delivery system, no one would be able to stop the spread.

“Blue what?” he questions, because why would he know the name that Reaver coined for the drug?

“We call it Blue Dragon. That’s its street name, anyway,” I inform, still unsure how I play into all this. “So why do you need me?”

“I don’t. I need your connections with the Timber Cove pack, and since you’re already cozy with Katrazyna we’ll be needing the connection to her parents’ pack in Vancouver. Cain had it all worked out...” He looked me up and down. “The other guy,” he says,

waving his hand dismissively at me. “He was going to sweet talk her all the way north... and probably south.” He laughs at his own joke made in poor taste.

Listening to him talk about my mate as if she were nothing more than a pawn has my claws extending and visions of gutting him where he stands flash before my eyes. A low growl vibrates in my chest and for the first time in my life, I feel my canines extend as my body prepares to protect its mate.

Taking a few steps forward, Azazel is so lost in the sound of his own voice that I could easily gut him where he stands. But as much as I want to kill him and anyone else that would do Kat or her family harm, I know the more information I can bring back to Axzel, the better.

I take a few cleansing breaths, but it does little to calm my temper. Even if I weren't mere moments away from entering a mating heat that would seal the bond between Kat and me, I would still want to rip his throat out.

“Anyway, that plan has now gone to shit. So now we're going to need a little bit more help and a bit more muscle to get you to cooperate.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

KATRAZYNA

I waited around at the Salt Point lookout for more than an hour after returning from my run back to the small clearing Cain and I found. Everything in me wanted to believe that he was okay, and not part of whatever this was. I shouldn't doubt him, but Axzel is right. I barely know him.

What if this was his plan all along?

"No," I say out loud just so it's real. Not that anyone can hear me. I take a moment to think about my half-assed plan to go to Sacramento and try to see Zachriel Seal. Like, talk to him. Have a full-on conversation.

"What the hell am I going to say?" I mumble into the darkness as I tuck my hair under the skully helmet.

It's late, well past midnight, when I start the bike and begin my ride south. My heart is heavy knowing that Cain is... Fuck, I don't know where he is or if he's okay. My gut tells me he's fine, and I don't know if that's this mating thing or just me hoping for the best outcome from a shitty situation.

The road is dark and long, and there is no way I will be able to make it to Sacramento tonight. I don't even think I'll be able to

make it back to Timber Cove and the relative safety of my bar.

I'm about an hour outside town when I decide to stop. The last thing I need to do is dump Cain's bike and make roadkill of myself in the process. Trying to figure out whatever the hell this is isn't worth dying over. At least, I don't think it is, not yet, anyway.

The motel sign doesn't say human only, so I take my chance as I park the bike.

"Shit," I mumble when I realize I don't have anything with me, including my license. A quick search of the saddle bags doesn't divulge any spoils, so I'm left with the grim decision to either ride on or shift and sleep in the woods.

While the latter is probably the safest bet, I opt to ride on. I should make it to the bar in less than an hour if I speed, but that wouldn't be a wise move on essentially a stolen bike with no license.

"Obey the law it is," I say to myself as I re-secure my helmet and resume my ride.

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It's nearly dawn when I pull into the lot at The Drop Off. I drove by it several times to ensure that the parking lot and surrounding area was empty. I can only hope I'm right. Pulling in, I steer the bike around the back and snug up as close to the building as I can. If anyone is looking for Cain's ride, they'll have to come around to the back, and hopefully, I'll hear them coming.

There's an old, blue tarp folded inside the back door, so I grab it and cover the motorcycle. I'm sure Cain would have something to say about the haphazard way I'm concealing it, but he's not here. So, I tuck the tarp around the bike and make my way inside.

It's pitch black, and if it weren't for my wolf eyesight, I'd be blind as I make my way through and head upstairs to Cain's apartment, well rather the apartment that I rented to him.

I haven't made it two feet inside when I spot movement on the couch. Before I can react, a half-asleep Axzel has his gun drawn on me and blinks the sleep from his eyes.

“Fucking hell, Axzel!” I shriek as I hold my hand over my heart that is currently threatening to burst from my chest in fear.

“What the hell are you doing here?” he asks, still pointing his gun at me.

“What the hell am I doing here? What are *you* doing here?” I counter. “And put the fucking gun down,” I insist as I shut the door behind me.

He holsters his piece, then runs his hands down his face as he tries to wake up fully, an exhausted yawn escaping as he shakes himself awake.

“When I told Leshia what happened to you and Cain”—he grumbles out Cain’s name as if saying it causes him physical pain—“she insisted I come back here just in case you came home. She insisted I made sure that you were safe. Are you okay?” he asks, and for a moment, I think he might care whether I’m safe or not.

Truthfully, I’m far too tired to analyze his heroic motives. I flop down on the overstuffed chair and lean my head back. “I’m...” I pause, not sure what to say. I want to tell him I’m fine, but that would be a lie, and at this point, I’m optimistic he would see right through it. “I’m exhausted,” I reply because it’s the truth, though I’m sure not what he’s looking for.

“Any sign of Cain?”

I open one eye and glare at him. “Yeah, he was running after the bike, but I thought it would be much more fun to drive through the night alone. Won’t he be pissed?” I mock.

“You’re not funny,” he deadpans, and perhaps my sleepiness affected my delivery because I can’t help but chuckle at my obvious pun.

“I went back to Salt Point.” I hear Axzel growl out his displeasure, but I ignore him and continue, “I shifted and went back to where we were. I picked up the scent of coyote blood combined with Cain’s, and definite signs of him being attacked. But then—” I stop as I catch myself about to mention the other scent I picked up.

I have high hopes that he’ll let my little pause go unnoticed, or perhaps he’ll chalk it up to just being tired, so I try to continue. But the fact is, I am exhausted, and I’m not quick enough currently to make something up.

“But then?” he probes, and I can’t think of anything except the truth, so I remain silent, hoping that he’ll think I fell asleep.

In response to my silence, Axzel gives the chair I’m sitting in a kick, presumably to wake me up. “But then,” he repeats, his voice lower and more serious. “I know you’re awake, I can see you peeking out at me.” He continues when he catches a glimpse of my one open eye.

I let out a long, drawn-out sigh. “Then I caught the scent of someone else. Not another shifter, a scent I didn’t recognize.”

“Vampire?” he quickly queries. “Cain was working with the vampires to push through their pipeline.”

“Not my Cain,” I snap because I can see where this conversation is heading. “It wasn’t a vamp or shifter or human.”

“Maybe another demon, like him?”

The idea crossed my mind, but I’m not about to admit that to anyone, let alone Axzel Salvador. So, I give him a shrug. “I don’t know.”

My body and mind are starting to shut down from the long day, and I struggle to keep my eyes open. Axzel is mumbling possible scenarios to himself as to who the mystery scent could belong to, none of which I’m sure are correct.

“Look, I need to get at least a few hours of sleep and a shower before I head south tomorrow... today... whatever,” I correct myself. “Stay or go. It doesn’t matter to me,” I continue as I get up and walk to the bedroom. “Just keep it quiet.”

“I’ll hang out for a bit, just to make sure you’re safe.”

I give him a weary smile. “Thanks. That would be great.”

Shutting the bedroom door, I don’t even bother to undress before I fall into bed. I snuggle myself into the sheets and inhale the lingering scent of Cain. I try to hold back my tears once again, but I can’t. Instead, I let myself cry as I hold his pillow and slowly drift to sleep, hoping he’s okay.

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Banging in the kitchen has me bolting out of bed and searching the room for anything I can use as a weapon. Sadly, the only thing I

have resembling a weapon is a bedside lamp. It takes me a full minute to realize that the sound I'm hearing isn't banging, but the clank of dishes. Then I remember Axzel saying he would stay for a bit to ensure I was okay.

I have no idea what time it is, probably mid-morning, making a guess. Too late for him to still be hanging out to ensure I'm okay. That thought has my heart filling with hope. I hope that somehow Cain made it back. That thought is quickly squashed when I open the door and spot Axzel helping himself to a glass of juice from the fridge.

"I was beginning to think you died in there," he jokes, and that's when I notice the clock on the microwave.

"Oh, fuck. Does that say one o'clock?" I shout in absolute panic. "Fuck!" I yell again as Axzel stands and practically laughs at my antics. "Why are you still here?"

He doesn't respond, so I turn and go back to the bedroom, slamming the door in my wake and head straight for the shower.

It doesn't take me long to get ready, and in less than forty-five minutes, I'm grabbing my bag and heading out the door. It isn't until I get downstairs that I realize my car is still parked at the station. I glance over at the tarp-covered bike close to the back door. I'm pretty proficient at riding, but that is currently Cain's only means of transportation.

"Shit," I mumble to myself.

"Need a ride to your car?" I hear Axzel ask from behind me.

With a reluctant sigh, I answer. "Fine."

"So, what's your plan once you get to Sacramento?" He asks as we pull out of the lot. "And for the record, I don't think it's a good idea."

I can only chuckle at his immediate response. He hasn't even heard my half-baked plan yet. "Well, I've got to get in to talk to Zachriel Seal. Cain thought that maybe he could help or have answers. I don't know. But he seemed to think that that meant something because he could find him."

"So, you have no actual plan?"

“I have a plan. I just told you the plan. I don’t have all the details worked out yet, but... I have a plan.” I slant my body and look out the window at the passing scenery, hoping he gets the idea that I don’t want to talk.

He doesn’t, so he just continues as if I’m an engaging partner in his conversation.

“Ummm-hmmm. And when you can’t get in to see one of the biggest rock stars on the planet, what are you going to do then?”

I glare over my shoulder at him. “You’re a real buzz kill, you know that? Zachriel is the only lead I have, and it was Cain’s plan,” I say with a hint more sadness in my voice than I intend.

The rest of the ride is quiet, my focus on how I will actually get in to see the lead singer of Destined to Fall, even if I get onto the show. And what the hell am I going to do when they escort me out of the venue as a crazed fan?

“Do you have my number? I don’t want you going down there without being able to contact me if you need to. You know, in case you get arrested for stalking,” he jokes, but I know he’s serious about me having his number.

I hold up my phone. “Got it.”

“And you haven’t heard anything from Cain?”

I shake my head and look at the dark screen on my phone. “If I do, I’ll let tell you,” I reassure him. “Have you?”

“No. I did call him after I spoke to you, but it went straight to voice mail. Are you sure you don’t want someone to go with you? I would feel better if you had someone.”

“Well, I’d feel better if I knew Cain was okay. So, I guess we can’t all get what we want.”

Axzel shoots me a menacing look that says I need to watch my tone with him. But he’s not a bad guy. He’s mated and married. A father. Leshia is a lucky woman, I think to myself as he pulls up alongside my car.

“Thanks for the lift. I’m going to keep the bar closed until I get back. Can you or your brothers take a ride by just to make sure it doesn’t get burned to the ground or something?”

“I told you I would. If you need us, just call.”

His words make me feel somewhat okay about leaving Angie and the rest of my staff high and dry. But it's far better to be closed than to come back and have another person I love injured or worse.

Stepping out of Axzel's truck, I lean over, grab the parking ticket from the windshield of my 2016 Jeep Wrangler, and toss it onto Axzel's passenger seat. "You can take care of that too." I smile. He mumbles something as I shut the door that I can't make out, so I just give him a polite wave as I get into my Jeep and start it up.

The ride to Sacramento takes a few hours and during that time, all my mind does is wander back to Cain and the crazy notion that we are mates. I never dreamed of being someone's mate. Hell, I'm not even sure I believe in the whole *fated mates* thing. And for him to not be a wolf shifter and potentially not even be from this... what? Planet, universe ... dimension. It all makes my mind go insane at the thought.

But on the bright side, it made the ride to Sacramento fly by.

Walking the mile or so to the Sacramento Memorial Theater, I can't believe what I'm about to attempt. The crowd gathering is massive, and I can feel the hum of energy before I even see the venue.

"What the hell am I thinking?" I mumble to myself as I make my way through the ever-thickening horde of fans. I want this plan to work so badly, but then the realization hits me. The man I'm going to try and talk to isn't just famous, he's practically reached cult status, and that's when I realize a large hole in my plan. "Fuck."

In my haste to make it down in time for the show, I left out the most important part of getting to speak with Zachriel. Grabbing my phone, I pull up the venue's website and search for tickets for tonight's show. The blaring red banner that reads *Sold Out* in big, bold lettering placed across the promotional picture of the band has my hope faltering again.

I let out a deep, frustrated sigh as I realize this plan is *destined to fail*, and then I laugh at my own dad-joke pun. Because what else can I do? Cry? Nope.

"*Tickets!*" I hear a guy yelling from across the crowd.
"*Tickets!*"

I make my way through the fans in the direction of the hollering scalper. When I see him, I question my sanity in buying

tickets from some guy outside a concert venue. He's making a deal with two young women, and I hear him make a few leud comments. The two girls can't be more than eighteen, and I can see in their faces the man clearly scarred them with his comments.

"There you are, girls," I say in my best *Mom* voice. The two girls look at me with relief in their eyes, and I give them a wink.

"Hey, Mom, we paid him, and he won't give us the tickets unless we come with him," they state as I stare down the weasel of a human.

I partially shift, something I very rarely do. But this time it's a protective instinct that causes it. Flashing the man a bit of fang, I growl at him.

"Give them the tickets or their money back," I snarl. I can see the man visibly shaking at my request before he hands me back their money with unsteady hands and turns to run.

He doesn't get more than a few feet before he runs into a mountain of a man. The behemoth can't possibly be human. He's nearly seven feet tall and looks to be carved out of granite. The three of us watch stunned as the weasel is lifted several feet off the ground until he's being held at eye level with the mountain.

"I already warned you once tonight and you chose not to listen," the giant barks out. We watch, the three of us stunned when he releases one hand but continues to hold the flailing man in the air while he talks into a radio attached to his shoulder.

A moment later, two Sacramento police officers cart the weasel away while the two girls and I watch with our mouths agape. The three of us just stare at the monster of a man who is handsome in an unconventional way. When he takes a few steps forward, the three of us take a step back in unison. Or more like, I take a step back and protectively push the girls with me.

He smiles and holds up his hands in mock surrender. "I saw what you did for the girls," he says to me. We watch as he pulls out a lanyard from around his neck and shows it to us.

"I work with the venue," he states, now holding up his laminated badge and his other hand.

A small crowd has now gathered around us, most having witnessed the interaction with the man attempting to scam the girls.

“Come on, ladies, don’t you want to see the show?” he asks with a smile. The two girls practically scream with glee at the offer.

I grab onto both by the shirt as they move around me. “Hang on, ladies. Can I see that ID?” I ask the man who I am really hoping is legitimately a staff member.

He holds out his badge and I take a few tentative steps forward to read it. “Reaver? Is that your name or title?”

He gives me a kind smile and drops the lanyard. “It’s my name,” he informs with a big, bright smile while he holds out his hand for me to shake or take, I’m not sure. “I work with the band. And you are?”

“I’m Kat.” And before I can say another word the two girls are spouting their names.

At his revelation, I’m just as excited as the two girls. I’m not jumping up and down like they are, at least not externally, but inside I am giving the universe a fist pump of excitement.

The two girls whose names I never got are chatting and following behind Reaver and me as we zig-zag our way to the venue.

“Your daughters seem very excited,” Reaver says as he looks behind him.

“Oh... no, they aren’t my daughters. They just looked like they were in trouble.” I leave out the part where I was trying to get to the same asshole who was yelling he had tickets. “I’m just glad I got there when I did.”

“Me, too. That guy is bad news. So, you’re just a fan of Destined,” he says, shortening the band’s name as if I’m some hardcore fan. In truth, I know their songs, but it’s not the style of music I regularly listen to.

“Not exactly,” I say with a nervous chuckle.

He gives me a raised eyebrow that reminds me so much of Cain, I can feel a twinge of pain in my chest.

“I’m just here to... try... and talk with...” I pause on the last word because I’m about to sound like a crazy stalker and there is no way around it. “Zachriel,” I mumble, hoping it’s too low for him to hear.

He laughs and when I don't, he must realize I'm here to talk to the lead singer of the biggest band in the world... without even having a ticket.

"You're serious?" Reaver asks and all I can do is nod in response.

"Yeah," I confirm sheepishly. "He's a sort of a friend of my..." I hesitate because the term mate is new and sounds foreign on my tongue. "He's a friend of my mates."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

REAVER

Is this woman crazy?

I know she isn't human, not after the little display she gave to frighten away the devious scalper. But that doesn't help me figure out why she's here, and what her business is with Zach.

"So, Kat. Who's your mate? I might know him. I've been with Zachriel quite a while." The last part may be a bit of a stretch, in a sense.

As I wait for her to answer, I watch her body language. She's nervous and seems to be out of her element. By her little display of fangs, I would guess she's some sort of shifter—wolf, or coyote maybe.

"I doubt you would know him," she answers almost dismissively. "He's... new to the area. I think they knew each other years ago."

"Indulge me."

I hear her let out an aggravated sigh. "His name is Cain," she replies flatly.

"Cain?" I spit out a bit louder than I intended. The only Cain I was able to find when I got here was one that was tangled up with

some vampire pipeline. And as far as I knew, he got himself killed. Cain also wasn't a shifter, so it could just be a coincidence in the name, but something in my gut tells me it isn't. "Is he a shifter too, like you?"

Kat shoots me a look and for a moment, I wonder if I've somehow overstepped my bounds. This place is more than confusing, considering where I'm from. Not many humans know about other species living among them.

"No, he's not, and how did you know I was a shifter?"

"Your show of fangs back there," I confess, thumbing over my shoulder in the direction we just came from.

"Oh. Yeah, right. I don't usually..." Her sentence dwindles as she looks around at the passing crowd.

When we get to the venue side doors, I flash my badge and the two security guards let me and the three women pass. They're used to me bringing excited fans back and upgrading their tickets to the front row. It's something I did since hooking up with Zach and his band. The strangest thing since I arrived here nearly a year ago after following Azazel, was that as far as I can tell, there is no other Reaver, just me. Everyone else that I have met here is slightly different than who I know.

"Well, ladies, here is where I leave you," I inform as I hand each of them a ticket.

All three smile and thank me profusely. The two young girls run off squealing as if they just won the lottery, which I guess in a way they did. But I watch as Kat smiles and thanks me again, but I can tell that she is crestfallen.

"All I can do is get you into the show," I say, breaking her out of her pensive stare at the ticket in her hand. "But they are front row, so maybe you can yell up to him," I say, trying to make a joke out of it because I'm still not sure if she's serious or not.

"This is more than I could have hoped for," Kat says, holding the ticket in her hand. "Thank you so much, Reaver."

Kat doesn't wait for my reply before she's off. I watch her until she's swallowed up by the throngs of fans milling around before I turn and make my way to the staging area.

When I enter the band's private area, Zach is in the back with a few blondes hanging on his every word. The sight still makes me uncomfortable, but in this reality, there is no Emogine and no Max.

In fact, as far as I can tell, he's just your average fallen angel. He was judged by Themis, but she never cursed them as she did in my reality. I could think about the situation until it makes me crazy. Most things here are only slightly different. The biggest difference, of course, being that a few years ago, all paranormals, as they call us, "*came out.*"

"Reeve!" Zach yells as I make my way through the band's worshipers. He isn't an addict here, since he didn't spend six years trying to dull the pain of leaving Emogine behind. Nope, here he's just a rock star with an asshole attitude. I'm not sure which one I hate more. At least as an addict, he had an excuse for his behavior. Here he's just a dick.

"Did you go out to the masses and spread your fucking cheer?" he asks as he stands, dropping one of the blondes to the ground.

I take a good long look around the room. There are far too many people here for me to have a serious conversation with the rock star. I'll have to wait until after the high of the show kicks him down a few notches.

"You know me, always happy to make some crazed fans day. I did run into someone we might want to speak with. In private," I add, looking around the room. Privacy isn't something a mega star like Zachriel ever gets.

But lucky for me, he takes the hint.

"I need everyone out," Zach demands in a flourish of dismissive arm waves.

Like Moses parting the Red Sea, the room quickly empties, leaving just the two of us.

"Who did you meet?" he asks, any hint of the rock star attitude now gone. If he was like this on a daily bases, he wouldn't be so bad.

"A woman—"

"Bout time, you need to get laid," he jokes clapping me on the shoulder.

I brush him off with a sneer. “I’m serious. She said she’s Cain’s mate.”

“Cain, the dead demon? Who the fuck cares?”

“Not the Cain from here,” I inform him.

“Oh, right.” He laughs. “The Cain from the alternate universe where I’m married with like, six kids.”

I shake my head because as much as I tried to explain my hypothesis about the fact that I’m not from here, I don’t think he’s one hundred percent on board with it. I can’t say I blame him. I’m not even sure if I’m a hundred percent on board, but what choice do I have?

“She said she was here to talk with you.”

“Why the fuck would she want to talk to me?”

I fight the urge to punch him, because he really is an asshole. “Probably the same reason I did. You’re the only one we can find. It’s as if the others never even fell,” I remind him.

When I first followed Azazel, it took me a few weeks to realize that I wasn’t exactly in the same place I left. Then it took me days to research and the best I could come up with, was that Zachriel was the only one of the Blood Angels to ever fall. So, I searched him out and he confirmed that I died on the battlefield, but not by my brother’s hand, rather by the sword of my then friend, Azazel. The same one I followed here, searching out answers on the drug he released on the vampire population back home.

“*Stage in five.*” Bares through the speaker and I know any semblance of a conversation with him is gone. Zach pushes past me and out the door to the stage.

Usually, I watch the show from the side of the stage, helping where I can, and looking for any sign that there’s a Blue Dragon release at the event. But tonight, I make my way to the floor where stage security is tight. It only takes me a moment to find Kat in the crowd. She’s the only one not jumping up and down, chanting the band’s name as they wait for them to take the stage.

When the curtain drops and the music starts, it’s easy to see that the booming sound is uncomfortable for her sensitive hearing. From what little I know of shifters, they aren’t usually found in attending concerts unless it’s an open-air theater.

I watch her covering her ears as she looks around. She's probably trying to figure out how she can get backstage. I'd hate to be the one to break it to her, but our security is the best, and no one gets back unless they are invited.

Tapping one of the stage security guards on the shoulders, I point to Kat and tell him to invite her back. He gives me a questionable look because Kat doesn't fit the usual mold of typical groupies. That's usually reserved for the scantily clad, with loose morals or severe daddy issues.

I give him a nod to proceed, and he quickly goes to her, yelling into her ear, something he needn't do. I'm sure she can hear him just fine.

She smiles and looks up at the security guard who points to where I'm standing. I give her a friendly wave when she spots me to reassure her. I step back through the door before she's escorted back.

I'm not exactly sure what she knows or suspects, but she doesn't need to talk with Zachriel, she needs to talk with me.

"Hey," she says, breathless and a bit sweaty from the crowd.

"Hey," is the only reply I have, because I'm not sure how this conversation is going to go. She could be a crazy stalker, or she could be my ticket home. "You didn't look like you were enjoying the show!" I yell because the blast of the stage amplifiers is still blaring even where we are standing.

She winces a bit at the deafening sound that shakes the building to its core. Without thinking, I grab her by the elbow and pull her further into the guts of the venue.

"Is that better?" I ask, as the sounds of the band fade into the background. She doesn't answer, just gives me a quick nod.

"Not a fan?" I question, half joking, half trying to figure out why she's here.

The flush of her cheeks gives her away before she has time to answer. "No, not really."

"So, tell me why you're here again," I inquire as I lead us down the hall to the band's private suite.

All I can do is watch as a barrage of emotions crosses her face. "It's—"

“Unbelievable,” I finish her sentence before she can utter another word.

“You have no idea,” she says as she lets out a long, exhausted sigh.

I don’t want to tell her straight out what I suspect, because I am more than aware of how insane it all sounds when you tell other people. I’m pretty sure that Zachriel still thinks I’ve gone insane. But I know that this is not my reality.

“Try me? I’m a great listener,” I confess as I offer her a seat in the private suite. The band still has over an hour to play so it will just be the two of us until the concert ends.

“I don’t even know where to start,” she confesses as she drops her head into her hands. I’m about to tell her it’s okay when she continues, “I think my mate is from another universe.” She laughs. “Like some next-level, Marvel shit.”

The room is eerily quiet, and I motion for her to take a seat. Destined is one of the biggest bands in the world and Zach is a legend, so the opulence of their suite isn’t lost on her. I give her a minute to take in her new surroundings. If she’s impressed, she doesn’t say it, she just takes a seat on one of the many leather couches.

I take a moment to really look at her. She is quite stunning and tall for a woman, most likely just over six feet. If this woman is Cain’s mate, I’ll do anything I can to help her, even if that’s just an ear to listen to the problem.

“I think I’m going crazy,” Kat confesses, and I know exactly how she’s feeling.

“You’re not,” I say, trying my best to reassure her, but I know I’m failing. I was never good at the touchy-feely stuff where women were concerned, except for Kennedy. I shake my head to extinguish the thought. “Cain and I are from the same place.”

When Kat lifts her head, I see immediate relief wash over her features. “He thought maybe Zachriel,” she confesses. “I don’t know,” she breathes out.

“Sounds like Cain and I had the same idea. Zachriel was the only one I could find when I followed Azazel and ended up here,” I

explain without getting too in-depth. “Tell me about Cain, because the man I know and the Cain I found here can’t be the same.”

I listen to her tell me everything that happened in the last few days, including the run-in with the coyote shifter pack. I keep quiet until she’s finished, but the twist in my gut tells me that Azazel learned that Cain is here and is going to try to use him to gain the upper hand with the vampires running the pipeline.

There isn’t a doubt in my mind that her Cain and the man I know are one and the same, right down to his damn vintage Valkyrie motorcycle that he treats like a baby.

“How crazy do you think I am now?” Kat inquires, the flush of embarrassment ripe on her cheeks.

“You’re not a stalker,” I tease trying to lighten the mood. “But I believe you, and I think you are correct. The pack of coyote shifters you ran into sounds like the same group working with Azazel. He’s the one I followed here.”

“Azazel?” It’s her turn to look at me like I’m the crazy one. “Like the Bible Azazel?”

I watch as all the color from her face drains until she looks as if she might pass out. While vampires, shifters, and who knows what else came out of the woodwork over the past few years, each playing a chess game for dominance, fallen angels and demons kept a low profile until the last couple of months.

Kat drops her head into her hands, and I watch as all her resolve disappears. “My mate is a demon and now you’re telling me he’s somehow with Azazel. What next? Destined to Fall is a bunch of fallen...” She stops talking and looks up at me. “No. You can’t be serious.”

I shrug my shoulders. “Zachriel is a fallen angel, if that’s what you’re getting at. Fallen archangel, to be more specific.” I confirm what she was alluding to.

“And you are? Wait!” She holds up her hand, stopping me before I can speak. “I might need a drink before you tell me.”

Since this is the band’s private reception area, there is every known alcoholic beverage imaginable, and even some that aren’t.

“Pick your poison, they have everything.” I motion toward the fully stocked bar.

“Just water, unless you think what you’re going to say requires tequila. Then bartender’s choice.”

I grab her a bottle of water and a healthy shot of tequila, just in case. Placing both in front of her, I take a seat.

“All right, lay it on me,” she continues, taking the shot in one hand and the water in the other. “I’m prepared for anything,” she adds with an easy smile. “Unless you tell me you’re the devil or some shit like that, then you should bring me the bottle.”

“No,” I laugh. “I’m complicated but I am not the devil. Just your average Archangel, nothing overly special about me.”

It’s easy to tell that she isn’t quite convinced, especially since she still has both drinks in her hands. Standing, I flex my back and unfurl my golden wings and watch as she downs the tequila in one gulp.

“Okay, I wasn’t expecting that,” she blurts, chasing the tequila with a few chugs of water. “And you know Cain—my Cain—tall, horned, demon Cain?”

“Yeah, pretty well, actually.” I tuck my wings back and take my seat. “I might even know where he is,” I add, and now I have her full and undivided attention.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

KATRAZYNA

My head is still spinning from watching Reaver unfurl his golden wings. I'm in no way, shape, or form ignorant of the world around me, I just never put much weight on angels and demons. However, in light of my newly mated status, I suppose I'm going to have to.

Oddly enough, I wasn't quite as taken aback by Cain's natural appearance as I am with Reaver's. Demons seem much more likely than angels. His golden wings are breathtakingly beautiful, but they don't do anything for me. Not like Cain's horns. The thought of him warms my body and puts a devilish smile on my face.

Shaking the thought from my head, I glare at Reaver. "Where is he?" I snap, wishing for the first time that I had my pack was by my side. It would make being here easier if I weren't alone. Axzels' offer to have someone escort me here rings in my ears, and I understand his reasoning. Still, having a TC pack member here for protection isn't the same as my own pack. A pack is family and they would look after only me, not necessarily their best interest. It doesn't matter if Reaver is an angel or not, he still has a lethal vibe that emanates off him and it makes my wolf uneasy.

Reaver gives me a genuine smile and my trepidation seems to dissipate ever so slightly. "I've kept very close tabs on Azazel, and

I'm able to find the Dimmu gates here relatively easily."

"Dim...what gates?" I question, because now he really is speaking a foreign language. "What is a Dim-u gate?"

He gives me a quizzical look, something akin to questioning my intelligence. Which I try not to take offense to.

"It's the portal system used to travel," he replies matter-of-factly, his tone ever so slightly condescending, as if it were common knowledge. All I can do is shake my head and hope that he gives me a better explanation than just the portal system he's referring to. But he continues, not bothering to explain further, "Azazel was able to travel to the underworld, probably because he also has no counterpart here. I don't know why, but I'm sure Michael will be very interested when I get back if I can get back."

"You don't know if you can get back... like you haven't even tried?" I snap. "That would have been the first thing I did."

It's Reavers' turn to give me the dismissive shoulder shrug. "I was more concerned with him poisoning the vampire population and turning them into mindless killing machines."

"Isn't that what they are?" I snort.

"Yeah," he grunts. "And all demons are evil and wolf shifters eat babies."

I realize my unintentional ignorance at thinking all vampires are nothing but a bunch of ruthless killing machines. Especially since they've hid as long as we have, sometimes in plain sight just going about their lives.

"I see your point. So why don't we leave and go to this underworld and get Cain? Wouldn't that be the best course of action?"

Of course, that leaves the blaring question of ... what happens to Cain and me after that? Do we stay here? Can he? Or maybe we could just run away and start a life someplace else, someplace far away from Timber Cove and the vampire pipeline.

Reaver throws his head back and lets out a bellowing laugh. "Cain would have my head if I took you with me. No, sweetheart, you won't be going."

It takes everything in me not to shift and rip him limb from limb just for the *sweetheart* reference. Instead, I let out a low growl and flash him a bit of fang as a warning. He gives me a raised eyebrow and simply shakes his head as if I am an insolent child.

“Yeah, well he’s not here, and he doesn’t make decisions on my behalf. So, I’m going,” I demand as I stand and take a few steps toward the door. To my surprise, Reaver doesn’t move, he just crosses his arms over his massive chest and leans back, lifting one booted foot and resting it on the opposite knee as if he’s settling in for a bit.

I let out another low growl, this time a bit louder so that there is no misinterpretation of my displeasure. I can feel my wolf prowling back and forth, uneasy and ready to strike. She wants to protect her mate as much as I do, and she’s willing to fight dirty to do it.

“Your wolf doesn’t scare me,” Reaver responds with far more pleasure in his voice than I expected. “I’ll go with Zachriel, and you’ll wait here, where it’s safe. This isn’t up for negotiation. Azazel isn’t someone who will back down and if he sees you as Cain’s weakness, he won’t hesitate to strike. He doesn’t give a shit that you’re a woman or a wolf. He’ll skin you in front of him just to prove a point.”

His crude description doesn’t scare me. “I can take care of myself,” I retort. “I’m not some good little girl who’s going to sit around and wait for the menfolk to come back. That’s not in me. So, either I go, or I’ll find someone else that can help me.” I stomp my foot to emphasize my point.

Reaver has the audacity to laugh before he gets up and stands before me. He’s so tall that even at my height, I have to strain my neck to look him in the eyes.

“You’re not going,” he insists, as he stares into my eyes and for a moment, I almost acquiesce. I can feel a foreign pull deep inside me, urging me to obey his command to stay behind.

Our eyes are locked in a stare down, and I have no intention of succumbing to his angelic Jedi mind trick. I take a single step forward, leaving less than a hairsbreadth between us.

I physically must shake my head to clear his influence from my thoughts. “I know what you’re doing,” I finally blurt out. “And

it's not going to work. I am the granddaughter of one of the strongest northern Alphas in the Vancouver territory. I do not back down, and whatever you think you're doing, you're not."

The air between us crackles with tension, each of us trying to bend the other to our will. But Cain is my mate and I have every intention of going after him. I'd rather not do it alone, and I have no idea where to find a *dimly-lit-gate* but fuck if Reaver thinks he can out stubborn me.

Long minutes pass with neither of us budging. Then I notice his eyes dart to one of the many wall monitors displaying the concert. My gaze follows his and all I see is the band still performing. But he must see something else because a slow smile spreads across his face.

"Fine, you can go. But we wait for Zachriel, and when the shit hits the fan, and trust me, it will. He's pulling you out, with or without Cain."

My shoulders relax a bit and the week's tension seems to ebb away. "Thank you," I remark as I turn on my heel and sit back down on the leather couch. "Was that so hard?" I'm having a hard time letting the argument go.

Reaver doesn't answer, he just sits back down and watches the monitors on the wall. I try to occupy myself with the concert. There isn't any audio of the show, so the awkward silence between us grows to an unnerving level. Oddly enough, even with my superior hearing, I cannot hear the concert from the suite.

"Is this room soundproof?" I ask, trying to make a friendlier conversation.

"Why? Are you plotting my murder and don't want anyone to hear?" he jokes. At least, I think he's joking, but his face remains serious as if he's deep in thought.

"I don't know... can you even be killed? Do angels die?" My tone is a bit more mocking than I anticipated and by the look on his face, he doesn't seem to be very amused.

"Yes and no," Reaver answers without bothering to look at me. His voice is deep and low. "It's always best to make sure we are actually dead though, because if we're not, we tend to hold a grudge."

“Sorry I asked.”

Over the next few hours, we don't speak much. A few roadies come in and out of the room and I notice they're nervous the moment they notice him. I can't say as I can blame them. He's quite intimidating, even sitting.

“Do you even have an actual job here?” I inquire, wondering why everyone who comes in seems to shy away from him.

Reaver doesn't have time to answer before the monitors go black and the doors to the suite are swung open. A crowd of people scurries into the room and there is a bustle of activity. There are cameras flashing and a microphone being shoved into my face before I even have time to think about what is going on.

“*Are you Zachriel's new love interest? Is your name Emogine?*” someone yells as I'm surrounded by reporters all vying for information I don't have.

I stammer my words and before I can answer any of the questions, a strong hand reaches through the crowd and pulls me to my feet. The throngs of people around us close in around Reaver and me as they snap more pictures. He puts up a monster-sized hand and pushes the cameras out of our faces.

“Zachriel and the rest of the band will be in momentarily. Please step back,” he growls. The crowd does what he asks without question, giving us enough space to move to the back of the room and through another door that I didn't notice before.

If I thought that the suite was opulent with its high-end leather sofas and an array of food and drinks, I was wrong. This new room screams money, and it's also occupied by a few scantily clad blonde women who seem to perk up as we enter. But the moment they notice we aren't followed by the band they sit back down and ignore our presence.

“Who's Emogine?” I ask, my curiosity getting the best of me. “Is one of them Emogine?” I motion toward the two women who are now chatting amongst themselves as if we weren't even in the room.

Reaver lets out a laugh as he looks over at them and shakes his head. “No, they are most certainly not Em. They're entertainment,” he says flatly.

“So, who is Emogine and why were they so adamant about knowing if I am her?”

Reaver pauses and looks around the room as if deciding how much he’s willing to tell me. “Emogine is Zach’s wife.”

My mouth hangs open for I don’t know how long as I process the information he’s just told me. If the two women heard him, they don’t seem to care.

“He’s married,” I say, unable to hide the shock in my voice. I may not be a huge fan of the band’s music, but everyone knows the song *Sweet Emogine* and the fact that Zachriel was voted most eligible bachelor for the past five years.

Reaver shakes his head and rubs his temples as if this line of questioning is giving him a headache. “Not here, he’s not. But…” He looks over at the two women still ignoring our presence. “But, back where I’m from, he’s married and has a gaggle of kids. I made the mistake of asking about Em when I first got here, and now he’s obsessed with finding her.”

“Awww, that’s sweet,” I reply, because it warms my heart to think that the world-famous Zachriel Seal is looking for his true love. Reaver doesn’t say anything, but something in my gut tells me there is more to this than he’s letting on. “So where is she?”

He shakes his head, as if the action will somehow make me forget that I asked the question. Clearly, he doesn’t know me. I’m not one to back down on anything. “Where is she?” I repeat, my voice almost demanding an explanation. Something in my gut tells me that I’m not going to like what he has to say.

“She’s not here,” he states, but I need more than just a generic explanation.

“Then where is she?”

Again, he glances around the room, which suddenly feels too small for the four of us. “As far as I can tell, she doesn’t exist here either. I’ve looked. But I’ve turned up nothing on her or her family. Not even the diner where they met is here and the same. It’s there, but not owned by her family. I can’t explain it.”

My heart sinks. “I wonder if there’s another me. You know, where Cain is from, and if she’s really his mate, not me.” My heart

aches at the thought that his true mate isn't me, but Katrazyna from his world.

It wasn't a question as much as it was me voicing what I was thinking. If he's not from here, then I can't be his fated mate. Not really. Reaver seems to ponder the idea for a moment and the concerned expression on his face does nothing to ease my thoughts. I don't think I ever looked at the possibility that maybe I'm not his. Perhaps it's the Kat from where Cain is from. The concept makes my head spin.

"I don't know," Reaver says, trying to reassure me. "It isn't an exact science. I mean... I'm sure it is an exact science, just not one I'm familiar with. I'm sorry, I just don't know."

A moment later, the door swings open and the sound coming through from the other room is almost deafening. I can hear the same voices yelling for information about the mystery woman, and when Zach is going to settle down. He must be well-versed in avoiding their questions because a moment later, he's standing in the doorway.

When Cain suggested that I come here to speak with Zachriel, I thought he was crazy. Now, with the man standing less than six feet from me, I know he's crazy. What the hell is some fame-crazed rock star going to do to help us? Reaver seems to think that Zachriel will be my protector when we go to the underworld.

"I must be going crazy," I mumble aloud. How the hell is he going to protect me? What's he going to do, start serenading the bad guys?

I can't help but be a bit star-struck by him. He is, after all, Zachriel Seal. The two women who were chatting among themselves quickly attach themselves to his side. Their giggling and carrying on over him is truly cringe-worthy.

"Ladies," he addresses them, giving them each a full kiss on the lips. I cringe and look over at Reaver, who just shrugs. "I'm going to have to decline spending time with the two of you tonight. My friends here have a bit of an issue that I must attend to."

The two women pout at his dismissal of them. But, the moment they see the other members of the band they're off to make sweet music with them. Without looking Zachriel pulls the door behind him closed and stares at Reaver and me.

“This better be good?” he asks as he moves past us to sit.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CAIN

Standing outside the bar that I know so well seems strange. The illuminated sign that should read The Firehouse blazes a bright red that now reads The Inferno. I take a moment to familiarize myself with my surroundings. Every bit of what I'm looking at is nearly identical, yet something is very off.

“Nothing you once knew as The Firehouse exists here,” Azazel informs as he takes the steps into the bar two at a time.

I can't make my feet move, so I take the opportunity to listen to Axzel's voice message.

“You son-of-a-bitch. I knew you were in on this. When I find you, there will be no mercy. Kat may believe you were taken, but that's only because she doesn't see who you really are. I do. I will hunt you down like the animal you are.”

My heart drops as I listen to his message again. I hope she's safe with the TC pack. The only thing I can do now is to gather as much information as I can and funnel it to Axzel so he and his pack can take down this threat from the outside.

Even if that means being the Cain Azazel needs me to be. Stopping the blood pipeline is the only thing that will save Kat's

world and keep her safe when I'm gone.

"Hey, pretty boy, you coming or not?" Azazel yells from the door, drink already in hand. "My contact will be here any moment."

My curiosity is piqued. Who is his contact? The only person who would ever allow business to be conducted at The Firehouse was Alastor. But if nothing of The Firehouse exists here, then who is running The Inferno?

I shake my head, because who the fuck cares?

I hold up a finger and he turns to go back inside. I grab my phone and send a quick text to Axzel.

ME: I'm in the Underworld, heading into The Inferno. Azazel needs me to be Cain. I'll get any info to you I can. Protect Kat at all costs.

I don't expect him to reply, not after the scathing voice message he left me. But the moment I hit send, the little dots jump around. I keep a tight eye on the door, not wanting Azazel to come back out, I also watch as numerous demons enter.

When my phone pings with a new text, I swipe it open.

UNKNOWN: Kat went to look for you, asshole. She's in Sacramento with a rock star and a psycho. What the fuck does heading into the inferno even mean? And who's Azazel?

"Fuck," I mumble as I read Axzel's text. "Why can't she just stay safe?" I growl before I quickly respond. There's too much to explain and I know I'm on borrowed time.

ME: Too much to explain. I'm on your side. Keep Kat safe, even if I don't make it out alive.

I pocket my phone, not wanting to tempt the fates any more than I already have. With a deep inhale, I make my way inside.

Despite the outside differences, I still am taken back by the inside. The bar is identical, right down to the blue and pink neon lights streaming down from the upper level.

It isn't until I see the back of a woman's head sitting at the bar that my entire world comes crashing down around me. Her long, white hair is plaited between her horns and she's laughing at something the bartender is saying. I expect it to be Val behind the bar, but it's some nameless demon slinging drinks.

For a moment, I completely forget why I'm here when she turns around and looks directly at me. My mind is trying to make sense of the face I haven't seen in hundreds of years. Her delicate features are so like mine, it's easy to see that we are related. The look on her face resonates with the same shock mine does, because here... her brother is dead and shouldn't be walking into The Inferno as if it were just another day.

She covers her mouth with her hand, and I can see her pale eyes begin to water as she takes me in.

Time slows as she jumps down from her bar stool to make her way to me. My mouth is dry and I'm not sure I can even speak.

"Awan," I manage to choke out when she's an arm's length from me.

"Cain," she squeaks out as the tears she was holding in flow down her pale face.

Without a thought, I grab her and pull her into a tight embrace. She is so much smaller than me, as all female Enoch demons were.

"How is this possible?" I hear her soft voice ask. The sound is like music to my ears. "I saw your body when Azazel brought it down to the river."

Pushing her back, I hold her in my arms as I take in the sight of my sister for the first time in centuries. "The virus?" I manage to ask. But her expression tells me she has no idea what I'm talking about. "Where's Val?"

She squishes her eyebrows together and I let out a laugh because I never thought I would see that expression again. The one that she always made when I did or said something stupid when we were children.

"Who is Val?" she breathes out.

With shaky hands, I run my fingers down her cheek. “I’ve missed you so much.” My voice cracks with unshed emotions. I have so much I want to tell her, but she’s not my Awan. “Are you happy?” I manage to choke out, forgetting for a few brief moments why I was here.

“Cain!” Azazel yells, pulling me out of what can only be a dream.

“Don’t leave,” I demand as I pull Awan back in for another long overdue embrace.

“The family reunion can wait. My contact is here,” Azazel says as he grabs the back of my shirt and pulls me from my sister.

I turn on him with claws drawn and fangs ready to rip out what’s left of his soul. “Don’t fucking touch me,” I say through gritted teeth. “There isn’t anything keeping me from tearing you apart down here,” I add pulling him in to meet my eyes.

Heat and anger are flowing through my veins, sparing me on to rip Azazel apart. Before Kat, there was only ever one woman whom I would have laid down my life for and that was my sister. My vision is clouded in red as my anger boils over.

I don’t know if it’s the mating heat taking over or the shock from holding Awan that brought me to this point. But my rage is focused on one person—no not a person, a leech.

“Save it for the pits, demon. Either calm the fuck down or fight in the pits, not here.”

I hear a deep baritone voice that is vaguely familiar from behind me as I’m pulled back. Whoever it is has a tight hold on my arms and is strong enough to hold a fully grown Enoch demon immobile, even as I’m about to rage.

“Cain, please,” Awan says stepping in front of me. “Do as he asks,” she says, placing a delicate hand on my shoulder. “I’ll be here, I promise. We can talk after.”

Her words calm me down enough that I can once again maintain rational thought. The strong grip on my arms loosens enough that I can take a few steps forward. I’m still a bit disoriented, but coherent enough to know whom I’m looking at when I turn around.

Another face I haven't seen in decades stares back at me. "Astaroth," I growl out.

Astaroth narrows his eyes at me. He's not quite a god, but the leader of the Seven Armies of Hell isn't a demon, either. I watch as his nostrils flare. "Where the fuck are you from?" he asks, somehow knowing that I don't belong here.

"We have business," Azazel informs him as he tugs me through the crowd. When I glance back, Astaroth is still staring, watching my every move. I watch helplessly as he whispers into Awan's ear, a look of horror suddenly masking her delicate features.

When they are finally out of sight, I stop Azazel. "I wasn't expecting this much difference," I tell him, cautious not to mention my sister. He doesn't need more of an upper hand.

"I told you, nothing here is the same."

My phone vibrates again as we enter one of the back rooms of The Inferno. Axzel will have to wait.

"What the fuck," I mumble out as I follow Azazel in. "Isn't this place just full of fucking surprises!" I exclaim as I look at the man sitting at the end of the table.

Reaver sits staring at me as if he's seeing a ghost. Which I guess he is, since I'm dead in this fucked up world. I should have known, or at very least suspected that Reaver would somehow be involved. Asher may believe his brother is good, and righteous, but I've never thought that. I've seen firsthand the damage this man has done, he's not innocent.

After all, where I'm from, he and Azazel have always been thick as thieves, plotting and scheming for their own profit. Why should this world prove to be any different?

"You son-of-a-bitch. You could be so much more than his pawn," I say as I motion for Azazel, who is standing with a smug look on his face.

"And you should be dead, yet here we are," Reaver adds.

"Reaver was nice enough to supply the workforce of demon labor that the vampires are using to build the pipeline. Cheap and efficient." Azazel laughs as this entire thing is nothing but a game to him. "He was the first person I sought out when I got here. Our old alliance is still as strong as ever."

I watch as Reaver's lip twitches as he listens to Azazel drone on about his plans. He speaks non-stop for what seems like hours. He outlines his entire scheme for the distribution of Blue Dragon, and how it's so much easier here than it ever was.

All the while, I keep my attention squarely on the man sitting so calmly behind the table. Reaver is listening, hanging on every word Azazel lays out. I watch as his knuckles grow white as he grips the arms of his chair when Azazel describes the madness the vampires will endure.

"I need to speak with Cain," Reaver finally says through gritted teeth. "Alone," he adds when no one makes any attempt to move.

Azazel lets out a low growl of disapproval. "I don't think that will be necessary. Cain is with us."

"Cain is dead. You said so yourself." Reaver stares at me when he speaks and for the first time, I wonder if I'm going to get out of any of this alive.

The power dynamic that I knew between the two has dramatically shifted in this world. Reaver was always under Azazel's thumb, doing his bidding under the guise of some misguided allegiance. But not so here. The Reaver in front of me exudes confidence and power, something sadly lacking in my world.

Without a word, Azazel gives Reaver a nod and heads back out the same door we came in. I take a moment to look at the man before me. He is identical in every way to the man I know as Asher's brother except this man doesn't show any signs of insanity as Ash's brother did from his time in Treachery Prison.

"So, what do you want?" I ask as I pace the length of the room. "You already stated that I'm dead, so you're aware I'm not the same Cain you've been dealing with."

"But I am the same Reaver," he says with a wide smile as he stands.

I take a defensive stance not trusting him one bit. Reaver is barely to his feet when the door behind him swings open. My heart sinks to the pit of my stomach when Kat comes running out.

"What the fuck is this?" I yell ready to rip him limb from limb.

She runs past Reaver and is jumping into my arms before anyone has a chance to answer. A moment later, Zachriel, who is rubbing his chin, follows her out the same door.

“Your girl packs quite a punch,” Zachriel admits as he comes to stand by Reaver. “But we gotta go. Astaroth is only going to occupy Azazel for a few minutes.”

“Well, I wouldn’t have had to hit you if you had let me go,” Kat snaps, and a swelling of pride blooms in my chest. I kiss her on the top of the head as I inhale her sweet scent.

“She shouldn’t be here,” I snap at Reaver and Zachriel, who both look at me as if I’m the one that lost my mind. “I don’t understand what the fuck is going on, but Kat can’t be here.”

I can feel Kats spine stiffen at my words. I know without even looking down at her that she is offended by my protective nature. But I cannot help myself where she is concerned. I can’t explain it, and I’m not even going to try to understand it. The thought that Azazel could use her as a pawn in some sick game sets me on fire.

“I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself. I’ve done it long enough,” Kat exclaims as she pushes herself away from me.

If we were anyplace else, I would take the time to explain this place to her and why she can’t be here. No one comes to the Underworld to play fair. The moment she leaves my arms, I have to stop myself from reaching for her and pulling her back. Instead, I push her toward Zachriel. “Take her out of here,” I demand.

“You need to leave as well,” Reaver explains. “We didn’t come here to just say hi. My meeting with Azazel was planned, but only so I could get the name of the pipeline’s head developer.”

Together, Reaver and I look at Zachriel, who is casually leaning against the wall as if we weren’t sitting in a bar on the banks of the river Styx.

“What?” he asks as the door behind me swings open with such force the hinges are bent at the frame.

Reaver and I share a momentary glance and in that moment I know he’ll protect Kat. But there is no way I want to let on that he isn’t what he is portraying.

“Take her!” I yell to Zachriel, who doesn’t hesitate to lunge for Kat. But he’s a moment too late and all I see is Azazel with his hand

wrapped around her throat.

“No!” I scream out as red-hot rage courses through my body.

I’m across the room and on Azazel in less than a single beat of my heart. But from the corner of my eye, I can see Kat fall to the ground clutching her throat, then the unmistakable scent of blood hits my nostrils. Any sense of humanity that I once carried melts away with the scent of my mate’s spilled blood.

“You will fucking die,” I hiss as my vision goes red and everything I had once tried to hide spills forth. My fists are fueled by the need to avenge my mate combined with hundreds of years of pent-up rage from my sister’s death. I land blow after blow until my fists are covered in Azazel’s blood and he is unrecognizable.

I can hear Zachriel’s voice urging Kat to shift, but he sounds so far away as he pleads with her. I never had a mate, and I don’t know what having one means. All I do know is that I feel as if my soul is being ripped from my body as she lies dying on the floor.

“She’s not able to shift here.” I hear Astaroth’s deep baritone voice below as he pulls me from what’s left of Azazel. “You need to take her back home now or she will die.” He addresses Reaver, whom I hope has a plan.

Astaroth’s words bring me back from my madness long enough to compose myself and kneel at Kats’ side. Her skin is so pale, and blood is still pouring from the wound on her neck. As quickly and as gently as I can, I cradle her in my arms and stand.

“Where are we going?” I ask Reaver, who is already moving toward the door.

“The gate is right outside. I can get you both back to Timber Cove. Does her pack have a doctor?” he asks and I can hear the fear in his voice.

“I don’t know,” I answer honestly, because I have no fucking idea if the pack in Timber Cove has a doctor or not. “But I know who will. Axzel Salvador.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CAIN

One of the best things about Northern California is the vast amount of woods surrounding just about everything. That's most likely why a pack of wolf shifters calls this part of the state its home. It's also ideal for Dimmu gates, since the majority of them use natural occurrences, like the two boulders that Reaver, me, and an unconscious Kat walked through.

Taking a quick look around, I don't immediately recognize the location. It isn't the same gate that Azazel and I traveled through originally, so where the hell are we? I will myself to remain calm. Kat isn't human, and while a wound like she's suffering from would be fatal to humans, she should be able to survive.

She better be able to survive this. I don't think I could stand losing her. The thought has me cradling her tighter in my arms.

I hear her let out a soft moan, and I quicken my pace through the woods. The sound is the first I heard her make and gives me hope. At least she is still alive. Although, she won't be if we don't get her help soon.

"Where the hell are we?" I demand from Reaver, who is looking around as if he's never seen this gate or where we are before

right now. Which is unusual in and of itself. Gates are fickle and typically only bring you where you have been before.

“You said Timber Cove. This is behind that bar, The Drop Off,” Reaver confirms as he points up the hill.

“Kat’s bar,” I breathe out as I run past him with her clutched tightly in my arms. The moment I crest the small hill, I can see the backside of her bar. My legs pumping at a full-out run, I don’t even bother to check the door before I kick it open.

Wood splinters in every direction from the force of my booted blow. It doesn’t even occur to me that I should have at least tried the handle, since its owner is currently leaving a trail of blood through the kitchen.

The main bar is dark except for a few glowing signs scattered around on the walls. I place her as gently as possible onto one of the pool tables and wait for her to make a sound. But she doesn’t. She just lays on the green velvet, pale and lifeless. For a moment, I debate taking her upstairs where she may be more comfortable, but I don’t want to waste more time.

I’m about to search the bar for a med-kit when movement from one of the dark tables against the wall catches my eye.

“What the fuck happened?” a deep male voice asks, cutting through the darkness. A moment later, Axzel is standing next to me. He eyes me up and down with a sneer. “Jesus Christ,” he mumbles before nudging me out of the way.

On instinct, I let out a low, guttural growl and Axzel holds up his hands in mock surrender. “I only want to help her.”

“What are you doing here?”

“She asked me to check in on the bar while she was gone, looking for you.” He glances down at her unmoving body. “Holy hell, what the fuck happened to her and why hasn’t she shifted?”

“I...I don’t know. I don’t even know why she was even there,” I mutter as I slide my hands through my hair only to find my horns still present. In my haste to get her to safety, I didn’t bother to glamor myself in my human façade. No wonder Axzel looked at me as if I were a monster. “We were there to meet with someone, and there she was.”

The moment the words are out of my mouth, Reaver saunters into the bar. He has more than just a little explaining to do about what he was doing with Azazel.

“What was she doing at The Firehouse?” I yell over at Reaver as soon as he steps into the bar. I know we weren’t at *The Firehouse*, but I don’t bother to correct myself. When he sees Kats lifeless body on the pool table he rushes to her side.

“Who the hell are you?” Reaver asks Axzel, who is now putting pressure on Kat’s neck to slow the bleeding.

“Axzel Salvador. And you are?”

“Not important.” I grab the small medical kit I find stashed behind the bar.

I toss the kit over to Axzel, who catches it without even bothering to look up

“I’ve triaged a wound or two in my misguided youth,” he admits as he digs through the kit, one hand still on Kats neck. “If she would shift, this would be a hell of a lot easier. She’d at least begin to heal.”

I vaguely remember someone insisting that she shift before I picked her up and we left The Inferno. But I have no idea why she hasn’t, other than the fact that she was unconscious. “I don’t know, I don’t think she could.”

“Kat!” Axzel yells at her as he moves her head from side to side, examining her wound. “Kat, honey, I need you to shift, even if you can only do it partially. It will speed up your healing.”

His voice is calm and reassuring as he addresses her. But a moment later, his eyes are pinned on me

“What the hell did this do her?” Axzel’s tone is accusatory, and I’m instantly put on the defensive. “And where were you?”

“Azazel, I don’t know what he used,” I answer as I pace next to the pool table feeling helpless to assist my mate. “I think I killed him... I don’t know. Fuck, I don’t even know if he *can* die. Who the fuck cares, you need to save her.” My words come out as more of me begging for him to save her life than a statement, but I don’t care.

“Shit, I can’t stop the fucking bleeding. She has to shift,” he repeats, as if I didn’t hear him the first time.

“She needs a doctor,” I demand.

“Move,” Reaver says as he pushes Axzel out of the way. The male instantly growls and shows him a bit of fang, but reluctantly steps back.

“And what the hell do you think you’re going to do, demon?” Axzel asks.

I answer before Reaver has a chance. “He’s not a demon, he’s an unfallen Archangel,” I say as Reaver puts his hand over the wound. “At least, I hope he is.”

In the confusion of The Inferno, I remember Reaver saying he was the same Reaver and I was a different Cain. I only hope that it wasn’t some ass backwards code he used with the other Cain.

I continue my pacing. In as many battles as I’ve fought, I’ve never worried about an injury taking me out. As a demon, I’m extremely difficult to kill. But Kat isn’t immortal and can only heal when she shifts into her wolf form. This has me genuinely concerned that she could possibly die. If that happens, there will be no stopping my rage on everyone who harmed her, whether it be directly like Azazel, or indirectly like, Reaver.

Axzel and I both watch, mesmerized as Reaver’s hand glows a golden yellow when he places it over Kat’s throat. A moment later, she gasps for breath when Reaver pulls his hand away. Reaver stumbles back and collapses to his knees.

To my surprise, Axzel goes to Reaver and lends him a hand to help him up while I rush to Kat’s side. She’s still pale and unconscious, but the wound on her neck is closed, and now only has a thin red scar to show that it was ever there.

“Why isn’t she awake?” I ask as I run my hand down her soft cheek and brush her hair out of her face. In all my long life, I never felt so helpless as I do looking down at Kat right now. “Please wake up, baby,” I whisper in her ear. “I’ll never let anything happen to you again. I swear it, just wake up,” I beg her.

My momentary respite is blasted apart when Zachriel runs through the door. “We need to motor, like now!” he bellows. “We

have about a thirty-second lead on about a hundred seriously pissed-off demons,” Zachriel huffs out a ragged breath.

“I’ll take Kat to my pack, they’ll protect her,” Axzel informs us as he scoops her up into his arms. As much as I want to argue with him, I don’t, because he’s right. His pack will be the safest place for her right now.

Axzel must see the pained look on my face. “I’ll protect her as if she were my own mate, I swear. I’ll come back here once she’s safe.”

“No!” I yell. “I’ll come to you,” I inform him. No way do I want him coming back here and potentially leading Azazel’s demon horde back to her. “Protect her with your life.”

He gives me a nod as he takes off out the door. She’ll be safe with his pack, of that I have no doubt. The moment they are out the door, my heart breaks and it takes everything in me to not follow them. But that would only lead whatever is about to attack us directly to her, and I can’t have that.

I look over at Zachriel and Reaver. “We’ve had worse odds... I guess.”

“Fuck, yeah, we have,” Zachriel cheers, taking a defensive stance while wielding a pool cue. Reaver chuckles before breaking a cue over his knee and spinning his dual weapons.

I grab two bottles from the bar and break them against the mahogany before jumping up into the bar top. A moment later, the bar is swarming with hundreds of small, angry, soldier demons all vying for a piece of us. They spill in from every door and window and my first thought isn’t for my safety or the safety of the men about to risk their lives for me. It’s for Axzel and my mate, who only had seconds to escape.

I don’t have time to consider that fact before several of the demons are at my feet. I punt one across the room and he smashes into one of the neon signs on the wall. He sparks in a spectacular display before his body zaps out of existence.

“Where the hell did Azazel dig these guys up from?” I yell across the bar to Zachriel and Reaver, who are both fighting off their own attacks.

“Good question!” Reaver shouts back as he stabs a demon through the chest with a pool cue. The demon instantly explodes into ash. “Well, that’s convenient.”

I slice and stab with the two bottles as demon after demon explode around me. Ash covers every surface of the bar, yet more keep coming. I have no idea how long the three of us were fighting, but Kat is going to be pissed when she sees her bar and the mess we’ve made.

“I figured you guys could use a hand... or rather a sword,” Astaroth says from the doorway as he tosses a sword to Reaver.

“Fuck, yes! Come to Papa!” Reaver exclaims as he catches his sword with one hand. His first swipe takes out several demons at once. Reaver wields the weapon like an extension of himself, a warrior to his very core. If the demon ash were blood, we would all be dripping in it.

With the additional manpower of Astaroth and his weapon, we now have a fighting chance to get out of this alive. Anytime I feel as if we aren’t going to make it, I picture Kat laying on the pool table unconscious, and my rage takes over. Never having had a mate to protect the feeling is new, but not unwelcome.

“You couldn’t have brought enough to share?” Zach yells over to Roth who slices through another few demons as if they were butter. The ash cloud around us is so thick I can barely see where they are fighting. Thankfully with every demon we kill, a flash of light pops before they burst into ash.

“Next time,” Roth jokes as he swings and slices his way closer to where I’m standing with my own demon threat. “Go to your girl, we got this.”

“What and miss all the fun? Are you kidding me?” I reply as I poke a demon in the throat with a shard of glass. Roth clasps me on the shoulder. “Go to your girl. But you might want to alter your appearance to something a bit more... human.” he jokes as he glances up at my horns.

“Thanks for your help. I hate to say we needed it, but clearly, we did.”

“Go,” he repeats and when I look over at Reaver and Zach, they both give me the thumbs up. “I saw a bike out back when I came in.”

I smile at that, knowing that Kat must have driven my bike back here after the coyote shifter chased her. I would have loved to see her ride. She must have been sexy as fuck tooling down the highway on my black beast of a bike.

Taking a last look around the bar, there aren't many demons left and the ones that are still hanging on are being toyed with by Zachriel and Reaver. The two men now have smiles on their faces as they taunt the remaining few.

I only encounter two demons as I make my way to the back door. The sharp, broken bottle I still have makes quick work of them. My bike is directly outside the back entrance and Kat took the time to safely store her under a tarp. Thankfully, she had the foresight to put the key back in its lockbox, or I would be shit out of luck for a ride.

The moment I get on the road the Northern California, rain pelts down on me. The weather isn't just bad timing, with the added winds associate with a coastal storm, I have trouble keeping my bike on the road. Lightning streaks across the sky and I debate pulling over until the storm passes, but my need to see Kat is too great. So, I decide to press on until I reach Timber Cove.

As soon as I pull into town, the rain stops, and the night sky clears. Timber Cove is much as it was the first time I drove through. Quiet, without a soul around. Axzel didn't mention where to meet him, so I turn down the street where the small café where Kat and I ate lunch at the other day sits.

I pull into the same spot in front that Axzel parked my bike in previously and grab my phone to give him a call. Swiping my device open, I'm bombarded with ping after ping of missed messages. For a moment, my heart sinks, thinking it might be Axzel with unthinkable news about Kat. But when I swipe open my messages, I see that they are all from either Ash or Sloane and were sent over the last few days. Additionally, I have forty-eight missed calls and voice messages.

I listen to the first message, then the next. Each is the same—where am I and why don't I return their calls. All the same and yet they get more panicked as the days go by. At least Sloane's. Ash can keep the worry out of his voice... for the most part.

“What the fuck,” I mumble.

I swipe over to the last text thread with Axzel and call his number. Thankfully, he answers on the first ring.

“Hello.”

“Axzel, man, thank the gods. How is Kat?” I ask in a panic.

“Who? Sorry, man, you must have the wrong number.”

Pulling my phone away from my ear, I look down at Axzel’s name and number blazed across my screen. Looking up to the sky for answers, I notice the sign above the café, it flickers Saltie’s in bright neon, not The Salty Dog, in which Kat and I ate.

“Sorry,” I say as I hang up the call.

I sit on my bike for a moment before I make the decision to go back to the bar. I try Axzel’s number one more time, but when the same voice answers, I hang up without saying a word. The town and highway pass in a blur as I push my bike to her limit. The speeds I take on the highway would classify me as a low flying aircraft, but I don’t care. I need to get back to the bar as quickly as I can.

Pulling into the parking lot of The Drop Off, I’m confused by the number of bikes parked out front and the sound of music coming from inside. It’s only then that I notice the sign on the roof now reads Trader Vic’s.

My heart constricts in my chest and for the first time since my sister died, I feel as if the world was pulled out from under me.

With no other option, I dig my phone out and call Asher. He answers after a few rings.

“I thought you fucking died,” Asher says instead of a greeting and at this moment, I wish I had. “Where the fuck are you?”

“Timber Cove,” I say flatly. “I’m heading back to Vegas now.” *Because there is no point in me being here.* I don’t add the last part, but I know there is no one inside that bar waiting for me.

“That’s it?” he asks, as if expecting some long explanation.

“Yeah,” Is the only response I can muster.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CAIN

I didn't bother to go into Vic's.

Even if there was a Kat inside tending bar, she wouldn't be *my* Kat. She wouldn't have Kat's memories or be who my mate is. Just like I am not the same person as their Cain. There wouldn't be any point in putting my heart through that.

Instead, I do the only thing I can. I get back onto the Pacific Coast Highway and head south. The ride back to Vegas is uneventful and the miles pass me by in a blur, my mind replaying every memory with Kat and Awan. I feel the loss of both right down to my bones, the ache too great to even deal with.

By the time the bright lights of the Las Vegas strip come into view, I'm numb, both physically and emotionally. My apartment is in the same building as the BDC Vegas, and at three in the morning, the club is booming. The Vegas club was the first to allow humans in, but only during the day, at night it's a vampire haven. But to everyone else, it's a private membership-only establishment.

I pull into the underground garage and slide my bike into its usual space. It's surrounded by luxury cars, some of which only a handful of people in the world own. But none of it matters, because

the one person I would want to share anything with isn't here, and I have no way of getting to her.

Hours pass and all I do is sit and stare off into vast space of the garage. I can hear the cars moving from the above public lot and the occasional honk of a horn but other than that, I only exist as a silent observer.

In my head, I replay the short drive that I took from Kat's bar to the center of Timber Cove repeatedly, yet I can't seem to pinpoint the moment in time when I switched from her world to mine. I'm also riddled with guilt. If I stayed and continued to fight, would I still be there now?

Standing up, I swing my leg over my seat and let out an earth-shattering yell as I slam my fist into the concrete wall. The blow is so hard, pieces of masonry crumble to the ground. When I look down at my bloody hand I can see bone, yet I feel no physical pain.

The elevator ride to my apartment seems to take forever and when I walk in, it's as lifeless as I feel. The only thing that shows that anyone has been here is the plate of cookies on the counter with a note.

Welcome home, we missed you.

Love, Sloane

The simple gesture warms my heart and puts a brief yet genuine smile on my face.

Grabbing the plate, I head over to the window and on my way, I grab the bottle of Skull Wine I have stashed. It's the only alcohol that will get me drunk and right now, I don't want to be sober.

Using my teeth, I pull the cork out of the bottle and spit it onto the floor. The fumes from the concoction hit my nose and I cringe. Skull Wine isn't for the faint of heart, or for any human who wants to live more than thirty seconds after ingesting it. But for me, the cherry-flavored jet fuel will serve its purpose. It will numb me to the point of unconsciousness.

The first sip burns as it travels down my throat, so I chase it with one of Sloane's cookies. The combination is revolting, so I wash the cookies down with another swig from the bottle. I rinse and repeat the process until the Las Vegas lights blur, and I can barely stand.

Despite the spinning in my head, every second thought I have is still of Katrazyna, my one and only true mate. And when it's not her invading my thoughts, it's my sister, who somewhere is still alive even though I held her as she took her last breath.

I sway as I open the French door to the small balcony patio. Unlike the rural Northern California night, there are no stars visible here. I flop down on one of the cushioned chairs, or at least that was my intention. In my inebriated state, I miss my mark and land my sorry ass on the stone floor. All I can do is let out a drunken laugh and take another long slug from my nearly empty bottle.

"Fuck!" I yell out into the night with no anticipation of anyone answering me. But this is the Vegas strip and even though it's near dawn, someone yells back with an offer to fuck them.

Throwing my head back I laugh at the irony. Once an Enoch demon finds its mate, that's it. We will want no other. So even if I wanted to, I wouldn't be able. My laughter gives way to anger, and I want to destroy everything. But the moment I manage to stand up, my drunken legs refuse to hold me. I immediately fall forward, hitting my head against the concrete hard enough for it to bounce twice before I finally lay nearly unconscious on the ground.

With no other option, I close my eyes and wish for a quick death, although I know that isn't possible. My death will be long and painful. It will be every day of my life that I am separated from Kat.

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"Fuck, you smell as bad as you look."

I crack open one eye to see Asher standing over me. It takes me a few minutes to realize that I am no longer outside on the balcony but laying in his shower, naked.

"What the fuck," I moan out as I attempt to stand. "How did I get in the shower, and where the fuck are my clothes?"

Asher laughs. "All good questions. Now clean yourself up," he orders just before turning the cold water on full blast.

The shock from the water momentarily clears my head of the fog I'm currently experiencing. Hazy memories trickle into my head, but none explain why I am currently here. "Shit," I say before adjusting the temperature to something a little less arctic.

It doesn't take me more than a few minutes to shower. I grab the pile of clothes Ash was thoughtful enough to leave on the bathroom sink. More than likely it was Sloane's doing, not his. But either way, I'm glad for the gesture.

I just stare at my reflection in the mirror for a few minutes. I look like complete shit and can only imagine what I looked like before I took a shower. The stubble along my jaw looks like I haven't shaved in a week. And my skin has a dull, lifeless hue.

"Fuck," I mutter as I run my fingers through my damp hair.

When I finally emerge, Asher is waiting, ready to scold me as if I were an out-of-control teenager.

"You can save your lecture," I inform him as I rummage through the kitchen cabinets looking for another bottle of Skull Wine, and maybe a snack. "I don't need to hear it."

"There's nothing in the house. And even if there was, I'm fairly certain you would have already drunk it all, or don't you remember?"

I shoot him a menacing look. He may be my oldest friend, but he doesn't know what I'm going through. I slam the cabinets as I open and close them.

"Don't you guys have anything normal to eat?" I ask as I slam the final cabinet door shut after grabbing a box of animal crackers.

"What the fuck happened to you in California?" he asks, completely ignoring my question or the fact that I just tore through his entire kitchen like a rabid wolverine.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," I answer as I toss a handful of cookies into my mouth. "But I'm pretty sure I know where your brother was hiding out all this time." I say while chewing.

"Reaver? Did you see Reaver?" Asher asks, but there is no way I can tell him without sounding crazy. Instead, I merely nod, because any other answer would leave far more questions than answers. When I don't speak, Ash continues, "I don't understand. Where were you that you saw Reaver, but couldn't tell me?"

An honest question, one I have no way of answering. "Timber Cove," I say, which apparently is the wrong answer. The words are

barely out of my cookie-filled mouth when he gets up and paces the room.

“Bullshit!” he yells. “Look, I don’t give a fuck where you were. But don’t tell me you were in Timber Cove when I know damn well you weren’t. The real estate agency called when you didn’t show up. So, what the fuck happened to you? I haven’t seen you like this since...” Asher stops short, staring at me because we both know what he’s about to say. “I haven’t seen you like this since your sister,” he finishes before sitting back down.

“I saw her,” I admit as I flop down on one of the oversized leather chairs that are sporadically yet fashionably placed around the room. Sloane’s doing, no doubt, as everything in this apartment is. “Do you even have any idea how lucky you are to have a woman like Sloane?”

“What? What are you talking about? Of course, I do. When I thought I had lost her I wanted to die.”

The day he speaks of is clear in my head. Reaver lunged, sword in hand, ready to skewer Ash, but Sloane ran between them. Asher’s pain on that day was something I never thought I would see, never mind feel. But at least he knew she lived after Michael and Olish healed her. I don’t even have that knowledge.

Leaning forward, I rest my elbows on my knees and drop my head. “I found my true mate,” I whisper so low I’m not even sure the words truly leave my lips. When I look up, Asher is staring at me with disbelief in his eyes. He knows as well as I do that there are no more female Enoch demons, at least not here.

“How? Where?” he mutters, clearly as confused as I was.

“In...a Timber Cove, which is where I was.”

Before he can argue that I never showed up. I continue, “When I arrived, it was late. The only place open was this bar, The Drop Off...”

For the next few hours, I stare at the floor and tell him every detail of my trip to Timber Cove. I watch as his expression his expression changes from disbelief to concern and finally to understanding.

“Fuck,” he finally says when I finish what sounds like a tall tale from a Sci-Fi novel. “What can we do to get her back?” he asks,

and for a moment I am truly shocked.

“You believe me?” I ask, my voice laden with shame. I’m not even sure if I believe what I just said, or if it was a mating heat-induced delusion. All I do know is that part of me came alive for the first time. Every breath I took was for her, and now that part has died, and I will never be the same.

“Of course, I do. Do you think I wouldn’t believe you after all the shit we have gone through?”

“I don’t know that I believe me. All I know is that it hurts to even breathe, knowing I’ll never see her again.”

Unable to sit still any longer, I get up and begin to pace the length of Asher’s living room. The floor-to-ceiling windows let the bright sun of the day stream into the room. They are made of a special polymer that allows both Blood Angels like Asher, and vampires to enjoy daylight without its adverse repercussions.

“What would humanity do if they knew what walked among them?” I asked as I stand in the sun’s warm light, not expecting an answer.

“I don’t know, but I suspect we would find out who the true monsters really are, and it wouldn’t be us.”

I nod my head in agreement. “Azazel was looking to start anarchy. I hope I killed him, but I guess I’ll never know,” I add turning away from the window. “I should talk to Val, tell her about Awan.”

“Why would you do that? She already lost her once, don’t make her share in your pain.”

His words are harsh but hold the truth. “Is that what I’m doing? Looking for someone to share in my pain so I don’t have to bear it alone?”

“I should knock you on your ass just for thinking that. You aren’t alone. If you were, I would have left you in your drunken stupor. Have you even considered going back to Timber Cove? Or was your plan just to drink yourself into oblivion?”

I let out a laugh. Have I considered going back? “Why would I go back? There is nothing there. Should I go reminisce in the bar that isn’t hers? Or worse, a Kat is working there, but she’s not my

Kat. This entire situation is beyond fucked up. I can barely wrap my head around it.” I seethe.

“So, what? You’re just going to give up? Say fuck it. Oh, boo-hoo, my mate is from another dimension, poor me,” Ash mocks. “Should I list all the impossibilities that became possible over the last few years? Let me start with the fact that for thousands of years, not one Blood Angel knocked up anyone yet now I’m pretty sure if Zach even walks by Em, she gets pregnant, and Sloane is about to give birth any moment. So don’t sit here and bitch about how it’s not possible. You’re barking up the wrong fucking tree.”

Ash’s words are like a slap in the face. As much as I want to wallow and wait for my own demise, he’s right. Impossible shit has happened so often over the past few years, it’s become normal.

“What if there is no way of getting her back?” I ask, not wanting to let hope into my heart. “Or worse, what if I can get back, and she’s dead? I don’t think I could handle that.”

Asher’s hand comes to rest on my shoulder. “An old friend of mine once told me, that forever is a long time to live with regret. Don’t let fear keep you from the happiness you deserve.”

I know he’s right and if I stay here, I will only make myself and everyone around me miserable.

CHAPTER TWENTY

KATRAZYNA

Every bone in my body feels like it's been blasted apart and then put back together with Elmer's glue. *And not in their original order.* Each move I make as I push myself to sit up seems to send painful shockwaves through my body. In my frustration, I flop back down on the bed.

When I open my eyes, the room is shrouded in darkness, with only a sliver of light coming through the drawn curtains. I can hear hushed voices behind the closed door, and for a moment, I panic that I am back in Hell, the underworld, whatever Reaver called it. But then I remember hearing Cain's voice begging me to shift.

"Hello," I manage to squeak out. My mouth is so dry, I can barely form the word. I try again, but my throat feels like I was gargling glass for the last decade.

My hand instantly goes to my neck, expecting to feel a gaping wound, but there's nothing, not even a bandage. That thought brings back the memory of having my throat sliced open by the man they called Azazel.

Closing my eyes, I try to remember what happened but it's all a blur. Reaver planned to go into the underworld to a bar called The Inferno. I remember laughing at the thought that there was a bar in

Hell until I saw it. He didn't want me to go, and now I hate to say it, but he was probably right. Nothing went as planned once we reached The Inferno. I was able to spy on Cain from one of the rooms while we waited. Reaver mentioned that the woman I saw him talking with was his sister.

I couldn't believe I was in the Underworld. But as much as I wanted to venture out into the main bar area, Reaver and Zachriel refused to let me out of their sight. Reaver was to pose as Azazel's contact for the vampire pipeline. When Cain entered, I was supposed to wait until Reaver gave the okay to come in.

But I didn't.

In the rush of adrenaline at finally being able to see Cain and knowing that he was safe, I had a momentary loss of control and ran to him.

All at once, the man they called Azazel was in the room. He was past Cain before I knew what was happening. His hand had wrapped around my neck, and the next thing I knew, I felt the warm trickle of blood trickling down my body.

The memory causes me to gasp for breath at the fear rushing through my body. I tried to shift because my wolf was strong, and she could have fought against Azazel. But she was silent.

I can feel her now. She's restless and on edge, but she's here, which means that I am no longer in the Underworld.

Easing my legs over the side of the bed, I slowly push myself into a sitting position. Every move is sheer agony. The room spins a bit as I try to stand, but I push past the initial discomfort, gripping the bedpost to steady myself.

My wolf begs me to shift, knowing I need to. But doing so in unfamiliar territory makes me uneasy. There were fur trappers caught recently, and I don't want to make myself an easy target because I'm not sure where the hell I am.

But shifting is the only option available to heal myself fully.

Looking around the room, there isn't much I can use to barricade the door without alerting whoever is out there. But there is a chair. As quietly and as quickly as I can manage, I wedge the back of the chair under the knob.

Honestly, I have no idea if it will stop anyone from coming in or not. The only place I've ever seen it done is in the movies. But it's all I have to go on.

When I feel the door is secure, I slip out of my clothes and lay them flat on the bed. Usually I wouldn't care, but since they're all I currently have, I'll be careful with them. Pulling the t-shirt over my head, I realize what I'm wearing aren't my clothes.

"Great," I mumble before I call my wolf forward.

The instant I shift, I can feel the healing magic embrace me. I can also smell a familiar scent. It puts my wolf at ease as I scent the air, identifying several familiar individuals.

"Kat," I hear my name being called from the other side of the door. A moment later, there is a knock, and the door is jiggled, then pushed against the chair I have securing it. To my amazement, the chair thing works.

As quick as I can, I shift back and grab my clothes from the bed.

"One second!" I yell back, my voice cracking from the strain.

"What's blocking the door," Axzel asks as he tries again to push the door open, but the chair doesn't budge.

"Hang on!" I yell back, the distinct sound of aggravation in my voice. "I'm getting dressed," I snap.

Kicking the chair out of the way, I step back and let him come in.

"Did you have the chair under the knob?" he asks, motioning to the wooden chair awkwardly placed in the middle of the room. "Never mind. Did you shift?"

"Yeah. Where am I?" I ask as I fidget from foot to foot, rubbing my arms as if I were chilled.

"Safe house. Come on," he says as he motions toward the door.

Following him out, my nerves are on edge. He shouldn't be the one waiting for me to wake. "Where's Cain?" I ask, my voice shaking with panic. "How did I get here?" I can feel the sting of tears behind my eyes, but I refuse to let them flow. "Answer me." I demand.

“Sit, let me get you something to eat. You must be starving, and it will help with the healing,” he informs before heading into the small kitchen. “I wasn’t sure when you would wake, so all I have are sandwiches.”

“What do you mean, you weren’t sure when I would wake up? How long was I out?”

An ominous dread seeps into my chest the longer Axzel goes without answering me.

“Axzel Salvador, what the fuck is going on?” I yell as loud as my damaged vocal cords will allow. He doesn’t answer, tosses the butter knife he was using into the sink and calmly walks into the living room, holding a plate for me to take.

“You eat, I’ll talk,” he says as he sits down on an old recliner.

Grabbing the sandwich, I make a show out of taking a large bite. “Now talk,” I mumble through a full mouth.

“I’ve seen some shit in my life Kat, you know that. But nothing like I saw at The Drop Off. I watched Cain carry you in, bleeding from a gaping wound on your neck. You should have been fucking dead.”

My hand instantly goes to the spot on my throat where I should be able to feel the remnants of some recent trauma. But I feel nothing.

“Then I stood back while an Archangel miraculously healed you, and an international rock star walked through the door. I don’t know who the fuck Cain is, but I know he’s not the same man I met a year ago. I swore to him that I would keep you safe, and that was three days ago.”

My heart sinks to the pit of my stomach. “I’ve been here for three days?”

Axzel nods.

“Where is Cain?”

A pain-filled expression converges across Axzel’s face. “I grabbed you and told Cain I’d ensure you were safe. That was right after the rock star came in yelling about a horde of angry soldier demons about to converge on the bar.”

“What?” I squeal, standing up so fast the empty plate crashes to the ground. “Does he know where we are? Have you called him or sent one of your brothers to the bar to ensure he’s alive.”

Axzel just stares back at me and shakes his head. “He was going to call me when the threat to you was gone. He hasn’t done that. I swore to him...”

I cut him off mid-sentence. “I don’t care what you swore to him. We are going back to the bar right now.” I stomp my foot. “What if he’s dead or dying?”

“Three days, Kat. He hasn’t reached out in three days.”

“I get that,” I cry out, the tears I swore I wouldn’t shed are now streaming down my face. “But if it were Leshia, you wouldn’t just leave her, and I can’t leave Cain.”

I watch as his resolve melts away. “Fine, but I go in first. No argument.” He points his finger in my face. “And if I think it’s even the slightest bit unsafe, you leave. No argument.”

I give him a curt nod. “I could shift. I’m wicked strong...”

Axzel holds up his hand. “No... argument.”

“Fine,” I acquiesce

“Fine,” he agrees.

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The ride through town and then to The Drop Off is quiet. I don’t think either of us want to say anything. If Axzel believes Cain is dead, he doesn’t let on.

As we pull into the empty parking lot, my stomach begins to flip-flop and the sandwich from earlier threatens to make an appearance. I’m not sure what I should be expecting. I have no idea what a demon horde entails. The outside of the establishment looks unharmed, apart from a few broken windows. But that’s almost a regular occurrence, considering the clientele.

Angie is pacing back and forth on the porch. When she sees the car pulls into the lot, she runs to it.

“I don’t know what the hell happened in there, but I am not cleaning up that mess!” she shouts as Axzel exits the vehicle.

“You went inside?” he asks, brushing past her and pulling his pistol from the waistband of his pants. “Was there anyone inside?” He approaches the front door, gun drawn as if he were expecting an ambush.

“Angie was already inside!” I yell to him just before he kicks open the door.

“What that hell happened in there?” Angie repeats, and I have visions of dead demons lying on every surface. “There are piles of dust or ash or something all over everything.”

“What?” I ask as I lean back against Axzel’s truck. “What do you mean dust?”

“Kat, I can’t even explain it, you’re just going to have to see for yourself. We’ll have to call a service to clean it, that’s for sure.”

The need to ask if she spotted Cain’s dead body gnaws at me. But I’ve known Angie a long time, and she knew I left with Cain, so surely, she would have led with ‘*Oh, hey, that hot guy from the other night is dead inside.*’ Thankfully, she didn’t, so I have to assume no visible dead bodies are laying around. That thought alone makes me feel slightly better.

A few minutes later, Axzel emerges from the back side of the bar. He must have gone through and made sure the threat was gone. I can’t read the look on his face, but something tells me the news he has isn’t going to be good.

The anticipation is killing me so I jog over to where he is. “Well?” I ask as I bounce up and down with nervous energy.

“There’s no one inside,” he remarks with no emotion in his voice. “But there was clearly a battle.”

Pushing past him, I run up the porch stairs in push open the front door. Nothing could prepare me for the sight laid out before me. Angie said there were piles of dust, but what she failed to mention was the utter destruction of everything else.

Bottles lay smashed on the ground, and pieces of pool cues, tables and chairs litter the floor in every direction.

“What the fuck!” I yell. My bar might be a dive, some may even say shithole. But it’s mine and very rarely does it look as if the apocalypse has descended upon it.

Taking two steps forward, the ash beneath my feet begins to billow into the air. Pulling the neck of the t-shirt up over my mouth and nose, I continue forward. Axzel says there was a battle, but the only evidence of blood I can find covers one of the pool tables and the floor below.

My heart clenches in my chest. With the amount of blood soaked into the velvet, whoever fell here is surely dead.

“That’s your blood,” Axzel says from behind me. “If Reaver wasn’t here, I don’t think you would have made it.

“I don’t get it. Did they just leave?”

Axzel shakes his head. “I don’t know. But there’s no sign of them. Fuck, I don’t even know how you guys got here.”

“Some gate thing, I don’t know, Reaver was able to see them. We went through one when we went to the Underworld, so maybe there is one close by.”

The idea that there is a gate to the Underworld close to the bar is a bit unsettling. But it’s also the best chance of finding... anyone who can give us answers.

“Did you check the apartment upstairs?” I ask Axzel as I make my way over to the kitchen area where the back stairs are located.

“Yeah, there’s nothing up there. Cain kicked through your back door nicely though,” he adds, pointing to the wood shards scattered over the floor.

There are two more ash piles on the kitchen floor leading out to the door. Outside I find two broken bottles and Cain’s bike gone. My heart instantly swells with optimism.

“He left,” I announce, a huge smile on my face. “Cain’s bike is gone. He had to of taken it.”

Axzel comes out and looks around the area. “Or it was stolen,” he counters as he kicks the tarp to the side.

“Maybe he drove into town,” I say, rushing past him and back into the kitchen. Angie is dragging a trash bin past me while holding a broom. “What are you doing?”

“Someone has to clean this place up, although I think I need a shovel instead of a dustpan,” Ang jokes but continues, dragging the bin.

Grabbing the barrel, I stop her. “Ang, it’s not safe here, and we don’t even know what all this dust is.”

“It’s what’s left of the demons we slayed,” a deep, baritone voice says from behind me. His response makes me jump and a small scream escapes me.

“Eeewh!” Angie squeals, dropping the dustpan and the broom.

“What the fuck,” I breathe out while holding my hand over my frantic heart. “Reaver, you scared the shit out of me. Is Cain with you?” I blurt out without even bothering to ask how he is or thanking him for saving my life.

He gives me a raised eyebrow. “Why would he be with me?”

“Because he never made contact with me,” Axzel says from behind. “Are you sure he made it out?”

“Positive. Only a handful of demons were alive when he left, and I heard his bike roar off.”

I shoot Axzel an *I told you so* look, which he promptly ignores.

“That was three days ago. Can you stay here with Kat and Angie while I go into town? Maybe he’s there, maybe he’s not. Either way, I don’t think Kat should be left alone until we know what happened to Cain.”

“Agreed,” Reaver says with a nod of his head.

“I don’t need a babysitter in my own bar,” I snap at Axzel, who again ignores me. “Hello? Did you hear what I said?”

I watch as Axzel takes a few deep breaths in before he turns and hands me his phone. “Call his number,” he insists, shoving his device at me. “If you’re so sure he’s still alive or even in the area, call his number.”

Staring down at the phone in his hand, I’m crippled with fear. Fear that Cain is dead, fear he’s gone, fear I never really meant that much to him to begin with.

“He’s not dead,” I maintain as I shake my head. “I would know if he were dead. I’d feel it,” I add pounding my fist over my heart.

“You don’t know that,” Axzel suggests. “He’s not a wolf. We mate for life; you don’t know what that entails for a demon.”

His statement hits me hard and the need to lash out at him is nearly all-consuming. Cain may not be a wolf, but I know in the deepest reaches of my soul that he is my true mate. And if he were dead, I would feel the loss.

I don't bother to answer, and Axzel doesn't feel the need to continue before he's out the door, leaving us alone with Reaver.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

REAVER

Stepping through the Dimmu gate outside The Drop Off, I can feel the energy here has somehow shifted. I know I shouldn't have returned, and the feeling I'm having only confirms it.

But I need to make sure that Kat survived her ordeal. Neither Cain nor Axzel were able to save her life, and I couldn't just stand by and let her die.

I didn't expect to find out that Cain didn't contact Axzel after he left us. That little tidbit of information was likely the energy shift I was feeling.

Yet, it didn't make any sense.

I saw the love in Cain's eyes when he saw Kat at The Inferno, and the pain when she nearly died. Those were not emotions a man could fake, not even Cain.

I followed Kat and Angie back into the destroyed bar. I didn't take a real good look at it after the last demon was killed, but it was a disaster.

“So, all this ash is—”

“Dead demons, yes.”

“Okay,” Kat breathes out as she steps around an ash pile. “So, how am I supposed to clean ashed demon out of my bar?”

Her tenacity puts a smile on my face. “I like you,” I answer as I reach around the bar and grab a bottle of Jack from the shelf. “You don’t listen for shit, but I like you.”

“Great,” she mocks, and I can tell by the look on her face that she is filled with questions. “Feel free to help yourself,” she chastises.

Twisting the top of my bottle of Jack, I take a seat at the bar and a long swig, emptying nearly half the bottle.

“Holy, fuck. You’re gonna kill yourself drinking like that!” Kat’s friend yells as she sweeps a pile of ashes into a too small dustpan. The dust spills over onto her hands and I laugh as she jumps back, shaking the dust off.

“You’re never going to get it all,” I tell her before I look over at Kat standing at the end of the bar, staring at me. I pat the seat next to me. “Take a load off.”

She looks from me to her friend and for a moment, I think she’s just going to attempt to clean the place up. Instead, she motions for her friend, who reluctantly accompanies her. They whisper to one another, but I can’t help the fact that I can hear a pin drop a mile away. Instead, I turn my back and let them speak in private.

“You should go, Ang. I don’t think it’s safe for you to be here.”

“Me? What about him? Who is he?”

I don’t have to be looking at them or be the only other person in the bar to know that Ang must be pointing in my direction.

“His name is Reaver. He’s a good guy, I promise. Besides, Axzel and Cain will probably be back soon. You should go. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Without turning, I can feel the woman’s eyes on me. “Are you sure?”

“Positive,” Kat reassures her. “Go.”

I glance over my shoulder and watch as Kat walks Ang to the door. The two women hug then Kat locks the door behind her friend.

A useless gesture, considering Cain kicked in the back door, and most of the windows were broken or just completely missing.

A moment later, Kat is sliding into the seat next to me. Without a word, I hand her the bottle of Jack.

“Fuck. Is what you’re going to say really that bad?” she asks, referencing the shot of tequila and water I handed her at the show.

I smile when she grabs the bottle and takes a healthy gulp. I watch as she cringes and sets the bottle back onto the bar.

“Easy, killer. This does not affect me,” I say, grabbing it again. “But I don’t think you’re so lucky.”

“Do you think Cain is in town?” She asks the one question I’m unsure I can answer with any degree of certainty.

Before answering, I polish off the bottle. “Does this place have a surveillance system?” I ask, avoiding her question.

“Are you kidding?” She laughs. “If I didn’t, I’d never know who to ban for life.”

Jumping off my stool, I head behind the bar, searching for another unbroken bottle of something to drink. The only things that aren’t smashed to bits are a few bottles of vodka. Not exactly my drink of choice, but beggars can’t be choosers.

“Lead the way,” I say, holding up two bottles. “I want to see this epic battle of good versus evil,” I joke. Anything to avoid having the conversation I know we should be having.

Kat leads the way around the bar and into a small office in the back. This is her office. It would be hard to tell if it weren’t except for the few pictures strewn around, her as a young girl and an older man, her father maybe.

“Your dad,” I motion toward one of the pictures. She gives me a sad smile, and I really wish I hadn’t mentioned it.

“No,” she answers, grabbing the photo. “My grandfather. He was the Big Mountain Alpha” She gives no other explanation, and I can see by the look on her face that she loved the man very much.

“So, why did you come back?” she asks as she sits behind her desk and opens her laptop, placing the picture safely in her desk drawer. “And don’t say it was just to ensure I was still alive. Because that’s bullshit, and you know it.”

“You remind me of a woman I know back home. Her name is Kennedy. I could never put anything past her, either. Maybe I need to work on my delivery or something,” I say as I take the seat across from her desk.

“I lied,” Kat whispers, and when she looks up, I can see her green eyes glistening with tears. “When I told Axzel that I’d know if he were gone,” she chokes out. “I don’t think he’s here anymore,” she continues, before wiping away the tears in her eyes. “I don’t think he’s dead, you know. But he’s not here.”

I can only nod as she speaks because I know she is right. I don’t think she’s prepared for me to agree with her just yet, so I don’t.

“Play the video, then we can talk.”

She pulls up the feed from three nights ago and hits play.

“Oh my God,” she gasps as she watches Cain bring her in and place her limp body on the pool table. I can see that it takes everything in her to continue to watch as it would for anyone seeing their lifeless bloody body brought in

Since there is no sound, I give her a blow-by-blow commentary. It isn’t until Zachriel comes in and then a moment later the swarm of demons, that she jumps back.

“Holy shit!” she exclaims, holding her heart. “Those things were in my bar?”

“You can fast forward. This goes on for a few hours. It isn’t until Roth shows up with my sword that it gets good,” I tease.

“Is Cain fighting with two broken bottles?” she asks through a laugh as she pauses the video and squints at the screen. “No wonder my bar is a disaster. Look at the three of you.”

We watch until Cain leaves, then she switches camera angles to follow him through the kitchen, where he slices through two more demons.

“My mate’s a bad-ass,” she says with pride.

“He’s okay.” I shrug.

When the video is over, Kat and I sit in her office, an awkward silence stretching between us.

“Do you think he went back?” she finally asks.

It pains me to know that he saw and spoke with his sister. I intended to come here and talk with him tonight about bringing Awan with me when I left. Her true soulmate wasn't here, but rather tending bar at The Firehouse. I find it interesting that Awan and her brother have mates not from the same world. Another cruel joke by the fates, no doubt.

After Kat chastised me for not knowing if I could get back, I had to try. As it turns out, going back was easy, at least for me.

"If he did, I don't think he did so willingly. I'm not exactly sure how he got here. When I followed Azazel, the Dimmu gate he went through was struck by lightning."

Kat gasps. "You don't think he was hit by lightning, do you?"

Shrugging my shoulders, I try not to let on that anything is possible. "I don't think so. But I could check," I offer.

It takes her a minute to realize what I'm suggesting. "You can go back?" There is no hiding the excitement in her eyes. "Can you take me? I don't have anyone here, just this bar and one friend. But if Cain is gone, he took my heart with him."

I watch as she ponders what she's asking. Does she know the weight of what she's suggesting? Do I?

"Maybe he did what he was supposed to do while he was here?" It's a question, not a statement, and the sadness in her voice breaks me.

"I don't know. Maybe," I say with a nod. "I just don't know if you would be able to come back. I'm not exactly sure why I can yet. Azazel never could. He was stuck here as far as I can tell."

The mention of his name kills the excitement in her eyes. "Did Cain kill him?"

Everything in me wants to lie to her and tell her that Cain killed him. I wish he had, but that son-of-a-bitch just won't die. When Astaroth pulled Cain off Azazel, I suggested that he toss them both into the pits. Cain was fueled by the need to protect his mate and would have easily finished him, but the bastard took the high road, so unlike him.

"No, sadly, he didn't." I watch as her hand comes up and feels the area that Azazel sliced, nicking her jugular, most likely. There is fear in her eyes. "Astaroth delivered him to Treachery."

She shoots me a questioning look. “It’s the worst prison in the Underworld. When he tried to resurrect that pipeline deal, he essentially tried to poison the world and cursed humanity. For that alone, he deserves to be there. But given his unique circumstances here and back home, he won’t be able to even fight in the pits for his freedom for a few millennia.”

“There’s no chance of him retaliating?”

“Not even a little bit,” I inform her, and I can see the tension visibly disappear from her face. “He wishes he was dead right about now. Trust me, I know.”

“So, what now? Besides cleaning this place up? I don’t want Angie to have a heart attack the next time she comes in. How do we…” She waves her fingers in the air and it makes me laugh.

“What is?” I imitate her finger wave.

“I don’t know. How do we get to where Cain is?” She laughs and I can only guess that the Jack Daniels and the vodka have taken hold of her faculties.

“First, you need some food and rest, and I need to go talk with someone,” I inform her as I stand. Reaching my hand over her desk, she takes it, and I pull her to her feet.

Before I can say another word, she scoots around the desk and embraces me. For a moment, I’m unsure what to do with my arms, so I stand there holding them awkwardly out to the side. Her embrace is tight, and she seems to be squeezing me harder, and the gesture has me a bit confused.

“Thank you,” she mumbles into my chest. “Thank you for saving me. I know I would have died without your help.”

Wrapping my arms around her, I hug her back. “You’re welcome,” I choke out, not used to being thanked for anything I do.

Pushing her back, I give her a friendly smile. “Once Axzel gets back, I’ll leave you to figure out the bar situation. We can leave tonight if you have everything sorted out here.”

“As I said, I don’t have much to sort.”

“Hello!” Axzel’s booming voice startles both of us as he stands in the doorway staring at us. “Don’t let me interrupt.”

I let out a low growl at his accusation, which wipes the smug look off his face.

“I was just thanking Reaver for saving my life,” Kat explains as she pats me on the shoulder. Kat eases my tension towards the other male as she passes. “We watched the video footage from the other night. Those guys were bad-ass,” she comments as she walks past Axzel.

I give him a cocky smirk. “We were bad-ass,” I grumble as I shoulder my way past him.

Axzel follows us back into the main section of the bar.

“I couldn’t find any sign that Cain went into town,” he states. “I find that a bit suspicious, don’t you?” he asks Kat, who instantly looks to me for help.

“I think he went back—” I say about to explain out thoughts on the matter.

“Back to Vegas, that was my thought too,” Axzel interrupts me. “I knew I shouldn’t have trusted that guy. I’ll ensure you’re safe from whatever he brought here the other night.”

His bravado has me laughing. “You would be dead if you stayed the other night,” I chime in. “They won’t be back. The man who sent them is in prison, and no one escaped death.”

I watch as Kat rolls her eyes and shakes her head at us. “What?” Axzel and I say in unison.

“Males are all the same, regardless of species. Just don’t start pissing on the furniture, I still have to have it cleaned. I didn’t think you would find any trace of Cain in town,” she informs Axzel as she tosses broken bottles into a trash bin. “He went back to where he’s from, and I’m going after him. With Reaver’s help,” she says, looking at me.

By the look on the male’s face, he wants to argue but thinks better of it when Kat shoots him an “*I dare you*” look.

“I’m going to let Angie know she’s in charge of the bar once it’s back up and running.”

“You don’t even know this guy, Kat,” Axzel says, pointing his finger at me. “Think about it. Do you even know where he’s taking you?”

Kat looks at me for a moment before addressing Axzel's concerns. "Reaver saved my life and has a way to get me to my mate. I have to take it, even if it means I can never come back here again."

Axzel looks as though he wants to say something, but Kat puts up her hand. "And before you remind me that Cain isn't a wolf, and that it's possible we can't form a true mated bond. Remember that you are not my father or my Alpha, so you have no say in what I do."

I watch silently as Axzel nods. "I just want you to be safe. Your right, I'm none of those things. But I still consider you pack, which means your safety is my concern."

Kat looks over at me, and I shake my head. I have no intention of getting in the middle of their squabble. "Can you meet me back here tonight?"

My eyes glance over at Axzel, who clearly has his opinion on what Kat should do. I know there is nothing he can say to keep her here. She belongs with Cain, and I'm willing try to get her to him.

"I'll be back tonight. Pack light," I joke.

I give Axzel a nod before leaving, but he doesn't return the gesture.

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There is another person I needed to speak with before I can leave. If I got back home and found that I couldn't return I would never forgive myself if I didn't speak with Awan, Cain's sister.

The plague that wiped out all the female Enoch demons didn't show its ugly face in this reality, but there were other consequences here. Awan's mate, like Kat's, belonged someplace else.

I didn't know if she would want to come. Her brother, Cain, is dead here, and this is her home.

Walking into The Inferno is like walking into a mirror universe. It is as it should be, yet entirely different. Awan, as I learned, worked the bar area most evenings. The moment she spots me she gives me a friendly wave.

“Ambrosia?” she asks as I settle up to the bar. The drink choice initially threw me, but since Alastor isn’t the purveyor of the establishment, I shouldn’t be surprised. The vile concoction we all know and loathe is his secret recipe, so without him, the world is safe from its repulsive existence.

“No, I actually came to talk to you... about Cain,” I add when I notice her attention is on other patrons, not me. The mention of his name has her moving around the bar to come speak to me quicker than I think possible.

“Is he here?” she asks, looking around.

“No, I think he went...” I stop and take an uncomfortable look around the bar. Cain isn’t liked here, having associated with Azazel, and if The Inferno is anything like The Firehouse, the place has ears. “Can we talk in private? I don’t have much time.”

She gives me a quick nod and grabs my arm to lead me into the back area of the bar where several offices and private rooms are located.

“What about Cain?” she asks as soon as the door shuts behind me. “He said he was going to come back. I can’t believe he’s alive,” she sputters out with pure joy in her voice.

As quickly as I can I explain what happened and who Cain is, Awan, to her credit, doesn’t say much, not even when I ask if she wants to come with Kat and me.

She lets out a nervous laugh. “That sounds very unbelievable, even for Cain.”

“I’m sure it does, but I’m leaving tonight with Kat, his mate. You should come with us.”

It takes her a moment to soak in all the information I just gave her.

“I don’t know. It all sounds so bizarre, and why do you have to go tonight? And what if he doesn’t want me there? I’m not *his* sister, just like he’s not *my* Cain. Maybe if I had more time to think about it,” she rambles on.

“I saw his face when he came into the bar the other night. You are still his sister, and he is still your brother. I can’t explain it, and I’m not sure anyone can. But I need to make the offer to you, because I don’t know if it will be a one-way trip for me or not.”

“I understand,” she says, her voice laden with sadness. “Tell him I love him and that I wish him all the happiness in the world.” Her voice cracks as she puts her head down. “I just... I just got used to him not being here, you know.”

A curt head nod is all I can do. I have no idea what is holding her here, or why she won't come, but I have to respect her decision. She's a grown woman and has her reasons for remaining, just like Kat has for leaving.

“I will come back, if I can,” I tell her before getting up to leave. “The gate is across the river. We'll be there tonight,” I add, hoping that she reconsiders the offer before I leave.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

KATRAZYNA

When Reaver left, I called Angie to return to the bar as soon as she could. I tried my best to keep the excitement out of my voice, but it wasn't possible. Axzel sits staring at me from a barstool as I clean up a bit more of the mess.

“Do you have something to say?” I ask him as I dump a pile of broken bottles into a trash bin. Axzel gives me a shrug but remains silent. “Really? Because you look like you have something to say.”

“You don't even know this guy.”

Stopping, I stare at him. I've known Axzel and his family for as long as I lived in Timber Cove. They can be a dangerous group if you're not family or pack. I'm neither, but as the granddaughter of the Alpha from an absorbed pack, I always feel safe where the Salvador brothers are concerned.

“This guy? Do you mean Reaver or my mate?”

Axzel lets out a long, drawn-out sigh. “Either. Cain may be your mate somehow, but you don't know anything about him. Not really. I'm just trying to keep you safe. I promised him I would keep you safe. And that means questioning a rash decision to go God only knows where.”

“All you Alpha types are the fricken same,” I spout, my hands on my hips as I stare down Axzel. “You’ll all go to the ends of the world for your mates. But when a female does it, she’s making a rash decision. You guys are all a bunch of hypocrites, and you know that, right?”

I watch as Axzel opens his mouth to refute my accusation then promptly closes it.

“It’s not the same,” he finally says, but doesn’t bother to offer an explanation to his reasoning. Typical. He has the alpha mentality of: *It is what it is because I say so.*

Watching him, I let out a laugh. “Oh, okay. You’re right, it’s completely different. I actually have a plan.”

“You have a plan? And what if he didn’t *go back* to wherever he said he was from? What if he just left? There is still the possibility that he’s putting all of us on.”

His accusation that Cain isn’t who he claims is infuriating and has anger flowing through my veins like water.

“Go in the office,” I point to the back. “Watch the video from the other night. Then come back here and tell me to my face that he’s not whom he claims to be.”

With a huff, he gets up and grabs a broom. The two of us clean in silence for a few hours and I’m pretty sure we haven’t even made a dent in the mess.

My mind is a whirlwind of thoughts and I hate that Axzel planted doubt into my head. What Cain and I have may be new and brief, but it doesn’t make it any less real. No wolf has ever affected me the way Cain does. Nor has my wolf desired anyone so much that she would be willing to fight to the death for him.

It isn’t until the front door opens and Angie walks in that I take a break and let my thoughts settle.

“Look what I brought,” she announces as she holds up a Shop-Vac. “This should help get this place ready to open again.”

“You, my friend, are brilliant.” I turn to Axzel, who stopped sweeping. “You can’t use it. Your negative attitude requires time with the broom.”

Without changing his expression, Axzel gives me the single-finger salute. "It's not my fault you don't like my opinion."

"What opinion? What's he talking about?" Angie asks as she gloves up to help clean.

"She's leaving!" Axzel bursts out before I have a chance to ease into the conversation.

Closing my eyes, I let out an aggravated sigh. "Thanks," I say, my voice dripping with sarcasm. "Not like I wasn't going to ease into it or anything."

"Ease into what?" Ang asks in a panic. "What's he talking about, Kat? Where are you going?"

"After Cain," Axzel says, again before I can speak.

"Will you shut the hell up!" I yell as I toss a dustpan at his head. He catches it easily and places it on the bar as if it weren't thrown in anger.

Angie stands there looking at me, waiting for me to answer for Axzel's statement. My heart is beating so fast in my chest, I feel as though I may pass out.

"What's he talking about Kat?" she finally asks after a few minutes of uncomfortable silence.

I glare at Axzel, who just shrugs as if he didn't let the proverbial cat out of the bag.

I run my hand through my hair and scratch my head as I try to find the right words. Angie is more than just a friend to me, she's like a mother. She always looked after me, even when I didn't think I needed looking after. And when my grandfather died, she was there, helping me every step of the way.

So why now, looking at her, do I question my decision?

"What happened to Mr. Hot-to-Trot that you need to go after him?"

I shoot a look over at Axzel, who holds up his hands in mock surrender.

"He's..." I'm suddenly at a loss for words and a reasonable explanation. "He's not from around here. And I think I need to go to him because he can't come back here," I explain in the simplest terms I possibly can.

Axzel scoffs and I point my finger at him. “Zip it.”

“Anyway,” I return my gaze to Angie. “I’m going to need you to look after the bar for a while. I’m not sure how long I’ll be gone.”

She narrows her eyes at me. “What aren’t you telling me?”

“Interdimensional travel,” Axzel coughs out.

“What’s the big, bad wolf over there talking about?” she asks, and I smile at her term of endearment for him. Like me, she has a love-hate relationship with the TC pack.

“He’s not exactly from here,” I say, pointing to the ground as if that explains it all.

Ang gives me a raised eyebrow. “What, like he’s an alien? I’ve been reading some books about hot alien abductions lately.” She wiggles her eyebrows, and I don’t even want to ask.

I shake my head and smile. “Not exactly, no. But I’m not sure if I’ll be able to come back once I’m there. It might be a one-way trip,” I say with a bit more sadness in my voice than I thought I would have.

“He might as well be an alien,” Axzel chimes in from behind me. “He’s a demon from another universe.”

“And my mate,” I add before he can continue further.

Angie stands staring at me for what seems like an eternity. Then she looks to Axzel, who has a smug look on his face that I want to smack right off.

“If he’s your mate,” she says with a sad smile, “don’t let him go. Even if it means going to another universe to find him.”

Without a word, I embrace her. “I knew you would understand,” I whisper before pulling away. “If there is any way for me to come back, I will.”

“I know you will, honey,” she chokes out, and I try to stifle back my own tears. “But you deserve to be happy and if that means going wherever you’re going, then you must take the chance. Forever is a long time to live with regret,” she adds. “But I am not cleaning this place up by myself, and if you think you’re heading off into the wild blue yonder before it’s clean, you have another think coming. You, too,” she adds, pointing to Axzel.

“You’re not even going to try to talk her out of it?” Axzel asks. “She knows nothing about this guy.”

Anger boils up inside me. “She... is standing right here and has a name. And once again I’ll remind you, you’re not my father or my Alpha, so you... have ...no... say!” I yell as I punctuate each word so he understands.

Axzel throws his hands up and wisely turns back to helping to clean up the place.

“I know better than to try to talk you out of anything,” Angie whispers. “And I saw that man.” She whistles. “There isn’t any place I wouldn’t go to get a man like that. If I was only twenty years younger,” she teases.

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It takes us nearly all day to get the bar looking like it should. At the very least, I’m thankful for the distraction.

There isn’t anyone else for me to call or anyone who will even miss me being gone. And that tells me that I’m making the right decision.

I’m ready to go when Reaver walks through the door at nearly midnight. My heart beats with excitement and my body hums with nervous energy I’ve never felt before.

“Wow, this place looks great,” Reaver says, looking around. “You ready to do this?”

“I feel like I’m Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz,” I joke nervously. “Do we just walk there?” I ask, because I didn’t really think about the logistics of what Reaver suggested until now. “Or do I click my heels together three times?”

“I don’t know who Dorothy is,” Reaver says. “But we’ll take the Dimmu-gate out back to the Underworld, then the gate there too...” Reaver pauses. “Well, to Vegas, actually. That seems to be where it lets me out every time.”

“Well, I’ve never been to Las Vegas. And my reference would have been funny if you knew who Dorothy was. How do you not know the Wizard of Oz? You know what, never mind.”

“Shall we, then?” Reaver asks, holding out his elbow for me to take.

“This is so weird,” Angie adds as she holds out her arms for a hug. “I feel like I should at least be driving you to the airport or something.”

I embrace her so tightly I fear I might break one of her ribs. “This isn’t goodbye,” I snifle. “If I can’t come back, maybe Reaver can,” I add, and thankfully Reaver doesn’t say anything.

There are only two things that I grabbed, Cain’s backpack that I found still upstairs and the picture of me and my grandfather from my office. Everything else is just stuff and can all be replaced when I get to where we are going.

Axzel and Angie follow us out the back door and into the woods for about fifty yards, all the while Axzel continues his rant on why I shouldn’t be going, or why it would be a better idea for Cain to come here.

When we finally stop in front of what looks like nothing more than a few trees and two large boulders, Axzel steps forward. I expect him to try and talk me out of going once again. Instead, he turns his attention to Reaver.

“Her safety is in your hands. If anything happens to her, I will hunt you down and kill you. I don’t care what universe you’re in.”

Reaver pounds his fist against his chest in a very old-school warrior fashion. “I will protect her with my very life.”

I can’t help but roll my eyes.

“Good God. I’m not going to fricken war,” I remind them. “But thank you, Axzel, for everything.”

“Be good, kid,” he jokes, before pulling me into a tight embrace.

When I was in Sacramento, Reaver explained the strange gate system they use to travel. But to me, it does not look like anything except forest when I turn to look at where he’s standing.

“You’re telling me there’s a gate to the Underworld right here?” Angie asks, jumping in between two rocks and then back out. “I don’t see anything. Do you?” she asks me and all I can do is shake my head because I see nothing but trees and rocks, same as her.

“Nope, but I didn’t see anything in Sacramento either,” I tell her.

Reaver holds out his elbow. “My lady.”

“Good sir,” I say, adding a curtsy for good measure before I kiss Angie goodbye.

The walk through the gate is anti-climactic. There is no fanfare, we just step from the forest in northern California to the burnt, desolate Underworld.

The smell of sulfur instantly has me gagging as it did the first time I came through one of the strange gates. Unlike last time when we ended up inside The Inferno, this time Reaver and I are standing on the banks of a river of fire.

“Wow,” I breathe out as I look across the burning expanse. It’s somehow beautiful and ominous at the same time. “Does Cain live down here?” I ask as I take a good look around.

The question should be one that I asked long before now. But would it have really mattered? No, not in the slightest. Although the smell to my sensitive wolf olfactory sense would take some getting used to.

“No. As far as I know, he barely travels out of Vegas,” Reaver answers as he looks around.

“What are we waiting for?” I ask, following his gaze.

“Awan,” he says without further explanation.

“Cain’s sister?” I ask, although I know the answer. I was able to witness their interaction at the bar. If Reaver didn’t already inform me that the beautiful demon he was embracing was his sister, I would have spiraled into a jealous rage.

“Yes,” he mumbles, and I take that as my cue not to ask any more questions.

Funny that I never really thought about demons and angels when the first paranormal stepped into the mainstream three years ago. And if I did, I wouldn’t have put them into the unbelievably hot category. But it makes sense for them to be attractive; I just hadn’t expected the women to be as beautiful as Awan when I saw her.

Nervously, I tap my foot as we wait. Finally, after a few minutes of silence, I hear Reaver let out a disappointed huff.

“Maybe we should wait a few more minutes,” I say, trying to lighten the mood. “I don’t mind. Was she supposed to be here? We could go and get her,” I toss out as an idea in case he somehow thinks I wouldn’t want Cain’s sister tagging along.

“No, she wasn’t supposed to meet us,” he says shaking his head and still looking off into the distance. “I just hoped she would. It would mean so much to Cain if she came with us.”

The idea was in my head and spilling out of my mouth before I could stop it. “We should go get her. Or at least try to talk to her again,” I say taking a few steps away from Reaver in the direction of his gaze. “How far is it?”

“It’s too dangerous. I’ll come back.”

I take several more steps away from him. “It is not too dangerous. Besides, I can take care of myself,” I inform him.

“Then shift,” he demands. “If you can shift, then we’ll go. If you can’t, I’ll come back,” he states, and I know there is no arguing with him. I also know I can’t shift here.

The moment I step foot through the gate, my wolf falls silent.

When I do not attempt to answer him or shift, he turns and walks away from me. “Come on. We’re leaving.”

I don’t move for a few minutes, until it’s painfully evident Reaver is not going to wait or even turn around. “Hey!” I call after him, but he doesn’t stop. Looking back toward the direction he thought Awan may come from, I try to peer into the distance to see if I can see the tall, willowy woman.

“Shit,” I murmur to myself before I take off in a sprint toward Reaver. When I catch up to him, I grab him by the shoulder. To my surprise, he has an overconfident smirk on his face. “Were you just going to leave me there? What if some hellcat came out of nowhere and ate me?” I ask.

“Then you would shift, and we would be on our way to meet up with Awan. But you didn’t, because you can’t,” he deadpans, and I really want to smack him for being right, and cocky about it.

“You’re an asshole,” I say on a sigh. “You know that, right?”

“Sure do,” he says confidently. “You ready?”

“What if you can’t come back?” I ask. “I don’t want Cain’s only chance of being reunited with his sister ruined because I can’t shift.”

“He’s had to deal with the loss of his sister for hundreds of years. What do you think it would do to him if he lost his mate too?”

His words hit me with more force than I ever would have thought possible. It also put into perspective what I was about to do. I’m about to walk through an invisible gate from the underworld and into another universe.

“You’re right, I wasn’t thinking. Cain must already think he’s lost me,” I whisper, more to myself than to Reaver.

Without a word, Reaver holds out his hand and I take it. I’m ready to start the next chapter in my life, even if that means leaving everything I know behind.

Closing my eyes, I take a few steps forward, my fingers wrapped tightly around Reaver’s. I know we leave the underworld behind when I can no longer smell sulfur and the intense heat of Las Vegas slams into me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

KATRAZYNA

“**You can open your eyes,**” I hear Reaver say. But for some reason, I’m petrified to do so. I don’t know why, and it seems completely unreasonable. Yet my fingers are so tightly wrapped around Reaver’s that I’m fairly certain that my grip has broken at least one of his digits.

“Kat.”

“Yeah?” I answer as if I’m not standing here in fear of the unknown with my eyes shut tight.

“Why are your eyes still closed?” he whispers.

“I don’t know,” I lie.

“It’s just Vegas. I mean, it is pretty scary,” he jokes, and I can’t help but crack a smile. “Especially after just coming through the Underworld,” he continues, and I get his point.

Cracking open one eye, I take in my surroundings. I’m not exactly sure what I was expecting but standing on top of what looks like a roof in downtown Las Vegas isn’t it.

“Are we…” Opening both eyes, I look. Finally letting go of Reaver’s hands I spin around. “Are we on a roof?” I question despite the answer being obvious.

“Yeah,” he says as if it’s a surprise to him as well. “This is where it drops me every time. It’s my brother’s building.”

Well, that is an answer I’m not expecting. “Your brother owns a building in Las Vegas?”

Reaver just shrugs.

I take a moment to make my way to the edge of the roof. A waist-high wall winds around the perimeter, so there is no danger of just toppling off. When Cain talked about a club in Vegas, I didn’t think he meant smack-dab in the center of the strip. But that is exactly where we are.

I’m standing looking out over the iconic Las Vegas strip with my mouth hanging open when Reaver comes to stand next to me.

“Are you okay?” he asks, and I can hear the genuine concern in his voice.

“Yeah, I just...” I pause for a moment to gather my thoughts. “I don’t know what I was thinking when Cain talked about Vegas. It certainly wasn’t a high-rise downtown, that’s for sure. Does he live in this building?”

“Yeah, he does. The club is on the lower few levels, then there are offices and apartments. This...” He looks around and points down to the strip below. I can see hundreds if not thousands of people milling around. “This isn’t like where you’re from. Like all the Black Door Clubs, this building is a safe haven, with no humans. If you shift here and someone sees you, you’ll end up in a lab someplace. So don’t do it in public.”

I didn’t really take that into consideration when coming here. Humans here have no knowledge of the existence of anything but themselves. Not that I was one of those shifters who thought we were superior to humans, and I never shifted in a public place. But I would have to watch my anger. If the man at the concert was here and I flashed him some fang, the situation might have gone completely different.

“Can you shift here?” Reaver asks.

It hadn’t occurred to me that I might not be able to shift. Was the magic that lived inside every shifter only relevant in our own dimension? I took a moment to call my wolf forward. I could feel her, but it was faint. She was frightened.

Looking around the rooftop, I notice an AC unit that is large enough for me to disrobe and shift.

“I’ll be right back,” I tell Reaver, who gives me a raised eyebrow in concern. “These are the only clothes I have, and I don’t want to ruin them shifting,” I say, looking down at myself.

“Got it,” he answers, giving me a thumbs-up. “When I said pack light, I didn’t mean bring nothing but a backpack.”

“Well, I wasn’t about to roll a few suitcases through Hell,” I say back from my spot behind the AC.

I take a quick look around once I’m out of Reaver’s view. We might be towering over the strip, but there are still buildings taller, and I don’t want to be seen. Taking a deep breath in, I let the spirit of the wolf engulf me so she can see our new home.

Reaver never saw me shift, most people never have. My wolf is bigger than most, due to the Alpha blood running through her veins. I watch as Reaver takes a tentative step back, then kneels down so that we are at eye level.

“Wow,” he says as he holds out his hand for me to nuzzle. “As a human you’re okay, but as a wolf, you’re pretty amazing.”

For his back-handed compliment, I rear up on my back legs and land my front paws on his shoulders, pushing him off balance. He lets out a genuine laugh.

My wolf is happy to be out and Reaver gives me a few minutes to explore and stretch my paws. Most shifters don’t live in the confines of a city like Las Vegas, so it will take some getting used to. When the bright lights, loud noise and barrage of smells become overwhelming, I shift back and get dressed.

“Thanks,” I say, stepping out from behind the air-conditioning unit. “I needed that.” I stretch my arms up over my head.

“Are you ready to head downstairs?”

Looking around the rooftop I smile. “I am so ready.”

The excitement of seeing Cain again is almost too much to bear. But there is still a gnawing, self-deprecating voice deep within me that asks, “*What if he’s not here? What if he just left Timber Cove and me?*” I do my best not to let those voices win the internal

battle inside my head. But the reality is, we don't know that Cain made it back here. It's just the best theory we have to go on.

Reaver holds out a hotel-like keycard. "This will access the elevator. Cain lives on twenty-nine, apartment A1. There are only two per floor. Asher and his wife, Sloane, live in the other."

I stand there looking at the card in his hand, confused. "You aren't coming with me?"

Shaking his head, Reaver thrusts the card at me. "Take it."

Reaching up, I take the small, black card. "But, what if he's not there?" I ask, a sliver of panic lacing through my voice. "Why aren't you coming with me? Don't you live here as well?" I ask, my curiosity getting the best of me. I assumed that Reaver and Cain were friends by the way he spoke of my mate.

It takes Reaver a moment to answer as he stands looking out over the bright lights of the strip. "My brother hates me, as he should," he whispers, not bothering to look at me. "It would be best if he doesn't know I am here." I can hear the sadness and pain in his voice as he speaks.

Confusion washes over me. How can anyone hate Reaver? From the time I met him at the concert until now, he proved to be one of the most forthright people I ever met. He saved my life after only knowing me for a matter of days. Terrible people don't do that.

"How could your own brother hate you?" I ask, placing my hand on his shoulder. "You said that every time you come back, the gate lets you out here. There must be a reason the fates drop you here every time."

Reaver lets out a laugh at my statement. "Fates. Those heartless bitches better not be meddling around in my life ever again."

As I open my mouth to speak, Reaver holds up a hand. "Just go to Cain."

"And where will you go? Back..." I pause for a moment, the word "home" stuck on my tongue. For the second time in my life, I have no home. "Should we try to go back—I mean together—to see if I can? I mean I'm here, which is unusual, right. So, what if it's possible for me to go back and forth, like you?" I ask, trying to change the subject from him leaving, alone.

“Kat,” he whispers my name and takes a few tentative steps toward me. “Go to Cain. I’ll be in contact with you, I promise. But I can’t right now. I need to make some things right before I face my brother.”

“What did you do that is so bad?” The question is out of my mouth before I can think better of it.

I see shame and regret in his eyes as he stands before me. “I tried to kill him and nearly killed his wife instead.”

My hand comes up to cover my mouth, which is hanging open in shock of the revelation. I have so many questions. I was not expecting him to say that he nearly killed his brother’s wife, when his brother was the target. The Reaver I know doesn’t seem capable.

“And now you can hate me too,” he says, misinterpreting my shock for disgust.

“No!” I gush, again putting a gentle hand on his shoulder. “I would never hate you. You saved me and brought me here. I know you are a good person. Evil doesn’t save lives, it destroys them.”

He gives me a half-hearted smile and I know he doesn’t believe my words. But I do.

“Will you at least wait here until Cain and I come up?”

He gives me a curt nod. “I’ll wait.” He adds, “Go, I’ll be here.”

~~*

The moment the roof door shuts behind me, I want to turn around. Not because I don’t want to see Cain, but because Reaver is in so much pain. I hate leaving him on the roof. My gut tells me that even if I turned around right now and went back, he would be gone. I’ll leave it as a mystery right now and press forward.

I take the few steps leading to the landing door two at a time, the keycard held tightly in my hand. I wave the card in front of the panel above the handle to get it to open. With one swipe, the light goes green, and I pull open the door. The elevator that will take me to my mate waits for me only a few steps away.

My heart is beating so fast that my hand shakes as I wave the card again across the panel where a button should be.

The wait for the lift is excruciatingly long and I look back at the door leading to the roof where Reaver hopefully waits. I'm about to turn around and go back up to demand that Reaver comes with me when the doors to the elevator swish open.

Stepping inside the lift, I hold my breath as the doors slide closed. Again, there are no buttons on the panel.

"What is with this place and buttons," I mumble to myself as I wave the black card in front of the panel. The elevator begins its descent and a moment later, the doors open.

I'm not sure what I expect to see when I step out. I've never been in a building like this before. I assumed the landing would look like a hotel, drab and cold, but I was wrong.

Stepping off the lift, the landing looks more like the reception area of an art gallery. It's spacious, with a large, round table in the center that has an immense fresh floral arrangement placed on it. It's the biggest arrangement I have ever seen.

The scent from the fresh blooms fills the air and makes me smile. The wall ahead is painted the perfect shade of gray and has large black and white photos artistically arranged. I want to look closer at them but instead, I gaze to my right, then left. There is a set of double wooden doors on either side. A1 and A2, in gold lettering above.

The doors marked with A1 have two beautiful floral wreaths hanging on them that match the center arrangement and look very welcoming. I can only guess that those doors are where Reaver's brother and his wife live. The doors to my left that have A2 above have no adornments, and it makes me wonder if Cain takes them down, or if whoever orders the arrangement and wreaths just never puts them up for him.

I inhale deeply before I walk over to Cain's door and knock. The wait is excruciating.

The seconds' tick by like hours, so I knock again and place my ear to the door, hoping to hear something like a TV or the trickle of water from a shower, but I hear nothing.

There is a card-swipe thing above the handle, and I debate whether I should just let myself in. He doesn't know I'm coming, and I have only what he's told me of his life to go on, so I feel as though that would be a bit intrusive.

I look to the elevator. I could go downstairs and check out the club. Maybe he's working. Or I could go back and check on Reaver.

Either way, I don't think Cain is here.

Several times, I look back and forth from the elevator to the set of doors. Ultimately, I swipe my key over the lock to Cain's apartment and step inside.

It's dark, but the neon lights from the strip below illuminate the vast space enough that even a human could easily see. I'm stopped in my tracks by the state of the place.

It looks as if he's been robbed. Furniture is toppled over, or completely broken, and empty bottles are strewn around. Despite the voice in my head telling me to turn around and go back up to the rooftop, I take a few steps forward. The apartment is an open concept with a kitchen Gordon Ramsay would be envious of to my right and a spacious living room, dining room, and bar combination to my left with a massive staircase leading to the upper floor.

"Wow," I breathe out because this place is massive. "Holy shit," I say as I make my way over to the floor-to-ceiling windows that encompass the place and look out over all of downtown Vegas.

I'm lost in my own thoughts when I hear the front door open. I whip around full of excitement, expecting to see Cain. Instead, I find a tall, tattooed and pierced man looking as if he's ready to tear someone apart.

"Who the fuck are you?" he yells as he flips on the apartment lights and taps a code into the keypad by the door,

Shit, I didn't even think about an alarm. Of course, an apartment like this has an alarm. It would be stupid not to have one. It's obvious he isn't the police, since he's sporting ripped black jeans that leave nothing to the imagination and a black t-shirt that has seen better days.

"I'm Kat," I answer, my voice shaky with fear.

The moment my name is out of my mouth, his expression changes immediately and the menacing scowl is replaced with a wide, genuine smile.

"Holy shit," he says as he runs both his hands through his hair. "You're here. Fuck. I can't believe you're actually here," he repeats and most of my fear drains away.

“Is everything all right?” I hear a woman’s voice yell from the hall into the apartment.

“Yeah, come in!” he yells back.

I don’t dare move from my spot, not even when a beautiful woman who is clearly pregnant enters the apartment.

“This is Kat,” he says, pointing at me.

I smile and give her a tentative wave.

“Oh my God!” she screeches as she attempts to run into the apartment and over to me. She is so far along in her pregnancy that the run is more of a quick waddle. “I’m Sloane,” she informs as she attempts to wrap her arms around me, but her belly makes it an awkward side-hug. “And this neanderthal,” she adds pointing to the man still standing in the doorway, “is my husband, Ash.”

“Reaver’s brother,” I breathe out, realizing who they are.

“That’s right.” Sloane smiles, “How did you... never mind, this pregnancy brain has stolen my manners. Come next door.” She grabs my hand, pulling me through the apartment. “This is Kat!” she exclaims as we pass Asher.

“I know,” Asher replies as he follows us out of Cain’s apartment and into theirs.

It’s amazing how two virtually identical places in set-up can look so vastly different. Cain’s apartment, while a disaster, has no personality to it at all. It looks like an upscale bachelor pad. No photos, personal touches, nothing that lends any information on who lives there. And in contrast, this isn’t an apartment, it’s a home.

“I didn’t mean to do any B&E while I was here in Vegas,” I announce as Sloane leads me through into a cozy sitting area. “I just...”

“Oh my God, don’t even worry about it.” Sloane laughs as she slowly lowers herself into a seat. “Tell me everything. Start with how you met and end right now.”

I glance over at Asher, who is staring at me as if I just sprouted another head.

“Yeah, how did you get here?” Asher asks. “I thought you were from another...” he pauses, at a loss for words, and I chuckle, because aren’t we all.

“I think the word you’re trying not to say is . . .dimension.” I smile.

“Yeah, that,” he agrees as he grabs a plate of cookies from the counter and brings them over. The love between these two is tangible as I sit here and watch this beast of a man hand his pregnant wife a cookie before offering me one. “Sloane baked them this morning,” he adds, holding out the plate.

“I have so much nervous, nesting energy that all I do is bake and grow.” Sloane smiles as she rubs her belly.

I grab one and immediately take a bite, more to buy me a little time than hunger. The last thing I want to do is tell them a lie, but the truth would betray Reaver’s trust. If he’s not ready to face his brother, it’s not my place to tell him he’s on the roof.

“Gate thing,” I say through a full mouth, opting for the truth and a lie by omission. “Great cookies,” I add, grabbing another. “Do you know when Cain will be back?” I inquire, ready to run back up to the roof to wait.

Neither of them offers up an answer as the three of us sit and exchange glances. I’m waiting for Asher to dive into the third degree, but to my surprise, he seems placated by my vague answer.

Sloane, however, does not.

“Where did this gate leave you?” she asks, her voice sweet as pie. “I didn’t think there were any Dimmu gates in the city.”

Shit, shit, shit. I don’t even know enough about the gates to make up a good lie on the spot before she’s asking another question.

“And how did you get Cain’s keycard?”

I take another few bites of my cookie, wishing I thought this through a bit longer before coming down here.

“Don’t mind my wife with her twenty questions. She’s a reporter and an author. It’s in her nature to grill people.”

I nod my head and smile, thankful for the rescue. “Umm, so do you know where Cain is?” I ask again.

Asher takes a seat next to his wife and tenderly rubs her knee. “He went to look for you,” Asher says. “He left a few days ago. Right after he went on a twenty-four-hour bender, he packed up and headed back up north.”

“You have got to be shitting me,” I remark as I lean back in the chair and stare up at the ceiling in frustration. “What if he ends up back in *my* Timber Cove? We don’t even know if I can get back there.”

“We?” they both say in unison, and I wish a hole would open in the floor and suck me back into Hell for the slip-up.

Sitting up, I look at the two of them. This is the brother that Reaver tried to kill, and Sloane is the woman that Reaver nearly did. They looked happy and are about to have a baby any moment, by the look of it. So, why not just tell them the truth?

“Reaver brought me here,” I whisper. “The gate is on the roof,” I add, looking at Sloane. “He wouldn’t come down, he’s waiting up there for me.”

Asher is up and walking to the door before I can stop him. I chase after him, grabbing his arm as he steps into the hall.

“Please,” I beg, but my efforts are futile. Reaver is standing in front of us, his hand poised to knock on Sloane and Asher’s door.

For a split second, I think that they may come to blows. However, the moment Asher sees his brother standing in the doorway, he pulls him in for a tight embrace.

“Brother,” Asher breathes out. “I’m so sorry. I have been waiting and looking for you...”

Reaver is stiff and unmoving and for a moment, I don’t think he’s going to accept Asher’s kindness. Then I watch as he slowly embraces his brother in return. When they finally pull apart, there are tears in both their eyes, although the teary eyes of Reaver are on me.

“Cain isn’t home,” I offer as an explanation as to why I am standing here. “He left to look for me,” I add as I sniffle back my own tears.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

CAIN

I take the same route I did the first time I made the trip to Timber Cove, California. I don't want to hope that the same storm that delivered me to Kat the first time will bring me back, but when I hit a storm about an hour outside TC, I can't help but smile.

The coastal storm beats down on me as I push myself and my bike to the limit through the raging weather. A vicious crosswind threatens to blow me off the road several times, but I press on, Ash's words blaring in my head. *Forever is a long time to live with regret.*

I have no plans to stop in Timber Cove. If Kat is anywhere, she's at her bar.

Pulling into the parking lot of what should be The Drop Off, my world shatters as I look up at the blazing sign on the roof that reads Trader Vic's.

Anger courses through my body, and I toss my helmet to the ground.

"Fuck!" I yell into the night.

My outburst brings several patrons to the rickety porch, but none are Kat. Several men stare at me as I sit letting the rain drench me to the bone.

I stay on my bike for close to an hour trying to figure out what my next move should be. Several ideas come to mind. Kat mentioned having family in Canada. I may head further north and find her pack.

“Then what?” I mumble to myself because there is no answer. *My* Kat doesn’t live here. Even if I find her, she won’t be the same person, with the same memories, she won’t be my mate.

Opening my saddlebag, I reach in and look for my phone. The least I can do is let Asher know I won’t be coming back. Not for a while, anyway. I’ll find a gate and spend the next year in the fighting pits at The Firehouse. With my mate being gone, I don’t have very many options.

“Fuck,” I curse as I dig around inside with no luck in finding my mobile. I probably didn’t even bother to take it with me in my haste to leave.

What is the point of bringing it?

The only person I want to speak with is a dimension away. The single solace I have is that Axzel made me a promise always to protect her, and I know he’ll make good on that. He’s a good man and a good wolf, and if our circumstances were different, we might be friends... someday.

With nothing else to do but wallow in the rain, I swing my leg over my bike and head into the bar for something to drink and possibly some food. The moment I open the door, I wish I hadn’t.

Everything is identical to The Drop Off, even the old guy with his head down at the end of the bar. I wonder if his name is even Lu? This is enough to make a man go insane thinking about.

“Shit. This is a bad idea,” I hiss despite my feet continuing to move forward toward the bar. I take the same seat I did the first night I met Kat. *Déjà vu* has nothing on reliving the same moment in a different universe.

Even though I know the bartender will not be Kat, I still hold my breath until she turns around. She’s cute and any other time I might make a move on her, but not now. I have a mate and even though she isn’t here, I’ll always be loyal to her.

“What can I get you?” she asks with a smile.

“Beer and a burger cooked rare, some fries,” I recite out my order on autopilot. “Hey,” I call out as she turns to leave. “What’s his deal?” I ask motioning to the old man passed out at the end of the bar.

“Who, Lu? His wife will come to get him. Either that or I’ll leave him there to sleep it off till morning. Wouldn’t be the first time,” she jokes, but I don’t find the humor in it.

“What a shit hole,” a deep, familiar voice says from behind me. Before I can turn around, Reaver pulls out the stool next to me and sits. “I think the demon dust we left at the other place was an improvement,” he adds as he waves over the bartender and places an order.

“Reaver?” I ask, excitement coursing through me, although the answer is obvious. “What the hell are you doing here? How are you here?” For a moment my heart fills with hope. “Can you take me back?” I nearly beg.

The waitress comes back and smiles at Reaver as she puts down his beer and my burger.

“First of all, I don’t think I can bring you back, and I wouldn’t even if I could,” he states, and it takes every ounce of self-control I possess not to punch him. “Second, I came through the gate in the back.”

“I thought you said the gate always dropped you off in Vegas?”

“It does,” he says without further explanation, before taking a sip of his beer and grabbing a pile of fries off my plate.

We sit silently for what seems like an eternity. “How did the battle end?” I finally ask, although it’s not the question I really want to be answered. I want to know if Axxel came back and if Kat is all right. But the thought of having to ask puts a pain in my heart that threatens to tear me apart.

“We kicked ass, of course. Made a hell of a mess of Kat’s bar though, that’s for damn sure. She... was... pissed,” he adds, and just the mention of her name brings a smile to my face.

“You saw her? Is...is she okay?” I ask, happy to know she’s alive.

“Yeah, she’s fine. Pissed off that we destroyed her bar, but fine,” Reaver says dismissively as if my heart isn’t breaking into a million pieces at the mention of her name.

Anger at the Fates courses through my veins. How could they grant me a mate, then so easily take her away? Without even realizing it, I squeeze the beer mug in my hand and shatter it. Beer and glass shards fall onto the bar, leaving my hand a wet and bloody mess. The brunette bartender rushes over with a bar rag to clean up the mess I’ve made.

“Oh my God, are you okay?” she asks as she does her best to clean up the destroyed mug and spilled beer.

“You can dress him up, but you can’t take him out,” a familiar female voice says from behind me. “I’ll have a Piña Colada,” she adds.

I’m stunned still because I know I must be hearing things. The voice behind me sounds like Kat’s, yet I know it can’t be.

“Oh, yeah,” Reaver interrupts my thoughts with a slap on my back. “I brought you something,” he adds motioning behind me.

The world around me stops as I spin on my bar stool to face Kat. Like something out of a movie, Warren Zevon blares through the speakers in perfect timing. She’s soaking wet, her long, chestnut hair dripping down the front of her t-shirt. And she is the most beautiful thing I ever saw.

“Hey,” she whispers, and I can hear the crack in her voice as she holds back the same tears of joy I do.

Hopping off the bar stool, I grab her hand and pull her into a tight embrace, nuzzling my nose into her wet hair. “I thought I lost you forever,” I breathe out as I tighten my hold. Her sweet scent is like heaven, and I never want to let her go.

Pulling back, I take a moment to memorize every inch of her face. My mate is so beautiful.

“I can’t believe you’re here,” I say as I glide my fingers down her cheek. When I get to her chin, I lift her face and kiss her pouty lips tenderly. The moment our mouths touch, it’s as if Hades himself has thrown gas on an already roaring fire.

When Kat wraps her arms around my neck and deepens our kiss, the entire world around me disappears. She is my everything...

my light, my dark, and the air I breathe.

There is no holding back my body's reaction to her. When our kiss is finally broken by Reaver clearing his throat, I pull her with me as I sit back down to conceal the raging hard-on I now have.

"If this bar is anything like mine, I know a secret room where no one will find us," Kat whispers in my ear. "I need you so badly."

"Lead the way." I smile back because there is no way I am passing up what she's offering. I look to Reaver, who smiles as if he didn't just hear our entire conversation. "We'll be back," I inform as Kat grabs my hand and leads me through the crowded bar.

"Where are we going?" I ask, although I don't really care. This woman could lead me into the deepest darkest depths of hell, and I would follow her willingly.

"You'll see," she answers as we sneak past the kitchen and around the stairs that would have led to her small rental apartment.

I'm amazed that no one has spotted us as we make our way down a dimly lit hall, finally stopping at a door marked *Storage*. Kat reaches up, slides her fingers along the top of the door frame, and smiles when she reveals a key.

She quickly unlocks the door and yanks me inside. I pull the door closed behind me and turn the lock on the handle. Kat reaches past me and slides the old-school latch lock closed.

"Sneaky girl," I say, pulling her against me and claiming her lips. "What did you say about needing me?" I ask as I snake my hands up under her wet shirt and lift it up over her head before tossing it to the floor.

"I said I needed you so badly," she replies as her fingers play with the buckle of my belt as she tries to undo it. The wet leather of my riding pants doesn't make for an easy task. Which is fine by me, because I want to lick every inch of her body...twice.

I walk her backward a few steps until she's leaning against the extra tables in storage. A few items stacked on top fall to the floor and make a clatter, but I'm far too lost in my mate to care. I take a moment to admire her full breasts covered in a sexy, black lace bra. With one quick flick of my fingers, the front clasp snaps open. I peel back the lace cups, revealing her dusty pink nipples that are pebbled peaks due to the chill from her wet clothing.

I want to take my time and make love to her for hours, but our surroundings combined with my growing need may put a stop to that. I make quick work of removing her wet jeans and barely-there panties.

When I finally have her naked, I drop to my knees in front of her, the need to taste her overwhelming. The scent of her arousal tickles my nostrils and has my mouth watering.

“Sit on the edge and spread your legs,” I command, and she does as she’s told.

Lifting one of her knees, I place one leg over my shoulder, opening her fully to my perusal. I’m thankful for my sight in the complete darkness of this room because I can see how her pussy glistens, coated in her arousal.

With a gentle touch, I circle her engorged clit with one finger. She is so wet that I can easily slide two thick fingers inside her tight pussy.

“Fuck,” she breathes out as she runs her fingers through my hair. “I miss your fucking horns,” she admits as she smooths back my hair.

My need to give her anything she desires has me dropping my human persona. The moment I do, she grabs onto my horns and pulls me to her. I kiss my way up her inner thigh while my fingers curl up and massage the one spot that drives her over the edge. I tease the apex of her thighs, my hot breath tickling her clit.

When she’s bucking against my fingers and nearly begging for my mouth, I flick her clit with my tongue before devouring her fully. I suck on her sweet little nub while my fingers slide effortlessly in and out of her tight sheath. It only takes a moment before I feel her pussy clench and pulse around my fingers as I bring her to orgasm.

She screams out my name as I take her over the edge. My cock is so hard behind my leathers that it’s agonizing. With my free hand, I make quick work of my belt and zipper, freeing my length from its prison.

I kiss my way up her body, savoring every inch, while I continue to tease her pussy with my fingers. I only stop to nip at her pebbled nipples, first one, then the other. Her hips continue to rock against my hand, and she gives a slight whimper when I remove my fingers.

With my hand coated in her juices, I pump my cock and line up its thick head with her entrance.

Her breathing is still rapid and I'm holding onto the last of my control by a thread. I look into her beautiful green eyes that are hooded with lust as I grip her hips and thrust myself deep inside her.

We both moan in pleasure as I fill her completely. Kat tightens her legs around my waist as I begin to slowly thrust into her. It only takes us a minute to begin to lose ourselves as we both buck for control.

“Fuck me hard, Cain. I want to feel you for days.”

Her command has me holding onto her hips so tight I know she'll have bruises, but I need the grip to steady her as I thrust into her. The table she's on bangs against the wall with each thrust. There is no way that we aren't being heard, but neither of us cares.

“Your pussy is so fucking tight,” I growl out as I slam into her, my balls smacking against her ass as I lift her higher to thrust deeper.

Her hands are wrapped tightly around my horns, and she uses them to gain leverage. Our rhythm is perfect, and I can feel my mating ring begin to expand as my climax grows near.

I know she can feel it too when her mouth opens, and she has to breathe through the extra stretch of her pussy. The added girth sends her over the edge and her pussy tightens like a vise around me.

“Mine,” I growl out as my mating ring seals us together.

With a final thrust and a low growl, I bite down on her shoulder, marking her on the outside as my seed spills into her. My cock throbs as her pussy milks out every drop I have to give.

“Fuuuuck,” she breathes out in a ragged breath.

“Fuck,” I agree because I have never needed or desired another person like I do Katrazyna.

It takes a few minutes for both of us to catch our breath. We're still locked together and each small quiver her pussy makes has me clenching my teeth in pleasure.

“You're doing that on purpose,” I say through gritted teeth.

Her answer is obvious when she smiles and tightens the muscles of her inner walls once more.

“Careful, princess,” I hiss against her neck as I try to still her body. “The second time I come is reserved only for my mate.” I nip her neck because I can’t resist her body and when I do, she clenches her muscles and tightens her legs around my waist.

“It better be,” she teases.

“It’s potent stuff,” I add as my mating ring expands again. The added stretch has Kat moaning in pleasure and I have to breathe through the intensity. Catching my breath, I add, “It’s meant to knock you up,” I inform her as I glide my hand across her flat stomach. A vision of her round and carrying my child is so intense, I have to grind my teeth to hold back.

“I can only get pregnant in wolf form,” she says as she rocks her hips.

“Fuuuck,” I growl out as I come deep inside her again unable to hold myself back. It doesn’t take much coaxing for her body to join in and I can feel her orgasm pulse around me.

The two of us are silent for a few minutes as we hold each other and wait for my ring to release us.

“Do you think anyone heard us?” Kat whispers.

I let out a small laugh at her question. “I’m pretty sure everyone heard us. I think at some point someone even tried the door,” I admit.

When my ring releases us, I reluctantly step back and pull out of heaven. The evidence of our coupling spills from her and the sight has me hard all over again.

“Let me find something to clean you up. Don’t go anywhere,” I joke as I look around the room. There isn’t much, but thankfully I find a few rolls of paper towels stored on a shelf.

It takes a few minutes to clean up Kat and the floor, but once she’s set, we get dressed. Silently, I slide the pin lock and then turn the lock on the knob. Slowly, I open the door and stick my head out into the hall. Thankfully it’s clear, so I grab Kat’s hand and pull her out.

She quickly locks the door and returns the key to its rightful place above the frame.

The question *Do you think anyone heard us?* is answered the moment we step back into the bar. A barrage of catcalls and clapping meets us. I take a bow as Kat covers her crimson face with her hands.

“Drinks are on me,” a stranger says as he slaps me on the back as we walk by.

Reaver is still sitting at the end of the bar with my empty seat next to him. I sit and pull Kat onto my lap.

“Were we really that loud?” Kat asks Reaver.

“Oh, yeah. We just turned the music off at one point because of the banging. When it got quiet, we thought you died,” he adds.

“What a way to go,” I say as I kiss Kat’s neck. “Did you say you can’t get pregnant unless you’re in wolf form?” I whisper into her ear.

She gives me a slow nod. “Sure did,” she answers, and I can hear the sadness in her voice. “Sorry.”

I give her a small laugh. “I’m a three-thousand-year-old demon from a nearly extinct race. That is not a game changer,” I whisper back.

EPILOGUE

ONE YEAR LATER – give or take

“**Would you sit the fuck down,**” Reaver demands. “You’re making *me* nervous.”

I continue my relentless pacing back and forth along the corridor. Kat and I traveled to Colorado to have our twins just over a week ago. Michael and Salem were excited to have us, since the babies will be the first ever half Enoch demon and half wolf shifters ever born.

“I can’t sit still. I’m so nervous. What if something goes wrong?” I ask, picturing everything that could possibly happen. “What if he drops one? Or what if she shifts in the middle of giving birth?” I babble as I run my hands through my hair for the hundredth time in the last few minutes.

The last few months proved to be very difficult. Kat was unable to control her shifts, so we haven’t gone out much.

“This is exactly why she didn’t want you in the delivery room,” Reaver says as he sits back and shakes his head. “Well, the fact that you’ve gone completely crazy, combined with the fact that you had her believing Enoch demons hatched out of eggs for the first three months. I wouldn’t want you in there either.”

I laughed, remembering how angry she was when I told her I was only kidding. She was looking up how to build a nest on the internet, so I had to stop the charade before it got really out of hand.

“Maybe we should have found a wolf shifter doctor?” I whisper, afraid that Michael and his staff might overhear.

“Would you sit down,” Reaver repeats. “Michael is an amazing physician. He has delivered every one of Zachriel’s gaggle of kids. Don’t worry, he even brought in Olisha as back-up and Salem is in there with her. There is nothing to worry about.”

In my long life, I have battled countless demons and fought for my life in the pits at The Firehouse yet I have never felt so helpless and so out of my element as I do today as I wait for my children to be born.

“Thanks for being here,” I say as I pat Reaver on the back. “It means a lot.”

Reaver was a tremendous help throughout Kat’s pregnancy. He has also become our otherworld liaison. Kat and I attempted to go back to her home several times, but we were never able. Reaver, however, has continuously been able to go back and forth between our two worlds without any problems.

So, everyone in Timber Cove knows that Kat and I are expecting. In fact, there is a waiting party at The Drop Off eager for news and pictures of the newest Belial clan members. My sister, Awan, is even there waiting to see pictures of her new niece and nephew. Reaver told me about how he tried to get her to come when he brought Kat.

Unfortunately, she has her reasons for staying, but we have been able to share recorded messages back and forth. So, I feel as though I’ve gained another sister, one who just happens to have the same name as the one I lost.

“How are you holding up, Dad?” Asher asks as he takes the seat next to me and clasps my shoulder. “Any news?”

“Nothing yet.” I shake my head. “Why, have you heard something?” I question.

“No, we just got here. Was I this bad when Sloane gave birth?” he asks Reaver, who gives him a nod. Ash was a mess when his

daughter was born, and a year later he isn't much better.

I'm about to get up and start my pacing again when Ash pulls me back down. "Sit, relax. This is literally the last peace and quiet you're going to have for the next twenty years. Enjoy it."

"Did I miss anything?" Jaxon pipes in as he joins the growing party, two huge teddy bears nestled in his arms.

"You had to outdo me by having twins," Zachriel says as he joins us. "Look at us, warriors waiting here helpless." His statement has all of us nodding in agreement.

"Where's Em, Sloane, and Maitlin?" I inquire, since it's rare that any of us are now seen without our better half.

The three of them share a look.

"They're all up with Kat," Jaxon finally says.

"What?" I spout out as I jump out of my seat. "Why am I down here? I should be up there with my wife."

Reaver grabs the back of my shirt and pulls me back down into my seat. "Can someone else explain it to him?" Reaver pipes in. "I've tried, but he won't listen."

"Trust us," Ash starts

"It's better this way," Jaxon finishes.

"There is nothing up there you want to see. Trust me," Zach adds. "Besides, we all want to know if it's true."

Unfortunately, the question comes from Zachriel so I can only imagine what he's referring to. Four sets of eyes stare me down as I sit nervously, bouncing my leg.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I lie. I know exactly what he's asking. It's the same question even Axzel wanted to know when he found out Kat and I were expecting. It's the same question everyone wants to know.

"Bullshit. You know exactly what I'm asking," he probes.

I'm surprised to see even Jaxon, who is usually so refined, waiting for my answer. Their ribbing and teasing are all good-natured, so I don't take any offense to the question. I'm about to tell them to all shut the fuck up when Michael walks into the room.

I can't read his expression, so for a moment, I panic, until he smiles.

"Congratulations," Michael says with a smile. "Mom and babies are doing amazing. Come on, I'll take you back."

The four of us follow Michael. Kat's room is large but crowded with our friends' wives and several nurses.

"Kat had to shift to heal," Michael says as he points to my beautiful mate who is laying on her side with her eyes closed.

I rush to her immediately and run my fingers through her soft, gray fur. "You are so beautiful," I whisper to her, and she opens her bright emerald eyes. "I love you, baby," I say as I nuzzle her face.

In an instant, Kat shifts back. "Hey, good looking," she whispers.

"Do you want to meet your children?" Michael asks.

With a smile that may be permanently plastered on my face, I give him a nod. Kat scoots up and I help her sit up as I sit next to her on the bed.

"You have a boy," Michael says handing me a tiny bundle.

"Hi, buddy," I choke out, overwhelmed with so much love as I look down at my son. He has a tuft of white hair and two tiny horns on the top of his head.

"And a girl," a nurse adds, handing me another tiny bundle.

I adjust so that I am holding both. Like her brother, she has a dusting of white hair and two adorable horns. She has no idea how special she is, not just to me, but to her species. As a female Enoch, she is unique, and one of a kind in this world.

I feel the first tear trickle down my face as I look at the two most precious gifts I ever received.

I'm about to tell Kat how happy I am when the same nurse that handed me my daughter a moment ago returns.

"And a boy," the nurse says, bringing over another tiny bundle.

Kat smiles as she takes my son and daughter while I meet their brother. Unlike his two siblings, this little guy is covered in gray fur,

his little eyes shut tight, and four perfect paws. My heart overflows with love as I look down at him.

“He’s beautiful,” I choke out as I take in my family. Kat smiles and looks at Michael, who picks up another little bundle.

“And a girl,” he says, handing me my second daughter.

She also takes after her mother, except her little eyes are open and they are a bright emerald green like her mother’s. Her fur, unlike her brother’s, is as white as newly fallen snow, like my hair. Tears of joy stream down my face and I can’t imagine my life without them.

“Four,” I breathe out. “We have four.”

“I was as surprised as you,” Kat says with a giggle. “It would seem that those two,” she adds, motioning to the two pups in my arms, “those little guys were playing a little game of hide-and-go-seek, behind their siblings.”

“I love you,” I say leaning in to kiss my mate. “And when they ask how their demon father met their shifter mother. I’ll tell them I had to go to another dimension to find her.”

THE END

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Please consider leaving a review

I hope you enjoyed Cain and all the sexy fallen angels in the Blood Angel Chronicles series. Word of mouth is crucial for any author to succeed. If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review. Even if it is just a sentence or two, it would make all the difference and would be much appreciated.

Thank you.

www.amazon.com/dp/B0B9KH25L1

Axzel’s Hunter Moon

If you enjoyed Cain, it is recommended that you also read Axzel’s Hunter Moon by Cyndi Faria to get the full scope of both worlds.

[Axzel’s Hunter Moon \(Timber Cove Wolves MC Book 4\) - Kindle edition by Faria, Cyndi. Paranormal Romance Kindle eBooks @ Amazon.com.](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0B9KH25L1)

If you are new to the Blood Angel Chronicles please read ahead for the first three chapters of JAXON, book 1 in the series.

UP NEXT IN THE BLOOD ANGEL CHRONICLES

(I PROMISE)

REAVER

BLOOD ANGEL CHRONICLES
BOOK SIX

JENNIFER FIELD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & BOOK SHIT

Okay so if you are familiar with my writing, you will know that this is the part of the book that is a mess. I write this after everything has been made pretty and is ready to go. So, it's pretty raw and usually full of unedited errors. As a disclaimer, I always like to mention that even my editor the amazing Carolyn Depew doesn't see this until it's already gone to print, so don't blame her for my poor grammar, blame the public school system.

All right, let's get to it.

I had a blast writing this story. It is meant to be a crossover with the Timber Cove MC books written by Cyndi Faria. The hardest part for me was trying to figure out how I could combine her world, where all paranormal people are known, and mine where they are not. It posed an interesting challenge. And if you've gotten to this part you know what I did, yup... I crossed dimensions.

This book started off as a short story in a TNT anthology, *Lawyered Up and Locked Up*. Cyndi and I were pored off because we both write Paranormal Romance. Her Story Axzel's Hunter Moon has an appearance by Cain, and he is BAD. When I read it I was like "*this is great*"... But, Cain isn't a bad guy... So what to do??

I decided to give Cyndi free range in her writing of my character Cain in her book, because we were in her world. And I told her she could make him as bad and as evil as she wanted, and boy did she. If you haven't already picked it up, go do it now.

Well, me being me, I was a little bit confused as to what the “assignment” was. She was to write a good guy story with my guy getting “locked up” and her character Axzel being the hero / good-guy. And I was doing a “bad-boy” story with the same premise. Except apparently in these things, they are supposed to be a telling of the same story from a different point of view. Yeah, I didn’t get that memo.

Anyway, I had fun writing it and I left the “gate” open so that if any of the Timer Cover MC wanted to come over, they could.

Okay, so that’s the first thing. Here’s the second thing. Maybe you just finished Michael and at the end of the book it says Book 5, REAVER. And you’re sitting there searching for the next book and all you find is Cain that is clearly NOT Reaver. You are not crazy, Reaver was supposed to be book 5. But, he wouldn’t talk, he is partially written, but... shit happens in a writer’s mind, IDK. So, instead of forcing something and not having a good story, I rearranged some things. HE IS UP NEXT and writing him in this story helped his character develop a bit more.

I also want to say that if you are picking this book up at TNTNYC22, then miracles can happen. It’s 9/21/22 now and it hasn’t gone to print. My fingers, toes, and hell even my legs are crossed in hopes that it makes it.

All right, enough book-shit, let me get on to thanking everyone who helped with this book.

To **Jacque Morneau** (*AKA, Mom*) Thank you for always being my biggest fan and giving me your opinion. I love you to the moon and back.

To **John** (*AKA, Mr. Field*) Sorry I gave you Rona. Thanks for taking care of me when I was sick, sorry my bedside manner isn’t as good.

To **Tricia** (*AKA, my partner in crime and a hell of a navigator*) Who has more fun than us? Want to go to a haunted prison or a haunted asylum? Sure, why not. Thank you for being my friend and humming along to the theme from I dream of Jeannie at an insane asylum. Welcome to room 144 the Gate to Hell.

To **Carolyn Depew** (*AKA, Editor extraordinaire and nacho cheese queen*) This is the woman that takes my mess of words and grammatical errors and makes them pleasing to the ear. She also

brings snacks. Thank you so much for being so accommodating even when life got crazy. You are the best!!!

To **J.M. Walker** (*AKA, Formatting genius, and crazy runner*) Thank you for not telling me to piss off when I asked you to format this in a heartbeat. I won't do that again I swear!!

To **Golden Czermak** (*AKA, The cover King & cover model super-genius*) Thank you for being an amazing person and always quick to answer questions or give advice. You have such a passion for what you do and it shows in your impeccable work.

To **Cyndi Faria** (*AKA, Mother of the Timber Cove, MC*) Thank you for letting me play in your world a bit. I had a lot of fun writing this and working with you, even when the bear came to my deck to say hi.

To **Gus Smyrnios** (*AKA, Cain*) Thank you for being the perfect representation of Cain. I'm not sure whose last name is harder to pronounce, yours or his.... Hugs.

To **Figaro** I'm sorry I couldn't catch you, I tried really hard. Your life was shorter than it should have been and I will never forget you. The people who left you might, but I never will. Run free over the rainbow bridge.

To **YOU** (*AKA, the best readers out there*) Thank you for taking the time to read what I've written. I can not express enough how grateful I am. You keep reading and I'll keep writing.

The best Alpha reader team did NOT get a chance to read this book before it went to print because I was working on such a tight timeline. But I want to thank them anyway because they have been great: Tricia, Barb, Lizz, Lenore & Deb, I'll get my shite together and get you some smut to read. Love you guys.

Well, that's a wrap on another book. I never thought I would be saying that, but here we are. I'll be doing so fun signings in 2023 (wasn't it just 2019 like a hot second ago) ANYWAY, come find me at ROMANTICON in July 2023, GETTING WITCHY WITH IT in SALEM, September 2023, and TNTNYC23 in October.

Until we meet again!!

Much Love,

Jennifer

Author Amazon Page: <https://amzn.to/2JuZENI>

Author News Letter: <https://www.subscribepage.com/k5r2k3>

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/Jenniferlin>

Author Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/JenniferFieldAuthor/>

Author Instagram: http://Instagram.com/jennifer_field_author

Who was Katrazyna?

Yes, there was a real Katrazyna, she was my friends' great grandmother born in Poland in 1889 and died in 1983.

She was married to Anthony in the early 1900's. Soon after they were married, they together made the trek to America to start their family. They bought a four-family house so that the rest of the family would have a place to live when they migrated to America. They had 2 girls together Julia and Sally, who are both deceased as well. Anthony died very young and Katrazyna raised the girls mostly on her own with the help of other family members in the house. She spoke no English but was able to secure work as a seamstress to support her family.

She was in her late 80's when my friend was born, she died when she was only 8. But some of her fondest memories were helping her with her enormous gardens, one for flowers and one for vegetables. Teaching her how to say playground in English (there was a playground right behind the house so she could watch the great-grandchildren as they went to play).

She was extremely healthy, considering that she had at least one whiskey a night and numerous cigarettes, and she LOVED bacon...almost every day she had bacon and then cooked the eggs in the fat of that bacon. Despite all that, she was in great health until about a year before she passed. She had a mild stroke that left her minimal deficits, but unfortunately, she could no longer do her gardening or things she enjoyed. Not long after she had another stroke that left her needing 24-hour care and she was put into a nursing home.

She died very soon after at the age of 94.

I kissed her hand and said goodbye.

That was Katrazyna my best friend's great grandmother.

PROLOGUE

Themis sat perched on her throne inside the judgment chamber, a regal and ruthless goddess. It never failed to amaze me how stoic yet beautiful she was. Her long red hair cascaded over her alabaster shoulders and down her slender back. She was as old as time itself, yet her age was seen only in her wisdom, never in her beautiful face. Her hazel eyes watched me intently as the guards escorted me inside, not an ounce of emotion reflected in them.

Though our encounters through the years had been few and far between, I would never have entertained the notion that we would meet again under the current circumstances — me standing before her bound and shackled, waiting for her to pass judgment.

The ethereal chamber of judgment was my current surroundings. It was as opulent as one would expect from the goddess of justice. The white marble floors glistened and sparkled in the light as if diamonds danced across their surface. Her throne sat center stage against the open-air balcony overlooking all of the heavens.

I was well aware that there hadn't been an Archangel judged since Gabriel, nearly a millennium ago. And though I had never been close to him, I had always considered him to be a noble Arch and a gifted fighter.

We had trained together and fought side by side in many battles, and I had, on numerous occasions, entrusted him with my life. Regardless of his prior brave deeds, he had deserved to fall from grace for his sins. He had, by all accounts, deserved death.

However, there had been speculation that he had been given a choice. That Themis, for all her spouting of eternal balance, had allowed him to fall from grace instead of being put to death as he should have been. After all, he had only committed genocide—why shouldn't he be allowed to live.

Sadly, I don't think I will be given the same consideration, despite my indiscretion being far less damning.

The sound of the guard's footsteps retreating, leaving me alone to face my punishment, echoed in my head. I watched as Themis rose from her throne and approached me, her golden gown billowing and dancing around her legs as she walked.

The clicking of her heels was the only sound I could hear other than my heartbeat, which seemed to suddenly be threatening to beat out of my chest as she approached. I made a futile attempt to kneel and give her a proper greeting befitting her station, but my actions were thwarted by the shackles adorning my wrists and ankles.

Finally, she stood before me. Though I towered over her, there was no denying her power. Our eyes locked, and while it was customary to look down when you were about to be judged, I refused to cast down my eyes, and I had no remorse for my actions.

"Jegudiel, you are aware of the charges against you, are you not?" Her soft and feminine voice echoed throughout the chamber.

"I am."

"Yet you look me in the eye without repentance. Why?"

My throat was tight and constricted as I spoke, knowing my words would only damn me further. Nonetheless, I couldn't deny them. "Because I would do it again. My only regret was that I was too late to save the woman I loved—to save Marra."

I fought to hold back my emotions as I spoke Marra's name. I had broken so many laws that I deserved to die a permanent death, just as she had. Arches, along with all who resided in the heavens, were not allowed human contact. I had

known that. None of it mattered. Once I saw her, I knew there would be no life for me without her in it.

Marra's blood had stained my hands and stopped my heart as she died in my arms. Her heart had been pierced by an angelic blade—my blade. As I stood shackled to the wall, Marra's death replayed over and over in my head. All I could do was await my fate.

Marra had been a slave in a small village. I was only meant to look after the humans who resided there. She captivated my heart like no other ever had. Her beauty was the stuff of legends, but her laughter and kindness drew me in. With one touch, one soft kiss, I was forever hers.

Over time we had fallen in love, even though I knew there was only one way we could be together. I was more than willing to give up everything to be with her. I had gone to her village to tell her that we would no longer have to hide. That we would find someplace to go where we could be together. But before I had gotten there, she had been sold. I had searched for days before I finally found her. I watched her from afar as she gathered water from a stream, the sunlight dancing across her chestnut hair that hung long against her back.

When she turned around and spotted me coming over the hill in the distance, my heart broke. Her beautiful face was swollen and bruised, nearly unrecognizable. The vibrant woman I had fallen in love with was a shell of who she had once been. In my haste to get to her, I had thrown down my weapon, an action I will regret forever.

She begged me to leave, told me that her new master was a tyrant. I had been too distracted with my concern for her and hadn't heard her master's approaching footsteps. She pushed out of my arms and went to him, fell to her knees, and begged him to forgive her. He had my sword, and before I could stop him, he thrust it through her chest. If he had used his sword—a human weapon—I could have saved her.

Instead, I had to watch her die in my arms, and I held her until there was no light left in her blue eyes.

When night fell, I went and slaughtered her master's entire house, then took his life with my own hands so I could feel his death and look in his eyes as he struggled to take his last breath, just as she had.

"Jegudiel." The sound of my name broke me from my memory. Themis circled me as she continued to speak. "Then you are aware of the severity of your actions and the penalty that comes with the taking of human life."

I gave her a nod of my head. After all, there was no point in speaking — my actions, no matter how noble the cause—were still punishable by death. I felt the bindings fall from my wrists and ankles. It was the first time in I didn't know how long they hadn't hung heavy, and the momentary freedom of my limbs felt good.

"There will be no jury. This judgment is mine alone, and I will bear its burden." Her voice was soft, and I could hear the pain laced through her words. She, indeed, would bear the burden of my death.

The marble floor in front of me dissolved before my eyes, leaving me gazing down through the clouds and blue skies. I wasn't sure what I had been expecting. Fire and brimstone, perhaps. A black hole where souls went and never returned.

The magnitude of my fate suddenly rested heavily on my shoulders, but I was ready to die. I had seen life with love, and any chance for happiness had perished with Marra.

Themis now stood so close to me I could feel her breath against my skin as she spoke. "Jegudiel, you have been found guilty of crimes against humanity. Deplorable acts against those you had sworn to defend."

The irony of her words was not lost on me. I had failed to protect Marra from the monster that took her life, and I had been unable to defend him against the beast that I became.

"For your crimes..." My heart stopped beating as I waited for her to sentence me, thankful that with my death, the memory of Marra's blood-stained body would finally vanish.

“For your crimes, you will fall from grace. You will no longer be allowed to bask in the light of the gods.”

Her delicate hand came up and rested on my shoulder. I could feel the heat radiating from her palm across my skin. I glanced down at my arm as the searing heat worked its way past my elbow. My skin was momentarily taking on an almost translucent appearance — my veins below the surface pulsed a bright, visible crimson.

“From this day forward, you will be a Blood Angel. You will feed on those you once swore to protect.” The heat of her touch radiated up my neck, into my throat, and fire permeated my gums. Pain invaded my mouth, and I let out a yell as my canines morphed and extended down. With my tongue, I felt the unmistakable sharp prick of my new, sharp fangs.

I fought to stay upright as the scalding pain from her touch moved to my back. My golden wings, once a symbol of my high rank as an Arch for eons, caught fire. I could feel the burn and smell the singeing of feathers and flesh. I tried not to wretch as the stench permeated my nostrils. When she finally lifted her hand from me, my skin felt different, almost foreign. I had a set of sharp fangs, my golden wings were now black as coal, and I had an indescribable hunger in my belly.

“Jegudiel, you must fall of your own free will, or be put to death for your crimes.”

A choice. She had given me an opportunity for redemption. I had to choose death or become a monster of people’s nightmares. “How long?” The words came out of their own accord, nothing more than a muffled whisper, my speech garbled by my new fangs.

Why had I even asked? I knew a fall was eternal.

“Forever, child. Forever.”

An unfamiliar feeling coursed through my veins—fear. It was the first time I had felt fear since I had left the Arch training camp and stepped into my first battle.

I met her gaze one last time. She was my executioner from the only life I had ever known. She sentenced me based

on an archaic list of rules set forth eons ago by gods that no longer ruled. It was the new gods' inability to change that would be their demise as well.

I gave her a curt nod. I wasn't going to thank her for the choice. I was to become a monster that fed on those I had protected. I closed my eyes and inhaled one last breath of heaven. Its sweet scent of jasmine and honey would have to last me an eternity. I would tuck it away, along with the memory of love and of Marra.

With that, I let myself fall forward through the chasm in the floor. I felt the sun searing my flesh as I passed through the gates of heaven. I was falling, falling, falling.

“Fuck.” I sit straight up in bed as sweat covers my skin and my heart pounds in my chest. I am disoriented as usual after the nightmare that has plagued me for nearly a thousand years.

My gaze moves to the floor-to-ceiling windows and the familiar twinkling lights of the New York City skyline. I know who and where I am.

CHAPTER 1

Present Day

JAXON

The familiar nightmare has my heart racing and my fangs extended. Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I slowly come back to reality and run my tongue along the sharp ends of my extended canines. The pains of hunger I feel are no longer just for food. I need blood, and soon.

I grab my phone that lies haphazardly on the nightstand next to the bed and swipe the screen awake. It's just after nine, and I've overslept. My fangs retract back with nothing more than a thought. The need to feed is beginning to take its toll on me. I haven't been in full bloodlust for hundreds of years, yet there is no denying that if I don't feed soon, that is precisely where I'll be.

I'll have to make a point to feed tonight. Find a hot young donor to sink my fangs and cock into. Finally, I'll rid my mind of the nightmares and the memory of Marra. Well, at least the dreams. Her memory will be something I'll carry with me for eternity.

"Fuck." I groan as I roll out of bed, trying to shake the vision of Marra's face from my memory. After nearly a millennium, it's still etched in my mind. Even after all this time, she still haunts me.

I shake off the pang of guilt and let out a sigh, knowing that the nightmares are only going to get worse—more vivid, more blood-soaked—the longer I go without feeding. I don't know why I've been putting off the inevitable. At my age, I only need to have blood about once a month to keep up my strength and apparent sanity, although the latter is beginning to be debatable.

When my feet hit the floor, they automatically venture to the floor-to-ceiling windows that adorn my entire penthouse

suite. Some might think that having such a thing with my aversion to sunlight is reckless, but I've always liked to live on the dangerous side. Besides, the miracle of modern technology allows for the auto blinds to rise with the setting sun and custom-built UV protection windows provide safety during the daylight hours.

With the screens up, I gaze out over the city lights that dance like urban stars for as far as the eye can see. The sun set about a half-hour ago. Sadly, even at my age, the long summer days aren't something I have had the pleasure of truly enjoying for quite some time. It isn't that I can't venture out during the daylight hours. I can for short periods, with minimal skin exposed. However, you definitely won't find me lounging on the beach anytime soon.

As Themis so eloquently put it, I can no longer bask in the light of the gods. But what that bitch meant to say was, I'll no longer be able to enjoy in the sunlight—ever. That's something that would have been nice to know during those first few days after my fall, when my flesh seared and burned under the sunlight, nearly causing my death. If it wasn't for Gabriel, I wouldn't have survived the first week.

Gabriel was the first of us to fall. He has never spoken about his first few hundred years when he was here, alone. None of us have very vivid memories of that time in our new lives. We're nothing more than our most basic of instincts. Hunt, feed, and fuck and not always in that order. Our mind isn't our own, and we have no one to help guide us back to sanity.

Without that guidance, things on Earth would have come down to survival of the fittest, and humans would not have won that war. Over the next few hundred years, the seven of us who are the only born Blood Angels formed the council and passed laws on everything from feeding and fucking, to turned vampires.

Turned vampires, yet another one of Themis's oversights, I'm sure. Just like any species, new or ancient, the need to ensure the survival of the race is right up there with

feeding and fucking. Little did we know the latter isn't going to ensure the survival of our species.

No, in the throes of bloodlust, sometimes there are moments of clarity. Moments we are more than a feeding, killing machine. Moments of compassion for our unwilling victims. As it turned out, a full Blood Angel can bring someone back from the brink of death, yet the process damned them to the same fate with which we were cursed

My dark thoughts are interrupted by the ringing of my phone. One glance at the screen puts a smile on my face.

“Good evening, sir. I take it you slept well?” Kap’s sunny voice never ceases to put a smile on my face. She has been my business liaison and personal assistant for nearly twenty years. She’s also CEO of the Lenox Hotel Corp, one of JDL International Holdings subsidiaries, and runs my business like a beautiful instrument. And lucky for her, she also gets to keep me in line. She’s as loyal as they come, as is her family line, who have been with me for hundreds of years.

“I’ve had better day’s rest. Thanks for asking.” There is no point in lying to her, she’s known me her entire life, and she’s seen everything...twice.

I can hear a loud sigh of frustration, and I have to roll my eyes. I’m about to be mothered by one of the most feared women in business.

“Are the nightmares back? Jaxon, you know you can’t go indefinitely without feeding. Do I need to remind you what happened to you in 2011 when I found you mad, nearly in bloodlust? Let me set someone up for you at the Lenox.”

She knows better than to bring up my last moment of weakness. She came to my penthouse after repeatedly trying to contact me for days with no luck. When she found me, I was a mess, having stretched my need for blood to almost two months. I was nothing short of a beast in full bloodlust. She forced me to take her blood to save me from my self-destruction. Since then, I’ve never let myself get even remotely close to that point, until now.

“No, Kap...you don’t need to remind me I’ll feed tonight,” I promise. “Now, give me the rundown on the Boston property.”

The Boston waterfront is one of our latest ventures in the expansion of the Lenox Hotel properties. Currently, there are eight scattered all over the world, including London, Paris, Millan, Sydney, Las Vegas, and Tokyo. Not to mention, of course, my personal favorite, New York City, where Kap’s offices and the JDL International headquarters sit.

While all aspects of JDL International are one hundred percent legitimate businesses, trading on all platforms, including the New York Stock Exchange, we are a world-renowned company known for our attention to detail and the discerning tastes of the luxury crowd. Our discretion for both our human and non-human guests is our number-one priority.

All Lenox Hotels around the world also serve as a haven for any vampire or other species requiring food, shelter, or asylum from persecution. While we follow all employment laws and don’t discriminate against humans working for us, the majority of our employees tend to be non-human, coming from a variety of different species and backgrounds. The only requirement for working in front of the house is that they must at least be able to pass for humans, even in New York.

“Jaxon, are you even listening to anything I’m saying?” She knows me too well and is one of the few people who is never afraid to call me out on my bullshit... clearly. Her no-BS attitude is one of many traits that have gained her my respect and adoration over the years.

I run my hands up my face and through my hair as I gaze across the city. “No, not a word. I’ll meet you in the office in about an hour. We can go over the business then.”

“Fine.” Her frustration with me is evident in her tone. “If you could be so kind as to feed before our meeting. I would appreciate your undivided attention when going over multi-million dollar investments. And you not looking at me like I am a slab of Kobe beef.”

“Watch your attitude with me, Kap. I’m not as nice as you think I am.” My voice is deep and stern, and if it were anyone but Kap, they would be reduced to a sorry, shaking mess.

“Ummm, hmm, yeah. Meet me at my office in an hour, ready to pay attention.”

I let out a laugh as I disconnect the call. She has always been one of my favorite people. No sooner than I tossed the phone down on the bed, did it vibrate again. Zachriel’s smug face and extended middle finger appear on the screen.

“Zach, man. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Zachriel is one of the original seven Blood Angels, his fall about five hundred years after mine. Needless to say, we are about as close as brothers. Despite our friendship, we are also opposites. Our similarities begin and end with our height and body type, which all Archangels possess. We both stand six feet six and have a similar, natural muscular build. The kind that screams *don’t fuck with me*.

But I tend to wear my dark black hair shorter, more board room appropriate. Although these days, I seem to need a haircut. Zach wears his hair long and generally pulled back into some ultra-trendy man bun. And I ridicule him about it every chance I get. But his tattooed, bad-boy, scruffy features work wonders on his adoring fans.

He is currently one of the hottest rock stars to hit the airwaves in decades, and the sleep-all-day, party-all-night lifestyle of a rock god is the perfect cover.

“I just rolled into the city for a few shows. Think I’ll hit up Rise tonight. Won’t be the same without you.”

“I’ll be at the Lenox for a meeting with Kap in about an hour. I’ll meet you up there when I’m finished.”

“Is she still fucking hot?”

All I can do was shake my head. He knows better.
“She’s off-limits, Zach.”

Kapalaran or Kap, as she prefers to be called, is part of a very elite group of humans. Through our long lives, the seven of us were able to locate families with angelic-genetics deep in their DNA that enable them to protect us during times of weakness, like extreme sunlight or starvation.

In return, we protect them as if they are family, which includes each other. While they are human, most, including Kap, enjoy a dramatically slower rate of aging, which can be extended further by drinking the blood of one of us, once a year.

“So that’s a yes, she’s still fucking hot.”

“She doesn’t put up with any of my shit. Do you honestly think even if she weren’t off limits to you, she would put up with your man-whore ways for more than a minute? Besides, she’s married.”

“Maybe I’ll just, you know, stop in and say hi. Doesn’t her daughter work for you too? Maybe I’ll stop in and see her, then. Give her the panty-dropping Zach smile. What’s her name? Sherry, Cheryl Shellie. She’s a tight little piece of ass.”

I know he is kidding. Messing with Kap or anyone in her family is strictly forbidden, not that he doesn’t follow his own set of rules. But I am pretty sure he won’t cross me like that, so I let it slide. “Goodbye, Zach. I’ll meet you at Rise after my meeting.” I disconnect the phone without letting him finish.

CHAPTER 2

MAITLIN

“Fuck.” I stare at my reflection in the bathroom mirror, questioning every life choice I’ve made up to this point. I don’t know why I bother—they are all undeniably wrong, or... questionable at best.

It has been exactly six weeks since I packed up all my belongings in Boston while Neil, my cheating, now ex-fiancé, tried to explain what he was doing in our bed with his assistant riding him like a prize bull.

To complicate things, he was my boss, so I had to quit my job or face jail time for murdering him and hiding his body in the mailroom. And while the latter seemed much more appropriate, I’ve never looked good in orange, even if it is the new black.

In retrospect, picking up everything I own and schlepping to New York City may have been a hasty move on my part. But since his father, Neil Colebrook Sr., owns the company, it was really for the best. Truth be told, I miss the job way more than I miss Neil.

Lucky for me, I have Shellie, my crazy as hell, live-by-the-seat-of-her-pants best friend to thank for taking my sorry ass in off the proverbial street. More accurately, I suppose I should thank her grandmother for leaving her the swanky brownstone on the Upper East Side, and enough money that she can pretty much do what she wants—and she does—including not charging my sorry ass any rent.

I do, of course, insist on paying her something. I mean, I’m not entirely destitute. Seriously, I can’t *not* pay her for the fantastic apartment and the fact that she is essentially saving me from being homeless.

Or a fate much worse—going back to my parents. At twenty-eight, that is not going to happen. They have already

made it quite clear that moving in with Neil and working at his company was a bad idea. The last thing I want to do is prove them right.

Granted, in my haste to grab everything I could while Neil trailed around me naked, trying to explain that “*it wasn't what it looked like,*” I neglected the fact that we joined all of our finances. Sadly, when I tried to use my card, it was declined.

According to the plethora of voicemails Neil left, if I agree to talk to him, he will unlock the account. So until I get back on my feet, I'll take Shellie's generous hospitality, because it will be a cold day in hell before I listen to anything Neil has to say.

In the meantime, I have quite literally blanketed the marketing world with my resume. So it's only a matter of time before I have a big-girl career again and my life back in order.

But, until that time, Shellie got me a bartending gig at the Lenox New York, the hotel where she works, not that she has to. She says it's to help her find hot, rich guys who don't care that she has money because they also have plenty.

I think her logic is slightly flawed, but who am I to judge? Besides, the job pays okay. Nowhere near what my marketing degree paid, but it's a stable gig and leaves most of my days free to interview.

Knuckles rap on my bedroom door. “Mait, you just about ready? We're gonna be late if you don't get your cute little ass moving.” Shellie's voice brings me back from my mental meanderings.

“Give me a sec, I'm just finishing up,” I answer while pulling my long, chestnut-colored hair up into a messy yet stylish bun on top of my head, then swipe another coat of mascara on. I opted to do a smoky eye, which makes my light blue eyes pop even more.

I learned while bartending in college that sexy eyes get just as many tips as good cleavage. Luckily for me, I have both.

The uniform at the Lenox is quite a bit more conservative than any other bar I've ever worked for. It consists of a black, knee-length skirt and a crisp, white button-down. Whoever thinks that a white blouse is a good idea to wear while tending bar has probably never worked behind a bar a day in their life. Most nights, I leave wearing more spilled drinks than I served.

I'm giving the uniform my best attempt to look conservative but am failing miserably. I still look like Jessica Rabbit dressing to go to church. But what can I do? I have hips, a tiny waist, and boobs. Conservative isn't in my wheelhouse.

I do up one more button than I would. "Looks like you're trying too hard," I say to my reflection as I undo the offending final button.

"Come on. We're going to be late," Shellie barks at me from the other side of the door.

When I finally exit the bathroom, Shellie stands in front of me wearing the same black, knee-length skirt and white, cotton button-down impatiently tapping the toe of her black-heeled stiletto. The only difference is, on her, the outfit seems to have the desired conservative effect. We are both five feet six, and theoretically, we're the same size. Where I have curves, however, she has none.

"Damn, girl, why don't I have your genetics? We're wearing the same damn thing, yet you look hot. And I look like I'm about to guide you over to the periodical section of the fucking library?" Shellie squeezes her A-cups together, making a lame attempt at cleavage. "Do you think I need a boob job?"

I can't help but laugh at her absurdity. "No, you don't need a boob job." I smile and look down at the straining buttons across my chest. "And if I breathe too deeply, my genetics are going to bust loose."

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Once we finally got to the Lenox and stuff our belongings into our lockers, Shellie heads to Arch, the posh restaurant that reeks of the old world charm that nowadays is tough to find. It is where billion-dollar deals are made and brokered over Kobe beef and fifty-year-old scotch that cost more than I currently make in a month.

The beautiful and opulent dark teak wood, high ceilings, ornate carvings, and plush leather make it the perfect backdrop for business. It's a charming throwback to another era. I suppose it isn't even a throwback since The Lenox was built a hundred years ago. It isn't a homage to a bygone era; it is the era itself.

If Arch is for business, then Rise is for play.

Sitting atop the luxury hotel, it overlooks the entire city with its three hundred and sixty-degree view. It is trendy, sleek, and modern, and no expense was spared. The glass and chrome half-moon bar sits dead center, the ambient glow from the under lighting casting golden shadows across the bamboo flooring.

On the back side of the bar is a stone fireplace that is lit nightly. Even on hot summer days like today, thirty stories up there is pretty much always a chill in the air. Trees and plants are strategically placed along with high top tables and rustic seating areas, allowing small, intimate gathering spots.

It is the type of place where the who's who of New York come to see and be seen. And on a beautiful Friday night in July like tonight, it is going to be slammed... all night.

By the time I get to the roof, it is just about six-thirty, and the Friday night after work crowd is starting to filter in. It will still be a few hours before the place is bustling. But after sunset, it will be wall to wall people all vying for the attention of myself and my nightly partner in crime, Leif.

"How's the night been so far, big guy?" I ask Leif while I check the stock on my side of the bar. As his name suggests, he is your everyday Norse god. He stands over six feet tall and

has dirty blond hair that, when it is out of its top-knot, just brushes his broad shoulders. He also sports a beard and a full array of tattoos that peak out from his collar and his rolled-up sleeves.

Truthfully he'd be more at home at a biker bar serving beer out of questionably clean glasses than at Rise mixing cosmos. Combine all that with the fact that he is probably the nicest guy I have ever met, and he's your essential panty dropper.

Perhaps, in another life where I haven't sworn off men, I would have been all over that. But thanks to Neil and his extracurricular activities, I learned my lesson about dating someone you work with... or is it for? It doesn't matter, lesson learned. So instead of lusting after Leif, we've become friends... how's that for fucking growth?

"Oh, you know, just our average Friday night of making cosmos and dirties underway," he jokes while shaking said martini shaker. "Any new news from the asshole?"

I love how he refers to Neil as "*the asshole*," which, of course, he is. "Not unless you consider the endless stream of voicemails he's left me telling me to talk to him."

"You know the offer still stands. I have a few friends, and we'd all be more than happy to take a ride up to Boston and ..."

I put my finger over his mouth, silencing him before he can say another word. The last thing any of us needs is for someone to overhear him threatening to maim or kill Neil. "Don't say it. Because one of these days I'm going to take you up on the offer."

Leif and I have an excellent working rapport. We laugh and joke while mixing drinks faster than any other bartenders currently working at Rise. This is probably the reason we are typically the only ones scheduled on Friday and Saturday nights. Anyone else will get in our way and slow us down.

By the time midnight rolls around and the bar is in full swing, my sleeves are rolled up, and that pesky button across

my chest has long since popped, revealing the white lace bra underneath. So much for their conservative image, but hello tips. My once cute, meticulously-styled messy bun now looks like I stuck my head in a blender while making a frozen margarita.

I take a moment to fix myself in the sliver of a mirror I can see between the bottles behind the bar. It is going to be a quick fix, fiddling with my hair tie, trying to get the mess on my head to look less...homeless and more purposely messy.

An odd feeling washes over me. I run my hand over the back of my neck, where all the little hairs are standing on end. I take a glance over my shoulder, half expecting to see Neil standing there watching me. But there's no one.

I bend forward once again to see my tattered reflection while securing my hair, and that's when my eyes meet his. They're dark and penetrating, seeming to cut through the crowded bar to gaze straight into mine. I can feel my heart beating in my chest, and hear the sound of my rushing blood pounding in my ears as I stay captivated by his stare.

Despite the heat from the July night, I feel my nipples pucker. A chill runs over my skin, and I can feel a rush of excitement between my legs. His eyes close and I watch as he inhales the air, a devilish smile creeping across his handsome face and ... fuck me, are those fangs? The last thing I need is some aging raver. No, thank you.

I spin around, hoping to catch a glimpse of the man across the bar. Instead, I feel my heel catch on the rubber of the mat, and my balance falters. I let out a squeal as I twist my ankle and nearly tumble to the ground.

"Whoa, there killer." Leif reaches out and grabs me before I can plummet to the ground in my haste to see who those eyes had belonged to. His hand rests on my arms as he steadies me. "You're shaking like a leaf. What got into you? Are you okay?"

"I just... I thought I saw." I stumble over my words, not able to comprehend what my mind thought it saw.

“Was it Neil? That fucker better not have shown his face here. He’s a dead man if he’s here.” The anger emanating from him is palpable.

I love that my coworker has such a protective stance about me and is willing to do bodily harm to my ex. But that isn’t what I saw. I can’t even explain to him what I saw without sounding like I am on drugs or crazy...or perhaps both. All I can do is shake my head no as I steady myself and peek around Leif’s massive body.

I expect to see nothing. Instead, leaning on the opposite side of the bar stands the most captivating man I have ever seen.

All thought of what I cannot have possibly seen vanishes as I push away from Leif and try in vain to fix my disheveled clothing and hair before approaching him and asking for his order. After all, this is a bar, and I’m a bartender. I’m sure that’s why he’s here.

“Hi,” Is the only word I can muster, my throat suddenly dry as a bone.

CHAPTER 3

JAXON

The music pumps through the rooftop bar as people drink, dance, and hunt. For blood or sex, it doesn't matter. At this time of night during the summer months, Rise becomes more of a nightclub than just an expensive bar in which to be seen. The sweet smell of sweat and sex permeates the night air, and satiating my hunger here would be easy, though dangerous.

I spot Zach and his entourage holding court against the back wall with a group of unsuspecting, star-struck women cooing over him. I'm about to make my way over when my eyes land on the stunning brunette behind the bar. She is mesmerizing, and I can't pull my gaze from her.

It has been a few months since I've been up to visit Rise, so she must be relatively new. There is no other explanation, and I would have never forgotten her. I rarely forget a face, and hers would have been seared into my memory by fire.

I stand transfixed by her as I watch her from the rear of the bar. She laughs and playfully engages with Leif, the other bartender. He's a male shifter, whom I've spoken to a few times when the bar was less crowded. He was friendly enough and someone I might call a friend. However, tonight, the desire to rip his throat out for smiling at the sexy brunette is... unsettling, to say the least.

He must have said something funny because she playfully smacks him on the arm as she throws her head back in laughter. A low, guttural growl emanates out of my throat as I watch her hand linger a moment too long on his bicep. She likes him, that much is obvious. I can't help but wonder if they've fucked. The visual of her receiving pleasure from him makes my blood boil with rage.

She saunters back over to her side of the bar to continue waiting on customers. It doesn't escape me that Leif's gaze lingers on her ass as she walks away. If he hasn't fucked her,

he certainly wants to. She smiles playfully, probably flirting as she makes round after round of drinks.

It's no surprise why these two are paired together—the combination is a virtual gold mine. The men gravitate to the brunette, and the women swarm to Leif like flies to honey. Normally, I'd find out who's brilliant idea pairing them together was and give them a raise. But my unusual reaction to their familiarity will belay that action. Perhaps I'll inquire about having him replaced instead.

I'm encroaching on creepy patron territory, but I can't pull my gaze away from her. When there's a lull in the crowd, I watch as she peers at her reflection in the mirror behind the liquor, attempting to fix her slightly disheveled hair. She doesn't need to, she's breathtakingly beautiful as she was. Her dark chestnut hair is haphazardly pulled up on top of her head with small, flyway wisps that have escaped during her shift, which only adds to her attractiveness.

The sleeves of her crisp white dress shirt have been rolled up, and it looks as if she might have lost the top button. Both are a clear violation of the employee dress code, but the way the white lace innocently peeks out through her shirt has my dick growing impossibly hard at the sight of her tanned flesh straining against her shirt.

My fangs throb in time with my cock as I picture running my tongue along the exposed skin beneath that white lace. When her eyes meet mine through the reflection, I can't help but smile.

When she turns too quickly, I watch, unable to do anything as she stumbles. Leif's reflexes are lightning fast, and he grabs her before she can tumble to the ground. I'm at the bar in less than a blink of an eye. My speed isn't something I usually put out for public view. But here... well, I can be a bit laxer.

I lean casually against the bar while she rights herself and peers around Leif's massive frame. She is stunning from afar, but up close, she takes my breath away. Her hair isn't just dark, it looks like creamy, melted chocolate and her eyes...

fuck me. Her eyes are the most captivating shade of blue I have ever seen. So light, they nearly glow with thick lashes surrounding them.

All she manages to get out once she's composed herself is "Hi." At least that's what I think she says. My eyes have lowered to her missing button like a litch. I smile back, sans fangs, and order myself a drink.

"Macallan thirty-seven."

She shoots me a look of bewilderment, scrunching her adorable nose in momentary confusion before she finally answers. "Ummm...Maitlin, twenty-nine."

I can't help but laugh as she stands staring at me. At the very least, I now knew her age. "It's scotch. Macallan 37." I point to the cabinet under the liquor on display. "Locked cabinet, and I'm Jaxon, slightly older than twenty-nine."

At that moment, Leif comes over and offers his hand. "Jax, I didn't expect to see you here tonight."

I take his outstretched hand but keep my eyes firmly on Maitlin as she bends and unlocks the cabinet where my personal stock of scotch is safely locked away. At thirty-eight thousand a bottle, it better be under lock and key. As we clasp hands, I can feel his increased heart rate rapidly pulsing through his veins as his protective nature toward Maitlin takes over.

His firm grip tightens even further around my hand, and an amber glow sparks behind his eyes as a warning. "Stick to what's on the menu, Jax."

As if having Leif breathing down my throat isn't enough of a fucking distraction, I feel a hard slap on my shoulder. Very few people would ever even consider such a thing. And since I am technically here to meet up with him, it is no surprise when I turn to see Zach checking out the same ass that I am.

"Well, well, well, look what's got your attention." He smiles like a Cheshire cat over to Leif, whose hard eyes still bore into me. "If it isn't my now *second* favorite bartender.

How about a round of whatever Jax is drinking for the bar?" he jokes.

That gets my attention. I'm not one for sharing women or my fucking private stock of scotch. Especially a Macallan 1937 that costs more than a fricken car. "Do it, and not only will I fire your mangy flea-bitten ass, but I'll kill you as well." I was only half-joking, as both seemed exceedingly rational at the moment.

Maitlin sets the amber liquid in front of me with a smile. "Did you want me to open up a tab for you?" Her question is innocent, clearly not registering that any patron who has a thirty-eight thousand dollar bottle of scotch locked behind the bar might not be an average customer.

"He's all set, Mait," Leif pipes in before I can utter another word.

"Oh, okay, then." She smiles as she speaks, and her entire face lights up.

Zach's attention is, of course, immediately drawn to her. I watch, clenching my fists as his gaze moves along her entire body. His stare lingers on the curve of her hip and again on the ample swell of her breasts. Another strangled, low growl makes its way past my lips. The urge to kill my oldest friend bubbles and churns in me like venom. I want to jump over the damn bar, toss her over my shoulder, claim her as my own and not emerge from my bed until we're both too sated to move.

Fuck, I need to get out of here before I do just that. I also need to call Kap and have her secure me a donor before I leave the Lenox. If I don't, there will be no way I'll be able to concentrate on anything but hunting down this sexy little minx named Maitlin and sinking my cock and fangs into her—in that order.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Zach's tongue come out and lick his bottom lip as a devious grin spreads across his lips. "Jax, man, aren't you going to introduce me to this stunning creature you're keeping hidden behind the bar?"

“How rude of me. Where ever have my manners gone?” Sarcasm drips from every word as I speak. For as long as I have known him, Zach has only two uses for women—blood or fucking—and he was getting neither from Maitlin. “Zach, this is Maitlin. Maitlin, this is...”

Zach interjects with an outstretched hand and one of his million-dollar rock-star smiles that is usually a guarantee to drop panties faster than the speed of light before I can finish. “Zachriel Seal, at your service,” he says

With a side glance my way, she’s almost asking for my permission to take his hand.

Surely that is all in my blood-deprived mind.

But I give her a curt nod just in case it wasn’t. Tentatively, she reaches out and takes his hand. Even humans have instincts that warn them against deadly predators, and hers are most definitely giving her the fight or flight signal. I watch as he brings her delicate hand to his lips, slowly turns it over and kisses the inside of her wrist where her vein pulses beneath.

He is most definitely tempting me to kill him, isn’t he?

Even in the dim lighting of the bar, the flush of her skin is evident as she pulls her hand from his. She stands there with her eyes locked on the place on her wrist where his lips have just been, clearly shocked by her body’s reaction to his mouth on her skin.

“Zachriel Seal...?” Her voice is breathless, and I can see the quickening of her pulse beneath her pale skin as she lifts her light blue gaze to meet Zach’s. “Just like the lead singer of Destined to Fall?”

“One and the same.” He smiles at her, and I refrain from punching him into next week. “You should come on over to my table and join us. We don’t bite...much.”

“Oh, well... I would, but I’m working.” She gestures around to the ever-growing crowd at the bar. A young guy at the end of the bar holds up his credit card to get her attention,

indicating that he wants to order. She holds up a single finger to let him know she'll be right there.

“After, then. I insist. We'll be going until the sun comes up. Then we'll crawl into some darkened hole for some... extracurricular fun.”

I silently watch their interaction until she dismisses him with a smile and a quick “Sure thing,” as she moves down to the other group of men to take their orders.

“What the fuck was that?” I ask Zach as he watches her walk away, nearly falling over the bar to follow her ass. His gaze is focused on the gentle sway of her ass as she moves to the end of the bar.

“What? I was just being friendly.”

“Friendly? I thought you were going to sink your teeth into her wrist right here at the bar. We do have a reputation to uphold that doesn't follow your rock-star motto of not giving a shit.”

I down the entire three fingers of scotch like it's a cheap whiskey, not a carefully aged, refined drink to be sipped and enjoyed. When I finish, I slam the glass tumbler down on the bar far harder than I intended and watch as it splinters and cracks under my hand.

Zach pushes away from the bar. “Whenever you manage to pull that stick out of your ass, feel free to come and join us. I have some news regarding Gabriel you might want to hear.” He waves goodbye to Leif with a “*Later, man,*” and then makes his way through the crowd, back over to his devoted entourage.

I seethe, watch, and wait for Maitlin to make her way back over to me. When she finally does, it is apparent she doesn't find the scowl across my face endearing. But to her credit, she does manage to plaster on a saccharine smile for me.

“Do you want another?” She looks down at the broken glass in front of me. “And a new glass, perhaps? I think we have some plastic solo cups around here if you'd prefer

something less... shattering,” she says as she grabs a towel from behind the bar and rushes to clean up the mess of splintered glass I’ve made.

The moment a shard of glass pierces her delicate finger, my nostrils flare and my cock swells as the sweet smell of her blood penetrates my senses.

“Oh, shit.” She looks down at her hand as a single drop of blood hits the bar.

It was nothing but my age and sheer will that keeps me from sinking my fangs into her. However, my resolve is as broken as my patience with this evening. I can feel the sharp point of one of my fangs as it nearly pierces my tongue. I inhale deeply, but it does nothing to curb my appetite for this woman. The air is laced with her scent, and at that moment, I need to possess her completely.

She takes a tentative step back. Even humans know when they are looking into the eyes of a deadly predator. Although most choose to ignore their most basic survival instinct, she doesn’t. Whether it is intentional or not, her body clearly warns her of the imminent danger she’s in.

Reaching deep into myself, I find a single shred of humanity. “You are aware that fraternizing with the guests, patrons, or other employees,” I motioned my head toward Leif at the other end of the bar, “of the Lenox Hotel is strictly forbidden and against company policy, are you not?” Our friendly banter from earlier is now gone replaced by my cold, all-business tone. I need to take control of the situation, and this is the only way I know how, reverting back to cold, heartless business. It has never let me down before.

Her face scrunches and she shoots me a look of sheer bewilderment. “What are you talking about?” She slides her bloody finger in her mouth, and visions of her lips wrapped around my cock make me grip the edge of the bar so hard, I swear I hear it crack.

“Your interaction earlier with Mr. Seal.” Fuck, I’m being a prick, even for me. She’s a bartender who makes better tips

by smiling and flirting with the patrons, but I don't fucking care.

“Oh.” She laughs, clearly annoyed at my questioning. “Not that it's any of your business, but I was just being nice. I have no intention of meeting up with him after my shift. And as for Leif, that's definitely none of your business.” She plasters on a smile and waves at Leif, who smiles and waves back at her.

“Clearly, Miss ...” I pause, waiting for her to share her last name. Man, I'm a dick tonight. I need to lock that shit down. At this point, I need to wrangle myself back in and be her boss's boss's boss before I rip that finger out of her mouth and suck on it myself.

“Addams.” She deadpans.

“Well, Miss Addams, you need a refresher on the policies and procedures of JDL Corporation.” I stand and lay down two one-hundred dollar bills on the bar with my business card on top. Not that I need to pay for anything since I own everything here down to the last bolt, but fuck it, I'm on a roll. “Might I suggest you and I have a meeting tomorrow before your shift? I have a previous business engagement until nine. I'll expect you in my office at nine-thirty, sharp.”

Her mouth hangs open in shock and surprise as I continue, “I suggest you make sure to come in proper uniform for your next shift. We have a certain standard I expect my staff to adhere to at all times, without exception.” I am curt and practically demeaning as I spit out my demands. My eyes lower for the briefest of moments to her ample cleavage and that one button just straining to pop open before once again looking her coldly in the eye. It's a dick move, even for me, but I do it anyway.

I turn and leave her standing behind the bar seething and, fuck me if it isn't the hottest thing I have ever seen. It takes every last bit of self-control I have left not to turn around and get one last look at the furious beauty behind the bar. I grab my cell out of my suit pocket and call Kap as I leave the bar and head for my office. She picks up after only two rings.

I don't even wait for her to speak before I bark my order into the phone. "I need you to send a donor to my office in fifteen minutes." My control is waning, and the request comes out as more of a growl.

She's more than used to me bellowing orders at her, but I can hear the slight twinge of surprise at having to get me a blood donor. It has been ages since I have made such a request from her, but the sassy brunette has me in knots. If I don't feed before our meeting tomorrow night, I won't be able to keep my fangs or cock out of her.

"Anything special?"

"Yeah, a brunette." I don't wait for her response, I just disconnect the call and make my way to my office.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Heterochromia Iridium – Possessing two different color eyes.

Acheron – River of Woe.

Lethe – Lethe is the underworld River of Oblivion. The dead would drink the waters of Lethe to forget their earthly existence.

Styx – River that marked the entrance to Death, across which the Dead were ferried by Charon.

Phlegethon – Phlegethon is a river of the underworld. The Phlegethon and Pyriphlegethon are rivers of fire, which join with the Acheron.

Cocytus – The Cocytus is the river of cries or lament.

Dimmuborgir – dimmu “dark,” borgir “cities” – said to connect Earth with the infernal regions. In Nordic lore, it is also said Dimmuborgir is the place where Satan landed when he was cast from the heavens and created the apparent “Helvetes katakomber” – Norwegian for “The Catacombs of hell.”

Psychometric – Having the ability to see the past, present, or future from an object or person just by touch.

Firehouse – Bar located on the banks of Phlegethon owned by Alastor, AKA Ali-Cat, the keeper of the fires of Hell.

Snakehead – A smuggler of souls in and out of hell for a price.

Cahliany-Mur – A race of demons that have been extinct for eons. They were so far extinct, they had fallen into myth and legend. They could, with a simple touch, turn any living being to stone.

Seraphim demon – Humanoid snake demon with reptilian skin, forked tongue, and snake-like facial features. The venom of a female Seraphim demon is deadly and usually used to kill her mate after sex.

Skull-wine – A Firehouse specialty, the equivalent of cherry-flavored jet fuel with an acid-like burn.

Blood Angel – A fallen Archangel, damned by Themis to prey on those they once protected. Their appearance is more demonic in nature, yet they cannot walk in Heaven nor Hell. They are the unintentional creators of the Vampire race.

The three fates – Sisters, deities, incarnations of destiny and life.

Clotho - the one who spins the threads of life.

Lachesis – The one who draws the lots and determines how long one lives by measuring the thread of life.

Atropos – The inevitable, she who chooses how someone dies by cutting the line of life.

Themis – The goddess of divine order, fairness, and law. Her symbols are the Scales of Justice, tools she uses to remain balanced and pragmatic. Her name means divine law.

Azazel – A fallen angel responsible for introducing humans to “forbidden” and “deceptive knowledge.”

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