



ROXIE RAY SKYE WILSON

THE
DEMON
KING'S
BRIDE

THE DEMON KING'S BRIDE

MARRIED TO THE DEVIL: BOOK 4

ROXIE RAY
SKYE WILSON

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FOREWORD

*“Io mi senti' svegliar dentro a lo core
Un spirito amoroso che dormia:
E poi vidi venir da lungi Amore
Allegro sì, che appena il conoscia”*

—Dante Alighieri
La Vita Nuova, “I Felt My Heart Awaken”

PROLOGUE

DON

I hate to break it to you, darling, but the first time I fell in love? It tasted just like you.

Golden honey, warmed by sunshine. Tart, luscious cherries. A rich, full-bodied red wine.

That first time, love was a brief sweetness that dissolved on my tongue far too quickly.

It tasted just like your lips.

I'll let you decide which set of those I mean.

That was centuries ago, of course. I loved, and I lost, and I knew damn well that I'd never love again. Not after losing her. Not after she was gone.

And then, it happened anyway.

Then, I met you.

My Beatrice. You share the name of my first love, you know. Sometimes, out of the corner of my eye, I think for a moment that you even share her face.

When I first saw you, it was like watching her walk right back into my life again. You have her same long, shapely legs. Her deep brown eyes. Her luscious, dusky rose lips. You have her long, slender neck, perfect for sinking my teeth into, and her thick, dark waves of silken hair, just begging to be wound around my fist.

You have her smile and her laugh. When you made my cock hard, there were moments that I was so certain the two of you were one and the same.

It felt impossible—but I've spent enough time between Earth and Hell through the millennia to know that if there's one thing that's full of infinite

possibility, it's the thing that our hearts want.

You were wildfire, burning clear through every wall of vines and thorns that I'd ever built up around myself.

You were a cool breeze that blew in through the ashes, soothing the scorched earth of my infernal heart.

You made me believe in second chances.

You made me believe in fate.

Maybe a little too much, even.

History has a terrible way of repeating itself. Just like I lost that first love, I lost you as well. You and I were always going to be two star-crossed creatures. We knew that from the start. Just like last time, you were promised to another by the time I found you.

And now, at the hands of angels, every memory you ever had of me—in this life, or another—has been stolen away as well.

It's your wedding day today, darling. You're the most beautiful bride I've ever laid eyes on, and you're doomed to be married to someone who doesn't deserve to so much as speak your name.

You don't remember me at all. You don't remember being my woman. My secret. My sin. But I remember you.

You're an irritatingly difficult woman to forget.

You don't know this either—not yet—but you're in danger as well.

Your memories of Heaven and Hell might have been taken from you, but the realms of angels and demons are far from done with you yet.

As for me...

I'm a king of Hell now.

I'm done losing.

I've seen my opportunity.

I don't plan on ever losing something as precious as you again.

Your life has been threatened. Your pathetic so-called husband-to-be has been dancing with demons. He knows you'll never belong to him, even without the things I could give you tempting you away. He wants you dead.

So, I took care of it. As you'll soon remember, I'm very good at taking care of things like ungrateful men.

Now, I'll take his place. All the better to protect you, my love.

Come Hell or high water—but especially Hell—I'm going to keep you safe.

Love is hard, Bea, but I'm a very hard man.

You'll soon see *exactly* how hard I can truly be.

Today's my wedding day too, as it turns out. After so long of loving and losing and waiting, I have to admit that I'm excited to become a husband.

Your husband.

Even if you don't know that it's me yet.

I told you, darling, that you made me believe in second chances.

I think it's high time for a lucky third.

BEA

Weddings are hell. Literal fire-and-brimstone, *abandon-all-hope-ye-who-enter-here*, demons with pitchforks in Louboutins and Chanel pantsuits *hell*. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise—they're probably just trying to sell you an overpriced honeymoon cruise.

It's a hell most women walk through eventually.

Today, I was doing it in an Italian lace veil that had been in my family for five hundred years, a pair of vintage Salvatore Ferragamo heels once worn by Marilyn Monroe, and with my tits pressed up to high Heaven in a skin-tight Zuhair Murad gown.

Growing up, I'd always known that real life wasn't made of happy endings. Forget about the romcom stuff. That's all Hollywood movie magic. Nothing more. For me, the only romantic swell of music after the officiant said *you may now kiss the bride* would be the one played by a string quartet on loan from Buckingham Palace. My husband-to-be hadn't won me over after an adorable meet-cute and a grand gesture so beautiful it had warmed even *my* cynical little heart. There would be no dashing hero to rush in and try to stop me from making the biggest mistake of my life, either.

Even if there *had* been a man in my life stupid enough to try that kind of thing, my father's security guards would have tackled and tasered him on sight.

No—everything about my wedding day had been perfectly orchestrated. Timed, staged, and set to run right on cue. Today's festivities had cost a pretty penny, sure—but when your family owns three islands off the coast of Greece and a fleet of matryoshka yachts big enough to make the US Navy

green with jealousy, money isn't exactly an object. Could you really put a price on getting hitched—*without* a hitch?

Apparently, no.

And it was all going perfectly, of course. Exactly according to plan.

Except for one thing.

As I walked down the aisle, the man waiting for me at the altar was *not* my fiancé.

I'd been engaged to Simon Roth since the moment I was born. Not officially, of course. That hadn't happened until last year, when he put a diamond as heavy as the Holy Bible on my ring finger. But, growing up, we'd always known that our parents intended for us to become husband and wife.

My father and Simon's owned one of the oldest financial institutions in the world. Through Leviathan Bank, the Argento family and the Roths had been tied to each other since the actual, honest-to-god Crusades. For centuries, our banking empire was passed down from father to oldest son.

Then, I was born.

A disappointment.

A *girl*.

Believe it or not, feminism never quite made it into old money institutions like Leviathan. The rich and powerful men our bank dealt with tended to see women as expensive accessories, not the managers of their extensive fortunes. To them, it was never going to matter how clever or ruthless or charming I was.

Like it or not, some glass ceilings are bulletproof.

So, a deal had been hatched. I'd marry Simon. We'd run Leviathan together as husband and wife. As far as marriage material went, he'd never been particularly inspiring. He wasn't hideous or anything. He was tall and broad-chested, with honey-blond hair and cornflower blue eyes. But he'd always had the temper of a petulant schoolboy and the general attitude of a man who hadn't been told *no* enough as a child.

I'd spent most of my life figuring out how to manage Simon as I resigned myself to my fate. In name, I'd be his wife. In reality, what he needed was a mommy.

It was hardly a love match, but that didn't matter when you didn't believe in love to begin with.

Maybe that was the reason that my heart skipped a beat as I saw the man

standing beneath the arbor of roses, waiting for me at the other end of the aisle.

He was wearing Simon's tuxedo. He was flanked by Simon's groomsmen.

But his hair was dark, thick and sleek. He had the jawline of a male model, the kind who might have been pulled out of a 1950's ad for an expensive cologne. Even beneath Simon's tux, I could tell he had enough muscles to put most Roman statues to shame.

If it *was* possible to fall in love, I would've sold my soul in a hot second to fall for a man like *him*.

That should have made me suspicious in an instant—except that I was too busy wrangling a completely different confusion.

This man wasn't Simon.

So why the *hell* was I the only one who seemed to have noticed?

Halfway up the aisle, I glanced at my bridesmaids with pleading eyes.

Ava wore a red dress that somehow didn't clash with her copper-colored hair and a smile that said, *You can do this, Bea! Even if it fucking kills you.* She didn't look alarmed at the groom switcheroo in the least.

Joan was scowling beneath her black bangs. I knew that scowl well. It said, *If Simon so much as thinks about getting handsy with you tonight, I'll kill him first.* But as far as the dark-haired man standing in Simon's place went, she wasn't acknowledging his presence at all.

My parents were similarly unperturbed by this error. My mother was doing her best to give me a look of warm encouragement. Not the easiest thing to do through her latest round of Botox, but she managed. My father gave me a dutiful nod. Nothing more.

Not even Simon's own father was affected. He should have been. My marriage to his son meant the continuation of the financial empire that Levi Roth had devoted his entire life to. But as I passed him, his blue eyes glimmered confidently beneath his thick, salt-and-pepper brows and his lips curled into a suave smirk of approval.

He didn't

What the *fuck*.

I clutched my bouquet of roses and blinked furiously as I considered saying something. I didn't know what—pretty much any words out of my mouth in that moment would have sounded like those of a crazy woman:

"Hello, excuse me, but did someone replace my husband?" sounded just

as insane as “*Sorry, but who ordered the hunky stunt double?*”

Even just a simple, “*Where the fuck is Simon?*” would have earned me some crazy looks in that moment. No one else had noticed but me.

As I opened my eyes, I realized the reason why.

The dark-haired man was gone, and Simon was there again. His blue eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled at me and offered me his hand.

I hesitated before I took it.

God. Had I been hallucinating?

Apparently. That handsome replacement groom was nowhere to be seen anymore.

“Bea,” he whispered, glancing down at his hand then meeting my eyes again. “Take my hand.”

I was still too stunned to say anything back. Too stunned to move.

If I was hallucinating other men on my own wedding day, I was even more stressed than I’d previously thought.

“All right, then.” Simon reached out and curled his fingers around mine, his hand was warm and solid. Definitely real. “Come here.”

He drew me toward him with a gentle but firm tug. As I stumbled forward, my heart skipped yet another beat. He caught me against his chest before I lost my balance completely.

His arms wrapped around my body, comforting and strong, as our guests chuckled, and a single wolf whistle cut through the summer air. I knew how I must have looked: so overwhelmed by the sight of my husband-to-be that I’d gotten entirely caught up in the moment. Like a smitten, awe-struck schoolgirl.

In a way, it was how I felt, too.

Simon was here again, but that intense, heady rush of desire I’d experienced when I first saw the figment of my imagination that had briefly replaced him still wasn’t gone.

We said our vows with my veil still between us. I stayed on script for mine: love, cherish, obey. But the whole time I repeated the officiant’s words, I stared up at Simon through the lace with suspicion in my eyes.

What was that? I wanted to ask him. *Am I crazy, or were you someone else for a second there?*

They weren’t questions I could get away with asking, though.

Neither was the most important one of all: *Why haven’t I ever felt like this around you before?*

My heart was racing by the time my vows were over. It wasn't just skipping beats anymore. It was playing hopscotch with them.

Suddenly, I was thankful for the cover my veil provided me with.

It hid the way I sniffed the air, trying to catch the scent of burned toast. If anyone heard me, they probably would have assumed I was trying to fight back tears of joy.

In reality, I was trying to make sure I wasn't having a stroke.

It was going to be a relief when all of this was over. I was just on edge. That was probably it. Weddings were hell, sure, but they were still big occasions.

Maybe my body was just confused enough about marrying a man I didn't love that it was trying to make up the difference.

Once we were done tonight, I would get to go to my own suite at the hotel we'd booked for our honeymoon, and Simon would go to his. I'd lock the door and take off this stupid dress and these uncomfortable shoes.

I'd pour myself into a plush king-sized bed and sleep until it was time for our private jet to leave LAX tomorrow. Then I'd spend the next month of my life on a white sand beach in Greece relaxing and trying to forget whatever stupid things I was feeling right now.

That was the plan, anyway.

But then, it was time for Simon's vows.

He didn't stay on script.

"Beatrice Argento." He positioned a thin, golden wedding ring against my fingertip and squeezed my hand. He spoke in Simon's voice...but in a different tone. One that I'd never heard Simon use before. "With this ring..."

Say the words, asshole. My shoulders were tense. My entire body was wound tight like a wire spring. I bit my tongue as Simon allowed the silence to linger for several seconds too long. *Come on. Say them. Stop wasting time, bucko. Let's get this over! Go, go, go!*

Instead of repeating the officiant's words, Simon breathed a laugh and shook his head.

Nope. He wasn't planning on staying on script at all.

"I still remember the first time I saw you, you know." I didn't know how that was possible. The first time we met, we'd been babies. During our parents' dinner parties, we'd shared the same crib. "You were wild and fierce and beautiful. I knew in an instant that I had to make you mine."

In the crowd, a few of our guests murmured with approval. There were

breathy gasps and quiet hums and even a few saccharine *awws*.

You're laying it on pretty thick today, buddy. I didn't buy it for a second. It helped, knowing that his words were lies.

Except that in my chest, warmth was stirring.

In my head, I knew what he was saying was bullshit.

But in my heart...it didn't feel like a lie.

Why?

"I've loved you for longer than anyone could ever imagine," Simon went on. His gaze bored through the veil, like he was searching for something behind it. Not my eyes, though.

Something deeper.

It felt like he was trying to stare straight into my soul.

"With this ring, I make you my wife." He smirked with a charming sort of wickedness that I'd never seen before. Not on Simon's lips. "And I make myself the luckiest bastard in entire world, too."

More laughter from the crowd. Louder, this time.

They were really eating this shit up.

To my horror, on some level, so was I.

Maybe after all these years of knowing Simon...maybe today was the day I realized I'd never actually known him at all?

Maybe I really could come to love him.

I almost laughed.

Maybe Simon was spouting beautiful words right now, but twenty-seven years of knowing him had informed me well of the man he *actually* was. Arrogant. Mercurial. Selfish.

Come to love him? Not fucking likely.

The fact that I was even considering that possibility reassured me that all this wedding nonsense was making me lose my damn mind.

"I pledge myself to you, Bea." I didn't believe his words, but they kept stirring that warmth in my chest anyway. Now, it was burning hot like flame that threatened to become a wildfire. "I promise you the protection of my body. The safety of my wealth. The depths of my soul belong to you now." He slipped the ring on my finger. It was hot too. Like he'd pulled it fresh from the forge. "As does all the love in my heart. Until death...and beyond it, too."

It was a good thing I'd done my vows first. Even if they did seem entirely lackluster now in comparison to his.

I was speechless.

I knew better than to believe him, but for a second...

Almost.

Almost.

He let go of my hand to reach for the edge of my veil instead. I was shaking as he raised it. I didn't know why.

On the other side of my veil, it was still Simon's face staring down at me.

But when my eyes met his...

Those *definitely* weren't Simon's eyes.

He settled the veil over my long, dark hair. As he arranged it around my face, his knuckles brushed my cheek and the fire in my chest erupted into roaring, hungry flames.

Simon's eyes weren't blue anymore. They were intense, glinting gray. I only had a second to stare into them before he took my face in his hands and pulled me toward him for our kiss.

We'd agreed on just a peck. Something quick and chaste, just to fulfill expectations.

But when Simon's lips met mine, chaste went right out the window and over a fucking cliff.

He crushed my mouth beneath his like a conqueror claiming the city he'd just burned. It took my breath away. I couldn't remember how I'd ever managed to breathe at all.

That first kiss was just a taste, though. When his lips moved for a second, they were hungry and relentless. He sucked my lower lip between his teeth, biting down just enough that I whimpered. His tongue slipped into my mouth, flicking against my own tongue. One of his hands left my jaw to wind around my waist instead, so he could pull my body roughly against his.

It wasn't just my chest that felt on fire now. The flames rose up in my cheeks, flooded my belly, and pooled between my thighs.

My clit throbbed. My lungs burned. My cunt was wetter than it had ever been in all my life. In an instant, those little white lace La Perlas I'd slipped on this morning were soaked.

Before I even realized what I was doing, my hands were dragging greedily over the rough stubble of his jawline (*stubble? He'd been clean-shaven just a second ago...*) and raking through his thick, wavy hair (*wavy? Simon's hair was straight...*)

But despite my confusion, in that moment, I couldn't help myself.

My tongue tangled with his and my lips moved like they were starving for him.

I kissed him back.

The moment was broken only when I heard the saucy whistles and rowdy cheers from the crowd. I didn't know how long we'd been kissing. But when I finally tore myself away from Simon's lips and hazarded a glance back at the wedding guests, it had definitely been for long enough that the standing ovation we were receiving felt well-earned.

I looked up at Simon, wondering what the hell had come over him—what the hell had come over *me*—

But once again, the man in front of me looked nothing like Simon at all anymore.

His dark hair was messy from where my fingers had moved it out of place. His gray eyes were full of the same flames I felt inside my body. And the way he was staring down at me...

Whoever this was, he looked pretty fucking pleased with himself.

He looked like he wanted to do more than just kiss me, too.

Like I was something delicious enough, he wanted to devour me whole.

He was gorgeous and dangerous and fucking *perfect*. A man pulled straight from my wildest, wettest dreams.

Only, I had no goddamn clue who he was.

DON

It was the happiest day of my life.

“Congratulations, Mrs. Roth.” I purred the words down at Bea as I smirked and stroked her cheekbone with my thumb. The moment was perfect except for the fact that I was still having to use her pathetic fiancé’s surname.

Still. She was mine now. If this was the charade I had to play in order to keep her, so be it. I would play it well. No one else here had even noticed that Simon Roth was no longer even in this realm.

“Who the fuck are you?” she hissed back up at me in return.

I chuckled.

Well. Almost no one.

Of course, Bea had realized that whoever I was, I certainly wasn’t her idiot of a groom.

Seeing her walking down the aisle toward me in her tight white gown and her lace veil had excited me enough to make my glamor slip for a moment. I was lucky she looked so stunning. Everyone else’s eyes had been entirely on her.

And kissing her had felt so good, so damn *right*... I knew I’d lost hold of glamor again, even though I’d tried not to let it. Not too much, at least.

That time, the only person who’d been close enough to see through my disguise had been Bea herself.

“Come on.” I lowered my hand from the small of her back and let my fingertips brush against the perfect curve of her ass—just for a second—before I took her hand in mine again. “Can’t keep our guests waiting, can

we?”

“Like hell we can’t.” She stumbled after me as I drew her back down the aisle. Thankfully, she kept her voice low enough that the others wouldn’t be able to hear her. The last thing we wanted right now was to make a scene. “These aren’t *your* guests.”

I snorted.

She was right about that.

“But they’re yours,” I reminded her, grinning as I hoisted her hand triumphantly into the air, clutched in mine. I spoke to her through my smile. “You don’t want to embarrass yourself in front of them, do you?”

“Fucking try me,” she growled back, digging in her heels.

I only laughed.

God, she was exceptional. Every bit the spitfire she’d been when I’d first fallen for her.

I couldn’t have chosen a better woman for my bride.

And whether she liked it or not—now, she *was* my bride.

I knew better than to take her up on her offer.

Instead, I swept her off her feet and took her into my arms.

“Put me down!” she insisted through her teeth. Her breath against my neck was a gorgeous wash of humidity and warmth.

“Not on your life, darling.” I carried her the rest of the way down the aisle like a knight in shining armor. I was Lancelot, and she was my Guinevere. “Now, smile for the cameras.”

Bea turned her face just in time to see the photographer waiting for us at the end of the aisle. His vintage camera flashed, capturing us forever in that moment.

It was the first of many pictures for our wedding album. Later, when the photographer developed it, he’d probably be surprised to find how shocked Bea looked in the photo—

But he’d be even more surprised when he realized that based on this photo, and every other taken today, he’d somehow misremembered the color of Simon Roth’s hair and the wicked charm of Simon Roth’s smile.

For a moment, it might even occur to him that the man holding sweet Beatrice in his arms in these photos might not be Simon Roth at all—and he’d be right.

WHILE THE GUESTS were guided off to their cocktail hour, Bea and I gathered with the wedding party and the families in the rose garden for more pictures. I kept her close to my side for all of them.

Now that she was mine, it wouldn't do to have her go wandering off. Or, for that matter, running away.

"What's wrong, darling?" I asked her in between shots. It was a dick move, sure—but while I was still pretending to be Simon, I was hardly pretending to be a saint. "You look unsettled."

"Gee," she snapped back at me quietly. With her family gathered all around us, I supposed she didn't want to risk raising her voice. "Wonder why?"

"Aren't you happy?" I paused and put my arm around her, fashioning my lips into a photogenic grin once more as the photographer counted down for another shot. I relaxed again after the camera had flashed. "It's your wedding day, after all."

"Oh, I'm *ecstatic*." As my hand wandered from her hip down to her ass, Bea grabbed my wrist and hauled my fingers back up into place. "Can't you tell?"

"I'm glad to hear it. As your husband, your happiness is paramount to me."

"That's so sweet of you, darling." Bea's eyes flicked up to meet mine for a moment. Her voice dropped to the breathiest of whispers. "Except that you're not my husband."

"No?"

"No," Bea said through a plastered-on smile. The camera flashed again. "You're a fucking faker."

"Am I?" I pulled back from her slightly to arch an eyebrow. "How so?"

"Some kind of technology, I suppose." Bea glowered at me for a moment, but already the photographer was snapping his fingers to demand more smiling. More staring into his bright, shiny lens. "Who are you working for, I wonder? One of Leviathan Financial's competitors?"

"No, but good guess." *I love the way your mind works*, I wanted to tell her, but it would have only sidetracked our current conversation. She'd always had such an imagination. Unfortunately, it was currently working in the wrong direction. My disguise wasn't a thing of science fiction; it was far closer to fantasy. "It's strange, though."

"You wearing my fiancé's skin?" She snorted. "Finally, something you

and I can agree on.”

“No.” My smile in the next photo was a smug one. “What I mean is, if you really cared about your so-called fiancé, you might have first asked me what I did with him.”

Bea’s lips fell open as she turned to me again. She looked surprised at herself for a moment. Then, her brows dropped back into a scowl. “I *do* care about him.”

“Is that so?” As I recalled, she’d seen him as a bratty child who needed to be put in a good, long time-out. Which is exactly what I’d been more than happy to provide him with. “You really believe that?”

“It is, and I do,” she insisted, but I wasn’t buying it.

Partly because I knew her better than that.

Partly because she didn’t even look convinced herself.

“If that was the case, then why did you go through with your vows?” I asked through another smile. Another photo. Another flash. “Why did you let me go through with mine? Why didn’t you run?”

“I thought you were him,” she snapped. “I didn’t want to make a scene.”

“Please, Bea. We both know that’s not true. I know you saw me. The real me.”

“I thought I was hallucinating. Now, I know better.”

“Or, an even better question still—” I looked down at her and ran my thumb across her lower lip. Luscious and dangerously kissable. Just like every other part of her. “Why did you let me kiss you like you were my very own personal whore?”

The camera flashed again. I was eager to see how that photo in particular turned out.

I imagined it captured her perfectly. An exquisite mixture of furious, stunned, and gorgeously turned on.

“I told you. I thought you were him.” Bea turned her face away from me. “As it turns out, I thought wrong.”

I took her chin between my knuckle and my thumb and turned her face back up towards mine.

“Then you must love him *deeply*.”

Bea frowned. “And why do you say that?”

“Because.” My smile was wicked again, and so was I. “If you didn’t, I can’t imagine any reason why you would have kissed me back quite like *that*.”

Bea stared up at me for a long moment, her brown eyes full of disparate things. Confusion. Shame. Anger. Lust—at the memory of how good that kiss had felt, maybe. Frustration. Confusion again.

I watched her cycle through each emotion until she finally settled on one.

Anger.

“I don’t know who you are, but you’re a fucking bastard,” she snarled up at me.

“Something else we can agree on,” I said with a smirk. “But remember, I may be a bastard, but you’re the one who married me.”

I could tell she wanted to slap me long before the photographer finally dismissed us from our photo session.

It was a show of immense personal strength, in my opinion, that she was able to wait until they were all gone before she finally drew her hand back and laid the smack across my cheek.

“I married Simon. Not you,” she spat, then turned and stormed off.

I rubbed my cheek and smiled, watching her walk away for a long moment before I followed after her.

Oh, yes. She was furious with me.

Good thing I liked her when she was angry.

Always had. Always would.

BEA

When I was younger, my mother told me love felt like being wrapped up in a nice cashmere shawl on a cold night.

My father had only ever shrugged.

Romance novels told me it would feel like the perfect kind of forever.

Love songs told me it was like Fridays or the rain on my skin.

How many times had I looked at Simon when we were younger and hoped to feel something like love? Hoped to feel something. *Anything*. Even the briefest flutter of butterflies in my stomach would've sufficed.

But no matter how long I'd looked at him for, no matter how hard I'd tried, I'd never felt anything like love for him.

Scratch that—I'd never felt anything like love at all.

Lust—that was another story. I'd had boyfriends, sure. Simon had dated around, too. It was part of our arrangement: we always knew we'd be married someday, but that didn't mean we needed to worry about saving ourselves for each other.

Not when I knew that sex with Simon was the last thing I'd ever want.

He'd only gotten handsy with me once, at a garden party when we were sixteen. I'd made it very clear to him then and there that while our impending marriage might have been a legal one, it was strictly for business.

He'd agreed.

When we were married, we'd have separate beds in separate bedrooms. Maybe even separate houses. Unless we were putting on a show for the wealthy clients of Leviathan Financial, we'd essentially have separate lives.

When I'd still believed in love, that had seemed a little sad. But once I

finally gave up on the notion, it actually felt entirely ideal.

I would have my life. Simon would have his. The company our ancestors had built from the ground up would continue thriving, and all we'd have to do in exchange was make a few public appearances a year and wear our meaningless wedding rings.

It wouldn't have been anything resembling an earth-shattering romance—but it would have been fine.

It *should* have been fine.

But then, the mysterious dark-haired stranger had shown up at the opposite end of the aisle on our wedding day in Simon's place.

Every moment after that one, it felt like my entire world had been turned on its head.

"Are you running away from me, Bea?" As I stormed off, the man who wasn't Simon caught up with me easily. His legs were long and muscular; mine were hindered by my stupid Marilyn Monroe heels that sank into the grass every time I took a step.

"Trudging away," I corrected him. I clutched the skirt of my wedding dress in my fists and hiked it up so I could stomp off a little faster. "But essentially, yes."

"Don't you have questions for me? Things you'd like me to answer?" I'd had a head start on him, but now that he'd caught up with me, he didn't struggle to keep pace with my steps.

"Oh, I'm sure I do." I scowled, but not at him. No, I kept my gaze straight ahead. I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of so much as a glance. After that kiss he'd given me...I was pretty sure he'd had satisfaction enough for one day, thank you very much. "But I don't want to be anywhere near you right now."

"And why not?"

"Seriously?" The temptation to look at him was intense. Not just because he was gorgeous—every time I looked at him, it was becoming more and more likely that instead of Simon, I'd see *him*—but because he was an excellent target to direct my fury at right now. I had to direct it to the grass in front of me instead.

"Seriously," he echoed. "Your attraction to me is pretty obvious, Bea. Leaving my side...what's the rush?"

"You're not the man I was supposed to marry today," I said through my teeth. "You're dangerous."

“Am I?”

“Very.” I finally lost my resolve. My heels sank deeper into the soft earth as I stopped in my tracks and wheeled around to face him. “You tricked me. Whoever you are. Believe it or not, most women don’t take kindly to being lied to. Especially by men wearing masks.”

“Is that what I’m wearing? A mask?” Before my very eyes, Simon’s face disappeared. Once more, I was glaring up at that handsome nose and dark hair. Gray eyes. Gorgeous smirk. He laughed as he saw me taking him in. “Better?”

I opened my mouth to answer him, but for a second, no sound came out. When I finally managed to shape words again, they burst from my lips in a brief, flustered stutter.

“I... I don’t...” I swallowed hard and set my jaw. “Not in the slightest.”

I turned to storm away from him again, but my heels caught in grass. I realized I was going to fall a second before I lost my balance—

But before I could, he caught me by my elbow and pulled my body against his.

“Careful, darling.” He purred the words down at me as he held me in his embrace. He smelled like leather and mint and a freshly lit match. Something smoking and smoldering, recently on fire. “Wouldn’t want you to ruin that pretty white dress of yours on the grass.”

“No?” I sneered up at him. God, his eyes were mesmerizing. I couldn’t look into them for too long without risking getting lost in the silver swirls through the grays of his irises. I focused my gaze on his stupid smirk instead. “You’ve already marred my entire wedding day. By comparison, what’s a little grass stain going to matter?”

“In that case...” He pulled me closer to him. Closer still. My breasts were pressed tight against the buttons of his tux jacket as he lowered his lips to my ear. “Why don’t I throw you down and take you right here? If you’re hell-bent on getting grass stains on your lovely white skirts, you might as well enjoy them.”

Oh.

My heart was thrumming again. I could feel a blush rising up from between my tits and across my cheeks. The two flushes met in the middle at my collarbones.

This was wrong. All of it. From his handsome smirk to the way he looked in Simon’s tux to the way he made my cunt spasm like an electric current was

running through it, wild and uncontrolled.

In an instant, from my neckline to my eyebrows, my skin burned.

“If you’re so horny, why don’t you find a bathroom to go jerk off in.” I composed myself with care. He already knew exactly how to get to me. I wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of giving into him on top of it. “It’ll keep you busy while I alert security and call the police.”

“As much as I like the idea of you putting me in handcuffs, Bea,” he whispered back down at me, “You might find it in your heart to allow me to explain my actions first.”

“And why would I do that?”

“Because...” he said. His gray eyes glinted wickedly. “If this marriage of yours was meant to secure the future of your family’s company, I can’t imagine anything that would ruin it quicker than calling the cops before the reception. Can you?”

I blinked several times as I considered it.

Fuck. I hated him.

But...

He did have a point.

“Fine,” I snapped at him. “But I need to know who you are. Fast. And more importantly, I need to know what your game is. What you’ve done with Simon.”

“So, you’re finally concerned with what happened to this so-called fiancé you supposedly love so much.” He chuckled as he dropped down on one knee.

“What are you doing?” For a second, it almost looked like he was about to pull out a ring and propose for himself—which would have been stupid, I supposed, since we’d just said our vows. But instead, he reached for my ankle.

Gently, he lifted my foot out of my heel. My skin burned in a whole new way at his touch.

“I’m not divulging my secrets out in the open here. And it’s going to be hard for you to walk without snapping a bone in these shoes.” He put the first heel aside, then moved to the next. His hand gripped my ankle, soft but firm. “Either I carry your heels, or I carry you. Which do you prefer?”

I swallowed. Hard.

As much as I’d balked at the way he’d swept me up into his arms when he’d whisked me down the aisle...

He had strong arms, whoever he was. Much stronger than Simon's, that was for sure.

"Have them, then." I turned my glare to the shoes. At least they were safe things to look angry at. "My feet won't miss them at all."

"No, I don't suppose they will," he agreed. He took my foot into his hand for a moment and rubbed his thumbs into the arch of it. It felt so good my eyes nearly rolled back with pleasure. Like if a massage was an orgasm. *Ridiculous*. "Your feet are too pretty to be in cages like these. I've always preferred you barefoot, anyway."

"Always?" I arched an eyebrow as a shock of worry shot through me. "Have you been stalking me too, then? For how long?"

"Longer than you imagine," he admitted. "But not stalking. Just...looking out for."

I scoffed. "Like a guardian angel?"

"No." He shook his head slowly, gray eyes glimmering darkly and sunshine catching the veins of silver that just barely streaked his dark hair. "Not quite. But—"

His gaze flicked away from me. They focused on a copse of trees at my back.

In an instant, he was on his feet again.

"Get behind me," he growled, stepping between me and the trees. "Now. If I tell you to run, you run. Don't look back."

"What are you talking about?" I peeked around his shoulder, trying to catch a glimpse of what had set him off. But all I could see were green leaves and branches. Nothing more. "What's happening?"

"Exactly what I'm trying to prevent." My new husband's shoulders tensed as he glowered at the trees. "There's something there. Something demonic."

"Why can't I see it?"

"Because—" Abruptly, he swept an arm back to shove me roughly to the right. The air whistled sharply as I stumbled aside.

His hand moved quickly, snatching something out of the air. When he caught it, I saw that it was a long, sharp black knife made of something that looked like obsidian.

What the *fuck*.

"All right. Get out of here," he growled. He shrugged the jacket of his tux off and let it drop to the grass, rolled up his sleeves—

Then launched himself toward the trees.

Simultaneously, something dark from the trees launched itself at him in return.

The thing was only a shadow, but it was shaped like a man. It was almost as tall as the man masquerading as Simon was. It moved just as fast as he did, too.

When Not-Simon collided with it, it proved to be more solid than it looked. He threw it to the ground with ease and pinned it beneath his knee.

“Your name,” he snarled down at it. “Tell me your name.”

“*Fuck you,*” the shadow hissed back. I didn’t know how. It certainly didn’t have a mouth, but its voice sounded haunted. It was a shiver of a sound. As it raised its hand, its fingers lengthened into long, sharp claws. It swiped at Not-Simon, but he drew back just in time to avoid its slash. “*I would rather die, King of Hell.*”

“Have it your way.” Not-Simon brought the knife he’d just caught down on the shadow. He plunged it into the thing’s chest over and over again.

The shadow screamed as the knife sank into it. Every time the blade entered the shadow’s body, it faded away a little more, until finally, there was no shadow beneath Not-Simon at all. Just a dark mark on the grass in the place where it had been, shaped like the body of a man.

It was only when the screams stopped that I realized I’d been frozen where I stood the entire time.

Not-Simon had told me to run, but the order had barely registered for me.

I guessed I’d already broken our vows. My legs were shaking, but I didn’t seem to be able to tear my eyes away.

The shadow wasn’t the only thing worth staring at, as it turned out.

As my new husband had battled the thing, something about him had changed.

“Bea.” Slowly, he turned his head toward me. Short, dark horns had risen from his temples. His eyes were entirely black. No more irises. No more whites. His shoulder heaved with every breath. He was panting like a beast.

He looked satanic.

Unhinged.

My heart was racing. I didn’t know what I was looking at—except, in some distant part of my brain, for a moment, I thought I might.

Demon, something in my head whispered.

Maybe he really was.

“I told you to get out of here,” he growled as he pushed himself back to his feet. “Why didn’t you leave?”

I glanced down at his jacket and finally, I moved to pick it up off the ground.

“I didn’t want to leave you alone with that thing,” I said softly. My feet moved forward as I took a few steps closer to him, holding the jacket out like an offering. “Are you all right?”

He stooped to pick up my heels. His eyes were returning to Simon’s blues. His horns disappeared as he reclaimed his disguise.

For a moment, it was so easy to pretend that I hadn’t just witnessed anything out of the ordinary at all. He looked like Simon again. If I tried, I could almost imagine that the anger set in his brow was just the result of a wedding day temper tantrum. Nothing more.

But in my heart, I knew that it couldn’t have been further from the truth.

Not-Simon snatched the jacket from my hand next and threw it over his shoulder. Then he took me by the elbow, marching me away from the site of the battle.

“The next time I tell you to run,” he grunted, “you had better fucking obey.”

BEA

With the soft grass under my feet and the man who wasn't my husband at my side, I found myself nearly dragged along in a retreat to my dressing room. The same one I'd had my hair and makeup done in back when I genuinely thought that today might go exactly according to plan.

"Thank you," I said softly as he closed the door behind us. "I...I guess I owe you one."

"You do," he agreed as he moved to the vanity. He dropped my heels onto it, placed the knife he'd taken from the shadow thing next to them, and tossed his jacket on the back of a chair. "You have no fucking idea."

"It would be easier to understand if I had some answers." I stood in the center of the room with my arms crossed over my ribs. "We're alone now, and I think I deserve an explanation. You can start talking any time."

"Well..." He turned to me and shrugged. "I'm not Simon Roth."

"Yeah, no shit." I'd known that the second I had kissed him.

I'd never kissed Simon, but sometimes, these were things you could tell just by looking at a man.

However Simon Roth kissed, it was certainly *nothing* like *that*.

"So, who *are* you, then?"

"Don't you recognize me?" He leaned back against the vanity and held out his arms, palms up. His Simon disguise fell away in an instant. Once again, I was standing in front of a dark-haired, ridiculously handsome, incredibly dangerous-looking man with intense, gray eyes. "This is far from the first time we've met."

“I meet a lot of people in my line of work.” That was true. Being the heiress to a banking empire didn’t exactly leave much room in my social calendar. “Though, I strongly suspect I wouldn’t forget a face like yours.”

“You like my face, do you?” He cocked his head to the side and stroked his jawline. He was still bristling with post-fight anger, but it was already beginning to fade.

Bastard. He knew *exactly* how good he looked—and when he was being all dark and dashing and cocky like this, he looked even better.

“Depends,” I said. “Is that even your real one, or just another disguise?”

“Oh, Bea. I’m all real.” He pushed off the vanity and drew himself up to his full height. He must have been at least six-three. Maybe taller. Tall enough, he was always looking down at me and I was always left looking up. “You can touch me to make sure, if you like.”

“What I’d like is answers.” Touching him was tempting, but it would only distract me, and I knew it. “You can start with your name.”

“That’s easy enough. They call me Apollyon. Destroyer. Emperor of the Abyss. King of Hell...” He took a few steps forward as he spoke. “Which do you prefer?”

“Which one is real?” He’d asked the shadow for its name. The fact that the shadow hadn’t wanted to give it to him told me something: there was probably power in the things people were called.

“They’re all real, darling,” he assured me. “But I usually go by Abaddon. Don, if you like.”

“Don.” If I ignored the rest of the stuff he’d just said, I could accept *Don* as normal enough. “And where did we first meet, *Don*? Like I said, I highly doubt I would have forgotten you.”

“I do have a way of making an impression on people,” he agreed. “But if I told you, you wouldn’t believe me.”

“Try me.” After the business with that shadow, he might be surprised with how much I could believe now.

“I’d love to,” he purred in a tone that made my clit throb. “But I’m afraid that will have to wait until later. You don’t remember me for a reason, Bea. Unfortunately, the memory of our first meeting was taken from you. Along with so many others. A shame, really. Some of them were particularly...” He rolled his lower lip beneath his tongue as his eyes raked up and down my body. “Inspiring.”

My breath caught in my throat. He was only a few feet away from me

now.

Any closer, and I was going to be able to imagine *exactly* how inspiring a man who looked like him could really be.

“And why did I lose my memories?” I asked.

“To keep you safe, of course. Some of them contained things that you were better off not recalling.” He reached for my arm and trailed his fingertips down my bicep. The look in his eyes was almost wistful. “Particularly the ones involving me.”

“Is that why we were attacked? Because you’re dangerous for me?” I kept my gaze as steely as I could.

It was difficult, with the way Don was looking down at me. There was something in his eyes that made it far too easy to imagine what kind of moments I might have forgotten.

“Some dangers are more pressing than others.” His eyes met mine. “I may be dangerous for you, Bea, but you saw the shade I just killed. What do you think would have happened if I hadn’t been there to stop it?”

“A shade,” I whispered, glancing at the knife on the vanity. “Is that what that was?”

“It was an assassin, yes. A thing forged from darkness in the shape of the demon that controlled it.”

There was that word again. *Demon*.

“Is that what you are, then? A demon?”

“Of course I am,” he said, like that was a completely sane thing to say to a woman. “What else would I be?”

I couldn’t help it. I laughed.

“*Demons*,” I repeated. “That’s ridiculous.”

It wasn’t.

Given everything else I’d just witnessed, it made about as much sense as anything else did right now.

“I told you that you wouldn’t believe me,” Don reminded me. “But whether you like it or not, it’s true. I’m a demon. I was born in the pits of Hell and now, along with two others, I rule there as king.”

“You’re the Devil, then,” I said, blinking. I hadn’t ever been that good of a Catholic, but I at least knew a thing or two about who was who. “Satan—Lucifer. He’s the king of Hell.”

“He was. Not anymore.”

“All right then, *Don*—if that *is* your real name—”

“Real as everything else.”

I brought my eyes up to his again. “Why do *demons* want to kill me, then? I’ve seen *The Exorcist*, you know. *Paranormal Activity*—all six of them. Killing random humans isn’t really the MO of you demonic types. Aren’t you supposed to try and possess me instead?”

“Haven’t you been paying attention? I already possess you. You married me. I own you now. Mind, body...soul.” Don brushed my hair behind my ear and dragged his thumb across my cheek. “Though, we’re going to have to work on your obedience. I’m not surprised, of course—you were always exceptionally strong-willed—but still.”

I drew in a breath.

I didn’t like the idea of obeying men at all. Normally, at least.

But Don was something else.

Looking the way he did...

He might be exactly the kind of man I’d like to obey.

“You only answered one of my questions,” I pointed out. “Why does a demon want me dead?”

“Humans have communed with demons for as long as man has walked the Earth.” Don’s gaze dropped to the swells of my breasts for a moment. “Woman, too, for that matter. Scholars, writers, poets...” His eyes trailed back up my neck until he was staring into my irises again. “And especially bankers. Money is the root of all evil, you know.”

“That’s not an answer, Don.”

“It’s part of one.” His gaze turned serious. “Simon. He’s responsible.”

“My fiancé Simon?”

“Your *ex-fiancé*, yes. I overheard him in the garden earlier making a deal with something from Hell. He asked it to kill you, and it agreed.”

“And you’re sure it was actually...*him*?” I’d always known Simon was kind of a prick but until just now, I’d been operating under the assumption that we were...maybe not *friends*, but something close. I certainly hadn’t anticipated that he’d want to take a hit out on me. Frankly, I was a little surprised that he’d had the balls to even consider it. “But... Why?”

“Something about not being able to control you, I think he mentioned.” Don shrugged. “But it could just as easily be a money thing. Most deals with demons are.”

Money. Control. Those *were* things that Simon had always been interested in.

The realization that it had nearly cost me my life hit me like a softball to the chest.

“So...you overheard a stranger making a deal with a demon to kill someone and you...what? Decided to start wearing his skin for the hell of it?”

“No,” Don said firmly. “I overheard an ungrateful little shit making a deal with a demon to kill *you* and I decided that I couldn’t let that happen. Putting a glamor on to make me look like Simon was just the easiest way to keep you safe.”

“By tricking me into marrying you?” I wasn’t sure how that kept me *safe*, exactly—though, even with barely knowing Don, I knew that I definitely preferred being his wife over being Simon’s.

Even if Simon hadn’t been trying to kill me, I suspected that might still be the case.

“Marrying you was the quickest way to bind you to me,” Don explained. “The bond between a husband and a wife isn’t easily broken. All the better to keep you safe.”

“I see.” I guessed that made sense, and after having a demonic knife thrown at my head, I didn’t *hate* the idea of Don keeping me safe. “And when you’re not masquerading around in a human suit...is this your real form? Or are you more like...” I bit my lip, recalling Don’s black eyes and black horns. “Like you were after you got done killing that thing.”

“A bit of both,” Don admitted. “Why? Did it scare you, seeing me like that?”

“A little.” It had been the strangest mix of terrifying and, well... kind of hot. “But I’m also...interested, I guess.”

“Interested?” Don arched an eyebrow. “Would you like to see more?”

I held my breath for a moment, then nodded.

“Yes,” I said. “I think I might.”

“Promise you won’t panic?” Don asked. “I can show you, but sometimes these things are difficult for humans to comprehend. What you saw earlier was only a small taste.”

“Anything you show me, I can handle.” I’d already seen his black eyes and horns. What was the worst he could do next? Sprout hooves? Spin his head around and spit pea soup? Run around with a pitchfork and start poking sinners in the butt with it? “I’m not exactly the swooning type.”

His lips shifted into a crooked smile. “That’s true. You never were.”

He glanced down, and I followed the line of his gaze.

He'd turned his hand over.

Sitting in his palm was a ball of bright, flickering flame.

I moved my fingers toward it but had to stop before I touched the fire. The air around it shimmered with a heat that intensified the closer I got to touching it. Definitely real.

"It's hellfire," he explained. "I can use it to hurt people who want to hurt you. Or, if I need, I can use it to speak with the other kings of Hell."

I blinked at the flames as he folded them back into his hand. Smoke rose up through his fingers as he made the fire disappear.

He was right. This *was* a little hard to comprehend.

"What else can you do?" I asked, curious.

Don laughed. "Greedy thing, aren't you?"

"Maybe I'm just trying to get a better sense of who my new husband really is."

There. I'd said it. Out loud, so Don could hear.

I'd said my vows to him. I'd kissed him at the altar. And in turn, he'd protected me. He'd saved my life.

Already, he felt more like my husband than Simon ever had.

At least Don didn't want me dead.

"All right," Don said. He took a step back and rolled his shoulders. He cracked his neck. "How's this?"

His body tensed. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw something dark and glossy rise from behind him.

I blinked, and suddenly, it wasn't just in the corner of my eye anymore.

Sleek black feathers. Broad, massive wings. His horns were back again, dark and even longer than they'd been the first time I saw them. Both curved up and tapered into dangerously sharp points.

Once again, his eyes were all black.

This was no trick. It couldn't be. There was no way.

Any part of me that had continued to doubt Don's story a moment ago was a true believer now.

My husband was a demon. I was the bride of a king of Hell.

What the fuck had I gotten myself into?

And why the fuck was I not more afraid?

"You're real." I took a step toward him, reaching out to brush my fingers against the feathers of his wings. "Aren't you?"

"You already know the answer to that, Bea." His wings flexed as I

touched them. The feathers were almost metallic to the touch and strangely cold compared to the heat radiating from Don's skin. "And if you like that—"

Don paused as a knock sounded at the door. A second later, the door began to open.

My heart jumped up in my throat as Don's wings folded back and vanished. He grabbed me quickly, wrapped me up in his arms, and placed a passionate kiss on my lips. Against my mouth, I could feel him shifting back into his Simon disguise—and not a moment too soon, either.

"Um...Bea?" Ava's voice sounded from the doorway. She cleared her throat uncomfortably at the sight of me in Simon's arms. Behind her, Joan's brow was fixed in a glare at Simon—no. *Don*.

"We thought you might need a quick touch-up before you and the *hubby* do your big entrance at the reception." Joan said. Her voice was ice cold and sharp as a butcher's knife. "He's not bothering you, is he?"

"No," I said quickly, pushing Don away. "We're fine. Totally fine. A touch-up would be great."

"I'll go." Don tucked his hands into his pockets and gave me a wink as he moved toward the door. He nodded at Ava and Joan as he passed them. "Good seeing you ladies again."

"Again?" Ava whispered as he left. "I think I've maybe met Simon twice in my entire life..."

"Uh. Yeah. About that." I let out a breath. "I've got something to tell you two."

"Yeah?" Joan arched an eyebrow and headed to the vanity. "Well, seeing as we walked in on you two smooching—which I *know* you're not into... Start talking. We're all ears."

DON

I summoned hellfire in my hand again as I left Bea to speak with her friends.

Maybe she'd tell them about me.

Maybe, she didn't dare.

Either way, I didn't begrudge her a moment with Joan and Ava. They didn't know it yet, but they were both just as tied up in the affairs of Heaven and Hell as she was.

Their memories had been taken too.

Besides—I had my own friends that I had to speak with now.

“Malacoda,” I whispered into the fire in my palm. “Moloch. I need you on Earth. Come find me. Something's wrong.”

I wandered out to the terrace. Below it, the wedding guests were still having cocktails on the lawn.

Mal and Lock didn't keep me waiting there for long.

“That you, Abaddon?” The scent of gunpowder, black coffee, and crackling firewood wafted around me as Mal swaggered up to my side. “Hardly recognize you in that get-up.”

“That's a fancy human suit ye've got there, lad.” Lock clapped me on the shoulder as he appeared on my other side. His presence added the scent of whiskey and heather to the mix. “What's the occasion?”

“Just got married.” I held up my hand so they could both see the ring on my finger.

“Shit!” Mal swore. “Seriously?”

“And ye didn't even think tae invite us?” Lock scoffed. “Bit rude, eh?”

“It was a spur-of-the-moment decision,” I admitted. “No time to send out Save the Dates.”

“So, who’s the lucky little lady?” Mal asked.

“That’s what I’m wondering.” Lock squinted as he surveyed the crowd below. “I thought we all agreed with the angels that we weren’t going to rollin’ about with human lassies anymore. Unless you’ve heard otherwise from Heaven?”

“It’s not Heaven I’m worried about right now,” I said with a sigh. “It’s Hell.”

“Aye, well. We’re kings of Hell now, are we not?” Lock pointed out. “If there’s trouble brewin’ in our domain, ye’d think Mal and I might’ve heard of it by now.”

“I’m not so sure anymore.” I shook my head. “This is Bea’s wedding. Or, it was supposed to be. I guess it still is. Just, I made the executive decision to take the place of her groom.”

“Don...” Mal growled in warning. “That’s a dangerous game to be playin’ and you know it.”

“Ye wee little shite.” Lock smacked the back of my head. “Did ye not *hear* the angels when we cut that deal? No more humans wrapped up in our affairs. Ye were there yerself when they took the lass’s memories away, fuck’s sake!”

I gave them both a glare. “Do you really think I would have done it if I didn’t have to? She’s in danger. I had no choice.”

“You fuckin’ bet she’s in danger.” Mal returned my glare with one of his own. “You put her there the second you went and married the poor gal, ya bastard!”

“No. I married her *because* she’s in danger.” Quickly, I explained what I’d heard in the rose garden before I’d made my decision to step into Bea’s husband’s shoes. The voice of a demon in the rose garden. The conversation he’d had with Simon. The plot they were hatching to get rid of her. For good. “They wanted to kill her. I couldn’t let that happen.”

“And you’re sure?” Mal asked. “This Simon fella has some kind of demonic ties to him?”

“I’m certain. Without a doubt.” That other voice I’d heard had been familiar. I just didn’t know why yet. “Simon didn’t like that he wouldn’t be able to control her. He made a pact with something dark and hellish to ensure that she’d be out of the picture. Permanently. Already, I had to kill a shade

that attacked her. If you don't believe me, I'll go fetch the knife I took off of it."

"Fuck," Lock swore. "Well...I can see why ye felt the need to step in then, aye. What'd you do with her beau, though?"

"You got him hog-tied around here somewhere?" Mal craned his neck like he was looking for someone bound and gagged in the crowd.

"I laid him out, opened up the Abyss, and pushed him in," I said simply. It had hardly been the most elegant of choices, but in the moment, it was the best I'd been able to manage. "It's not a good idea to let him wander around there on his own for long, though. Whatever demon Simon was conspiring with, he implied that Simon's father might not be quite as human as he appears as well."

"Right." Mal nodded. "We'll want to take care of that, then."

"And quick-like, aye." Lock patted me on the back. "Open your realm up for us, then. We'll slip in, track him down, push him in the Pit. That should hold him, don't ye think?"

"That'll do," I agreed. "I'd appreciate it."

"Then I suppose we'll want to go questioning him," Lock continued. "Figure out who he's working with—and who this father of his really is."

"I'd appreciate that, too." I gave Lock and Mal each a tense smile. "But the interrogation will have to wait, if you don't mind."

Mal snorted. "S'pose so. Looks like you've got hands full here now."

"Ye'll look after the lasses while we're gone?" Lock asked. There was a glint of urgency in his eyes. I knew exactly why.

Once upon a time before her memory was taken, Bea's friend Joan had stolen Lock's heart like a thief in the night. Mal and Ava had been madly in love as well.

Three human women. Three kings of Hell.

Three relationships that were supposed to have ended to ensure that the world stayed in balance.

And the moment that I'd decided to make Bea my bride, I'd gone and ruined it all.

I hadn't had any other choice.

"I'll look after them," I promised. "We'll deal with Simon tomorrow and get a better idea of what we're facing here." I straightened the lapels of my tux and forced my lips into a confident smirk. "Until then...looks like I have a wedding reception to attend."

And a beautiful bride to attend it with, too.

BEA

“Okay, *what the fuck was that?*” Joan perched on the counter of the vanity and cut right to the chase. “Because what it looked like was you making out with *Simon*—which I know good and well you’d never do.”

“Not if you were in your right mind, anyway,” Ava added with a wince. She touched the back of her hand to my forehead. “Are you feeling okay, Bea? Are you like...drunk, or something?”

“I’m not drunk,” I promised her. “And I’m feeling...okay. I guess. I think.”

“After the way you kissed Simon? Obviously, you’re not.” Joan crossed her arms and gave me a maverick’s stare. “Who are you and what have you done with our Bea?”

“I’m not the one you should be asking that.” I sighed. How the hell was I going to explain this to them? Every option sounded crazier than the last—which meant I was just going to have to settle for the truth. “The man that I just married... That wasn’t Simon.”

“Does he have a less dickish twin brother that we didn’t know about?” Ava asked. “A clone, maybe?”

“It sure looked like him,” Joan agreed.

“Not a twin. And not a clone.” I sighed again. “He says he’s a demon.”

“Simon? A *demon*?” Ava’s eyes went wide as she blinked several times.

“I’d buy it,” Joan scoffed. “I *did* see him make a pass at a cocktail waitress during the rehearsal dinner last night, you know. But that doesn’t explain why you were making out with him just now.”

“No—that was Simon hitting on the waitress,” I said with a sigh. “But from the moment I walked down the aisle onward... He hasn’t been Simon at all. He’s a demon, and I don’t mean that metaphorically.”

Ava and Joan stared at me for a long moment without saying anything.

They thought I’d lost my mind.

I wasn’t entirely sure that they were wrong.

But instead of calling me crazy—which I was pretty sure they had every right to—they just looked at each other and shrugged.

“Okay. So he’s a demon, then.” Ava was the first to speak. Her brow furrowed with focused seriousness. “To interfere with a wedding like this, he must be a pretty powerful one. Usually they steer clear of those.”

“Usually?” I blinked. “What do you mean, *usually*?”

“She means they don’t like hanging out in places full of ringing church bells and happy tears and declarations of love,” Joan explained. “But then again, I guess you and Simon were never really—”

“How do you two know so much about *demons*? You’re both taking this...surprisingly well,” I pointed out. Better than they’d taken the sight of me making out with a man they thought was Simon, at any rate.

“My mom’s told me about them, mostly,” said Ava. “You know how she is—all crystals and horoscopes and moon phases. She knows all sorts of stuff about this kind of thing.”

“Uh-huh.” Slowly, I nodded. I guessed Ava did have a point. Just looking at Ava’s mom, you’d never be able to tell she was into all of that witchy nonsense. But every time I’d visited Ava back in college, I hadn’t managed to escape without having my palm looked at and my tea leaves read. It checked out. But historically speaking, Joan was always a little more of a skeptic. Or she had been, once upon a time. I turned my gaze to her. “And you?”

“I watch a lot of horror movies. Read a lot of spooky books.” Joan lifted a shoulder lazily. “As for trusting you... Call it gut instinct, I guess.” She rubbed the back of her neck and sighed. “It sounds...plausible, somehow. Don’t ask me why. Like something out of a dream that I forgot the plot of as soon as I woke up.”

“What does he want with you, though?” Ava asked, looking worried again. “To hurt you, do you think?”

“I think he wants to protect me, actually.” I pursed my lips. “A shadow-thing attacked me just a little bit ago. He killed it. He can make fire appear in his hand. He showed me his wings. And when I walked down the aisle—

when he kissed me... he didn't look like Simon at all. He looked like..." I fanned myself with my hand, suddenly feeling incredibly warm. "Like if Don Draper from *Mad Men* and Gerard Butler had a lovechild."

"Weird," said Ava. She wasn't wrong.

"Hot," said Joan. She wasn't wrong either. Not even a little bit. "But... okay. Let me play devil's advocate for just one sec. Are you sure that Simon didn't just...drug you, or something? Slip something in your champagne so maybe you wouldn't realize what a horrible husband he'd be and pull a *Runaway Bride* before he could tie you to him for life? I'm okay with you macking on a demon, Bea, but if this is just some kind of trick Simon is playing on you—"

"I don't feel like I've been drugged." I imagined if I did, all of this would make a lot more sense. But the fact of the matter was...

I'd seen things today that defied all normal logic and reason.

All of this felt incredibly real.

"If he's not Simon, who *is* he, then?" Ava furrowed her brow. "Did you get his name? In those demon possession movies, the priest always tries to get the demon's name."

"I've always wanted to try my hand at an exorcism." Joan stroked her chin. "You think he'd let you tie him to a bed while I go rustle up some holy water and a crucifix?"

"We're *not* exorcising him," I told Joan sternly. "He says his name is Abaddon. Don, for short. He says we've, ah...met. Before. But my memories were taken. Or something." I started pacing. "I don't know. I'm still trying to wrap my head around it all myself, truth be told."

"Then you *know* how suspicious that sounds," Joan pointed out. "*Hey, Bea, I'm a magical demon hottie! Don't worry about the way I'm wearing your husband's skin—you know me! You just don't remember, because, like, amnesia and shit!*"

"It is kind of suspicious," Ava agreed. "Demons work in lies, Bea. That's kind of their entire thing, you know? Simon might not be tricking you, but this...this *entity* might be."

I cringed. "Are you going to call me crazy if I tell you that I...kind of trust him?"

I did. I knew it was insane, but there was something between Don and me that I couldn't quite put my finger on. Every time I tried to grab hold of it, it slipped away through my fingers. Like trying to snatch a stream of water or

make a rope out of sand.

I felt it every time he touched me and every time we kissed.

“Oh, honey.” Joan shook her head. “You’ve got it bad, don’t you?”

“If he’s as hot as you say he is...” Ava shrugged. “We’d call you crazy for wanting to bang Simon. Not some infernal hot guy. Simon’s not bad looking, of course, but if this demon guy is some kind of succubus sex god...”

“We haven’t fucked,” I promised them. “I’m not *that* stupid.”

“You mean you haven’t fucked *yet*,” Joan corrected me.

A blush was rising to my cheeks.

They had a point. They knew me well.

Being essentially engaged to a man I didn’t want to marry from the time I was born hadn’t exactly led me to make the most...*intelligent* decisions about boyfriends in the past.

But at least when I made bad decisions, they always looked good at the time.

“He says I’m in danger. More demon shit,” I explained. “He says that Simon’s responsible. That Simon made a deal with something from Hell, and now...I’ve essentially got some kind of satanic price on my head.”

“And where *is* Simon?” Joan asked.

I blinked. “Um...”

Ava snorted. “Bea! You didn’t even ask, did you?”

“I tried!” I threw my arms out in frustration. “I’m kind of dealing with a lot right now, thanks.”

Which was true. But just as true was the fact that, all things considered...

Simon had always been kind of an asshole.

If he’d made some kind of deal with the Devil that put me in danger... was I really supposed to care?

“Look, we get it. This *is* a lot.” Joan grabbed my lipstick from the vanity and brought it over to me. She held my face steady with one hand while she applied it to my lips with the other. “If even part of what this Don creature has told you is true, then you’re right not to worry about that weird little fucker you were supposed to call a husband.”

“But if it’s a lie...” Ava hugged herself as her voice trailed off. Her eyes were full of concern.

“Something weird is definitely going on,” Joan said as she capped my lipstick again. “But until we find out what that is... We just don’t want you to

get hurt, Bea.”

“I don’t want me to get hurt either.” I pressed my lips together to help set the lipstick and resisted the urge to run my tongue between them. I was nervous. Maybe even afraid. With Don around, it had been hard to tell exactly *what* I felt. “Or the two of you, for that matter. I don’t know what other evil shit might be lurking around this wedding now.”

“We’ll be fine.” Joan’s eyes glinted with promise. “I don’t remember if you recall, but I *do* know three different martial arts. If any demons crashing your reception tonight try to fuck with us, I’ll kick their asses straight back to hell. This so-called husband of yours included, if he doesn’t stay in line.”

“If he isn’t Simon, are you actually even married to him at all?” Ava asked.

I considered it for a moment.

She had a good point, but in my heart, I already knew my answer.

He was.

“I *feel* married to him. If that makes sense,” I said after a long pause. “It feels... like fate, or something.”

“That’s sweet, darling,” Don said from the doorway. He looked like Simon again. From his blond hair to his blue eyes to his broad-but-could-be-broader chest. But even though he looked like Simon, his words and his attitude and the suave way he leaned against the doorframe—those were undeniably all Don. “I feel exactly the same way.”

“Well. Speak of the devil,” Joan quipped. Her eyes narrowed as she looked Don over. “What fiendish things are you up to, I wonder?”

“*Joan*,” Ava hissed, but Don seemed more amused than angered by Joan’s words.

“Just thought it might be time for me and my blushing bride to make our grand entrance to the reception,” Don said. “If she’s ready, that is.”

“Do you want us to stay with you?” Ava asked me quietly.

“Maybe we should work this guy over for some information first,” Joan suggested, cracking her knuckles. “Find out what’s really going on here.”

“I’m fine,” I promised them. “I’ll see you on the dance floor. Okay?”

Joan and Ava both hugged me before they left. As Joan headed past Don, she gave him a look of blatant dislike. Ava glanced up at him in suspicion, but quickly turned away.

As for me...

I went and got my shoes.

Don was right.

If we were going to keep up this charade, we'd need to go face the guests eventually.

Part of me still wondered why I was even keeping it up at all.

"Wait," Don said as I moved to slip my feet back into my heels.

"Why?" I knitted my brow together. "I can't exactly go back downstairs barefoot."

"No, you can't." Don crossed toward me and took the shoes from my hands. "But I can at least make them more comfortable for you before we go."

I gasped as flame appeared beneath his palm again.

"Don! You can't just set my fucking shoes on fire! Those are vintage! They're *priceless!*" I dove for the heels in desperation—how the fuck was immolating my shoes going to make them more comfortable?—but Don pulled them up out of my reach.

"I'm not setting them on fire." He ran the flame in his palm over the pair of heels quickly. To my relief, they didn't go up in smoke. "Demons invented high heels, you know. Making them wearable is the least I can do to atone for it. Besides..." He smiled down at me as he handed the heels back over. "You've got pretty feet. It would be a shame to leave them aching all night."

I swallowed hard as I placed the heels back on the floor.

Right. *That* was why I hadn't called security on Don.

It wasn't the ache in my feet that I was worried about.

Every time he looked at me—every time he was even in the same *room* as me—there was a much more present ache in my body. It was settled right between my thighs, and it was almost impossible to ignore.

I might have still been in some kind of demonic danger, too. It still sounded crazy, and I knew it...

But I couldn't rule it out. Not entirely.

Not now that I'd seen fire appear in Don's hands and wings spring from his back.

When I slipped my feet back into the heels, it made his story even more convincing.

Just like he'd promised—they were actually comfortable now.

If that wasn't proof of some kind of magic going on here, I didn't know what was.

But I needed more than proof. I needed answers. Real ones.

And to get those, I needed more time with Don.
Preferably, alone.

“Are you ready, my bride?” Don offered me his arm and a charming, lopsided smile.

I took a deep breath, then took his arm in my hand.

“I guess I don’t have much of a choice.”

BEA

We walked into the reception hall like we owned the place.
I guessed, technically, we kind of did.

Only—that wasn't true. The wedding was being held on my parents' estate, yes. And when my parents died—hopefully a very long time from now—Simon and I were supposed to inherit it. Just like we would inherit all of Simon's father's property when he passed on as well. We'd been the joint benefactors of our parents' wills since birth. Not just me. Not just him. Simon and me, together.

Except that I hadn't married Simon today.

Even if it looked like I had.

“How does it feel?” Don purred down into my ear. He folded his hand over my fingers, which were curled around his arm. His smile was dangerously contagious.

But my smile was as fake as the disguise Don wore.

“Like we're lying through our teeth,” I said through my forced grin and my straight, white teeth. “Every moment that passes, I hate more than the last.”

The string quartet in the garden was playing Clarke's “Trumpet Voluntary.” With the flowers and sparkling wine glasses and soft glow of the candlelight, it felt like we were royalty greeting our subjects for the first time.

This was also almost true.

I was the future queen of the Leviathan Financial empire.

And if Don was to be believed—I certainly bought it, even if Ava and Joan were still on the fence—he was a king of Hell.

Given some of Leviathan's current corporate practices, those two things seemed like they could have a lot of overlap at times.

Some demons, like Don, could summon fire from their hands and wore hidden wings on their backs.

Some, like my father and Levi Roth, my new would-be father-in-law, controlled unfathomable amounts of money and dressed in Armani suits.

"Let me know when you hit rock bottom on hating things, then." Don patted my hand, then raised his palm in a brief wave of acknowledgment to our applauding guests.

"What? So you can break through bedrock and drag me back to Hell with you?" I waved to everyone as well. Like a beauty queen with a bomb hidden in her crown.

"Just thought it might be a nice place to consummate our marriage," Don said through his own smile. "When I make our bed rock later tonight, I'd like it to be on solid ground."

"If you wanted solid ground between us, you probably shouldn't have tricked me into marrying you in the first place." I chose to ignore the comment about consummating our marriage.

Was Don charming, clever, and smoking hot? Sure. If he was even half as good at sex as he was at kissing, he was probably a great lay, too. I'd give him that.

But there was a difference between being in business with devils and rolling into bed with one.

That's what I was telling myself, anyway.

It helped me keep my mind off of how badly I wanted to do exactly that: get Don into bed and never leave it again.

"The foundations of our union might be shaky, Bea. But I don't think your trust in me is," Don said with a dark chuckle. His breath was humid against my ear as he dipped down to whisper in it. "Just imagine the other parts of you that I could make tremble. Knees, lips..."

"Don," I growled at him in warning.

"And I can assure you, darling—" He winked down at me. "—as soon as I get you alone, I think you'll discover at least one thing between us that's *very* firm."

I swallowed hard as the thought of Don's cock crossed my mind.

I focused my eyes straight ahead and said nothing in return.

By the time we reached the head table, my pussy was throbbing again.

Don might have been a demonic scoundrel, but he certainly had a way with words.

Our table was perched up on a pedestal. On top of a white linen tablecloth lit by flickering candlelight, there were dinner settings laid out for two.

As we stepped up onto it, Don grabbed my hand. He raised it to his mouth before I could pull it away.

Don's lips seared against my knuckles in a triumphant kiss. When he broke it, he hoisted my hand into the air to the roaring approval and applause of the crowd.

A blush rose to my cheeks immediately. I stared up at him in a sort of awe.

"What?" he asked, smirking down at me. "Something wrong?"

"You're showboating, Don."

"Maybe. But it's hardly a sin for a man to show off his new bride."

"Pride isn't a sin anymore?" I arched an eyebrow at him. *God*, he was good-looking. It was almost unfair. "I hadn't heard."

"There are more interesting sins I think you and I should be considering right now." Don pulled my chair out for me and I slipped into it. His hands curled around my shoulders as he dipped down to whisper into my ear again. "And of all the sins I'm guilty of tonight, pride is the least of them."

A word, unspoken, rose up in my mind like the bubbles of the champagne a waiter poured into our glasses.

Don was right. He really could make my knees shake. I drew in a long, slow breath to try to steady them while he slipped into the chair at my side.

"I know I'm yours now." I whispered to him once the waiter was gone. "But certain other concerned parties aren't going to agree. Like Simon's father, for instance. And mine. How long do you expect you'll actually be able to keep this up for?"

"I can usually keep it up for several hours, if you think you can handle that." Don placed my glass of champagne in my hand and clinked his glass against it.

"You may have married me, but you aren't Simon," I reminded him. I tried not to imagine what a few hours in bed with Don might be like—and failed. "What's your plan, exactly? You'll spend the rest of our lives disguised as him?"

"Would you rather I changed back to my true form?"

I nearly choked on my champagne. I'd taken a sip at *exactly* the wrong

time.

“No,” I sputtered. I had to clear my throat to compose myself. “I don’t think that’s a good idea at all.”

It was hard enough to control myself around Don when he was sitting here looking like the man who’d put a hit out on me.

If Don decided to regain his actual looks, I was pretty sure that any sense of control I had left in me was going right out the door—and straight into bed.

“Oh, Bea.” Don shook his head slowly, staring deeply into my eyes. Every time he looked at me like that, it felt like he was looking right into my soul. “You’re not going to be able to deny me forever, you know. Face it—we both know there’s not a single part of you right now that would prefer to have Simon here instead of me. You were made for me. Only me. Surely you can feel it too.”

I scowled at him.

I didn’t want to admit it, but he was right.

If Simon had been here, he would have been complaining about being forced to wear a tux and making fun of my Great-aunt Gertrude’s skin-tight leopard print gown by now.

Don, on the other hand, smiled as Gerty waved at us over the crowd.

“She looks stunning in that dress, don’t you think?” Don raised his hand to give a small wave back to her. “It suits her. Whoever she is.”

“That’s my Great-Aunt Gertrude.” I paused for a second, wondering why I was telling Don any of this at all. “But she’s pushing eighty. You don’t think it’s a little...*gauche* on a woman of her age?”

“I think it’s fantastic,” Don said genuinely. “Don’t you?”

I couldn’t help but smile. Just a little bit. Genuinely as well. “I do, actually. She’s always been a free spirit like that. I used to spend summers at her villa in Italy when I was a little girl, you know. She taught me how to put on lipstick and gave me my first sip of wine.”

Those summers in Italy were some of my favorite memories as a child, in fact. I’d eaten my weight in pasta, fallen asleep reading books in vineyards, and been blissfully free of playdates with Simon for months at a time.

“She taught you well.” Don cupped my cheek to turn my face toward him. His thumb lingered around the edges of my lower lip, tracing its shape. “Promise me something?”

“It depends,” I told him. “What do you want?”

“When we’re that age, promise you’ll still wear things that tight. And that low-cut, for that matter.”

“You’re assuming that I’m going to let you live to see morning, given the mess you’ve made of tonight,” I warned him.

But Don only laughed.

He knew exactly what an empty threat that was.

“If you want to kill me, darling, you’re more than welcome to try. But do me a favor and wait until after dinner, will you?” Don nodded to the waiter who was coming toward us with two plates of filet mignon. His gaze didn’t leave me for long, though. When his eyes met mine again, they were gorgeously gray again. Don’s eyes, not Simon’s. “I’m *starving*.”

With that look in his eyes, I suspected he wasn’t talking about the steak at all.

We got through dinner without any issues—except that I couldn’t talk to him at all without him saying something that made my breath catch in my chest and my cunt ache. Every question I asked, he turned into yet another innuendo.

I supposed if Don was really a demon, it shouldn’t have surprised me that he was a horny devil on top of it.

But by the time the wedding band took their places and called us down for our first dance, it was hard to say whether I was more turned on or annoyed.

“You’re going to have to talk to me about something other than sex eventually, you know,” I told him as we moved to the dance, floor, hand in hand.

“And I will in the morning,” he promised. “But for tonight—it wouldn’t hurt if you tried to enjoy yourself, you know.”

“Oh, darling.” I mimicked the same tone Don used when he purred those words at me. “Doesn’t it look like I’m trying?”

“I’m surprised you have to try, frankly.” Don placed a hand on my waist and pulled my body close to his. If he wanted me any closer, we’d have to take off our clothes. “After all—they’re playing our song.”

I closed my eyes and sighed. I didn’t know much about Don still, but if Don and I had a song, I highly doubted it would be anything by the Police. Specifically, “Every Breath You Take”—the song Simon had chosen for our first dance. Don’t get me wrong—I didn’t have anything against Sting. But those lyrics about how he’d always be watching me? More creepy than

romantic, if you asked me.

So, imagine my surprise when the band started playing Frank Sinatra instead.

“Is this... ‘Strangers in the Night’?” My eyes popped open in surprise. My body was already moving with Don’s in an elegant, effortless waltz. Every time Simon and I had practiced this dance, he’d stepped on my feet so many times I usually had to ice them after. But with Don, it was instinctual. Effortless. Like we already knew each other’s moves.

“It is,” Don admitted, holding me close. “Your favorite, isn’t it? I thought it suited us well.”

“It is my favorite. And it does suit us,” I said slowly in return. It was perfect, actually. And—apart from the fact that Don was a demon who’d replaced the man who was actually supposed to become my husband today—in so many ways, so was he. “But...how did you know?”

“Like I told you. I’ve known you for a long time. Quite well, truth be told.” The guests all gasped as Don swept me off my feet and spun me around like I weighed nothing at all. They must have been terrified. If it had been Simon pulling that move, I almost certainly would have ended up crashing down onto the floor. But instead, Don placed me back down with a gentle ease and a wicked smile. “Can’t you feel it? This isn’t the first time we’ve danced in each other’s arms.”

“I can,” I admitted in a whisper. I was getting lost in his eyes again. Ever since dinner, they still hadn’t changed back to blue. “It’s crazy, but...”

“Of course,” Don added as my words failed me. “The last time we did this, we had significantly fewer clothes on.”

I gulped as I stared up at him. I couldn’t help but imagine it.

Don’s strong, firm body in place of Simon’s. My breasts pressed against his chiseled chest. The thick muscles of his arms wrapped tight around me. His cock, rock hard, throbbing against my stomach and my cunt burning hot between my legs.

The same way it burned for him now.

This was wrong. All of it. I wasn’t dumb. I knew exactly how bad and weird all of this was.

My husband wasn’t my husband.

The man I’d married had come straight from Hell itself.

He was here to protect me from some kind of demonic forces that wanted me dead.

It was still all a little crazy to try to hold in my mind at once.

But the longer Don held me in his arms, the easier it was becoming.

Yes, this was wrong.

But the way our bodies moved together, in such perfect sync, in such exquisite, sensual harmony...

It felt *right*.

That worried me. It scared me too.

But whether I liked it or not...

It excited me even more.

DON

By the time our song came to an end, I nearly had her eating out of the palm of my hand.

And as we fed each other pieces of wedding cake, I supposed she really was.

“Don’t mess up my lipstick,” Bea warned me. She opened her mouth slowly and sensually. It was enough to make my cock ache. Her brown eyes glimmered wickedly when they met mine.

“No?” I teased her with the piece of cake between my fingers, relishing the way she leaned toward me every time I moved it near. “Maybe I’d like to see your makeup smeared across that pretty face of yours.”

“Don’t even think about it, *darling*.” She grinned, nipping at the air in a flash of lovely white teeth as I pulled the cake away again. “If you do, I’ll make you pay for it. Dearly.”

“Is that so?” I liked the sound of that. “Tempting. Name your price.”

Bea’s eyes narrowed for a moment, then she laughed. “I doubt you can afford it.”

I slipped the bite of cake between her lips, behaving myself. For a moment, at least.

But I was sure to run my fingers slowly against her soft, wet tongue as I pulled them away.

“You’d be surprised what I can afford, *darling*,” I said back to her in a dark hush.

After all—a man could only be trusted to behave so much.

A woman, too, for that matter.

My cock stiffened in an instant as Bea's lips wrapped around my fingertips. My pants were suddenly far too tight as she sucked my fingers clean.

Fuck. For once, the crowd around us was dead silent. It was all too easy to imagine that they weren't there at all.

Easy to imagine taking Bea by the shoulders, pushing her down into that beautiful, expensive wedding cake we were eating from, flipping her skirts up and taking her then and there, too.

It was her turn to feed me, now.

But I could think of at least one thing I'd much rather be eating. Bea's cunt would be a far better thing to have on my tongue than wedding cake—though, as I recalled, it was just as sweet.

“That was dangerous of you, you know.” Now, it was my time to give the warnings. Already, I was salivating. “I won't be quick to forget that.”

In that moment, to have her lips wrapped around my cock instead, I would have paid any price she named.

“Let me help you take your mind off of it, then.” Bea's nose wrinkled adorably as she snatched up her own piece of cake—and immediately mashed it against my lips.

After that, I couldn't really help myself—and she could hardly blame me.

I grabbed her waist and pulled her slender body against mine like a man starved. If she wanted to play dirty, she was welcome to it.

But as my lips crushed against hers, cake smearing between our mouths and tongues alike, I was more than happy to play dirty right back.

Frankly, she was too fucking cute not to kiss.

I half-expected her to slap me for it. After all, she'd made it very clear that she was hating every moment of our little charade.

But as her lips moved against mine, kissing me back, I couldn't help but wonder if they told a truth that her words had lacked.

She reached up to run her cake-covered fingers through my hair. Her hips moved against mine, firmly enough that I knew she couldn't miss how hard for her I was.

She kissed me like she'd never forgotten me at all. Kissed me passionately enough, I was beginning to question whether this was just a continuation of her act to appease the guests...or if she was starting to get as lost in this as I was.

When our lips finally parted, a single glance at the guests solved that

riddle for me quickly enough.

I knew how little Bea and Simon had cared for each other during their forced lifelong courtship. The one time that he'd ever tried to kiss her, she'd made sure that he would never try anything like that again. She'd told me so herself.

Bea's wedding guests were apparently just as aware of this reality. They'd expected to show up to see a bride and groom uniting in name and name alone—not making out over wedding cake.

They all looked stunned.

When Bea caught their wide-eyed gazes, after a moment, so did she.

At that point, I didn't think either of us could pretend that she was putting on an act anymore. The realization made me grin.

That kiss had been all for me.

I grabbed a napkin from the table and drew her away from the crowd to wipe the cake from her lips. She stared at me in wonder as I did it.

It was only when I finished that her brows furrowed together in anger again.

“You shouldn't have done that,” she hissed up at me. “What do you think you're playing at?”

“Being your husband, I suppose.” I folded the napkin and turned it over to wipe my own mouth clean as well. When I pulled it away from my lips once more, my grin had turned into a smirk. “But I don't think either of us is playing anymore.”

“Oh, you're playing all right. With fire, I'll have you know.” She snatched the napkin back from me to wipe her fingers clean. “So don't be surprised when you wind up—” Bea's eyes focused on something behind me. “Dad?”

“Well, look at you two lovebirds.” An older man with a similar bone structure to Bea came up behind me and clapped me on the back. His dark hair was streaked with silver. His brown eyes were twinkling as he grinned at us both. “Seems like you're finally warming up to each other, aren't you?”

“Certainly took you long enough,” said the elegant brunette at the man's side. Bea's mother, I assumed. She looked exactly how I imagined Bea would in twenty years or so—though, I preferred Bea's brown eyes to her greens, truth be told. “We're relieved, of course, but...a little surprised. You should have warned us—we would have booked you one room on your honeymoon instead of two!”

“Well, I know how you love your surprises, Mom.” Bea’s lips shifted into a polite smile. Her tone suggested that her mother didn’t enjoy surprises at all.

“It’s just nice, Bea. That’s all we’re saying.” Bea’s father turned his grin toward me again. “It’s good to see the two of you finally getting along.”

“It’s not difficult.” My own grin was reserved only for Bea. She was the one who had put it on my lips, after all. “She’s a very easy woman to get along with.”

“I could make it harder for you, if you like.” Bea lips were still curled politely, but her eyes were full of threats when they met mine.

“I’m sure you could.” I dropped my gaze for half a second. Just to remind her that she’d been grinding her hips against my cock just a few moments ago. The way her smile had disappeared by the time I looked up again told me that she’d gotten the message loud and clear. I decided to make myself scarce before her parents caught on as well. “Champagne, anyone?”

I left them to catch up in my absence without waiting for an answer.

On our wedding day, I was hardly going to let my bride’s glass stay empty for long.

A waiter wasn’t hard to find at this reception. The entire garden was thick with them, tuxedos perfectly pressed and champagne or hors d’oeuvres on every tray.

But given the way Bea and I had just kissed...

If I wanted to keep my cock from busting through the zipper of these pants tonight, I was going to need something stiffer than champagne to take my mind off of my bride’s luscious lips.

I found the bar set up at the back of the garden. As I sat down and ordered an old fashioned, another man slipped onto the barstool next to mine.

“Enjoying yourself, son?”

I glanced over at him. He was tall with hair that was as much steely gray as it was black. His goatee was well-kempt, and his eyes were an icy blue.

“Isn’t it obvious?” I gave him a warm smile and tossed a twenty down for the bartender. “How about you, Dad?”

I hadn’t had much time between taking Simon’s form and stealing his wife, but with the time I’d had, I’d done my research.

This was Simon’s father I was talking to. Levi Roth, finance mogul.

If I kept this charade up, I supposed in a way he’d be my father as well. That notion almost made me laugh. Whoever my dad was, I’d certainly never

met him. Never cared to, either.

Sometimes, when it came to fathers, they were best left a mystery. Specifically, when they were of the demonic persuasion.

I didn't know how to expect Levi to react to my question, but the last thing I'd imagined was a look of surprise crossing his face.

"Interesting." As the bartender brought over my drink, Levi gestured to it, ordering one of the same. "You're putting on a good show, boy, but you can drop the act."

The act...?

I knew what he expected. A reaction. Any kind. Either I'd deny it outright, feign confusion, swear at him—something. Anything.

But I wouldn't give him that satisfaction.

If anything, I was impressed. There I was, a man sitting next to him looking like the spitting image of his son—and yet, he knew with a casual certainty that I wasn't Simon Roth at all.

All night, only Bea had been close enough to me to see me for who I really was. Even after witnessing that kiss over the cake, Bea's own parents had simply assumed that after so many years of chilly affections, Simon and Bea had finally started to fall in love.

But Levi Roth hadn't been fooled. It meant he was either very clever, or he truly knew his son.

Or...

"Where do I know you from, Levi?" I took a sip of my drink and kept my eyes on the bartender's hands. "I feel like you and I must have met somewhere before."

"That depends on who you are, I suppose." He tossed another twenty down on the bar, right next to mine. The bartender gave us both a nod of thanks as he gathered up his tips and served Levi his drink. "Let me guess—is it Malacoda? Moloch? Or...surely not Abaddon, is it?"

"Those are some big names to throw around so casually." I placed my drink back down and licked a stray drop of bourbon from my lips. "A man has to wonder where you might have gotten them from."

"Same place you did, I imagine." Levi turned his body toward me. "Look at me."

Slowly, I wheeled around on my barstool to face him as well.

"Hmm." Levi caught my gaze and studied my eyes with interest. After a long moment, his lips twitched in a facsimile of a smile. "Ah. There you are."

Abaddon. Nice glamor. It's been a while."

"Has it?"

He shrugged. "You tell me."

I searched his eyes as well. Behind his icy blues, there was definitely something there. Something vast and unyielding. A pale, intense fire.

He was right.

It *had* been a while.

"Leviathan." A laugh escaped my lips as everything clicked together for me. *Leviathan* Financial—all this time, he'd been hiding in plain sight. Before, I'd entertained the notion that Bea's family might have made a deal with him somewhere down the line, but I'd never suspected that the man who'd sired ineffectual, pathetic Simon could possibly be a threat. The apple couldn't have fallen farther from the tree if someone had chucked it across the garden. "Well. Fancy seeing you here."

Now that I knew who Simon's father really was, it all made more sense than I liked. The demon I'd heard speaking with Simon in the garden before I'd knocked him out and pushed him into the Abyss had mentioned that Simon had a powerful father.

And as far as powerful fathers went, Leviathan was certainly about as formidable as you could get.

"You'll give your mother my regards when you see her next, I take it?" Levi smirked. "Haven't seen her since the Fall."

"Don't suppose you would have," I agreed. "You never quite made it to Hell, did you?"

"Not once I realized that Lucifer had already claimed it for himself." Levi raised his glass to me. "Though, I hear its under new management these days. I suppose congratulations are in order. You're king of Hell now, aren't you?"

"One of them." I didn't bother raising my glass to him in return. Not until I knew what he wanted.

Leviathan had fallen from Heaven with Lucifer and the rest of the rebelling angels in the earliest days of Earth. My mother, Belial, had been among them as well. He'd been on here on Earth ever since, with all the powers of a fallen angel but none of the responsibilities of Hell.

I'd only met him a few times. Each of them had been marked by a major disaster for the humans shortly after. A financial panic in the year 33, after Roman bankers issued too many unsecured loans. The crisis of 692, when Emperor Justinian II refused to accept the gold coins as tribute from a

caliphate and had his nose cut off as a public act of torture as a result. The stock market crash of 1929.

Now that I knew it wasn't truly Levi Roth who controlled Leviathan Bank with Bea's father, but the fallen angel Leviathan himself, I had the distinct sensation that this evening might take a sharp turn for the worse.

It was a shame.

I'd only just started having fun.

"You don't need to worry, Abaddon," Levi said. Somehow, I doubted that. "The last thing I want from this evening is to ruin it. The wedding is going well, don't you think?"

I arched an eyebrow. "For me, sure. For your son, on the other hand—"

"I'm not concerned about him." Levi waved the mere mention of his son away with the back of his hand. "He was always a bit of a disappointment, honestly. I tried to create him in my image this time around, but..." He shrugged. "Maybe that's a task best left to the Almighty. I failed. The powers he inherited from me were weak from the start, and he never quite managed to control them properly. I had no choice but to bind them away, before he hurt himself with them." Levi sighed and shook his head. "In truth, Abaddon, I was quite happy to realize that someone else had taken his place."

I snorted. Bit brutal—not that I could blame him.

Fallen angels weren't exactly known for being the most nurturing parents in existence. My own mother was proof of that. Lucifer was the only exception to the rule I'd ever met.

"Beatrice seems happy too, don't you think?" Levi nodded across the garden, where Bea was laughing and dancing with her friends on the dance floor. She looked radiant.

She always did.

"Can hardly blame her," I said. "She's mine."

"And if you're willing to keep up this charade, I'm happy to keep things that way. Bea's family likes this new, improved version of my son. My friends and investors are impressed as well. Why ruin a good thing when it's been dropped so serendipitously in your lap?"

"Not a bad policy," I agreed. But no matter how amicable Levi's words were, I still didn't trust him. Words weren't always true. "Though, I have to wonder why you're telling me any of this at all."

"Because I want to warn you," Levi said with a shrug. "You may be a king of Hell now, but the moment you stepped into my son's place today, you

entered into *my* domain. I have very old and very powerful things in the works here, Abaddon. Things you won't want to fuck with."

"The only thing I'm interested in fucking tonight is my new wife." I finished my drink and rose. "But thanks for the advice, *Dad*."

"Always happy to give it, son."

For fuck's sake. He really didn't care about Simon at all.

But before I returned to Bea's side, I had one question for Levi.

It wasn't anything I could act on right now. Not with so many humans around.

But it was worth asking just the same.

"Tell me," I said down to him. "How does Bea fit into all of these ancient and powerful plans of yours?"

From the way his eyes sparked at my words, I knew that he understood my meaning.

There had been a plot on Bea's life tonight. A plot orchestrated by Levi's own son.

I needed to know if Levi was in on it as well.

"All I want is to see her happy," Levi said, still smiling. I didn't know whether to buy that or not. "If that means being married to you—well. Who am I to stand in the way of true love?"

Who indeed.

Bea was still in danger. I didn't know from who, or how—only that she was.

And no matter what Leviathan said, I was almost certain he had something to do with it.

But that was a problem for tomorrow.

For tonight, Bea was mine—

And she would be forever, as long as I played my cards right from here on out.

BEA

“**A**re you ready to get out of here?” Don whispered at me as he returned to my side.

I let out an exhausted sigh and nodded. Joan, Ava and I had hit the dance floor hard in his absence. The only thing about me that wasn't aching and tired right now was my feet—and I had Don himself to thank for that. “Thought you'd never ask.”

We left the wedding reception quietly. The night was dark, the guests were happy, and the band was playing our getaway song.

All things considered, it had been a much better night than I'd expected.

I hadn't expected much from my wedding to begin with.

But I never could have expected this.

For so many moments tonight, I'd almost forgotten that Don wasn't really my husband.

And yet, at the same time, he very much was.

“You look tense,” I told him as he led me through the garden and around the house toward the driveway. “I thought that was my role tonight, not yours.”

“Do I?” Don glanced down at me, his hand on the small of my back. “I hadn't noticed.”

“You do.” He did. In the time between the point when he'd disappeared under the guise of getting champagne and the point when he'd collected me from the dance floor, it was like he'd replaced his shoulders with stiff, heavy steel. “Did something happen? Another shade? Did more *danger* finally rear its ugly head?”

“Maybe I’m just tired,” Don suggested. “Aren’t you?”

“A little,” I admitted. I really was.

Even for a wedding, it had been a long day.

For a moment, I almost believed that he might be tired too. Out here in the dark, away from everyone else and lit only by moonlight, whatever trick he’d done to look like Simon was fading. Under the cover of darkness, he was beginning to look more like himself again.

His real self. The one that made my stomach flip-flop and my pulse pound and my heart race, just from looking at him.

And that was without the added benefit of Don’s way with words.

“You did well tonight, Bea.” He led me to a limousine parked outside of the estate in the circle driveway out front. “I hope you’ve realized that. I know how much all of this has been for you. I want you to know how brave you’ve been through all of it.”

“Is that what I’ve been?” I asked him. “Brave?”

“Oh, Bea.” In front of the limo, he took my shoulders in his hands and turned my body to face his. “You have no idea, do you?”

“Maybe I don’t.”

I stared up into his eyes and wondered what the hell I should have been doing with my hands. With the moonlight and the darkness and the way his face was slowly changing back into its true form, I felt like I should be pressing my hands to his chest and swooning—or something. Like the heroine on the cover of a paperback romance novel.

But as it was, my wrists hung limply at my sides, uncertain of whether I should give in and touch him the way my hands so desperately wanted to, or if I should give over to the sense of fear that hid beneath how bad I wanted him and simply push him away.

“Or maybe,” I continued, “I just know how afraid of you I really am.”

“You don’t need to be afraid of me, darling.” He rolled his lower lip beneath his tongue and slowly shook his head. “I may be a dangerous man —”

“A demon,” I said. “You told me you were a demon. A king of Hell.”

“And I am. You know it’s true.” He moved a hand from my shoulder and brushed his knuckles against the back of my cheek. “But I didn’t just come here to marry you.”

“Are you sure about that?” My eyes met his. A challenge. “That’s certainly what you ended up doing. Isn’t it?”

“I came here today to protect you.” Don’s eyes gleamed with honesty as they shifted from blue to gray. “I can’t explain everything to you right now. To give you the full scope of this situation—everything you’ve forgotten, and all the forces in play—I’d need hours. Maybe days.”

“Days?” I scoffed. “How much of you could there be to forget?”

“When we have a chance to get these clothes off, I’ll be more than happy to show you.” He cupped my cheek in his hand. The heat of his palm against my skin took my breath away. “I’m going to tell you everything. All of it, Bea. But to do that, you’ll need sleep, and we’ll both need time.”

“When?” That seemed like a reasonable question, all things considered.

After all, I’d been waiting around for answers all night.

“Soon,” Don promised. “But not tonight. You don’t want to spend your wedding night playing twenty questions, do you?”

The gentle buzz of champagne bubbled through me. “Did you have something else in mind?”

“If I did, I be a bastard for trying to make it happen.” Don moved his hand from my cheek to wipe something invisible to me from his mouth, which was quickly shifting from Simon’s thin lips into Don’s full, kissable smirk. “You’re exhausted, darling. I can see it in your eyes.”

“Not too tired to listen,” I said softly. “Try me. I’m all ears.”

Don only opened the door of the limo for me and ushered me through it. “All right. Get in, and I’ll try.”

But as soon as my ass hit the seat, I knew Don was right. I could feel every seam of my dress pressing indentations into my skin. My ribs ached from spending too long trussed into fabric that clung to my body so tight. My eyes were sore, and my knees felt like jelly. Even my tits hurt.

I still wanted answers. I needed them.

But whatever exhaustion Don saw in me, I felt every bit of it as soon as my body was allowed to sit down.

Fuck.

“Okay, then, brown eyes. What do you want to know first?” Don asked as he climbed in behind me.

I blinked up at him as he wrapped his arm around my shoulders. I shouldn’t have wanted that. Shouldn’t have liked it, either.

But I did want it, and I did like it.

I was tired, and inside the limo, Don didn’t look like Simon at all anymore.

Too tired to stop myself from giving in, and against my better judgment, I cuddled against Don's chest. Just a little bit.

But as soon as I moved for him, Don wrapped his other arm around my waist and pulled me closer. He certainly had a way of turning a little into a lot.

"When you knew me before..." I was sleepy enough that I was struggling to put my ideas into words. But I did my best. "Is that what you called me? *Brown eyes?*"

"Sometimes," said Don. "Sometimes, I called you *kitten*, or *sweetheart* or *sunshine*. Or *darling*. You're always *darling*. The rest depended on my mood—and yours."

It was a nice notion, at least.

Kitten. I liked that.

I liked it a lot.

"Is Simon somewhere safe?" I should have asked that question hours ago and I knew it. But the fact of the matter was, there'd been so many other things to ask...

And if what Don had said about Simon was true, then I really had no reason to care about how Simon was at all.

"Safe enough until I deal with him," Don said. "But once he's been dealt with...I can't make any promises."

I nodded against Don's chest.

Safe enough.

Maybe that was what Simon really deserved.

If what Don said was true.

"Am I still in danger now?" I asked him. My eyelids were heavy. Don's chest was comfortable and warm.

"Not at the moment, I don't think," Don purred down at me. He stroked the back of my head, smoothing down my hair over my veil. "But even if you were, *kitten*—" I smiled at the word. "I'd keep you safe."

"Promise?" The world was getting fuzzy. Don was sweet and kind.

"Promise," he said. "On my life."

DON

It was almost unfair, how beautiful she was.

She fell asleep on me in the limo almost immediately. As her head got heavier against my chest and her questions turned into gentle, almost nonsensical mumbles, I held her close.

She smelled like warm vanilla and dark jasmine. Her dress pooled around the delicate flare of her hips like white seafoam on ocean waves. Her hair tumbled down her shoulders in soft curls of rich, cool silk. Her dark lashes were long and thick. They fluttered gently as she dozed, which told me she was already dreaming.

Once upon a time, she'd told me all of her dreams. The recurring ones, like running barefoot through a vineyard that became more of a maze the harder she tried to escape it, and the silly ones too.

I wondered what she dreamed about now.

"Is she all right, Your Majesty?" Charon opened the limo's door for me once we'd reached our destination. His steely brow was knitted in concern.

"She's had a long day." Carefully, I scooped Bea up into my arms and eased her out of the backseat. "That's all."

"Do you need help with her?" Charon asked, closing the door behind me.

Quietly, I laughed. "I think I can handle things from here."

Bea might have been sleeping like a sack of rocks, but her body was still light as a feather in my arms.

The other limo—the one I'd had Charon cancel shortly after I'd decided to take Simon's place today—would have taken us to some overpriced hotel suite with separate beds in separate rooms, I had no doubt.

Bea might have been napping away our wedding night, but there were worse ways she could have ended the evening. If her only choices were being here, being with Simon, or being dead, I was glad that she'd ended up dreaming in my arms.

Besides, I had something much more exciting to offer her than a hotel room tonight.

I shifted her body in my arms and stuck out a finger to press through the fabric of the veil. It clung to my fingertip like gossamer and slowly separated as I dragged it down to create an opening.

The first threshold I would carry Bea through would be the one that separated her realm and mine.

“Are you certain about this, Your Majesty?” Charon’s eyes met mine. “If you take her through there, your agreement with the angels is broken.”

“I know, Charon. But I’m afraid I don’t have another choice.” I didn’t take this lightly. To maintain the order between Heaven, Hell and Earth that Lucifer had disrupted when he sired a child, Heaven and Hell had agreed to keep humans out of our affairs. Already, I’d fractured that promise by marrying Bea in the first place. By bringing Bea into my domain, I would shatter it.

But Bea’s idiot fiancé had already violated the agreement when he ordered demonic assassins after her.

Now, taking her into Abyss was the only way I knew for sure that she would be safe.

“Should I alert Lucifer and Evie?” Charon asked. “When the angels hear about this—and eventually, they will—we have no idea how they might retaliate.”

“The angels won’t be after Lucifer and Evie,” I said with certainty. “They may have been our enemies once, but they’re not monsters—or idiots. The Almighty has blessed Lucifer’s new little family, their daughter included. They can’t be harmed—and even if they could, the angels would never stoop so low as to harm a child.”

“It’s not Lucifer and his family that I’m worried about,” Charon admitted. “It’s you and Beatrice, Your Majesty. The angels may not be willing to harm children, but they’ve proven more than capable of targeting human women in the past.”

“All the better reason to keep her at Nevermore.” *Where angels feared to tread.* I gave Charon a nod. “I appreciate your concerns, Charon, but I know

what's best for my woman.”

My bride.

Charon returned my nod and took a step back. “Very well, my king. You’ll let me know if you need anything?”

I smiled. “I think right now, the only thing I need is the chance to put my wife to bed.”

IN THE ABYSS, the world was usually black and white. No colors lived here in my realm. An entire universe as gray as my eyes.

But Bea’s presence changed that.

It always did.

Everywhere she went here, every piece of this place she touched, turned to Technicolor in an instant. The rose on my lapel stayed red, just for being near her. So did the brown in her hair and the lovely burgundy color painted on her lips.

As I carried her through Nevermore’s gardens, the grass turned green, and the flowers of the hedges blushed yellow and orange and pink like some unseen watercolor artist had just dipped their brush to our canvas.

When I laid her down on the silk sheets in the master bedroom, she turned them a beautiful, glowing gold.

It was how I knew I loved her. One of many ways, I supposed.

My world here in the Abyss had always been a dim, bleak-looking one. Before I’d met her, I’d almost come to prefer it that way.

But where before, there had only been grayscale, Bea brought a flush of color into my life.

“I thought I’d lost you, darling.” I whispered the words down to her as I turned her on her side and unlaced her dress. Maybe that was wrong of me. If she’d been awake, Bea might have slapped me for my forwardness.

But when I peeled the fabric away from her body, I saw the indentations every seam of her gown had left in her skin. She’d been bound up in the thing all day. If I left her in it now, she’d wake up aching from it.

There was only part of Bea that I wanted to leave aching now that she was mine—and I wouldn’t be claiming that tonight.

“Pretty thing.” I eased the comb of her veil out of her hair and removed all of the pins. Along with the dress, I placed it aside. “When they took your memories of me away from you, I never thought I’d be truly happy ever

again, you know.”

These were things that I couldn't say to Bea. Not when she was awake, at least—not yet.

Without her memories, there was no way she'd be able to understand my heartbreak.

Not when she couldn't even recall her own.

Was bringing her here dangerous? Of course it was. Charon was right—the angels would discover what I'd done today eventually. When they did, it was entirely possible that they'd be out for blood.

But the angels couldn't enter the Abyss without burning for it. To conquer it, they'd have to conquer Hell itself first.

Hell wasn't safe for Bea either. Nor was Earth.

Here in Nevermore, I would keep her. I'd protect her.

And best of all, I'd have her all to myself.

“You're mine, Bea.” I slipped her feet from her shoes and unfastened the necklace of heavy diamonds from her neck. I wanted to kiss her lips, but as unconscious as she was, I knew that wouldn't be right.

Instead, I smoothed her hair down away from her brow and kissed her cheek.

I was determined that the next kiss I had from Bea would be a kiss she gave me of her own full knowledge and free will.

We had some difficult days left ahead of us. Giving Bea her memories back was only a small part of it.

I'd need to interrogate Simon. Find out what demon he'd made his dark deal with and what they'd expected to get out of it in return.

I'd need to deal with Simon's father, too. Leviathan was yet again playing some kind of sinister game on Earth. That much was clear. He may have approved of my decision to take his son's place as Bea's husband today, but I suspected he had something far more devious than just the appeasement of his investors and human friends in the works.

And maybe most importantly of all, now that I had Bea here, I had to find a way to keep her here. She'd been sweet and willing enough to go with me tonight, but come morning when she was rested and refreshed, I couldn't guarantee that she would choose to stay.

But she *had* to stay. Her life depended on it.

And in so many ways...

So did mine.

BEA

I woke up the same way every bride wants to wake up on the morning after her wedding night: in a soft, warm bed in a gorgeous bedroom to the scent of clean linen and the sound of my new husband showering in the en suite.

There was just one problem. Two, really, if I was going to split hairs about it.

Don wasn't the man I was supposed to have married last night, and this definitely wasn't my luxurious private honeymoon suite.

Not that I was complaining.

I didn't exactly adore the man that I'd been supposed to marry. Thanks to Simon, Don had been forced to save my life yesterday.

By taking Simon's place at the altar, he might have even saved my life more than once.

As for dealing with the fallout of Don's actions and figuring out where I was, I could face all of that in a little while.

The room was full of vases of deep red roses. The sheets beneath me gleamed like they'd been spun from gold.

And from the shower, if I listened close, I was pretty sure I could hear Don singing while he washed.

I closed my eyes and cuddled deeper into the blankets, for a moment. The sound of his voice was faint, but every note I could hear was low and perfect.

It took me a second to recognize what he was singing, but when I did, I smiled.

Frankie Valli. "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You."

Definitely more romantic than The Police, at any rate.

I moved my legs back and forth against the sheets like I was swimming. They were slick and silken against my skin.

I luxuriated in the sensation for a little while before I realized that I wasn't wearing my dress anymore.

A quick peek beneath the sheets confirmed it: someone—and I suspected I knew exactly who—had taken my dress off before putting me to bed last night.

“Don,” I growled, scowling as I spotted my dress, veil, shoes, and jewelry neatly laid out on a deep red armchair across the room next to the tux Don had worn last night. “You incorrigible, horny bastard.”

“I don't know about incorrigible.” Don opened the door of the bathroom, releasing a cloud of steam. When it cleared, he stood there in the doorway, glistening wet and dressed only in a towel around his waist. “But the rest of it sounds about right.”

Slowly, I sat up, blinking as I stared at him.

My heart was thudding against my chest again. My lips fell open softly as wetness flooded in beneath my tongue.

And my mouth wasn't the only thing getting wet.

“Speechless?” Don smirked and stepped out of the bathroom. Water dripped from his dark, slicked-back hair and trailed down his body, tracing the natural channels formed by the muscles of his chest. “That's rather unlike you, darling.”

“Is it?” I rolled tongue over my lower lip. I couldn't bring myself to look away.

I'd known that Don was strong. His thick, hard muscles had been apparent even when he'd had his tux on, and he'd carried me like I weighed nothing more than a little lost kitten he could cradle against his chest.

But there was a difference between knowing something and actually *seeing* it. Every inch of his body, both above and below the towel, was rock hard and so delicious looking, for a moment all I wanted to do was sink my teeth into him.

He didn't look human. I'd known plenty of models and bodybuilders and rich playboys who had nothing better to do than spend all their time getting shredded.

Don, though...

He was so gorgeous, he barely even looked *real*.

“Normally, you’re not the kind of woman who wastes a lot of energy holding your tongue.” Don walked to the side of the bed. Greedily, my eyes tracked his every move. “I’ve always liked that about you.” He took my chin in his hand and turned my face up toward his. I was grateful for that—if he hadn’t, I could have spent the rest of the morning imagining running the tip of my tongue over the outline of his abs. “You were never afraid to speak your mind.”

“I’m still not,” I whispered up to him, clutching the top sheet to my chest.

“Mm. But you’ve gone silent now, haven’t you? A man has to wonder what on earth you must be thinking.”

Slowly, I furrowed my brows until my eyes were glinting in a glare.

“I’m thinking that I must have actually married a demon last night,” I told him. “And I’m thinking that he must be some kind of pervert, since it appears he took the liberty of stripping me naked while I was asleep.”

“Not completely naked.” Don’s towel shifted a little lower as he reached out to run his fingers over the laced edge of my bra. “I could have undressed you even more.”

“Yes, Don.” My cunt flushed hot just imagining Don sliding off my panties and unclasping my bra, but I managed to keep my voice cold as ice. “I’m so very grateful that you carried me to your bed and so graciously had your way with my body while I slept.”

“You think so little of me, Bea.” Don’s smile was warm, if a touch patronizing. He lowered his hand from my chin so he could adjust his towel. If anything, it seemed even lower now. I gulped. “If I’d had my way with you last night, I can assure you—you would have remembered it.”

“All right...” I arched an eyebrow and struggled to keep my eyes on his face, not the deep V of his abs as they descended beneath the towel. “So, you’re telling me you weren’t ogling my mostly naked body while I was passed out?”

“I didn’t say that.” Don chuckled and turned toward the wardrobe. “I like to think of myself as a good man, darling—but even good men have their limits.”

Fuck. He was gorgeous. He was dangerous looking. And even when I was chastising him for getting me out of my dress while I slept, I couldn’t help but imagine how nice it would be if he undressed me just a *little* more.

But this was hardly the time to let my pussy do the thinking for me.

As I heard Don’s towel drop to the floor, I forced myself to become very

interested in the paneling of the wall of the other side of the room.

“So, it wasn’t a nightmare. You’re really a demon.” Of course he was. After everything that had happened yesterday, nothing else made sense. As far as small talk went, it was a dumb thing to say.

But the knowledge that Don was mere feet from me, completely nude as he rifled through the wardrobe for something to wear, was making it a little difficult to keep my thoughts straight right now.

“I am,” Don said simply. “Do you want to see my wings again? My horns, maybe?”

“I think you should keep your horns to yourself, thank you.” I drew in a deep breath and pressed my knees together. “And you’re, um, *you’re* definitely real? Not some kind of fucked-up wet dream?”

“A *wet* dream?” Don laughed. “Is that what was happening in that pretty head of yours last night?”

“I didn’t dream at all.” My cheeks were burning now. *Wet*. Why the *fuck* did I have to say *wet*? I needed to change the subject. Fast. “And you’re really my husband.”

“Not legally, I suppose,” Don admitted. “But in the eyes of the Almighty—yes, Bea, I imagine I am.” I felt him shift nearer to me again. My head was still turned away, but I could feel the heat of his body. It radiated off of him like the flames of Hell itself. “And to answer your next question—yes, it’s safe to look.”

I bit my lip.

Of course I wanted to look at him. He was hot, he was dangerous, and somehow—against all odds—he was *mine*.

Dammit.

Maybe it wasn’t worth fighting anymore.

Slowly, I turned my head to look at him. My pulse raced at the thought of seeing Don’s rugged, naked body towering over me while I sat in his bed, mostly naked myself.

My cunt clenched.

If the rest of him was so gorgeous, I could only imagine how perfect his cock must look.

But instead of thick, hard cock throbbing in my face, I was met by the sight of Don dressed in a pair of tan pants and a thin, white shirt, still unbuttoned down the front.

“Oh,” I breathed. My eyes raked up his body until I was staring into his

grays again. “You’re dressed.”

“What did you think *safe* meant?” As he sat down on the edge of the bed next to me, he was smirking again.

“I thought—” I clenched my jaw. I’d *thought* it meant he wouldn’t mind me staring. God. There might have actually been such a thing as *too* good-looking. Don’s mere existence was melting my brain. My cheeks burned even hotter as I tore my gaze away. “It doesn’t matter. Thank you for putting on clothes.”

At least now I might be able to keep my head straight.

“No need to thank me.” He reached out to brush his fingertips against my knee over the sheets. “Frankly, it sounds a little like you might want me to take them back off.”

“Oh, you’d love that, I’m sure.” I glowered at his fingers and shivered as they stroked down my calf.

“You might like it too,” Don said. “Though, if this is your way of angling for a striptease, I hope you’re prepared to go tit for tat.”

I glanced up at him again. “I’m not trying to get you naked, Don.”

“Is that so?” Don didn’t look convinced. “Why not?”

“Maybe because last I checked, before you dragged me to Hell with you —”

“Carried, really,” Don corrected me. “And this is hardly Hell. Not hot enough.” He winked. “Yet, anyway.”

“I’m still in danger, aren’t I? This hardly seems like a good time for my valiant protector husband to be caught with his pants down,” I reminded him. “And I distinctly recall there being some kind of plot on my life that got us both into this mess.”

“I wouldn’t call it a mess, exactly. The bed’s a little ruffled, sure. But I *did* shower.” Don raked his fingers through his still-damp hair. “As for the danger you’re in, you’re safe from all of it here, Bea. You’re in Nevermore, my mansion here in the Abyss. You’re inside my domain. The only being in all the realms who can open portals to this place is me.”

I pursed my lips. “You know how insane all of this sounds, don’t you?”

“Not really,” Don admitted. “It’s been my reality for my entire life.”

“For *me*, I mean. Heaven, Hell—that thing that attacked me after the wedding ceremony.” I shivered as I remembered how fiercely Don had fought it. “It’s all a little much, Don. If this is some kind of a trick—”

“Does it feel like one?”

“No.” I was almost uncomfortable with how easy that question was to answer. “It feels...rational, somehow. Even thought it shouldn’t.”

None of this was rational at all.

I remembered Joan’s words when I’d explained the whole demon thing to her and Ava. *Like a dream that I forgot as soon as I woke up...* Yeah. That was pretty spot on.

“Then tell me this,” said Don, “do you hesitate to believe what I’m telling you because your instincts are telling you that I’m lying—or are you hesitating because you’re afraid of what it means for you if I’m not?”

I stared down at my lap for a moment. “The second one, I guess. If we really are in some kind of other world—if this really is the only place where you can keep me safe from all the insane, demonic things that want me dead—then I suppose it means that I won’t be able to leave.”

“Why would you want to?” Don gestured to the room around us. “Does this displease you?”

“No,” I said quietly. I wasn’t looking at the room, though. I was looking at him. “No, it doesn’t.”

“Good. I don’t want to have to keep you prisoner here.” Don’s eyes glinted with a dark wickedness for a moment. “Though, if you make me...”

“If I’m safe here, then I’ll stay. For a while,” I accepted. The last thing I needed right now was to turn into Don’s captive. For...various reasons. Every single one of them, dripping with sin. “But I *will* have to go back to... to *Earth* eventually, Don.” *Earth*. Even saying it like that meant admitting that I was in a place that wasn’t Earth at all. “I still have a life there. I can’t just abandon it. Is there some kind of way I can go back to it safely?”

“There is,” Don said with a nod. “But...”

I sighed. “Of course there’s a but.”

“We could stop dancing around it and simply consummate our marriage.” Don said it like that was a normal, casual thing to say. And if we were any other married couple, I supposed it would have been.

But there was nothing normal about this situation.

Least of all the husband from Hell currently smoldering at me from the edge of the bed.

“You said that we’ve, ah...” I tried to think of any word other than *fucked*. Not exactly easy in that moment. “Been intimate together before. I think dancing naked in each other’s arms was mentioned, at least.”

“*Been intimate?*” Don laughed. “That’s one way of putting it.”

“Doesn’t that count?” I asked. “Unless you’re lying, I feel like it should.”

“Being intimate in a past you don’t remember isn’t quite the same as fucking as husband and wife.” Don was moving his hand back up my calf again. Even through the sheet, I could feel the heat of his palm. “If you’re still concerned that I’m lying, though... I could always just show you.”

“Show me...the two of us fucking? In a memory?” That sounded insane. But then again, so did everything else Don had opened my eyes to in the last twenty-four hours. “How?”

“Depends. Do you want it, Bea?” His hand rose back up to my knee again.

“Depends.” I placed my hand over his, stopping him before he got any wise ideas about conquering my thighs next. “What’s it going to cost me?”

“What do you charge a woman who can afford everything?” Don turned his hand over and wove his fingers into the spaces between mine.

“Name your price.” I found myself smiling at him. “I could always write you a check.”

“Your money is no good here, darling.” Don’s smile shifted to match mine. “How about a kiss?”

I let out a long, slow breath.

If Don was telling the truth about our forgotten past, then we’d done far more than a little kissing.

And if that was what he wanted in exchange for my memory...

I didn’t see how it could hurt.

“All right,” I agreed. “A kiss, then.”

I closed my eyes, leaned forward, and puckered my lips.

Don only laughed. After a moment, I opened my eyes again and frowned.

“What?” I asked.

“I don’t know how you think I used to kiss you, Bea.” He shifted closer, took my face in his hands, and moved his lips toward mine. His voice lowered to a hush. “But it sure as hell wasn’t like that.”

I waited for him to steal the kiss. To take it from me. Claim it, like he’d claimed the others.

But he didn’t. His eyes only glimmered darkly as they stayed locked on mine.

Oh.

It took me a second before I realized what he wanted.

When I finally did, I felt a little stupid for not understanding sooner.

He didn't just want to kiss me.

He wanted *me* to kiss *him*.

Slowly, I leaned toward him. I closed the gap between us.

I pressed my lips against his.

I did it expecting to pull myself away from him as soon as contact had been made. The bare minimum. Just a peck.

That was stupid of me too.

As soon as he kissed me back, I couldn't bring myself to stop kissing him.

Partly because it felt so good, so real and so fucking right—

Partly because I was no longer in Don's bed, in his mansion, in his realm.

I was somewhere else.

BEA

Somewhere in a memory...

“**B**astard,” I breathed at him as our kiss broke. We were stumbling into my apartment in Los Angeles, clinging to each other. My hands were shaking and my body ached, and if I stopped touching him for even just a single moment, I was certain that I’d fall apart. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

“Shouldn’t have done what?” Don laughed humorlessly as he pulled me through the door and slammed it shut behind us. “Saved your life?”

“Risky yours.” I shook my head as he ran his fingers through my hair. It had been in an updo when we’d left Vegas earlier that evening. Now, it was a tangled, fallen mess. “I don’t like when you try to trade your life for mine.”

“You’re right,” he admitted, drawing the bobby pins from my hair until it all came tumbling down over my shoulder in a cascade of wild, messy waves. “It’s hardly a fair trade.”

“I’m glad we agree.”

“You didn’t let me finish.”

I arched an eyebrow. It ached to do it. One of the humans that the angels had bewitched and sent to attack us had hit me hard enough with their fist to bruise my brow bone.

“I always let you finish,” I reminded him.

Don laughed. “Clever. And true.”

He moved his lips to the bruise on my brow and kissed it.

“It’s not a fair trade,” he whispered, trailing his kisses to my ear. “Because my life isn’t worth as much as yours.”

I pulled away, frowning. “That’s not true at all.”

“It’s true to me.”

“Not to me, though.” I hated the notion. Mostly because it forced me to admit that I believed the exact opposite: his life was worth more to me than mine. “Take it back.”

“I could, Bea.” He stared down at me for a moment, blood on his temple and exhaustion in his eyes. His lower lip had been split. That didn’t stop him from shifting his mouth into a slow, tired half-smirk. “But if it’s all the same to you, I’d rather take you to bed.”

Bed. That sounded amazing. My body was sore. My head hurt.

My heart hurt, too.

We’d been attacked right outside my apartment building. They’d been waiting for us the moment we’d stepped out of the Abyss.

It was what I got for living in Los Angeles, I guessed. City of Angels.

If I’d known what formidable enemies angels could be, maybe I wouldn’t have moved there in the first place.

Don had fought our attackers off handily. He hadn’t even hurt them. He knew that they were just humans acting on the angels’ will. They didn’t really want to hurt us, either.

When they finally came out from under their enchantment, they wouldn’t even remember who they were.

I hadn’t been nearly as effective in the fight, though. I’d been overwhelmed quickly. And Don, like a knight in shining Armani, had fought like hell to come to my aid. He’d taken plenty of knocks to get there, too.

Once again, he’d saved me. It was far from the first time. It’d probably be far from the last.

There was nothing that sounded better right now than being in bed—but I didn’t want to go there alone.

Not tonight.

“Will you come to bed with me?” I asked, hopeful. “It’s been a long night. If you wanted to sleep over, it’d be all right.”

Don chuckled and pulled me against him again. His lips were a comfort. They stirred things in me that no one else had ever made me feel.

“I will,” he whispered. “But I think you’ve missed my meaning. Sleep

wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

I bit my lip as Don took my hand. Willingly, I followed him down the hall to my room. With every step, my body flooded with fire and want.

We'd fucked before. Plenty of times. This was nothing serious—or it hadn't been. Not at the start.

Maybe we'd just done it too many times. That was how it worked for other people, or so I assumed. You rolled around between the sheets together enough, and suddenly in all that friction, feelings were born.

Maybe Don had saved my life too many times.

Maybe, this was all just inevitable.

I'd never fallen for anyone before.

As we fell into bed together, I knew I was falling for him now.

"Let's get you out of these clothes." Don pushed me onto my stomach, and I kicked off my heels. The zipper of my dress whispered as he pulled it down. His lips chased after it, kissing every inch of my skin the dress revealed as it fell away.

"That feels amazing." I closed my eyes and let the heat of Don's kisses mingle with the molten warmth that was pooling inside me. "Your lips always do."

"Good." He grabbed my hip and rolled me over onto my side. "Because you're shaking."

"Am I?" I held out my hand and watched it tremble.

I was.

Whether it was because of the fight we'd just narrowly escaped from, or because of him, it was hard to say.

"Come here." Don took my hand and rolled me over the rest of the way, so I was facing him once more. His arms wound around my body, holding me tight. "You don't need to be afraid."

"I'm not."

"You are," Don said with certainty. "But you're safe now. For as long as you're mine, you always will be."

"Is that what I am?" Our lips were dangerously close. He smelled like mint and leather and, faintly, like blood. I knew if he kissed me now, I'd lose all control. "Yours?"

Gently, Don smiled. "You are. You're mine, and you will be for the rest of your life."

"And if I don't agree?"

Don chuckled. “Oh, darling. You belong to me whether you like it or not.”

He stole the kiss. He had a way of doing that—laying claim to things. Conquering.

Had he conquered me too?

As his tongue flicked against mine, devilish and greedy, heat pounded through my body and a dark elation roared through my veins.

Yes. He had, and I knew it, and he did too.

He’d claimed me. More completely than any other man ever had, he’d made me his.

I shifted my thigh up to hug Don’s hip and ran my fingers through his hair, deepening our kiss.

If I really belonged to Don now—belonged to him in the way I’d always suspected wasn’t even possible, let alone *real*—then I’d be damned if he wasn’t mine, too.

We shed our clothes the way autumn trees lose their leaves. Slowly, slowly, then in the blink of an eye, they were gone. He slipped my dress from my shoulders as I eased the buttons from the fastenings of his shirt. Our bodies rose and fell as we helped each other undress. But the fewer clothes we had between us, the faster our fingers worked. The more our hands roamed.

We stripped each other naked with a mutual hunger, until there was nothing left between us at all except for longing.

Finally. Warm, flushed skin against skin.

Don’s lips crashed against mine, as greedy as even a demon’s could ever be. His tongue prodded against my mouth again, insistent. Just as eagerly, I met it with my own. As we kissed, we reveled in each other’s heat. He tasted like blood and ice and need. His cock had been hard since we’d stumbled in tonight, but as he pressed it against the swollen lips of my cunt, I felt it get even harder.

Fuck. How was that even possible? I wanted to ask him, but that would have meant breaking our kiss.

And the truth was, I already knew the answer.

With Don, everything was possible.

Even Heaven. Even Hell.

Even falling in love.

“Please,” I begged him as he rolled on top of me. “Take me. Now.”

Don slapped his cock down on my cunt, shifting his hips just enough that I could feel exactly how deep he'd go.

Deep enough to break me, maybe—

But I was in bed with a demon. To be broken right now—it was a wonder that I'd ever wanted anything else.

His lips fell on my neck. His tongue lapped against the delicate skin there. His teeth scraped against my collarbone, then he let out a ragged breath.

"I know you want it, kitten," he whispered against my skin. "But I need to warn you—"

"You don't," I promised. "Anything you want from me, you can have."

"I need to warn you," he repeated, rising up to stare down into my eyes again. His grays were darker than I'd ever seen them. "Once I'm inside you, I won't be able to stop."

"Then don't," I whispered back to him. "Fucking don't."

That was all it took. He shifted his cock down, pausing only to slide it up and down my slit until his shaft was covered in my honey.

It didn't take long. I was already soaked.

"Take it, then." He pulled back and forced his cock inside me. There was no more need for foreplay. No desire from either of us to deny ourselves what we really wanted. Not now.

I cried out as he sheathed himself in me. Pleasure and pain were undecipherable from each other. Perfect, exquisite bliss.

He stopped me from screaming with another conquering kiss. Only, he wasn't conquering anything anymore—not really.

He was only taking what we both knew was already his.

I wrapped my legs around his waist, pulling him deeper still. He didn't need any encouragement for that, though. His hips slammed against my thighs with raw force that only yielded so he could draw back and thrust inside me all over again. My chest rose and fell with quick, shallow breaths like I was hyperventilating. Animalistic growls left his lips in return.

My fingers scrambled against his chest, then his neck as I struggled to find something to hold onto. Not that it mattered. Don wasn't interested in being held.

"Mine." He forced the words through his teeth as he gathered my wrists in one of his hands. He pinned them up over my head, then wound his other arm around my waist. His abs clenched against my ribs as he lifted me upright against him. Only when he had me right where he wanted me did he

release my wrists so I could cling to him. “All mine.”

“Yours,” I agreed immediately. In that moment, he could have told me that the Earth was flat, and God was dead and two plus two equaled whipped cream, and I would have only moaned *yes* in return. “All yours.”

His arms wrapped around me, holding me tight. As I wound my arms around his shoulders in return, holding on for dear life, my fingers brushed against sleek, dark feathers.

His wings. Behind him, they unfolded from between his shoulder blades. With only two sharp flaps, they propelled us upward. Suddenly, we were airborne. Fucking, suspended somewhere between the bed and the ceiling.

It felt like being caught between Heaven and Hell.

“Fuck—*Don*,” I panted as my eyelashes fluttered. Something was building inside me, a tension that was desperate for release.

“What’s wrong, Bea? This is what you wanted, isn’t it?” He angled his hips up sharply to thrust right up against my G-spot. It earned him a high, sharp cry that tumbled from my lips like stars from the sky. “You wanted me to take you. You wanted me to show you how completely mine you are.”

“I did,” I breathed. “I do. I am.”

“I told you that once I started, I wouldn’t be able to stop.” His hand wrapped around my throat. He moved his lips to my earlobe, nipping at it as he purred the words into the shell of my ear. “And I won’t. Not even if you beg me. Not even if you cry and scream and plead.”

I clung to him even tighter. There were tears in my eyes already. In my throat, every whimper threatened to turn into a ragged wail—but not for help. I didn’t want him to stop.

He had me now, and I had him.

Now, I only wanted more.

“Do you know why I won’t stop, Bea?”

I clenched my eyes shut and dug my nails into his shoulders. My cheek pressed hard against the side of his face. My every muscle was wound so tight, when he finally sent me over the edge, I didn’t know if I was going to pass out or fall apart or simply explode.

“I won’t stop because I can’t,” he grunted. “Because your hot, tight cunt is fucking heroin, and because I’m addicted to your little whimpers and moans.”

I bit my lip, but that only made the tension inside me even worse. Instead, I moved my teeth to the thick muscle of his neck, slick with sweat. As I bit

into him, my tongue lapped against his skin and my mouth was filled with the delicious taste of him. Hellfire and sweetness and salt.

“I won’t stop because you belong to me.” His voice was louder now. Just short of a roar. “And I won’t stop because you don’t fucking want me to, do you, you perfect little slut?”

“Oh, *god*.” I was shaking all over again as I forced the words from my throat.

He only fucked me harder for that.

“No, Bea. Not God. Not here.” He tilted our bodies downward. In an instant, my heart leapt up in my chest and we were falling. We hit the mattress hard enough, for a moment I was sure we’d broken the bed frame—and I was even more certain I didn’t care. “Only me.”

“Don.” I said his name like it was a prayer. Right now, it was the only one I knew. “Don—I’m going to...going to come—”

“No.” His command only pushed me that much closer to losing control. “Don’t. Not until I say you’re allowed.”

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I slammed my head back against the pillow beneath me. My pride was gone. My dignity had been left at the door. My cunt was throbbing wildly, squeezing his... “Don, please—”

“No,” he growled again. “Not until you say it, Bea.”

“Yes,” I promised frantically. Immediately. The room was spinning around me. I still felt like I was floating, even now that Don had brought us back down. “Anything. Anything you want.”

“You know what I want.” Don wrapped his arm around my crown and rested his forehead against mine. “You know exactly what I fucking want.”

“Anything,” I swore again. “Anything at all.”

“The truth, Bea.” His kiss seared against my lips, hard and quick. “I want the fucking truth.”

“I can’t lie, Don.” I couldn’t. My soul was arching up, ready to leave my body. In that moment, I was made of nothing but truth. “Not to you. Not ever.”

“Then who do you belong to?”

“You,” I answered. I didn’t even have to think about it.

“That’s right. Not Simon. Not anyone who’s had you before me. Only me.”

“Only you.” I nodded fervently against him. “Only you.”

“What else, Bea?” His hand shifted down between my legs, stroking my

clit as his thick cock continued to slam up into my core. “I won’t settle. Not for anything less than all of you. You’re mine, kitten—and I want it all.”

“I love you,” I sobbed. “Please, Don—I love you!”

He had my body. He had my heart. He had my soul.

If he wanted it all, he had it.

There was nothing more of me to give.

“I love you too.” His mouth dove towards my ear again. “It’s the truth, Bea. I love you too.”

My breath left my lungs with relief. For having finally admitted it. For saying it out loud and finally making it real.

“Now,” he growled. “Come.”

My eyes shot open. The next breath I drew felt like I was being possessed—and maybe I was. My body tensed and released violently—not just my cunt, not just my clit, not just my womb, but *all* of me. I spasmed and I gasped, and I held onto him like I’d die if I let go. My pussy gushed with honey, milky and thin and so hot I could smell it between us.

It only allowed Don to fuck me harder. Faster. Every throb of my cunt felt like I was grabbing hold of his shaft and pulling him in until he was pushed over the edge as well.

With a roar, he spilled his seed into me. His thrusts turned sharp and, impossibly, even deeper. Every single one of them sent an explosion of pleasure wracking through my body until the stars in my vision burst into fireworks, then turned white-hot like I was staring straight into the sun.

I lost myself in the intensity of it.

I lost myself in him.

“Fuck,” I whispered up at him as his hips finally came to rest against my thighs. I blinked, trying desperately to refocus my gaze. His cum dripped from my cunt, still so hot and so slick. When my eyes met his, I felt my pupils widen. He was gorgeous, and he was mine, and I was completely in awe. “*Fuck.*”

“Yes, kitten.” He gave me a lazy smile and brushed my sweat-dampened hair away from my cheek. “Fuck, indeed.”

Then, he pulled my lips to his and kissed me all over again.

It was a kiss I never wanted to end.

I loved him. I needed him. I wanted to be his and his alone. Forever. My parents’ wishes and my betrothal to Simon be damned.

Love was hell, and I was in it.

It was the most perfect kind of torture I'd ever known.

DON

For the whole of the memory, our kiss didn't break.
I let myself enjoy it.

When it came to kissing Bea, enjoying myself was as easy as breathing air.

When she came back to me, she came gasping and clutching at my chest like she was desperate for something to hold onto. Her lips moved greedily against mine, like she was starving for something only I could provide.

I let myself enjoy that too. Just for a few seconds, until I heard her moan my name.

“Don...” she rasped against my mouth, her voice breathy and full of need. “Don, please...”

My jaw clenched. My cock stiffened. And inside my chest, something truly monstrous began to stir.

Carefully, I uncurled her fingers from the collar of my shirt and forced myself to pull my lips away from hers.

Any more of *that*, and I wasn't sure I was going to be able to control myself anymore.

Even a demon trying to be a good man had his limits. When she begged for me—that was mine.

“Don,” she whimpered as her eyes fluttered open again.

She looked heartbroken that I'd pulled away. Like I'd taken something from her that she desperately wanted.

I could empathize. I knew the feeling well.

It was the same way I'd felt when the angels had stolen her memories

away.

“You’re all right, Bea.” I kept her hand held in mine and gave it a squeeze. “You’re back now. Did you remember?”

It was obvious that she had.

I just wanted to hear it from those pretty lips of hers.

“Of course I did.”

To her credit, she sobered up quickly. She slipped her hand out of my grasp and moved it back to the sheets she’d been clutching. They’d fallen to her hips while she’d been busy kissing me.

As she hauled the sheets back up over her body, my gaze lingered on the way her breasts filled out her white lace bra. She could hardly blame me for it, either.

They were the loveliest pair of tits I’d ever known.

“Did you want to keep going?” I offered. “I could give you more memories of our past like that...or we could make new ones, if you’d prefer.”

“That was plenty, thank you,” she said curtly. Her cheeks were flushed a pretty, dusky pink. Same color as her nipples were, I recalled.

Same color as her cunt as well.

“Are you sure?” I smirked. “*Don, please*, you just begged me... I can imagine what you might have been asking for.”

“That was a mistake,” she said firmly. “I didn’t mean to do that.”

“Didn’t you?” I chuckled. “You certainly sounded desperate in the moment.”

“I was confused.”

“No.” I reached up and brushed her hair behind her ear. Even her earlobes were burning pink now. “You wanted me. Admit it.”

“I *thought* I wanted you,” she corrected me with a scowl. She swatted my hand away. “I don’t even know if that memory was real or not.”

“No? Not convincing enough for you?”

“Oh, it was convincing,” Bea assured me. Her hips shifted, a telltale sign of undeniable slickness between her thighs, as she licked her lips. “But believable? I’m not so sure about that.”

“I agree,” I said with a smirk. “Fucking you is always unbelievable. Always has been.”

“I don’t mean the sex.” Bea glowered. She looked eager to change the subject. “I meant all the rest. Demons attacking me—I can buy that. I saw that firsthand. Angels, though—why would they have wanted to hurt me? I

was under the impression they were the good guys.”

“Sometimes, they are. Other times, not so much.” Explaining the complexities of celestial politics to Bea would have taken hours, if not days. I knew I’d need to summarize. “They were after you because they were trying use you to get to someone who cared about you. Someone else you’ve been forced to forget.”

“Someone other than you?” Bea’s scowl softened into a frown. “How many people have I forgotten?”

“A handful,” I admitted. “Just the ones that connected you to Hell.”

“Why?” Bea asked. “Why steal all of that away from me? What did the angels have to gain by taking it?”

I sighed. Another big question. “The balance between Heaven, Hell and Earth is fragile right now. We’re not dealing with good and evil. Not as you know it. The angels seek to keep order. Your ties to me—to Hell—threatened to disrupt that.”

“So, they’re not the bad guys, then?”

“Honestly, darling...” I rose from the bed. “Given what happened on our wedding last night, it’s harder than ever to say who the good guys are anymore.”

“Certainly not you *demons*,” Bea said firmly. “It was demons that attacked me last night. Not angels. I know exactly who the bad guys are—and you play for their team.”

“A demon saved you as well, you’ll recall.”

“A *demon* that might be lying to me,” said Bea. “Isn’t that what demons do? Give people false memories, put bad thoughts in their heads...possess them?”

“I do love possessing humans,” I admitted. In front of the mirror in the corner, I started fixing my hair into place before it dried wild and askew. “One human in particular, actually.”

“Ha ha.” In the mirror, I could see Bea’s lack of amusement at my little joke. Even when she was annoyed, she was too fucking cute. “Yes, I’m sure you *adore* possessing me.”

“I do,” I agreed. “You’re a very exciting thing to own.”

“Only, you don’t own me.” Bea crossed her arms over her ribs and leaned forward, speaking to me through the mirror. “That memory was cute, Don. Hot, even. But I don’t believe it. No one owns me. Not you. Not anyone.”

“Is that so?” I took a jar of pomade and worked a small amount of it into

my hair to keep it in place.

“You hardly even know me.” She said it like it was some kind of *gotcha*.

It only made me grin.

Slowly, I turned to face her.

“I don’t know you?” I moved the last of my stray strands of hair back into place. “Oh, Bea. You have no idea.”

“Don’t I?”

“Not in the least.”

“Tell me something I would have only told a man that I loved, then.” She turned her chin up at me. A challenge.

I’d never met a challenge I wasn’t willing to rise to.

“All right.” I walked back toward her with careful, measured steps. “Let’s start with your dreams. You don’t normally tell those to anyone, do you?”

“I don’t,” Bea said. “But I already told you I didn’t dream last night.”

“I’m not talking about last night.” In truth, a dreamless sleep was a rare thing for Bea. It would be difficult to just choose a handful to recount for her. How could I, when I knew them all? “You have a recurring nightmare of being lost in an office building. Sometimes, it’s the rose garden at your father’s estate.” I paused. “Sometimes, you know you’re being chased by someone. Usually, Simon. Sometimes, someone else—a tall, dark entity with cold eyes. When it catches you, you always ask what it wants, and it only laughs. It never says.”

“I...I bet lots of people have dreams like that.” Bea turned her face away from me. “Lucky guess.”

“Was it?” I shrugged. “All right. How about your faith?”

She scoffed. “And what would a demon know about faith?”

“Plenty. I’m part of it, after all.” I took another step closer. “As a child, you used to wake up in the middle of the night with that same dark entity watching over from the corner of your room as you slept. It terrified you. You never had reason to believe in angels, but demons—those always seemed a little more real to you than you would’ve liked.”

“That was you, I suppose.” Her glare was trained on me again. “Watching me while I slept?”

“Not me,” I assured her. Ever since she first told me of that memory, I’d often wondered who that entity was. Now, knowing the identity of Simon’s father and the kind of friends Simon must have had in Hell, the possibilities were numerous. “I didn’t meet you until a few years ago. It’s not easy to

make you blush like you are now, but I've always had a knack for it. Fear is the last thing I've ever wanted to stir in you."

"I suppose that's true, at least," Bea grumbled. "Then how *did* we meet?"

"We were in the Inferno. It's a gateway between Hell and Earth on the Las Vegas Strip." I smiled as I sat down on the bed near her again. "You offered me your chair. Sweet of you, really—but a gentleman doesn't leave a lady standing while he sits."

"A chair?" Bea snorted. "We met over a *chair*?"

"We met over a chair," I repeated. "And I made you blush for the first time when I pulled you into my lap."

"Into your *lap*." Bea's voice was incredulous. "Smooth of you."

"I thought so. You seemed to agree."

"That doesn't sound like me, though." She leveled her gaze at me again. "That's how I know you're lying. I would have thought you were just another arrogant, overconfident asshole laying claim to things that don't belong to him. Nothing more."

"And you did. Initially, I imagine you thought I was quite the prick." My smile grew wider and more wicked. I lowered my voice to a whisper and leaned in. "But I also know those are exactly the kind of men you like to think about when you slip those pretty fingers of yours between your pretty thighs at night."

Bea's eyes narrowed in an instant.

"I've never told anyone that," she hissed.

"And yet, I know it."

She was right, in a way.

She'd never told anyone but me.

"You're...you're reading my mind." Her gaze was made of an exquisite mixture of pure embarrassment and unadulterated hate. "You're playing tricks on me. Fucking around with my head and doing..."

"Doing what?" My lips curled into an amused smile. "Stealing your heart?"

"Demon shit," she snapped at me. "That's all any of this is."

My smile endured.

Demon shit. She was cute, but she had no fucking clue.

"I don't have the power to read your mind, cupcake. But nice try." I patted her cheek. "The fact of the matter is I don't need to, either."

"Or so you claim." She swatted my hand away.

“Not claim. *Know.*” I caught her wrist and held it tight, tugging her toward me. Once my gaze locked on hers and we were close like this with her temper flaring up, I knew she would be too lost in my eyes to be able to look away. “I know your favorite color is mustard yellow, and I know you wish it had a more romantic name. I know the smell of roses makes you think of how long forever might be. I know you’ve got a scar on your knee from climbing an olive tree when you were a child.” I ran my hand over her leg, tracing exactly the place where I knew that scar was hidden. “You fell out trying to reach the top. It didn’t stop bleeding for an entire day.”

“More mind reading,” she whispered, but she no longer sounded so sure.

“No. And I don’t have to read your mind to know how wet that memory made you,” I purred against her ear, then breathed in her scent. Hot and heady and delicious. “I can smell it on you. The scent of a perfectly soaked cunt.”

Her next breath was a ragged one. “You’re lying.”

“I’m not.” I released her wrist and rose again. “You can’t hide from me, Bea. You don’t have any little secrets where I’m concerned. You’ve already told me every last one.”

“You’re a bastard,” she snapped at me as I walked toward the door.

“So I’ve been told.” I snapped my fingers in return. I didn’t look back. I didn’t have to. This was my domain, and what happened here was entirely under my control. Including but not limited to syrup-drenched French toast with fresh berries and hot coffee appearing in bed next to Bea on an elegant tray.

“Aah!” A soft sound of surprise came from behind me as Bea noticed the meal that had just sprung into existence next to her. “How did you—”

I glanced over my shoulder at her, smirking at the suspicion with which she regarded the tray. “Demonic magic, Bea. If seeing is believing, then I’m going to keep showing you things until you can accept that they’re real. Now. Eat your breakfast like a good girl. Maybe get some more rest. You’ve certainly earned it.”

“Okay,” Bea said slowly. “And after that? What then?”

In the doorway, I paused. Bea had painted the entire bedroom in color with her presence. But beyond it, the world was colorless once more.

Further proof of how much I needed her by my side.

Without her, my life was just black, white and gray.

“Come find me,” I said over my shoulder. “I’ll be in the first place you

look.”

BEA

He left me there in his bed with a cup of coffee and a plate of French toast. They'd both appeared by my side out of thin air when he snapped.

As of yesterday, that would have left me stunned. It was a magic trick my brain couldn't comprehend.

But in such a short amount of time, Don had opened my eyes to so many things. The existence of Heaven and Hell, for example. Memories of angels trying to kill me. The reality of demons who wanted me dead.

By comparison, magic French toast was pretty tame.

I sighed and pulled the tray over onto my lap.

I was hungry, and Don had been kind enough to make me breakfast.

It didn't matter so much that I had no idea how he'd done it.

I had bigger things to puzzle out now.

The French toast was perfect. The powdered sugar that dusted its crispy surface melted on my tongue as I took a bite. Ripe blueberries burst with sweetness between my teeth and the soft, syrup-soaked center of the toast was still chewy and warm.

I ate it all so fast, I might as well have inhaled it. As for the coffee—it was dark and rich enough, it must have come from Hell itself. There wasn't any cream or sugar on the tray to go with it, but here in Don's domain, my palate didn't seem to mind the fact that it was black as sin.

The food was a kindness. Having a full stomach and a little caffeine in me was almost enough to distract me from the other hunger that Don had left me with.

I knew I shouldn't sleep with him. Even in that memory, I'd been terrified of falling for Don. And if my hunch in that forgotten past was correct, sex with a demon was a gateway drug.

I'd been falling for him in that memory. I'd said I *loved* him—and I'd meant it too.

If I let him have me again—if it had even been real at all—who was to say I wouldn't start falling for him again now?

Sex was one thing. Being in love was something else entirely.

But the reality of my situation was also worth taking into account.

Don said that consummating our marriage would help keep me safe so I could return to Earth someday. I didn't want to go back unprotected. I didn't think Don would let me, either.

My choices were clear: I could either give Don my body and risk losing my heart to him as well, or I could deny him and risk losing my life.

Either because I was stuck here in the Abyss forever as his captive, or because without his protection, it was only a matter of time before some other demon assassin came along to slit my throat.

I was still mulling it over by the time my coffee cup was empty and my plate was clean. I thought about it in the shower as the hot water and steam rolled over my skin. I thought about it as I searched the wardrobe for something to wear that wasn't my wedding dress. I wasn't eager to slip back into it, and I couldn't exactly prance around Don's mansion wearing nothing but my lingerie.

Unless I decided to give in to him and let him fuck me.

That path was sure to be a slippery slope. If I gave myself Don, I was pretty sure it would only be a matter of time before we were both running around the place wearing nothing at all.

And as fun as that would be...

I clenched my jaw and rose from the bed.

It was high time I got some clothes on.

To my surprise, in the wardrobe I found clothes that looked like they belonged to me. Pretty sundresses that were exactly my size. Sandals that looked like they'd been made to fit my feet. I couldn't find any labels on them, which was strange—back on Earth, I dressed exclusively in the wares of up-and-coming designers. These, I couldn't really place.

But when I pressed the skirt of a mustard yellow sundress to my nose... Maybe I was imagining it, but I could smell the ghost of my favorite perfume

beneath the light scent of fresh laundry soap. Jasmine and vanilla and roses.

These clothes even smelled like me. Like I'd worn them before. When I pulled the dress on, it cupped my breasts so perfectly, I didn't even need to wear a bra beneath it.

Maybe I'd left them here in one of those memories that, according to Don, an army of angels had made me forget.

I WANDERED around the room for a little while, studying every little detail. The flowers were beautiful, the furniture was tastefully elegant, and the bed was so comfy that when I threw myself back down into it, it was hard to convince myself to get back up.

None of it stirred any more memories for me, unfortunately. Whatever the angels had done to my mind, they'd locked everything up in a way only Don seemed capable of revealing to me.

It made me suspicious. Of course it did.

If only Don could unlock my memories, then it supported my theory that they might all be lies.

There was just one problem: it had felt real. All of it. The ache in my body from the fight he'd saved me from. The soaking wet ache in my cunt that had lingered, even after the memory was gone.

That *I love you*—that felt the most real of all.

I'd come back to reality clutching at him, begging and whimpering and pleading with him.

I'd been desperate to go back.

My chest swelled with breath, then a heavy sigh left my lips.

My life had been a hell of a lot easier when I'd been resigned to marrying Simon and living out the rest of my days in a loveless marriage. That much was damn sure.

Being married to Don, on the other hand...

It was more interesting, at least.

More dangerous, too.

"What the fuck have I gotten myself into?" I asked the empty coffee cup I'd left on the nightstand.

It didn't answer me. I didn't know why I'd expected it to.

This wasn't *Beauty and the Beast*, after all. There'd be no horny talking candlesticks or coquettish French feather dusters to keep me company here.

Just little ol' me and the handsome, ravenous demon who'd made me his wife last night.

This was no Disney movie.

This was Hell.

Back on Earth, everyone thought that I was away on my honeymoon with Simon. That meant I had a few weeks to spare before I made any serious decisions about whether or not fucking Don was worth the protection a fully consummated marriage might give me.

But given the way Don looked, and the way he made my body feel, and the way he left my pussy throbbing and soaked every time he so much as spoke to me...

I was worried that if I didn't make up my mind soon, I wouldn't last for more than a few days before my body made the decision for me.

I wanted him, and he wanted me.

If it was inevitable...why deny myself? Why wait?

I'd fallen for him once. Would falling for him all over again really be so bad?

I clutched a pillow to my chest and closed my eyes, imagining his hands running up and down my legs again. Not over the sheets this time, but under them. His fingers against my bare skin.

Maybe it would be nice.

Fuck. I *knew* it would be nice.

But Don had suggested that I should get some more rest.

Maybe that wasn't the worst idea, come to think.

Maybe some more sleep would help me clear my mind before I made it up.

I didn't know how long I slept for. Only that, once again, I didn't dream. When I woke up again, it was to the sound of a dull, periodic thumping sound from outside.

It sounded like someone was chopping wood.

I pulled myself up out of bed and wandered to a set of tall doors where the sun was shining in. They opened to a white marble balcony. Its railing was wound with gray flowers on dark gray vines.

When I stepped out onto it, something strange happened to the flowers, though. They changed from gray to purple right before my very eyes. Like an invisible artist had just colored them in for me. The vines turned dark green and the marble beneath my bare feet became streaked with thin veins of gold.

I rubbed my eyes, certain that this was some kind of hangover effect from last night's champagne, or maybe just a trick of the light.

But when I pulled my hands away and blinked at my surroundings, I realized it was no trick.

At least, not any that I'd ever seen before.

The sky was gray outside. The clouds were, too. The sunshine wasn't golden anymore; instead, it was wan and white. The grass was gray, and the trees were gray, and the shadows were dark gray except for where they were black.

It was like I'd walked out of Don's bedroom and into a world completely without color. Beyond the balcony, an otherwise beautiful landscape was rendered bleak and hollow, like a black-and-white photograph turned into real life.

Thwack!

I approached the railing of the balcony as I heard the sound again. My eyes searched for its source.

When I found it, my heart flipped over in my chest.

Below, near the tree line beyond a gorgeous-but-colorless garden, Don was rendered in black-and-white as well. He'd taken off his shirt and left it lying on the dove gray grass.

His muscles rippled as he hoisted an axe up over his head and brought it down on a thick piece of wood he'd positioned on top of a tree stump. The log fractured where the axe's blade hit, but the split didn't go all the way through.

With a focused elegance, Don braced the log with one foot and pulled the axe back out of it. Taking the log between his hands, he finished splitting it by pulling it apart at its seam.

Then, he tossed the freshly chopped wood onto a pile nearby and moved to position the next log on the stump so he could start all over again.

Fuck. Nearly every man I'd ever known had a trust fund and a general aversion to hard labor. The only calluses on their hands were made in the gym, and they usually got those filed down when they went in for their regular manicures and pedicures. Once upon a time, it had made me feel safe.

I didn't have to worry about men like that—or so I'd thought. Even if I couldn't take them in a fight, I always knew that Joan could. If Simon had ever so much as raised a hand to me, Joan would have snapped each and every one of his fingers off for even considering it.

Don, on the other hand, was strong enough that even hordes of brainwashed humans and demon assassins didn't faze him.

My life isn't worth as much as yours, he'd told me in that memory. I'd been furious with him for it at the time. I'd known good and well that he'd go get himself killed if it meant that I was safe.

In our vows yesterday, he'd promised me the protection of his body—and what a body it was.

Fuck.

I believed him.

I believed all of it.

I'd loved him, once upon a time.

And in that instant, watching Don split wood beneath the heat of a pale gray sun, I knew I was going to sleep with him.

Not just because he was handsome and strong. Not just because it would help strengthen his ability to protect me from all the forces in the universe that wanted me dead.

Not even just because he chopped wood like he was some kind of rugged part-mountain man, part-demon, part-machine.

No. I was going to sleep with him because I fucking wanted to. Needed to. My body was screaming at me to jump over the balcony and go climb him like a fucking tree.

He loved me. He wanted to protect me. He'd give his life to keep me safe and he did it all looking like *that*.

He wanted me. He'd offered himself to me. Not just part of himself, but all of him. Every inch. Everything he was.

Demon. Husband. King of Hell.

All things considered, with an offer like that on the table, I'd be braindead not to take him up on it.

I watched him work through an entire pile of logs until they were all split down into manageable pieces. It was thrilling, in a way.

Don knew so much about me, and I knew so little about him still. It was exciting to be the one who was watching for a change, instead of the one who was being watched.

"You should come down and join me when you're feeling up for it," Don called out over his shoulder as he began to pile the split logs into a neat pyramid. "When you're done staring at me, that is."

My mouth fell open.

An audible gasp left my lips.

Okay, then. Maybe I hadn't been as sneaky as I'd originally thought.

Bastard.

"How long did you know I was standing here?" I called down to him.

He grinned up at me with a black-and-white smile. Even without color, somehow it was even brighter than the sun.

"Oh, the entire time. The Abyss is mine, remember. Not much happens here that I don't know about." He chuckled to himself. "Including peeping wives."

"And why didn't you say anything?" He was incorrigible. Impossible. Literally the worst.

He brought the axe down once more, burying its blade in the stump, mopped his hand across his brow, and shrugged.

"I thought you might like to watch." He held his hand up to me and beckoned. "Now. Come here."

I licked my lips and glanced at the staircase that descended from the balcony down into the garden.

I still didn't have shoes on. Or makeup, for that matter.

But Don's voice was commanding, and the grass below looked soft enough, even if it was gray.

"Okay," I called back to him.

Then, I headed down the stairs.

He'd asked—and for once, I was too in awe of him to fight him.

All I could do was obey.

BEA

“Nice dress,” Don said as I met him by his log pile. He certainly had a way of handling wood. “Looks good on you.”

“Nice shirt,” I said, nodding to the place where he’d left it on the grass.

Looks good off of you, I didn’t need to add.

Don laughed, then went to fetch it. He was in color once more, now that I was close. Everything near me was. It was like a little bubble of vibrancy surrounded me everywhere I went here.

“Did you get some more rest?” Don asked, slinging the shirt over his shoulder. Beneath it, his chest glistened with sweat.

“I did,” I said. Then, without thinking, I added. “Maybe you should have joined me.”

He arched an eyebrow. “Would you have liked me to?”

Idiot. I’d only meant that he must have been tired now, after all of that axe-swinging.

I hadn’t meant it as an invitation.

Had I?

I brushed my hair behind my ear, feeling suddenly self-conscious. Things were almost easier when Don was hitting on me or I was accusing him of lying.

Arguing with Don made it easier to deny my attraction to him. Talking to him now, like two normal people—or, as normal as a demon king and his stolen bride could possibly be—made me feel uncannily shy. Like a schoolgirl talking to her crush.

“Maybe,” I admitted. “You probably needed it more than I did. You went to bed after me last night, and this morning, you were awake before I opened my eyes.”

“I don’t need much.” He held out his hand to me. “Come on. I want to show you something.”

I hesitated for only a moment.

Then, I took his hand and followed where he led.

The bubble of color came with us. It encapsulated our bodies, turning the grass from gray to green as we walked along.

“What happened to the rest of the color here?” I asked, curious. “Does all of Hell look like an old black and white movie?”

“Just the Abyss,” Don said. “It’s always been like this—except for when you’re here, of course.”

“Why do I change it?” Not that I was complaining—an entire realm without color seemed like an incredibly boring place to live.

Don chuckled and glanced over his shoulder at me. “I think you know the answer to that one, Bea. Take a wild guess.”

I licked my lips but didn’t say anything in return.

Don was right. I did have one suspicion.

Because you love me.

Just like he’d said in that memory.

It was a suspicion that, for the moment, I would keep to myself.

Don led me down the gentle slope of a small hill to a broad gray pool. The grass was cool and soft beneath my feet, still damp with morning dew even though it must have been well past noon.

A weeping willow tree hung over the water. The fringe of its pale gray leaves turned to green as we approached. The surface of pond shifted to a lovely, deep blue.

Beneath the tree on the water’s edge, a white sheet had been laid out. On the sheet, a picnic lunch had been prepared. A golden baguette rested on a wooden cutting board next to a little mason jar of deep purple jam and a wheel of brie. Frosted red grapes and pink apples were scattered around a second board of small pastries and tea cakes. A bottle of rested wine sat in the midst of it all with two glasses—one for me, one for him.

My stomach growled as I took it all in. Loud enough that Don could hear it, apparently.

“Good. You’re hungry.” His hand brushed against my shoulder as he

helped me lower myself to sit on the sheet's edge.

"I guess so," I admitted. "I don't know why. It feels like I just had breakfast."

A breakfast that Don had summoned with just a snap of his fingers. My mind was still boggling a little over how he'd managed it.

Probably, I knew the answer to that one too, though.

More demon shit.

"Breakfast was hours ago." Don sat down behind me. The scent of his sweat, salty and masculine, flowed around him like a delicious, earthy cologne. "You slept straight through lunch."

"Did your servants prepare this for us, then?" If Don was a king of Hell, it would only make sense that he had a fleet of butlers and maids to wait on him hand and foot. The notion didn't exactly bother me, but having grown up with plenty of servants myself, it was far from ideal.

I hadn't seen anyone else here other than Don so far. It reminded me of growing up at my family's estate a little *too* much. My father had always said that good help was invisible: not seen, not heard, but always there. I'd never known who was watching me or listening in on my conversations until it was far too late.

It begged the question: who might be watching us now?

But to my surprise, over my shoulder, Don shook his head as he reached for a grape.

"I don't keep servants here," he said. "Never enjoyed being fussed over. And besides, there was never any need."

He popped the grape into his mouth, then snapped his fingers. Another grape appeared between them, like he'd conjured it from thin air.

My stomach growled again as he offered it to me.

I was no Persephone, and it was no pomegranate seed...but I was a little wary of it anyway. Historically speaking, women got in an awful lot of trouble accepting mysterious fruits from devils.

But then again, I'd already eaten the breakfast Don had left for me.

Compared to all that French toast I'd wolfed down earlier, a single grape surely couldn't hurt.

"So, you just will everything you want into existence here?" I asked, keeping my eyes trained on the grape between his fingers.

"Essentially, yes." Don pressed the grape to my lips. I opened my mouth and he slipped it onto my tongue. The grape burst with sweet juices between

my teeth as I chewed. *Delicious*. “Almost everything, anyway.”

I swallowed. “What do you mean?”

“Food, wine, pretty flowers, books—breakfast in bed—” Don reached for the baguette and pulled it apart with his fingers. The crust crackled as it came apart, revealing a fluffy white center. “All of those things can be created here, yes.”

“Then what can’t you conjure with a snap of your fingers?” I asked.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Don took a small knife from the cutting board and used it to smear a bite of baguette with jam. This, too, he offered to my lips. “I can’t conjure you.”

I took the bite and chewed slowly. It hadn’t even occurred to me that Don might have tried to will me into existence in this place.

It was a good thing, I decided.

I didn’t like the idea of a false version of myself wandering around here.

With Don around, I could imagine exactly the kind of trouble a carbon copy of me might get up to.

“Bet you say that to all the other girls too,” I said with a breath of a laugh.

“What others?”

“Don.” I narrowed my eyes at him. “I’m not so naive to think I’m the only woman who’s ever been in your life.”

“There was one other, yes,” Don admitted.

I arched a brow. “Should I be jealous?”

“She lived and died something like eight hundred years ago, so...” Don met my gaze with a challenge of a glint in his eyes. “You tell me.”

It was hard to imagine Don only having one other woman in his life. He exuded a playboy energy that made me feel like he probably spent most of his time partying with models and starlets on luxury yachts, not pining after the same woman for eight hundred years.

But instead of being overcome with rampant jealousy, my heart only panged for him.

“You must get lonely here all on your own.” I tore off a piece of the baguette as well, smeared it with jam like Don had, and offered it to him over my shoulder. His lips brushed against my fingertips as he took it into his mouth. The ghost of a kiss. “No color, no servants, no other women—it seems like a lonely kind of place.”

“I like the solitude,” Don said after he’d chewed and swallowed. He lay down on his side, half-curved around me, propped up on one elbow. “Helps

me think. And besides—it's never lonely here when you're around."

That confirmed it, then.

He'd brought me here before, sometime in my lost memories.

The dress that I wore and all those others I'd found in the wardrobe—those were mine.

He'd probably snapped them into existence for me as well.

"If you can just make things happen with a snap of your fingers, you hardly needed to chop all of that wood, you know," I pointed out as we continued to trade bites. Don fed me bits of brie from his fingers, and I fed him grapes from mine.

"I could have, I suppose," he allowed. "But it would have robbed you of such an excellent view." He chuckled. "Anyway, I like doing work. It's meditative. Does the body good."

I couldn't argue with that. Don had quite the body—and every inch of it looked perfectly suited for swinging axes and splitting wood.

I turned my body to face his, lying on my side as well. "I still have a lot of questions, Don."

"You always do." He shifted closer to me and reached for an apple. With another knife, he turned the fruit his hand as he carefully began removing its peel. "Where should we start?"

"With that demon assassin, I suppose." I watched the apple's peel curl and fall away at the edge of Don's knife. "How do we know there will be more of them? Maybe that was the only one."

"There will always be more," he said with certainty. "Deals with demons are like deals with the mob. Once there's a price on your head, the hunt doesn't stop—until it does."

"Until I'm dead?"

"Exactly," said Don. I swallowed. That was a harrowing thought. "But I'm not going to let that happen. For as long as you're here, you're safe. You don't need to worry about anything harming you in this place. The Abyss will protect you—and so will I."

I knew he would, too. Don had already proven that well enough. Once at the wedding, again in that memory he'd given me.

All those muscles of his were good for far more than just chopping wood.

"And you're sure that Simon is behind this...hellish hit that's been taken out on me?" It was still a little difficult to believe Simon Roth was capable of something like that. I'd known him my entire life. Simon was arrogant,

petulant, prone to temper tantrums when he didn't get his way. He had no shortage of negative traits.

But murderous?

Frankly, I didn't think he had that kind of ambition in him.

But Don certainly seemed sure that, somehow, Simon was involved.

"I heard him in the garden beneath your balcony a few hours before the wedding was supposed to start," Don said. With the apple half-peeled, he cut off a sliver and held it out for me. I took it. "He was talking with someone. A demon. I couldn't see who, but the voice seemed familiar. Prattling on about how you didn't love him, and that he couldn't control you."

I laughed. "Well, those are both true, at least. I'm not an easy woman to control."

"No, you're not," Don agreed. His lips curled into a slow smirk as his eyes met mine. "Makes it even more satisfying when you finally let your guard down and obey."

My heart leapt up in my chest at his words.

Obedying Don would be a satisfying thing indeed. I'd learned that from my memory as well.

The only things he'd asked of me in that memory were things that I'd needed. Things I'd desperately wanted to give him—he'd only needed to say the word.

"But Simon's known for a long time that I don't love him." I bit into my slice of apple and chewed on it for a few moments, mulling over Simon's motives. "Why go making deals with demons to get me out of the way now?"

"Because he's a greedy, spoiled bastard, I imagine." Don's eyes darkened as he looked away. "Some men can't stomach the idea of having a wife they can't control."

"And what were *you* doing, sneaking around beneath my balcony yesterday?" I asked. "You were hardly on the guest list, as I recall."

"Watching over you, of course."

I snorted. "You say that like it's a normal thing, stalking your ex on her wedding day to make sure she doesn't get into trouble."

"You have a particular knack for getting into trouble," Don said. "And I hardly consider you my ex. Just because you'd forgotten me doesn't mean I'd forgotten you."

If Don had been anyone else, that probably would have creeped me out. But he wasn't anyone else—he was *him*. A man I'd loved once in a memory

that had been stolen from me.

A man who I knew loved me still. Even if he hadn't said it out loud, I could feel it. Like being wrapped up in a warm coat on a cold night by unseen hands.

"Did you miss me when I was—" *When I was taken away from you*, I almost said. But that seemed a little dramatic. I almost laughed. Melodrama wasn't really my thing. "Never mind. Forget that I asked."

"Why?" Don moved closer still. He placed the knife aside. "You can ask me anything you like."

"It's a silly question." I shrugged. "It doesn't matter."

"It does," Don said. His eyes were focused and serious. "It's only silly because the answer is so obvious."

I found myself smiling shyly. "Tell me anyway?"

"Of course I missed you, Bea. Every fucking day. When I lost you, I lost part of my soul." He reached up and trailed the backs of his fingers along the neckline of my dress. My skin turned to goosebumps everywhere he touched. "And now you're back to me. You're mine. I'll be damned if I ever let anyone take you away again."

"Aren't you already damned?" I teased. "Abaddon, King of Hell."

"Once damned is fine," Don said with a small laugh. "I was born that way. Twice, though—if I'm to be damned again, it'll be on my own terms."

Don's hand fell away from my skin. He took a bite of the apple and smirked as he chewed.

My smile broadened as I watched him.

Don struck me as exactly the kind of man who lived life on no one's terms but his own.

I liked that about him, I realized.

Maybe even a little too much.

We ate in silence for a little longer. Every time I caught myself staring at him, he raised his eyes to me as well and I made myself look away.

To be fair, he was hard not to stare at. His dark hair was glossy and thick. His lips were enchanting. I even liked the way he ate—with an intense pleasure. Relishing every bite.

But unfortunately, I still had one question for Don. At least, for now.

I bit my lip. It was a question I should have asked Don the moment I realized that he'd taken Simon's place yesterday.

If I'd actually cared about Simon and his well-being, I supposed I would

have. It was telling that it had taken me this long to bother with it.

Simon wanted me dead, and I didn't love him at all.

"What did you do with him?" The *him* seemed obvious. I wasn't exactly talking about the Prince of Wales here. "When you caught him in the garden, planning my death—"

"I didn't kill him, if that's what you're asking."

"That's...good. Thank you." Admittedly, the thought had crossed my mind.

Don may have been handsome, but I'd seen him fight. In battle, he was vicious and brutal. Practically unhinged.

I still hadn't forgotten the way he'd swung that axe earlier, either.

"Don't thank me yet, Bea." Don shook his head as a look of disgust flashed across his eyes. "I still might."

"You're keeping him somewhere, then," I guessed. My chest felt tense and tight. "If you're planning on murdering him, why wait?"

"Do you want me to kill him? I can." I believed him. "Say the word, and I will."

"I...don't think so." Simon probably deserved it, honestly. But something in my heart didn't like that idea. "Who am I to go around ordering men's deaths?"

"He didn't hesitate to order yours."

Don had a point.

"I'm not like him," I said softly, looking away. "I don't want to be like him."

"I've killed men before. Demons, too. Yesterday, you saw that with your own eyes," Don reminded me. "Is it him you don't want to be like, or is it me?"

"You aren't like Simon at all." He wasn't. I didn't think for a second that Don and Simon were alike in the least. "That demon would have killed me if you hadn't finished him off first."

"He wanted to kill you because of Simon's word." Don scoffed. "I'm keeping your idiot fiancé alive for the moment, Bea. He's in the Abyss awaiting questioning. I need to know who he made his deal with and what the terms were. But once I have everything I need from him—well." Don's gaze flashed toward his knife. "You reap what you sow."

Tentatively, I reached out to Don. He stiffened as I touched my fingertips to his cheek, turning his gaze away from the knife.

“I know Simon’s done wrong. I know he wanted me dead,” I told Don. “But I don’t want his blood on your hands. He’s not worth it.”

“I’m a demon, Bea,” Don rasped. His brow furrowed and his jaw clenched as he stared up at me. “I’ve had blood on my hands for millennia. I’m not bothered by the notion of more.”

“You don’t need to get your hands dirty again,” I whispered. “Not for him. You said so yourself—he can’t hurt me here.”

“No, he can’t. But I have no intention of keeping him here—and I’m sure as hell not letting him go.” Don’s eyes flashed like a blade. “Maybe I want to get my hands dirty. He put you in danger. He deserves to die.”

“Don’t,” I asked him softly, cupping his cheek in my hand. He turned his gaze away. “Please. For me?”

Don was right—Simon really did deserve whatever he got. Even if it was death at Don’s capable, bloody hands.

But I still remembered the little boy who’d played tea party with me when we were children. I still recalled the Simon that pouted furiously when he lost at board games and cried when he scraped his knees.

Simon was far from a child anymore, but for a long time, we’d been something akin to friends. Or so I’d thought.

Even if he’d turned into a bastard of an adult, somewhere in my memory, he’d always be that same fragile, delicate child.

Even if now, he wanted me dead.

I didn’t have to stoop to his level.

And neither did Don.

“All right,” Don said after a long moment. His gray eyes glinted darkly as they flicked up to meet mine. “But if I’m going to behave myself for you, I think I deserve something in return.”

“Of course,” I said—then nearly kicked myself for it. I’d said yes before I’d even bothered asking him what I was agreeing to. “What do you want?”

Faintly, Don smiled up at me for a moment. A more wicked smile, I’d never known.

Then, he moved. Impossibly fast. Incredibly strong. By the time I realized what he was doing, he’d already taken my shoulder in his hands and pressed me down on the sheet beneath us. His fingers wound around my wrists, pinning me by them as his hips shifted between my thighs and his body moved over mine.

I drew in a breath. It was just short of a gasp.

Slowly now, so I could anticipate his every motion, he lifted my wrists together above my head so he could hold them there with only one hand.

With the other, he reached down beneath my skirt and began trailing his fingertips up my inner thigh.

“I think you know exactly what I want, Bea.” His voice was a low growl. His eyes were full of sin.

I rolled my lower lip beneath my tongue and held my breath as his hand moved further up my thigh.

I did.

I wanted it too.

BEA

“**N**o,” Don said as I reached down to adjust my skirt. He took my hand in his and moved my fingers aside. “None of that. I’m going to have you, Bea, and you’re going to lie back and enjoy being taken. Understand?”

I opened my mouth to argue with him but found that I had nothing to argue about.

My cunt was throbbing. Already, warmth and wetness were pooling at the entrance of my slit.

Don would realize that soon enough. If he hadn’t guessed it already.

Just like, if he reached far enough up my skirt, he’d realize that I hadn’t put on any panties beneath this sundress.

I could tell him that this was wrong, trading my body for Simon’s life. Maybe it was. I could tell him that I didn’t want this—but that would be a lie.

Not even a good one.

“I understand,” I said softly, meeting his eyes. “I’ll be good.”

I’d never thought of myself as the shy and obedient type, but Don had a way of bringing out sides of me that even I barely knew.

“Glad to hear it, kitten.” Don’s fingers curled around one of my knees, pulling it to the side. “You don’t want to find out what I’ll do to you if you change your mind.”

I bit my lip.

Actually, I suspected Don had every idea *exactly* how bad I wanted to find that out.

He knew, or he wouldn’t have said it.

Bastard.

I knew he could be rough with me if he wanted. After that memory he'd shown me earlier, I wasn't about to forget that any time soon. But his current gentleness—the menacing, barely contained anger he had toward Simon bristling through his every muscle as he smoothed his hand up my inner thigh—was just as enticing.

Don had different sides to him too, it would seem.

Each of them more fascinating and delicious than the last.

As Don cupped my inner thigh at the hollow where it met my pussy, he ran his thumb down the soft, dark hair that covered my mons pubis and my knees trembled in response.

“Shh,” Don hushed in my ear. “You don't need to be afraid of me, Bea. I'm a bad man. A dangerous one, too.”

“You're a demon,” I whispered back, closing my eyes. My mouth was nearly as wet as my cunt was. Just hearing his voice was making me salivate. “A devil.”

“I am, yes.” He folded his palm over my cunt and squeezed it gently. A shiver of excitement rippled through me at his touch. “But I'm not going to hurt you. Others, yes. Anyone who threatens you, I can't help but want to kill. You, though...”

His fingers dipped between my folds, stroking in a come-hither motion and gathering wetness.

“I'll never hurt you, darling.” Don's breath was humid against the stray locks of hair over my ear. “I'd burn the world down to keep you safe—but I'd die before I ever hurt you.”

I knew this. I understood. Don didn't scare me, exactly. He'd already proven his willingness to protect me. Once, on the day of our wedding, again in that memory.

“I'm not shaking because I'm afraid, Don.” My eyes flicked open as I turned my face toward his.

“No? Why, then?”

“I'm shaking because I want you.” Slowly, my hips rose and fell, matching the rhythm of his hand between my legs. “I'm shaking because I'm worried that if I have you, there won't be any turning back.”

A dark chuckle left his lips. The air from it tickled my mouth.

He was close. Too close, and at the same time, nowhere near close enough.

“No, kitten. There won’t be,” Don agreed. “But when your cunt feels this fucking good... why the hell would you ever want to turn back?”

He spread me open with his thumb and index finger. Willingly, I shifted my knees farther apart, giving him more room.

“Please.” My voice was breathy and weak. I’d never heard myself sound more desperate.

“Please what, Bea? Please stop...or please, more?”

“More.” I arched my back, closed my eyes, and gave in. “Please, more.”

He growled, low and dark, as he pressed his middle and index fingers deeper into my folds. I gasped as he entered me, then whimpered. My pussy had been clenching on nothing for our entire conversation so far.

Now, finally, it had something to clench around.

I couldn’t imagine anything that had ever felt so right.

“When I’m done with you, Bea, I’m going to leave you dripping and aching and satisfied.” His fingers slipped in and out of me with measured deliberation. Every time he pushed them back inside me, his fingertips flicked up against my G-spot, earning him another moan. “When I’m done, you can tell yourself that you did this for Simon. That you let me lay claim to you in this small, wicked way to save a man’s life.”

“That’s our deal. Isn’t it?” I clenched my jaw to stop myself from whimpering. Pleasure was unfurling within my core, hot and greedy. As gentle as Don was being now, with every move he made, I could tell exactly how much he was holding back. “To save his life, I’m the price.”

“You’re worth ten of him. A thousand. More.” The tip of Don’s nose nuzzled against my jaw as he shook his head. “But yes. If that’s the story you need to tell yourself to make you feel safe when I’m done with you, then do it. All I ask is that you remember one thing.”

“What?” My gasps were becoming rhythmic and sharper. My hips ached for him. I couldn’t keep them still.

“Later tonight, when you find yourself thinking of this moment—all the fucking pleasure I’m going to send thrumming through this perfect cunt of yours—remember that it doesn’t always have to be this way.” His whisper was growing as ragged as my breaths felt. “Any time you want me. However you need me—you can have me again. Just like this, and more.” He nipped at my neck, then shifted his lips to brush against mine. When I opened my eyes again, his were glinting with sin. “And when you do come to me—which you will—next time, there won’t be any lie for you to hide behind. Next time...

you'll be all fucking mine.”

He thrust his fingers into me, quick and hard. I cried out in response and he stifled it with a kiss. His tongue wove its way between my lips, massaging my own tongue in the same way he was fingering my cunt. He tasted sweet like grapes and warm like sunshine.

By the time I realized I was kissing him back, I was already too far gone to care.

Electricity flickered through me, humming and thrumming like there was a live wire inside my body, just beneath my skin. Don kissed me and pumped his fingers into me with a gently crescendoing intensity, until the flicker turned into sparks, and the sparks turned into a shock so sudden and violent that my entire body twitched and spasmed beneath his.

“Fucking perfect,” Don snarled against my lips. “Perfect woman. Perfect cunt. Perfectly fucking mine.”

He withdrew his hand from my cunt and moved down between my thighs. Still shaking from the aftershocks of the orgasm, I tilted my head up just in time to watch Don staring down at the honey that clung between his fingers before he sucked them into his mouth and licked them clean.

“Fuck, Bea. You taste too good to be true.” He moved his hand over my throat and shouldered my thighs apart so they were spread even wider. “It’s been too long. Can’t believe I almost forgot.”

His lips curled back with an agonizing need as he lowered his gaze to my pussy, spread and vulnerable and dripping with my own want.

“And you look as just as good as you taste, too.” For a moment, his snarl turned into a smile of disbelief.

Then, he plunged his mouth between my legs and lapped at my slit like it was the hottest day in Hell and my pussy was an ice cream cone. Our picnic lunch lay aside, entirely forgotten.

Now, I was the feast.

His wet tongue smoothed against my folds. His saliva mixed with my slickness, mingling together beneath his heat. He kissed my pussy just as passionately as he’d kissed my mouth only a few moments ago.

When he moved his lips to my clit, my eyes widened, and my fingers went to his hair on instinct.

I was throbbing, dripping, desperate for him.

I needed something to hold onto.

What I needed was him.

He sucked my clit into his mouth and trapped it gently between his teeth. His tongue lashed out, flicking rapidly against my swollen bud. His hands wrapped around my hips and squeezed my ass as he pulled me closer to him.

My body flushed with life in return. Yes. I wanted to be closer to him. As close as two people could be—that was what I wanted more than anything.

My hips bucked up against his mouth, rocking rhythmically like ocean waves. Inside me, an even bigger wave was building. It arched and soared toward the heavens, then came crashing down intensely, hard enough to wrack my whole body as it pulled me along with it.

“Perfect,” Don purred through my gasping. Even his breath against my clit was enough to keep pushing the orgasm on. “Beautiful and sweet. Fucking exquisite thing you are.”

He rose up just for long enough to kiss me again. It was a kiss that didn’t last for nearly enough time. When he trailed his kisses back down my body, all the way to my pussy all over again, I found that I could taste myself on my own lips.

He was right.

I was sweet.

“You should spend the rest of the day exploring Nevermore, darling. It’s your home now as much as it is mine.” I almost laughed at how casually he said it. It was such a normal thing to say—and such a strange thing to feel the consonants of those words still vibrating against the lips of my pussy as Don shifted his kisses across it. I was almost pathetically despondent when he finally pulled away. “And while you do, you should consider the benefits of consummating our marriage properly. If you liked that, then you’ll love what comes next when we have more time.”

Consummating our marriage. I knew that Don meant *letting him fuck me like the ravenous demon he was*, but it was more than that, too.

Consummating our marriage would give me all the protections I needed to return to Earth when our honeymoon was over.

It would mean binding myself even more deeply to Don, too.

“And what will you do now?” I asked, still breathless as I propped myself up on my elbows to stare down at him.

Don’s gray eyes were dark, but his smile was darker still.

“Now, I’m going to go deal with your traitor of an ex.” He pressed a final kiss to my knee, then picked himself up off the ground. “But don’t worry. I’ll be gentle. Just like you asked.”

As he left me there, he said something else. So quietly, I almost didn't hear it at all: "If I can."

DON

I'd promised Bea I wouldn't kill her waste-of-space fiancé.

But Simon Roth wasn't Bea's fiancé anymore. Now that I was Bea's husband, I considered their engagement thoroughly over.

And while I'd promised that I wouldn't kill him, I hadn't sworn any oaths against hurting the stupid prick.

No less than he deserved.

I flew across the Abyss with fire in my eyes and the taste of Bea's perfect cunt still on my tongue.

She was falling for me all over again. I could see it in her eyes and feel it in my bones. In a way, it was inevitable. Of course she was falling for me. She was the other half of my soul.

For her, I'd spare Simon's life.

I hoped he'd appreciate her generosity.

I suspected that he wouldn't.

"Enjoying your honeymoon, lover-boy?" Mal met me at the mouth of the Pit. Some parts of the Abyss were darker and deeper than others. To find a place more inescapable than the black vastness of the Pit, Mal and Lock would have had to push Simon straight into a black hole.

"I am," I assured Mal. "But if there's anything worth interrupting it, it's certainly this."

"True. But still, let's make it quick." Mal wore a pair of jeans and a black Johnny Cash t-shirt with cowboy boots. His shoulders were stiff with pent-up energy. The toothpick between his teeth looked like it had nearly been chewed all the way through. "I haven't minded hanging around here to make

sure the fucker doesn't wiggle his way back out somehow, but I'm eager to get back to Earth soon as possible, if ya don't mind."

"You're worried for Ava," I guessed. Given the attack on Bea, he had every right to be. We still had no idea what kind of forces might have been targeting the women we loved. "Have you found her again?"

"Never lost her in the first place. She's back in Greenriver with her family, runnin' that little garden shop of theirs."

"She's safe, I hope."

"Safe enough," Mal said with a nod. "That mother of hers has some kind of magic to her. Dunno what kind. Plenty of protection around the place, but still—I'll feel a hell of a lot better when I can get back to keeping an eye on her again. Just in case."

"Thank you for being here," I said, and meant it. "I know how much she means to you."

"I'm better off than Moloch is, at least." Mal tucked his thumbs in his pockets and spat his toothpick into the Pit. "He's having a hell of a time trackin' down poor Joan. After the wedding, he reckons she all but disappeared off the face of the Earth."

"That's sure to have pissed him off." Lock was as good of a hunter as he was a warrior. I didn't imagine it was doing his ego any favors, not being able to track down his lady love. "But if any one of the girls are capable of protecting themselves from danger, it's Joan. He knows that."

Bea had an excellent backhand when she was in a face-slapping mood, and if Mal was right about Ava's mother, Ava probably had a little magic of her own to protect herself with. But Joan—I'd seen her fight before. In battle, she was just as ruthless and capable as Lock was.

"Oh, he knows it," Mal assured me. "But he knows how much she likes to go lookin' for danger, too." Mal nodded to the pit. "You gonna kill him when we're done?"

"No," I said with a glower. "I promised Bea I wouldn't."

"That was generous of you." Mal laughed humorlessly. "You ready to get this over with, then?"

I cracked my knuckles and nodded. "Let's bring him up."

I crouched down and reached into the Pit. It was a bottomless chasm that defied any of the physics that bound the Earth. But here in my realm, I could find things within it as easily as I could search my own pockets for spare change.

I reached in deep and caught hold of the collar of Simon's tux almost immediately. My grasp yanked him out of the infinite free fall that he'd been languishing in ever since Mal and Lock had pushed him in last night.

With a grunt, I hauled him out of the Pit and tossed him to the ground at Mal's feet.

"What..." Simon pushed himself into a sitting position, blinking and looking dazed. His nose was still broken from where my fist had connected to his face. The blood had dried over his lips and chin. The bags under his eyes were swollen and bruised purple and green.

He looked like shit.

He *was* shit.

When he finally became aware enough of his surroundings to notice Mal and me looming over him, a yelp left his throat.

"Fuck," he swore. Fear filled his eyes as he tried to scramble away.

I stopped him with a swift kick to his ribs. It felt good to hurt him. Would have felt even better to kill him.

But I'd promised Bea I wouldn't.

It was a promise I'd have to do my best to keep.

"Not so fast, kiddo." Mal grabbed Simon by the scruff of his neck and pulled him back up off the ground. "Got a coupla questions for you. Reckon you'd better answer 'em before you get more than just a kick in the ribs."

"Fuck you," Simon spat at us as he coughed.

Mal and I shared a look.

Then, I kicked him again, a little harder this time.

"We can do this all day," I informed Simon. "If you want to minimize the pain I'm willing to put you through, I'd suggest you stop swearing and start talking."

Simon coughed some more. This time, he stayed on the ground.

"What do you want to know?" he rasped. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"You and I are of very different opinions on that front." I dropped down to sit back on my heels. "You took a hit out on my wife. I'd like to know exactly what kind of brain worms you'd have to be teeming with to come to the conclusion that it was a clever idea."

"*Your* wife?" Simon glanced up at me, his blue eyes sharp with rage. "I think you mean *my* wife."

I smiled at him for a moment. "No, I don't."

“She married *you*?” Simon’s face twisted in confusion. “I find that hard to believe. My father never would have allowed it. When he finds out—”

“Your father already knows,” I assured him. “Gave me his blessing and everything. Looks like you’re not exactly Daddy’s little golden boy after all.”

I still didn’t trust Leviathan. But figuring out what role he played in all of this would be much more difficult than getting information out of his son.

Simon was an idiot. Little more than a child in a grown man’s body.

The apple couldn’t have fallen farther from the tree if someone had picked it up and thrown it across the orchard.

“Fucking asshole,” Simon snarled. “As if I wanted to marry Bea in the first place. She’s a—”

I took a fistful of Simon’s hair in my hand and pulled his head back sharply, forcing him to meet my eyes.

“I would choose your next words very carefully,” I warned him. “You don’t want to find out what a demon like me does to men like you when they speak unkindly about my bride.”

Simon gulped, then nodded. As suspected, he was quick to lose his nerve.

“Like I said. I didn’t want to marry her. She didn’t want to marry me.” He licked his lips, which were chapped and dry. “I wanted her to love me, once upon a time. I knew she never would.”

“So, you reckoned the best plan of action was to kill her for it?” Mal’s lips pulled back in a sneer. He looked at me and shrugged. “Go on. Kick him again.”

“No!” Simon yelped, jerking away from me. He fell backwards as I let his hair slip from my fist. “Please. No more kicking.”

“You’d better start explaining yourself, then,” I said. “And fast.”

“All right, all right!” Simon held his hands up in surrender. “Yes, okay? I understand that trying to kill Bea was a bit of an overreaction.”

“Understatement of the fuckin’ year,” Mal scoffed.

“But I did my best to make allowances for her while we were engaged. I tried to make her love me, but she was never interested in that. I let her date whoever she wanted. I gave her her freedom. But there was no way either of us were getting out of that marriage. Just...put yourself in my shoes for a second, okay?”

I glanced down at Simon’s dress shoes. They were scuffed and spotted with his blood.

“I’d rather not.”

“Try,” he pleaded. “How would you feel, being forced to marry a woman who would never want you? Never obey you? Never be the wife you deserved?”

“That’s rich,” I said with a cold laugh. “If you ask me, you never deserved *her*. Not the other way around.”

“I wasn’t interested in being married to a woman who didn’t give a fuck about me as a man.” Simon shrugged. “So yes. I made a deal with a demon to put her out of her misery. It was a mercy, really. If she would rather die than love me, who was I to deny her?”

“Which demon?” My hands curled into fists. “Tell me now and I might let you live.”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Simon’s eyes were full of fear as his gaze focused on my hands, but his voice was petulant. Mocking. He just couldn’t seem to help himself. “It doesn’t matter that you married her. It doesn’t matter what you try to do to keep her safe. My father may have given you his blessing, but my father doesn’t have the powers of Hell at his disposal.”

“No,” I agreed. “But I do. I’m a king of Hell, you spoiled rotten little shit.”

“So am I.” Mal’s smile was cocky and threatening. “So imagine what the two of us might do to a yellow-bellied, half-human idiot like you if you don’t answer our questions.”

“Kings of Hell?” Simon scoffed bitterly. “I know who you are. Abaddon and Malacoda. You’re just two low-level demons who crawled out of Belial’s rotten womb and managed to weasel your way onto a couple of thrones. You might have the title, but you’re not even members of the Fallen. You don’t have the powers that my connections have.”

Mal and I exchanged another glance. We both laughed.

If he thought he could get to us by insulting our mother, he was sorely mistaken.

If anything, I was fairly certain Belial would have taken that *rotten womb* comment as a compliment. The highest form of flattery, really.

In his anger, Simon didn’t even realize that he’d outed himself.

“So you’ve made a deal with a member of the Fallen,” I guessed. “Which one?”

“Mulciber’s too soft for assassination attempts,” Mal mused. “And Mom’s not interested in murdering humans.”

“So either Beelzebub or Mammon.” I looked back to Simon. “Are you

going to tell us which of them it is, or would you prefer that we beat it out of you?”

“You can beat me all you like,” Simon sneered. “It won’t help you. Even if you knew who I’d made my deal with, you wouldn’t be able to stop him. Any move you make, he already predicted before you even thought of it.”

“I highly doubt that,” I said. Zeb dealt in information. Mammon in money. Neither of them could see the future, though. “You’re bluffing.”

“You’d like to think that, wouldn’t you?” Simon chuckled like he’d just said something hilarious. I wasn’t inclined to agree. “He knows all about you—and through him, so do I. You and Bea really thought you were being clever about keeping your relationship a secret, didn’t you? But I knew. I knew the whole time.”

I didn’t show it, but that rattled me more than I would have liked. Simon had no way of knowing that Bea and I had been together before the wedding. Bea certainly wouldn’t have spilled it to him—as I understood it, their betrothal had been built on a strict rule of *don’t ask, don’t tell*.

But whether Simon realized it or not, my goading was causing him to say more than he should have.

If I kept it up, I suspected we might actually get somewhere.

“You’re a bad liar, Simon Roth,” I said, shaking my head and scoffing. “Your father would be ashamed of you, if he could see you right now.”

“I’m a liar, am I?” Simon’s cheeks turned red with anger. Good. I was getting to him. “If I’m such a liar, then tell me how else I would know this: all three of you idiot kings of Hell have set your hearts on women you’ll never be able to keep. And when they’re all dead, you’ll only have yourselves to blame.”

Mal’s jaw tensed. That confirmed our suspicions—Ava and Joan were in danger as well. “How come your new buddy has so much interest in these human women at all, huh? If he’s so great and powerful, aren’t the affairs of humans a little below his pay grade?”

“Because they’re dangerous,” said Simon. “Especially in the hands of stupid assholes like *you*. Arranging for them to be married off to other men like they have been in the past hasn’t worked this time around—obviously.” Simon turned his head, coughed, and spat blood on the ground. “And manipulating the angels to take their memories wasn’t enough to put a stop to things this time, either.”

I arched a brow. “Enough to stop what, exactly?”

“The end of the world.” Simon looked between Mal and me with surprise. “The two of you really *are* idiots, aren’t you? I’m surprised you haven’t figured it out yet.”

“Why don’t you be a little sweetheart and enlighten us, then?” Mal suggested.

My chest was pounding with trepidation and concern. I was lucky I didn’t show it on my face as well.

But maybe I was even luckier that Simon seemed almost desperate to talk to someone—anyone. Even if he was laying out everything we needed to know on a silver platter without so much as a thought about how he was simultaneously digging his own grave.

The little shit must not have had many friends to chat with, I supposed. I couldn’t imagine why.

“It was bad enough that Lucifer was allowed to have his child with Lilith. But if the three of you can’t manage to keep away from Beatrice and Ava and Joan—and my friend in the Fallen already knows you aren’t capable of that—then things will only get worse from here on out.” Cruelly, he laughed. “Tell me—are you all really so in love that you’ll risk the fate of Heaven, Hell and Earth over it? If you ask me, those bitches are hardly worth it.”

I held myself together for just long enough to hear Mal draw in a breath.

I knew he’d want to beat Simon bloody for even insinuating that Ava was a bitch.

Thankfully, I managed to beat Mal to the punch.

I wanted to hurt Simon more.

I threw myself out him, fists raining down on any part of him I could hit. He held his hands up, trying his best to protect his face, but it wasn’t enough.

My knuckles hammered against his throat and cracked against his ribs. When he lowered his arms to clutch at his chest in pain, I smashed his broken nose in all over again. Bloodied his mouth. Blackened his eyes.

I’d held my temper back for as long as I could. I’d humored Simon’s sneering and his evasions of my questions. I’d suffered his insults. For Bea’s sake, I’d kept myself calm.

But if he thought he could get away with insulting Bea like that in front of me, he was sorely mistaken.

I suppose my hands slipped.

Whoops.

“C’mon,” Mal grunted, taking me by the shoulders and pulling me off

Simon. “Keep that up and you’re gonna kill him.”

“I want to kill him,” I snarled, jerking forward again.

“I know you do,” Mal agreed, holding tight. “But you made a promise. Best keep it. Look at him, Don.”

My chest heaved with heavy breaths as I straightened and stood back. On the ground, Simon was cowering and weeping. His face was a bloody pulp.

“You’ve hurt him enough.” Mal clapped me on the back. “Don’t get me wrong, I think you should kill him too. But right now, you’ve gotta let it go.”

“Fine.” I turned away before I changed my mind. “Kick him back into the Pit, then. I don’t think we’re going to get anything more out of him right now anyway.”

I heard Simon wheeze and yelp as Mal nudged his body back over the Pit’s edge.

He wouldn’t like being back in the Pit either, I was sure. But he was safer that way.

My temper was still burning hot in my veins. If I’d had to so much as look at him for another second, I knew I would have snapped his neck.

“You should go,” I said to Mal. I wiped my knuckles against my slacks and let out a low growl of frustration. “You heard him. As we suspected, Ava’s in danger too.”

“If you’re sure.” Mal came to stand next to me and nodded to the Pit. “You don’t reckon he can get out of there, can he?”

“No,” I said with certainty. “He’ll be falling through the darkness until I’ve decided what to do with him next.”

Maybe I’d just leave him there forever.

If Bea wouldn’t let me kill him, it would serve him right.

I certainly couldn’t let him go. Not now.

I opened a portal back to Earth for Mal and closed it back up once he was through. I knew he’d contact Lock once he knew Ava was safe to warn him of what we’d just learned.

Either Mammon or Beelzebub had plans for Bea, Joan and Ava. Sinister ones.

They didn’t want us anywhere near the human women who had our hearts. It was all the more reason to keep them close at our sides.

It made me furious, all these machinations of angels and demons alike. No—more than furious.

Simon had implied that Bea, Ava, and Joan had all been taken from us

before this. Married off to other men or simply killed.

I knew that Lucifer's bride Evie—Lilith, in a past life—had been reincarnated hundreds of times before.

Now, I had reason to believe that Bea, Ava, and Joan were part of that cycle as well.

Everything and everyone that tried to keep me from Bea was the enemy. She was mine. *Mine*.

I wanted blood.

Starting with Simon's. I'd work my way down the list from there.

But Mal was right. My promise to Bea was one I needed to keep.

Simon Roth wouldn't die today. No matter how deeply he might have deserved to.

After what I'd just learned, I needed something else to focus on to keep my mind off of turning back and ending him once and for all.

I needed a distraction. I needed release.

I needed my wife.

BEA

In Don's absence, admittedly I was a little lost.

He'd left my knees trembling. My legs were wobbly as I picked myself up off the grass and took my little bubble of color back into the mansion.

Every room I entered turned Technicolor the moment I stepped into it. The Abyss was a coloring book, and I was a one-woman pack of crayons. As I walked through the halls, I turned them from gray to pretty golds and reds and browns.

It's never lonely here when you're around, Don had told me.

How many times had I colored this place in? I didn't recognize any of the rooms I moved through, but they did seem vaguely familiar somehow. Without my memories, it was hard to tell.

Still, having the power to make color in the Abyss was kind of fun. As I stepped into the library, I smiled as all the books on the shelves shifted into a rainbow of blues and reds and greens.

I liked to read. Always had—even when my parents told me it was a waste of time. I knew they would have preferred that I'd focused my time on learning languages and doing my math homework and memorizing etiquette rules instead of burying my nose in books. I'd humored them as much as I could.

But many of the best parts of my childhood had been spent sitting out in the garden with *Jane Eyre* or *Little Women* open in my lap. Don's library here was even larger than the one I'd grown up with—and the books on its shelves were far more interesting than my parents' collection as well.

The library at Nevermore didn't just have law books and the classics. Don had romances and horror novels, Haruki Murakami and Stephen King. That surprised me—I didn't think of Don as a causal reader. But parts of his library made me feel like I'd just wandered into a bookstore full of bestsellers.

Other parts, I was almost too afraid to touch. Some of the shelves were full of books so old and fragile looking, I would have expected to find them in a museum, not a personal collection.

I wiped my hands clean on my dress and carefully pulled out a copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It was written in its original language, Italian. The pages were tawny in color and incredibly thin.

There was something strangely comforting about this book. Its weight in my hands just felt...*right* somehow. Familiar. Like something that was important.

Maybe at some point in my lost memories, it had been.

Unless I was willing to pay Don's price of kisses for more recollections, I supposed there was no way I'd ever know.

Then again, given the way Don's kisses felt on my lips... Maybe I could afford the cost of remembering.

Maybe when he got back from interrogating Simon, that's what we'd do: spend the whole day here in the library, making out and remembering.

Assuming that he'd kept his word and avoided murdering my fiancé. *Ex-fiancé*.

Now that I was married to Don, it was hard to say exactly what Simon was to me now. But I hoped he appreciated the way I'd bargained for his life.

I had no doubt that Don would have killed him otherwise. Maybe not right away, but eventually.

Then again, Simon had never really been the gracious type.

If he'd really made a deal with a demon to secure my demise, he was lucky that I even gave a damn whether he was alive or not.

"Find something interesting?" Don's voice was deep and gravelly as he called out to me from the doorway.

I snapped the book shut and turned, startled.

I hadn't heard him come in.

"I was just... Oh." I blinked as I looked Don up and down. His hair was tousled. His eyes were dark. His gaze was intense.

His shirt was stained with blood.

I slipped the book back onto its shelf and frowned. Seeing him like that again, bloodied just like he'd been in that memory, made my heart pang like I'd just been shot through the chest.

"What happened?" I moved to him quickly, breaking into something just short of a run. My hands shifted over his body, hovering half an inch over his skin. I wanted to touch him. Badly. But I didn't know if he was safe to touch. "Are you hurt? Did *Simon* do this to you?"

Somehow, I doubted that. Simon seemed like the kind of man that Don could break in half in an instant if he'd been of the mind to.

But I guessed I'd doubted that Simon would try to have me killed on our wedding night, too.

"I'm not hurt. Simon is." Don dropped his gaze to the blood on his shirt for a moment, then grabbed my wrist and pressed my hand to his chest. I could feel his heart beating through his skin. It was pounding and racing, hard and furious. "This is his blood. Not mine."

"Oh." I guessed I should have been more concerned about Simon's well-being instead, then. But I only felt a tender kind of relief. "I'm glad you're all right. But..."

I glanced down at his hand on my wrist. The skin over his knuckles was broken and even bloodier than the rest of him.

Some of that blood was dark and glimmering. Not Simon's at all, but Don's.

"You are hurt," I breathed. "Your hands—"

"They'll heal." Don took my throat in his other hand, framing my jaw with his fingers and thumb. "I did as you asked. He's not dead."

"I don't care about Simon right now, Don." I looked up at him with pleading eyes. "We need to clean your wounds. Please. Let me help."

"Later." Don walked me backwards, moving my body with his. His eyes burned with steely flames. He didn't take them off me. It was like he didn't know how. "If you want to wash that bastard's blood off me, it'll have to wait."

"Why?" I didn't understand. Something had happened, obviously. Simon himself was annoying, but I doubted that would be enough to make Don act like *this*. It must have been something Simon told Don. Something he'd said to make Don this satanic. Demonic. Unhinged. "Tell me what happened. What did he do?"

"Later," Don growled again. He pressed my back up against one of the

bookshelves and pinned my hips there with his own. I could feel his cock against my stomach, thick and stiff beneath his pants. “Right now, I need something from you.”

“Anything,” I whispered. My chest ached for him. For his broken knuckles and that furious look in his eyes. My body ached too—but not quite in the same way. “What do you need? Tell me and I’ll do it.”

“I’m going to kiss you again, Bea.” His lips moved in close to mine as he gave me the warning. “I told you, did I? That I’d loved someone before you.”

“You did.” I’d actually managed to feel jealous of her when he’d said it. Silly of me, maybe, but I felt it again now. “Did Simon tell you something about her?”

“In a way.” Don’s eyes seemed to be searching for something within mine. Beneath my hand, his chest rose and fell with a ragged breath. He dragged his thumb to my lower lip and shook his head. “I think you were her. I think she was you. *Beatrice*.”

He said my name like it was a bitter, forbidden fruit.

“How?” It sounded ridiculous. Impossible. “I know I’ve forgotten things, but I’ve only ever been me.”

“I know. You’re always you.” Don’s lips eased even closer to mine. His breath was hot and humid against my mouth. He smelled like mint and blood. “That’s why I need to be sure.”

“Sure of what?” I asked, but Don was done answering my questions. I could tell.

“Tell me I can kiss you, Bea. I need you. I need your mouth.” His voice was even lower now. Even more commanding. “Now.”

“You can kiss me,” I breathed. “Of course you can.”

His lips crushed against mine, burning hot and rough enough to bruise.

This time, when I felt myself going somewhere else, I felt Don coming with me.

This time, I wasn’t going alone.

BEA

Somewhere in a memory...

Florence, Italy 1287

It was my wedding day again.

Funny, almost, how all wedding days felt the same. There were always flowers. There was always a dress and a veil and shoes that hurt my feet.

There was always a sense of dread.

And somehow, one way or another, I always ended up in Don's arms.

"Is this really what you want, then?" Don's voice was dark and deep as he pulled away from our kiss. "To marry him instead of me?"

"You know that's not true." How could he possibly believe that? "No, Don. I don't want to marry Simon dei Bardi. I never did."

"Then why do it?" His eyes searched mine, challenging me. "Why do anything you don't want?"

"It's not that simple." I shook my head. My chest was crushing inward on my aching heart. "You know that too."

"Oh, I know. I know everything, *mi cara*." Don scoffed. "Everything except why you'd sell your soul away to some pathetic associate of your father's instead of running away with me like you want."

"I wish I could," I told him. "But my soul isn't mine to sell."

My father had already auctioned it off to the highest bidder. I had no say in the matter.

If Don really knew everything, then he'd know that as well.

"Is it because of what I am? Is that why you refuse me?"

"Of course it isn't." That wasn't entirely true, though.

Don was *infernale. Il diavolo*. Satanic. Sinful. A demon and a devil and a thing that belonged to Hell.

My soul had already been promised to another, along with the rest of me.

In loving Don, I was certain I was already damned in spite of it.

I didn't know that he had a soul at all.

"I'm sorry, Don." It killed to do it, but I slipped from his arms and backed away. "You know that if I had a choice..."

"What am I meant to do without you, *stellina*?" For a moment, Don's face looked as broken as my soul felt. "Today, I lose you. How am I supposed to go on?"

"You'll have to write more poems about me, I suppose." The ones he'd

already written for me were beautiful. Glorious. The stuff of legends. Maybe he could take his pain and write more. “Tragic ones.”

“I’m tired of pawning off my words on that poet whose name I’ve been borrowing,” he said with a glower. “They don’t belong to anyone but you.”

“And I belong to you,” I said softly. “You know I do. I always will.”

“Your heart might belong to me.” Don’s hands curled into fists as he turned away. “But the rest of you—that will all belong to him now. Not mine at all anymore.”

“My heart’s the biggest piece of me.” Slowly, I stepped toward him again. I knew I shouldn’t have. I knew it was wrong. But I’d fallen in love with a demon. For every moment after that, right and wrong had been incredibly blurred. I laid a palm against his back, over his linen shirt. Over the same place where sometimes, he spread his wings. “The most important part of me will always be yours.”

“I don’t want part of you, Beatrice. I want all of you.”

“I know.” I smoothed my hand down his back as tears began to form in my eyes. “But my heart is the only part of me that’s mine to give.”

For a long moment, neither of us spoke. Through the window, church bells began to ring through the streets of Florence.

We didn’t have long. But even in moments of silence, I knew that every second we had together counted now.

“No,” Don finally said. He turned to me and took me in his arms once more. “Not the only part.”

He smoothed his hand down my hip, tracing the outline of my thigh through the skirts of my wedding gown. His fingers dipped lower, pushing the skirts aside so he could reach beneath them. His touch roamed up the soft fabric of my stockings, climbing greedily until finally, he found bare skin.

“Is that what you want from me? My body on my wedding day?”

“I told you. I want all of you.” He lifted my leg up until my thigh was hugging his hip. “And if I can’t have that... Then yes, your body will have to be enough.”

He moved my skirts up higher, pinning them between us. His cock was hard as he pressed it against me through his trousers.

His eyes were locked on mine.

“Ask me to take you, Beatrice.” His voice was ragged and commanding. His gaze was intense.

I licked my lips, desperate to agree immediately. I knew this was wrong. I

belonged to another man—or I was supposed to.

But *supposed to* wasn't what we were dealing with. Not right now.

I was well aware of my reality: no matter who else tried to lay claim to me, I would always belong to him.

My hesitation cost me dearly, though.

“*Beg me to take you,*” he growled into my ear. “*Beg me to fuck you here, in your wedding dress, on your wedding day. Beg me to claim you before that man we both know you have no desire for can so much as touch you. Give yourself to me. You don't belong to him. You shouldn't be his wife. It's a sin for him to try to claim you against your will, and when he dies, he'll burn for it. But first...yes, beg me. Beg me to make you mine before he can make you his.*”

“*Please.*” This time, I answered right away. I couldn't hold myself back any longer. Not from him. “*Fuck me. Take me. Please. I'm yours.*”

He unfastened his belt with quick-moving fingers. When his cock stroked against my slit, he found me dripping for him already. Eager. Willing—far too willing. I'd been ready for him long before he ever touched me.

As he entered me, slow and firm, an ache pulsed through my cunt. There was pain, and yet, there wasn't. It was quickly eclipsed by the sheer ecstasy of having him inside me. I'd been a virgin up until that moment.

Now, I knew why marriage was spoken of as two souls joining. He filled me with far more than just his cock. Pleasure, yes, and sorrow, and joy.

I'd been made for him. Anything else was a lie. He was right. To belong to any other man was sin, and I would relish the thought of my husband-to-be burning in hellfire for it.

The fire that Don stirred in my body burned too, but only in the most delicious way imaginable. He thrust up into me, stroking against my core, and I wrapped my leg around his waist to take him deeper still.

“*I love you,*” I gasped against his lips as his kisses conquered my mouth with every buck of his hips. “*I love you. I love you. You and only you.*”

“*I love you too, Beatrice,*” he growled back at me through the kisses. “*God in Heaven—Satan below. I love you too. You and only you.*”

The flames inside me rose high, burning bright. I arched against him, crying out and straining my muscles. He was moving me toward something. Salvation or damnation—I didn't care anymore.

Not for as long as his thick cock was deep within my channel and his fingers were in my hair and his lips were against mine.

When the fire erupted inside my core, I finally couldn't hold it back any longer. I let it burn. I burned with it. The world became an explosion, and all I could do was cling to him and gasp and pray that the strength of his body would stop mine from falling apart.

His seed rushed up into me in return, gushing from his tip and fountaining deep. With hard, forceful thrusts, he sent it shooting deeper still. My cunt convulsed around his thick shaft, milking out every last drop with unabashed greed. The veins of his cock throbbed back in response, sending me further into the flames of my need.

This was wrong, and yet it wasn't.

Sin was tricky. It was supposed to feel good. That was why people were tempted into sinning in the first place.

But nothing was better than the way I felt as he held me in his arms and took me as his own.

A pleasure like that could only possibly be divine.

"My Don." I rested my forehead against his, blinking back tears I hadn't realized I was crying. My voice was soft and holy. When I smoothed my fingertips down his cheek, I found a stray tear on his face as well. "My Dante."

"I'm going to find you again, Beatrice," he panted against my lips. He looked so certain of it, I wanted desperately to believe him. "I'm going to make you mine. If not in this life, then in the next."

"After death?" How would I ever be able to wait that long? "But... You can't come to Heaven, *tesoro*. They won't let you in."

"There are other ways to live again," he promised me. "And when you come back to me—next time, you'll be mine. Mine and mine alone."

"Promise?" My heart was broken. Every part of me was. If he was lying now, it would kill even this last fragile scrap of hope. "Do you swear it?"

"Yes," he whispered. "I swear."

But when he kissed me again, it was the kind of kiss that told me even he wasn't sure.

He kissed me like it would be the last time.

DON

“D on... What was that?” Bea whispered as she eased out of our kiss.

“Fate,” I whispered back to her. I held her face in my hands. In spite of the tear in my eye, a smile was beginning to tug at my lips. “That was fate.”

“I was me, but...” Bea frowned. “I wasn’t. I was someone else, too. Wasn’t I?”

“You were her, Bea. The woman I told you about. Beatrice Portinari—the only person I ever loved before you came into my life.” I wiped the tears away from her cheeks. “Only, she wasn’t another woman at all. You were her, and she’s you.”

“How, though?” Gently, Bea shook her head. “Reincarnation...that’s not exactly a biblical belief.”

“Isn’t it?” We weren’t the Hindus or the Buddhists, no, but that didn’t mean living again wasn’t possible. Quite the opposite, in fact. “Resurrection comes in many forms.”

“Beatrice Portinari...” Bea glanced over at the bookshelf I’d found her standing at when I came in. “I know that name. I called you...Dante. Does that mean...”

“I had a poetic phase, once upon a time.” Maybe that was embarrassing to admit, but I felt no shame about it. If anything, it amused me. I knew Bea was familiar with my work. “Everything I wrote, I wrote for you.”

“You were Dante Alighieri.” Bea’s laugh was full of disbelief. “*Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso...* The entire *Divine Comedy*. That was all...you?”

“I *called* myself Dante,” I corrected her. “I let him borrow some of my work and ideas in exchange for borrowing his name.”

“*Incipit vita nova.*” Bea breathed the words from one of my poems like they were holy. “A new life begins. If I really was *her*... Is that what we’ve been doing all this time? Reincarnating? Finding each other again?”

“I wish,” I admitted. If only we could have been like Lucifer and his Lilith, who’d loved each other a thousand times throughout the ages. “You’re a rare thing, Bea. As far as I know, this is only your second time on Earth.”

“But...” She bit her lip. A look of tragedy passed through her lovely brown eyes. “I know what happened to Beatrice Portinari. She was dead by age twenty-five.”

“Yes. She was.” I’d lost her to another man, then I’d lost her completely. “You were. You wouldn’t run away with me like I wanted, and so I had to do my best to watch over you from afar. In the end...” I sighed. “I lost you, then you died. You wouldn’t come with me willingly, and I couldn’t bring myself to steal you away against your will. It was the greatest regret of my entire life.”

“But you said we’re fated.”

“We are.”

“Is that our fate, then? To find each other, fall in love...lose each other?” Her fingers curled against my bloody shirt. “Is that my destiny? To die?”

“Not if I can help it.” So far, this time I’d managed to avoid making the mistakes of my past. I intended to keep things that way. “We may be star-crossed, darling, but if fate gave you to me... To keep you, I’d put out every fucking star in the sky.”

“I don’t want you to put out the stars for me, Don,” Bea whispered. All of this seemed to be hitting her hard. I didn’t blame her. In my chest, my own heart was still pounding with passion. With rage. With fear—and yes, with love. In such a mix of emotions, I could understand if she was feeling a little overwhelmed right now. “Destiny can’t be changed, can it? It’s no use. No matter how powerful you are...you can’t turn the tides of fate.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” I said, taking her shoulders into my hands. “This time, you didn’t marry some other man. This time, you married *me*. A difference. A significant one.”

Bea held her breath for a long moment. Then, slowly, she let it out once more.

“If all of this is true—”

“It is.” Why the fuck would I lie?

Bea bit her lip. “Do you think it will be enough?”

“It will be,” I said with certainty. “It has to be. But...”

“What?” Her eyes were full of confusion as they searched mine. “What’s wrong?”

I dropped my gaze to her breasts, so full and pert and firm. Luscious. Beautiful. They rose and fell tantalizingly with every breath she took.

When my eyes flicked back up toward her, they were as dark as they’d ever been.

“It would be easier to keep you safe this time if you’d give yourself to me first.”

The intensity of my stare didn’t waver. But as I watched her breath catch in her throat, my cock stiffened on instinct. My balls were tense, tight and full of cum. Already, precum was beginning to form in a pearl at my tip.

God, how I would have liked to take her then and there. The way she breathed as she thought about what to say in return told me she might have even let me.

But no. That wasn’t what I wanted.

She’d find that out soon enough.

“You mean...that we should consummate our marriage,” Bea said slowly. Her cheeks were tinged pink—not in a blush of embarrassment this time, though. They were flushed like she’d spent far too much time today imagining doing exactly that: giving herself to me as soon as I got back.

“I mean I want your body, Bea.” I wanted to claim it now. I wanted to cup my hand against her cunt, drop to my knees and lap at her sweet nectar from the chalice of her sex all over again. I wanted to force her to her knees and show her exactly how good my cock would feel in her mouth. But I wouldn’t. It was what she expected—to be taken. It would be far too easy. “I mean I want to fuck you. To make love to you as my bride.”

“And if I do...it will help you protect me?”

I smirked. “Yes. And it will help you protect yourself as well. I’ve shown you how gifted I am in bed already—but my cock is far from the only gift I can give you today.”

“Is that the only reason you want me? So I can be safe?”

“You’re far from stupid, Bea.” I shook my head, almost disappointed in her for a moment. I was fairly certain I’d made myself clear exactly the intention behind my desires. “You know that’s not true.”

“I know,” she whispered. Her lips trembled as she spoke. “But...can I think about it? Just for a little while longer?”

“Of course.” I took a step back from her, then another, then another. “Take all the time you need. When you’re ready to give me your answer, I’ll find you.”

“How will you know where I am?” she asked.

I laughed. “I know where everything is here in my realm, kitten. But if you’re worried I won’t be able to find you... When you’re ready, just say my name and I’ll be there.”

BEA

I stayed in the library for a long time after Don left.
Reincarnation. Love, sex and marriage in another time. Another life.
It was hard to believe. Even harder to accept. But in spite of that...it *felt* true. All of it did.

Trusting my logic and intuition had gotten me far in life. My work with Leviathan Financial depended on it. Within moments of meeting a client, I had to figure out exactly how to present myself to them. Exactly what they wanted. Some people were easy to read, and others were much, much harder.

When it came to that, I simply had to trust my gut.

And my gut said that I could trust Don. That Don was telling me the truth.

It wasn't just my instincts that were talking to me as I mulled over everything he said, though.

My body was making some compelling arguments as well.

My cunt was wet for him. After he'd gone down on me near the pond earlier, I didn't know that it would ever be anything but soaked for him ever again.

My breasts ached for him. They wanted to be squeezed and caressed and bitten and sucked.

And my mouth...

Fuck. The things my mouth wanted to do to him.

In truth, I'd known my answer to Don's offer the moment he stepped out of the library's doors.

I'd only needed to talk myself into it first.

"*Abaddon,*" I whispered as I wandered through the library's shelves.

Behind every turn, I expected to find him waiting for me. I anticipated watching him materialize from thin air. "I'm ready. Come back to me, Don."

I raised my hand up to trace the spines of the books as I moved down a new aisle.

I'd called for him. Just like he'd asked. Now...where was he?

Thankfully, he didn't leave me wondering for long.

A hand reached out from behind me and caught my wrist. Don twirled me around quickly. When I stumbled, tangled up in my own feet, he caught me against his chest.

"Have you made your decision?"

I had. But his gaze was so intense and his heartbeat beneath my fingertips was so strong and his scent was so delicious, for a moment, I could only stare.

I was awestruck that after so long of not believing in anything, this was the man I was about to put all my faith in.

He had me at a loss for words.

"Your eyes are already saying yes, Bea," he purred down at me. "But I need your lips to tell me the same."

My chest was tense. My cunt was flushed hot and dripping with honey. My breaths were short and sharp and full of longing.

I couldn't hold myself back any longer.

Not from him.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled his mouth down to mine so I could crush my lips against his.

He welcomed my kiss. His tongue danced against mine, flicking and twisting teasingly. I was desperate for him. Surely, he felt it. But every time I tried to settle into that perfect rhythm I knew we always found within each other's kisses, he denied me.

"You know how I love kissing you, kitten," Don purred as he pulled away. "But I wasn't asking for that."

"Then what?" What better answer could I have given him? "What do you want?"

"I want to hear you say it. Out loud. One simple word and I'm yours."

I licked my lips. They still tasted like his kiss. Then, eagerly, I nodded.

"Please," I whispered.

He chuckled and ran his fingers through my hair.

"I was looking for a yes, Bea. But if you're dead set on begging me..."

He kissed me again, rougher this time. I gasped and moaned as my lips moved with greed against his. When he drew away again, his eyes were dark once more. “Best do it on your knees.”

He took my shoulders in his hands and pushed down. I dropped to the floor without hesitation and stared up at him with wide eyes. My heart pounded as I watched him, waiting to see what he’d do next.

“I’ve gone far too long without enjoying that pretty mouth of yours.” He unfastened his belt and unzipped his slacks, then reached into them and pulled out his cock. “We’re going to rectify that now—then, when you’ve pleased me, I’m going to take your cunt. Do you understand?”

Quickly, I nodded. My mouth was already filling with saliva. My pussy clenched with need.

I wanted him. I was starving for him.

Whatever he asked of me, I was prepared to give.

“Use your words, kitten.”

He stroked his cock in his fist, pumping it twice. It was long and thick with a swollen, dark pink tip. Already, it glistened with precum, sticky and clear, barely an inch away from my lips.

“Yes,” I breathed. “I understand.”

He pulled my head toward him. I opened my mouth to take him inside. My lips wrapped around his tip immediately. I hollowed my cheeks as I sucked him. His glans slid toward the back of my tongue, giving me my first taste of his precum. Delicious, salty, and just the slightest bit sweet.

Above me, Don hissed. His balls tightened as I took them into my hand.

“Fuck,” he swore. “I almost forgot how hot your mouth is.”

I bobbed my head up and down, taking him deeper. His fingers twisted into my hair, setting the pace. If he’d almost forgotten, I was more than happy to remind him. To make sure that he never even came close to forgetting anything about me ever again.

When he reached the back of my throat, his tip slipped down it for just a moment. My throat and my pussy clenched in unison at the sensation. It only pulled him down into my throat even deeper still.

“God,” Don panted. “You suck cock like a fucking dream, Bea.”

He pulled my mouth off of his shaft with a sudden, sharp tug of my hair. I barely had time to catch my breath before he’d taken me into his arms again.

“You nearly made me come just then,” he warned as he shoved my body up against one of the bookshelves. His fingers curled possessively around the

neckline of my sundress. He ripped it down the middle like it was made of tissue paper instead of fabric, tearing the dress all the way down to my lowest ribs. Don caught my breasts in his hands as they spilled out of my ruined top. He squeezed them tight, sliding his fingers down to tease my nipples. I caught a flash of dark flames flicker through his eyes in the moment before he stole another kiss. "But I've waited for far too long to spend myself in your mouth."

As he continued to kiss me, he tore the rest of the sundress away. It fluttered down my thighs then fell to the floor.

Now, I was naked before him. Completely bare.

More kisses. His hands couldn't seem to decide what was a better idea: wandering over my body or tearing his own clothes away as well.

When we were both naked, Don kissed his way down my body. Every place where his lips met my skin burned in a way that lingered long after he'd moved on. His teeth scraped against the newly exposed skin of my thighs. I laced my fingers through his dark locks, massaging his scalp as, finally, he moved his kisses to my cunt again.

When he'd kissed me there earlier, I'd thought that it was impossible to want him more. But Don was quick to push that notion from my mind. He lifted one of my legs up and hooked my knee over his shoulder then drew back for a moment to breathe in the scent of the heady humidity between my legs.

"No woman has any right smelling so good," he rasped before he dove between my thighs.

As he sucked my clit into his mouth, I gasped for him. I could hardly argue with his assessment of my smell.

I was wet enough, I could smell myself too. Dark and rich and deep, like rain-soaked earth.

He flicked his tongue against my swollen bud, sending tendrils of pleasure unfurling through me. I twisted my fingers in his hair, tugging his lips more firmly against my cunt.

"Don, please," I whimpered. "I need you. All of you."

He looked up at me, still sucking my clit. He was always gorgeous, but he looked even better with his mouth on my cunt.

Vibrations shuddered up through my pussy to my core as he groaned. With that sound, he licked a final stripe up my slit, and I watched his resolve die in the pools of his gray irises.

“Then you’ll have me, Bea.” His lips glistened with my nectar as he pulled away. “Just remember—you asked for this.”

He straightened and pinned me against the bookshelf. His hands wrapped around my hips to grab my ass and lift me up with his strength.

“Arch that back for me, darling.” His cock leapt up between my thighs, swiping between my pussy lips. When his tip throbbed against my clit, I could feel exactly how slick he’d gotten me. Now, his cock was slippery with my juices too. “Wrap those long legs of yours around my waist so I can fuck you the way you deserve.”

I obeyed his orders without a thought. I wanted this. I wanted *him*. Disobeying him now would almost certainly lead to punishment—which I wasn’t exactly opposed to.

But it would only slow us down.

My body was tense. Every muscle ached with desperation for release. I needed him inside of me. *Now*. If I didn’t have him, I truly felt like I’d die.

I arched my back. Just like he’d asked. I hugged his hips with my legs, holding him tight against me.

He held me up with only an arm around my back, pinned between the bookshelf and his body like I weighed nothing at all. With his free hand, he positioned his cock at my entrance.

Our eyes met for only a moment—then, he was inside me and the entire world burst into an even brighter wash of color as he forced every inch of his shaft into me with a single thrust.

“Don!” My mouth fell open in a gasp of sheer ecstasy. “Fuck!”

His cock had been thick enough to make my jaw ache when I’d sucked him just a few moments ago. But impossibly, it felt even thicker now. Heat pulsated through my body as he stretched my channel, molding it to his shape.

Don’s teeth were gritted as he filled me. With a final, sharp thrust, his balls slapped against the curves of my ass as he bottomed out. His fingers dug into my shoulder and my hip like he was using my flesh to ground himself. Like if he let go of me for even a moment, he might come entirely undone.

“Your cunt’s even hotter than that mouth of yours, kitten.” His hips pulled back until only his tip remained inside me, then he entered me all over again. “So fucking tight you make my teeth ache.”

With every thrust, my body adjusted to the sensation of being so full more and more. His hips rolled against me, setting rhythms that shifted just as

I began to feel out their beat. The curve of his cock felt perfectly designed for stroking up against my G-spot. My moans grew deeper and the tension in my muscles expanded into something almost unbearable.

“Kiss me,” I begged, and he did. Our tongues slicked against each other, tangling mercilessly.

Tenderness. Passion. Rough, raw desire—and yes, love. I felt it blooming in my core and bursting around my edges until the sheer force of it clouded my brain and sent my moans rocketing into cries just short of screams.

“Come for me, Bea. I know you fucking want it. Take it. Take every fucking inch of my thick, hard cock and let me hear you fucking come.” His kisses shifted to my cheek, then my jaw, then my neck. Every single one of them felt so full of fire that for a moment, I was certain I was burning in the flames of Hell itself. “I’ve got you. You’re mine. Now—let me watch you let go.”

My knees quaked as a tingle shimmered through my body, rising up from my core. My cunt throbbed around him, clenching and unclenching rapidly until, just like he’d asked, I had no choice but to let go.

Rapture. Eruption. My pussy spasmed violently and my body followed its lead.

“Fuck,” Don swore, a single, sharp word snarled from his gorgeous lips. When he pounded his length up into my depths next, his balls pressed against me, tighter than ever. “Fuck. Now take me with you, darling. Let me empty myself inside you. Passion of my life. Fire of my fucking soul.”

I felt the first burst of his cum enter me, exploding hot and deep. Every inch of Don’s cock filled me, barely even withdrawing enough to allow him to thrust back in. And between us, coating my channel and painting it with white-hot pleasure, his seed flooded into every part of my cunt that his cock hadn’t already claimed.

I squeezed my eyes shut and held onto him as tight as I could. Heat radiated all around us, like the warmth of a silky bubble bath after a long night in the cold. The final ropes of his cum shot into me, these ones far gentler than the first. I took every drop of it and clenched my pussy tight around him, desperate to hold his seed inside.

If any dripped out, I feared I’d just drop to my knees and lick it up off the floor.

“Bea?” Don breathed in my ear. “Bea.”

I kept my eyes clenched shut as I nuzzled against his neck. I knew this

moment would have to end eventually, but that only made him cling to him even tighter.

“Just stay inside me for a little while longer,” I pleaded with him. Behind my eyes, everything felt blissfully floaty and light. My chest felt open, like the hinges of a door that had been shut for far too long had finally swung free. And best of all, as we held each other, that delicious heat between us crackled and purred just like—

“You’re on fire, Bea.”

I laughed. That was one way to put it, I guessed.

But then, after a moment, I opened my eyes and saw flames.

Real, actual flames.

They undulated around us, skimming along my skin. When I reached up to run my fingers through my hair, embers scattered from the strands of my waves.

On fire—I really was.

“Oh, fuck!” I swore, snapping back to reality. My eyes went wide with panic in an instant. *On fire*—that definitely wasn’t good. “Don—the books!”

Don only chuckled. “Tell her she’s on fire and she’s only worried about what books might burn. You’re a ridiculous woman, Bea—and I’m so fucking glad you’re mine.”

“But...fire burns books.” The words felt even dumber than they sounded. I didn’t imagine I needed to explain to him the mechanics of how libraries were burned to the ground, and yet...Don didn’t seem nearly alarmed enough at the potential that any minute now, all his favorite novels might go up in flames.

“It burns pretty brides too,” Don reminded me, rolling his eyes. “The books will be fine, Bea—and even if they weren’t, better them than you.”

“It doesn’t hurt, though.” I stared down at the flames coming up off my skin. “Don...what in the name of Hell—”

“Exactly, Bea,” he said with a grin. “Remember—I did promise you gifts. This is one of them.”

“How?”

“We’re truly husband and wife now. The vows were only the half of it. The rest...” His cock twitched within me, still impossibly hard. “Well. You can figure that out for yourself.”

“So I can make...fire happen now?” I hoped Don would forgive how slow on the uptake I was being. To be fair, he must’ve fucked me pretty hard

to leave me with so few brain cells in the aftermath.

“You can. We’ll have to train you to do it on demand, but... yes. My powers are yours now. The more you practice, the more they’ll grow. So. How does it feel?” he asked, stroking his fingers up my arm through the flames.

“Incredible.” I held my hand up between us, marveling at the way the fire licked against my skin without burning. “Like something that’s a part of me. Something I’ve needed for a very long time, without even knowing.”

The fire around us was gentle and burning. Incredible didn’t even come close to summing it up. It felt impossibly good and impossibly *right*.

And as Don kissed me again...

So did he.

DON

“**A**ll right.” I turned Bea’s hand over in mine and gave her the nod. “Let’s go again.”

“Do I have to?” Bea grimaced as she let her hand fall to her side. “I appreciate your continued faith in me, Don, but I’m beginning to suspect it’s poorly placed. I don’t think I’m any good at this.”

“Of course you are.” I crossed my arms over my chest and stood back several paces away from her. “You’re just not trying hard enough.”

“We’ve been at this for *hours*,” Bea groaned. “How the fuck can you say that?”

I smirked. She was cute when she whined like this. Pitiful and just the right kind of bratty. The Bea I knew rarely found reason to complain—usually, she naturally excelled at anything she tried her hand at—so seeing her pouting as she’d struggled to master her new powers over the last two weeks had been a rare treat.

Something about this made it all too tempting to take her over my knee until she did what I wanted.

Maybe I’d have to.

Maybe she’d even like it.

“I know that you’re capable of summoning flames between those pretty fingers of yours, Bea. I’ve seen you do it with my own eyes. So, what’s holding you back now?”

“You’ve seen me do it in *bed*, you asshole.” Bea clenched her fists and glowered at me. “I can’t do it here.”

I rested my elbow on my fist and dragged my thumb across my lower lip

as I stared her down. “We could change locations if you think it would help.”

“Oh, you’d love that, wouldn’t you?” She crossed her arms over her chest and looked away haughtily. “You’re loving this right now too. Don’t lie. I can tell how much it’s amusing you, watching me fail.”

Gently, I snorted.

She wasn’t wrong.

“Am I frustrating you, Bea?”

“You always frustrate me.” A soft blush rose up on Bea’s cheeks. “In various ways.”

I took a step closer to her. “Maybe I’m just trying to make you angry. Has that occurred to you?”

“Well, it’s working,” she snapped back at me. Her eyes were full of flame as she met my gaze again. “Proud of yourself?”

“Almost.”

I took another step closer, then another. I wanted to pull all that flame from her eyes and put it in the palm of her hand instead. I’d tried everything else so far. Patience. Praise. Encouragement. But if those had been things that Bea needed from me, they would have worked.

We’d need to leave the Abyss soon. The honeymoon was ending, and when it was over, Bea would need to return to Earth. Her life there, her family, her friends, her career—these things mattered to her. These few weeks had been a blissful reprieve from it all, but her world didn’t stop turning just because she had a price on her head.

I would go with her when she went, offering her all the protection that a man like myself could provide. I’d watch over her. I’d keep her safe. She’d already agreed to that much.

But before we left my domain, I wanted her to have protections of her own first.

One way or another, she was going to give me what I wanted.

It was time to try something new.

“You’re a spoiled little girl, Bea.” I took her throat in my hand and gently squeezed it. My eyes glimmered teasingly, but the darkness behind them was sharp and deep and barely contained. “An incorrigible, hot-cunted brat.”

“And you’re a cruel bastard,” she snipped back at me—but I saw something flash through her own dark eyes that took the venom from her voice by half as she grabbed my wrist. “Just because I’m your wife doesn’t mean I have to do everything you command. If I’m telling you that I can’t do

this, it means I fucking *can't*.”

She tried to pull my hand away from her throat and I laughed. She was as strong as she was stubborn, but I was stronger. She gasped as I only tightened my grip.

“I know you, kitten.” My voice dropped to a black velvet whisper. “I know you better than anyone. Whether you want to admit it or not.”

She let out a long, slow breath. “You don’t know me at all.”

“No?” I moved my free hand between her legs, cupping her pussy through the thin fabric of her sundress. Bea’s eyelashes fluttered rapidly as she closed her eyes. Instinctively, she leaned into my touch. “I know I’ve just made your cunt throb so hard that it’s practically dripping down your thighs.”

Her eyes flashed open again in an instant. She glared daggers up at me. “No. You haven’t. It’s not.”

“Liar.” I leaned in, looming down over her until my lips were just inches away from hers. “You’re fucking swimming in it, Bea. You might be able to fool everyone else, but you can’t fool me.”

“Is that so?” she said through her teeth. “And how am I trying to fool you, exactly?”

“Playing like you can’t do this when I know you can. Unless…” I tilted my head to the side and narrowed my eyes. My fingers slipped between the lips of her cunt, pressing down on her clit through the fabric of her sundress. No panties today—that was a bit of information I’d keep in mind for when we were done. “Are you really only able to let go of your inhibitions when I’m making you come?”

“Fuck you,” Bea panted. She was trembling—half with arousal, half with rage.

I smirked in the way I knew really got her blood boiling and stole a rough kiss, conquering her lips. When she pulled away, snarling against my lips, I only leaned in closer.

She couldn’t free herself from me that easily. Not until she’d given me what I needed from her—what we *both* needed if she was going to be able to protect herself in the days to come.

“Maybe I should,” I suggested when I finally allowed her to break our kiss. “Maybe I should throw you down right here and have you in the dirt. Is that what you want?”

“I want you to stop fucking needling me, you arrogant *prick*.” With that final word, Bea raised a hand to my chest and shoved me backwards. Her

other hand flew up in front of my face, shaking hard with fury.

I felt the heat coming off her palm a mere moment before I spotted the flame. Had I been even half a second slower, when the fire began to spiral out from between her head line and her life line, she would have singed my eyebrows off in an instant, and temporarily blinded me on top of it.

Instead, I jerked my head to the side just in time. The air shimmered with searing heat as Bea shot a column of hellfire just a few inches away from my cheek.

Good. Yes. That's my girl.

I almost smiled. But I wasn't done with her yet—

And she was far too pissed off now to be done with me.

She shifted her hand when she realized that she'd missed. I wasn't sure that it had even hit her yet how well she was doing—I'd pushed her over the edge too completely for that. I ducked her next attack, moving with demonic speed and focused precision. If she really wanted to hurt me, she'd have to try much harder than that.

Her shoulders heaved as I snatched her wrists up in my hands. Her eyes were dark. Her lips were curled. Her hair fell down over her shoulders in deep, silken waves that rippled of their own accord.

She was dangerous, and she was beautiful. And best of all—

She was *mine*.

All fucking mine.

She tried to spin away from me. With all of her weight, she jerked her body from mine as she tried once again to break my hold on her.

I wasn't about to let her get away now, though. I pulled her back towards me and wrapped her up in my arms, too tight for her struggles to mean anything.

Together, we tumbled to the ground.

I rolled our bodies so that mine would bear the brunt of the fall. My shoulder hit the grass first, then the rest of me as I used my momentum to throw myself on top of her, pinning her down.

“Bastard!” she roared at me.

“Yes,” I agreed. “I am. But, darling—”

“What?”

“You did it,” I pointed out calmly.

“Did what? I want to *kill* you, not—”

“Bea. Take a breath.” I waited for a little of that fire in her eyes to recede

once more, then smiled. “If you’ll stop raging at me for a moment, I think you’ll realize you just made flames.”

I laughed as she blinked up at me.

I’d been right. She’d been so angry that she hadn’t even clocked what she’d just done.

“Well...good.” Bea’s chest rose and fell as she panted beneath me. “Are you happy?”

Slowly, I nodded, staring down at her with pleasure. “You did well, darling. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Good.” She bit her lip, and I watched the fury fading into exhaustion in her eyes. “I’m glad. You finally got what you wanted, didn’t you?”

“Poor thing.” I laughed again and placed a kiss on her forehead. She was slick with sweat from exertion. As I pulled back, I licked her salt from my lips. “I’m glad that you’ve figured out how to defend yourself, yes. But you’re here with me, and you’re safe, and you’re mine. I already had everything I could ever want before we began.”

“You’re being too sweet.” Bea’s eyes narrowed. “What are you angling for now?”

“I don’t have to angle for anything with you, Bea.” I took her hand in mine, then brought it up to my lips so I could kiss her fingers. They were still warm from the flames. “You’re not a difficult woman to charm.”

Bea smiled and sighed with acceptance. “Not when it comes to you, I suppose. Let’s just hope the other humans are of similar mind when we get back to Earth.”

“They will be,” I assured her. “And if they’re not...well, we can fight fire with fire now, can’t we?”

“Is that your plan?” Bea arched an eyebrow and shifted her hips beneath mine. “Entering the Leviathan Financial offices, guns blazing unless they bow down to you and kiss your feet?”

“It’d be rude of them not to,” I joked. Her body felt so right beneath mine like this. Firm and warm and sweet. “As king of Hell, I deserve no less.”

“And what does the queen of Hell deserve? I’m royalty too now, aren’t I?”

“You were born a queen, Bea,” I assured her. “As for what you deserve—the entire universe, if you’re leaving it up to me. Barring that...I think the respect of the investors at Leviathan is a good place to start.”

Bea laughed. “I wish I could say our meeting at Leviathan was my

biggest worry about going back, you know.”

I pulled back, a little surprised. “Is it not?”

“Of course it isn’t. I’ve been preparing to take over Leviathan for my entire life. It’s what I was raised for. What I went through all those years of college for.” She closed her eyes and let out a satisfied breath. “And it’ll be even easier now with you by my side instead of Simon. He was never very business-minded, believe it or not.”

“Oh, I believe it.” I stroked my thumb down her cheekbone, relishing the angles of her face. “What are you worried for, then? More demon assassins?”

I wouldn’t have blamed her if that was the case. It was exactly why I’d pushed her so hard today—and she hadn’t let me down.

“Honestly... I trust you, Don. If I can’t protect myself with all this new power you’ve given me, I know you’ll step in and keep me safe.”

“You’re right.” She was. I wouldn’t even hesitate. “So what, then? What terrible worry troubles your pretty mind?”

“Well... Are you sure you’re prepared to face my parents again?” Bea asked, staring up at me. She brushed her fingers through my hair, and I leaned into her touch. “They were on their best behavior at my wedding—but that isn’t always the case.”

“I’ve charmed your parents once already,” I reminded her with a smile. “Doing it again won’t be hard.”

“And you’re sure that you’ll be able to manage yourself over the course of an entire dinner?” Her fingers brushed against my chest, stirring my heartbeat to pick up its pace. “If you end up bending me over the table halfway through the salad course, I can assure you—my parents won’t find it charming in the least.”

A smile curled onto my lips as my cock stiffened. Now *there* was an interesting notion. A pretty picture too. Bea, bent over a dinner table with her skirt hiked up around her waist, wine bottles crashing over as I took her.

That was certainly an idea I could get behind.

“I’m sure I’ll find some way to contain myself,” I purred against her neck in between hot, humid kisses. “We’ll just have to skip dessert.”

“Skip dessert?” Bea grabbed my head and pulled it up, forcing me to look her in the eyes. “But that’s the best part!”

“True,” I agreed, moving my lips to hover over her mouth instead. When I kissed her, I knew my body would demand that I fucked her here in the courtyard all over again. Already, my fingers were trailing up her thigh,

preparing to force her skirt aside. She was right—around her, managing myself was a difficult thing indeed. “But as sweet as pie and ice cream is, kitten—you’re far sweeter.” I nipped at her lower lip, pulling back nice and slow as I released it. “Think I’d much rather eat you for dessert instead.”

BEA

The next afternoon, we walked through the Abyss like two lovers strolling through a park. Don kept his arm around me, keeping me close. I held the hand he had draped over my shoulder. My other arm was wound around his waist.

Wherever we walked, the world colored in.

We'd spent the two weeks of our honeymoon here in the Abyss. That first morning, I'd been afraid that Don would never let me return to my life on Earth at all. But now that we were leaving, I was a little sad to go.

My life on Earth involved a lot of boring dinners and dense paperwork. I'd spent most of my time doing Simon's work for him, laughing at the jokes of rich men who weren't all that funny and appeasing clients who were too busy staring at my tits to learn my name. Ever since Simon had finally made our engagement official, planning the wedding had eaten up everything that was left of my free time.

But now, as crazy as it was to admit, it felt like I had a true partner. A *real* husband. Tonight, at dinner with my parents, Don would have to return to the glamor that made him look like Simon—but he *wasn't* Simon, and now that I knew him better, I could see exactly how much of a good thing that was.

"Are you excited to see your parents again?" Don asked. "You've barely spoken with them since the wedding."

"That was on purpose," I admitted. "My parents are nice enough, but we're not exactly...close."

"I'm sorry," he said. He even sounded genuine about it.

But his sympathies were a little misplaced.

“You shouldn’t be. Like I said, they were always kind enough to me when I was growing up.” I hadn’t been blessed with loving parents like Ava, but at least I wasn’t an orphan like Joan. “My mother is a sweetheart, don’t get me wrong, but she gave up a modeling career to marry my dad. I’m not sure she ever really *wanted* to be a mom. And my dad was gone on business so often, sometimes it was kind of like I didn’t have one.”

“Mm.” Don hummed gently, nodding along. “Yes. I know exactly how you feel.”

“Do you?” Don and I had spent a lot of time getting to know each other over the last two weeks, but an awful lot of that had involved being naked together in bed. The subject of our parents hadn’t really come up.

I hadn’t even realized that demons had parents at all.

“My mother is one of the Fallen—the angels that followed Lucifer when he rebelled against heaven,” Don explained. “Her name is Belial, and she’s not exactly the mothering type either. I’m not sure who my father is. I don’t think my mother even knows—if she does, she never mentioned it.”

“I see what you mean.” A fallen angel mother *and* an absent father? I wished I could say that I couldn’t imagine what that had been like, but from the sounds of things, I might have known a little too well. “You and I are an awful lot alike, huh?”

“More than you know.” Don pressed a kiss to my temple. “And even more now that we’re husband and wife.”

I smiled at that.

Don was still a bastard, but he was a good husband. I hoped I’d make a good wife in return.

“Do you have any siblings?” I asked, curious to learn more now. “I’m an only child. I guess Mom never wanted more than one.”

“I have a brother,” Don revealed. “Malacoda. Mal for short. He and your friend Ava... ah. They have history together, just like you and I do.”

“They do?” I blinked, surprised. “She’s never mentioned it. And believe me, if she’d been with anyone—especially a *demon*—she definitely would have said.”

I wouldn’t tell Don about Ava’s sex life—that was her business. Not mine to share. But the subject of her virginity had been a regular topic in our girl talk. Once, when she was a little tipsy, she’d even revealed to me that she didn’t go all the way with her boyfriends because she was convinced she was

cursed, of all things.

I'd laughed it off at the time, but knowing what I did now about the existence of angels and demons...maybe she hadn't been joking.

Now, even the silliest of superstitions seemed a lot more real.

But if she'd fucked a demon, it definitely would have come up.

"She's had her memory taken as well. Just like yours. Joan's, too. All three of you had your minds wiped of all knowledge of Heaven and Hell."

"To maintain the balance between all of the realms. Right." We'd gone over this a few times, but I'd never managed to entirely wrap my head around the specifics of it. "I know that for the whole time we were together, the angels were trying to keep us apart, but...what changed? How did they finally win?"

"They didn't, actually. They lost."

"What?" I trusted Don now, but even within that trust...what he was saying didn't make a lot of sense. "But if they lost..."

"You and I weren't the only ones they were targeting. You had a third friend—Evie. I suppose somewhere in Vermont, you still do."

"Evie..." The name sounded familiar. Like an old favorite song that I'd forgotten the words to, even though I still knew the tune. "Did I forget her too, then?"

Some friend I was. BFFs kind of lost its meaning when your friends' memories could be wiped by angelic beings at any turn.

"You had to, I'm afraid. When I met you in Las Vegas, you were there to celebrate Evie's wedding. It's almost funny, actually." Don shrugged. "She was there to marry a different man entirely. But he cheated on her, and she fell in love with Lucifer that same night. She ended up marrying him instead."

"Lucifer...like *the* Lucifer?"

"The one and only."

"I guess I'm not really in a position to judge, but... Meeting and marrying the Devil on the same night—especially when she'd just been jilted by her fiancé right before their wedding..." I really *couldn't* judge her, given the situation that Don and I were in now. But it was worth asking about. I was curious to learn what kind of person Evie really was. "Did she always move so fast?"

"She very much didn't," Don assured me. "But the angels had it out for Evie, and she and Lucifer are like us. Reincarnated throughout the ages."

Destined to fall in love across many lifetimes—only, where I’ve only known you once before, they’ve had hundreds of lives together.” Don sighed. “All of them ending in Evie’s death, unfortunately. Until this one.”

“That’s tragic,” I whispered. It really was. Being born over and over again, falling in love and then being torn apart—it wasn’t *fair*. “The angels wanted Evie dead too, then?”

“They did,” said Don. “There was a prophecy. One that none of us are sure is even real anymore. It told the angels that any child born of Lucifer would bring about the end of the world—and there was no one he would ever have a child with other than her.”

“But they managed it this time around,” I guessed. “That’s what changed.”

“Exactly. Hell had a version of the same prophecy the angels knew, but it said that the child would only bring about change. We came to an agreement with the angels—that Lucifer and Evie would be free to raise their child in a way that would ensure those changes were good ones. But in exchange...”

“Ava, Joan and I had to forget everything.” *To keep everything in balance*. That didn’t seem fair either—but I supposed if the fate of the entire world was at stake, it was a sacrifice that I hadn’t been given much of a choice about.

And to ensure the safety of Evie and her baby... It was one that I’d been willing to make.

It was strange, hearing about a friend that I couldn’t remember. As far as I could recall, it had been Ava and Joan and me ever since we’d first met during undergrad. Sometimes, yes, it felt like there was something missing. When I thought back to the time we’d gone to Vegas together, I honestly couldn’t recall why we’d gone in the first place.

Now, I supposed I knew. Evie’s wedding. An actual, honest-to-god marriage to the Devil. In a weird way, it actually made sense.

“I wish I hadn’t forgotten her,” I said softly. “It sounds like we were good friends.”

“You were,” Don said with a chuckle. “Damn near inseparable, actually. All four of you were.”

“And now...she has a baby.” I wished I hadn’t forgotten that, either. It would have been nice, having a close friend with a child. “How old?”

“She’s probably nearing two years, now. Lily, they’ve named her. Evie went into labor right before your memories were taken. Lucifer and Evie

abdicated in favor of Mal, Lock and me once Lily was born. Now, they all live near Evie's parents in Vermont—as far away from Hell as they could get.”

“Well, that prophecy was definitely right about one thing—it sounds like Lily really did change things.” The loss of my memories. Don's ascension to the throne of hell. For starters, at least.

“Babies always do,” Don agreed.

I pursed my lips as we continued to walk along to the place where Don could open the portal to my parents' estate.

He was right—babies *did* change things. It made me wonder, though... what would happen if *I* got pregnant?

I'd gone off birth control right after Simon had proposed. Not because I was preparing myself for my new husband or anything—it had just started making me moody. My doctor suspected it had something to do with all of the wedding planning stress. If anything, I'd been under the impression that I'd never need protection like that ever again.

I certainly hadn't been planning on fucking Simon, and he'd mentioned enough times that he didn't want me dating once we were married that I hadn't expected to have sex ever again. Or, at least, not for a very long time.

I didn't even know if demons could even *have* babies with humans. Could a human woman like me actually get pregnant off of demon semen?

I guessed if the Devil had managed to get a human pregnant, anything was possible. Could Don and I do the same?

Maybe so.

Don and I hadn't exactly been using condoms during all of our romps here in the Abyss. And as far as time went...I knew that two weeks had passed on Earth, but sometimes here in the Abyss days stretched on for so much longer than twenty-four hours. Nights seemed longer too. Especially when I was naked in bed with Don.

There was no telling where I was at in my cycle now. I wasn't even sure how to calculate it—or if time even existed at all in the Abyss.

“God.” My knees were a little weak just thinking about it. “You don't think *I'm* pregnant, do you?”

Don smiled down at me. “Would it be so bad if you were?”

A laugh escaped my throat. He couldn't be serious.

That certainly wasn't the answer I'd been expecting, at any rate.

“What's so funny?” His brow furrowed as he brought me to a stop.

“We’re married. We’re good at it, too. You’d make a good mother, and I’ve always liked the idea of having a child. There’s no one I’d rather raise one with than you.”

“We barely know each other, Don,” I pointed out. “The last two weeks...I can’t complain. They’ve been beautiful. All of the time we’ve spent together—even the time we’ve spent bickering—I’ve enjoyed.”

“But?”

“But I only just now learned you have a brother. I don’t even know enough about you to know what I don’t know.” I frowned. “If that makes sense.”

“It does,” Don said softly. “And it doesn’t. For you, this has just been two weeks together. For me, though...it’s the continuation of more than a year together. And before that, centuries ago, even more time. I feel like I’ve loved you my entire life. For so much of it, I truly have.”

“You... you love me?” My breath caught in my chest as the word resonated through my mind. I’d heard him say it in that first memory he’d stirred in me. I’d said it, too. But all of that...it felt like it had happened a lifetime ago for me. Almost like it had happened to someone else entirely. “You mean that?”

“You may not remember all of our time together, Bea, but I recall every moment perfectly.” Don took his hands in mine and stared down at me, serious for a moment. “I’ve loved you through all of it. Even when you were lost to me, I loved you still. I remember every kiss, every touch, every word you’ve ever said to me. So, yes, I love you.” He laughed, shaking his head. “I couldn’t forget you if I tried.”

“That’s...really, really sweet.” It honestly was. Back when I’d believed in love as a child, it was the kind of thing I’d always imagined a man saying to me. And now that Don was in my life...maybe I’d never stopped believing. Maybe I’d only forgotten. “I wish I could remember you, too.”

Don hesitated for a moment, then brought my hands up to his chest. Against my knuckles, I could feel his heartbeat. Steady and strong. “Do you want me to show you? I can, if you like.”

Two weeks ago, that offer would have terrified me. I wouldn’t have been able to know with certainty what was real and what was a lie.

But now, Don had earned my trust. More than anyone else ever had in all my life.

“Of course I do.” I nodded and squeezed his hands. “Please.”

“What do you want to see?” Don asked.

“Everything,” I said immediately. “I want to see it all.”

He smiled, then kissed me.

In an instant, it all came flooding back in.

BEA

Somewhere in a memory...

The room smelled like coffee and old books and good booze. Up on a stage, “Purple Rain” was being played by a man who bore a striking resemblance to Prince himself—and beneath me, there was Don.

His arms were around me, and I didn’t want them there...and at the same time, I absolutely did. I didn’t often sit on the laps of strange men, but then again, strange men rarely looked even half as good as him.

Besides—I hadn’t had much of a choice. When I’d stood up to offer him my armchair, he’d grabbed my wrist and pulled me down on top of him without even bothering to ask.

“You should dance with me,” he purred in my ear. “I bet you’re good at it.”

I glanced to the open floor just in front of the stage. On it, a beautiful blonde—Evie—was dancing with a tall, dark-haired man. Lucifer. Luke. Her husband. And if everything else I’d seen over the last few days was to be believed, the Devil himself as well.

“I’m great at it,” I told the man beneath me. *Don*, he’d called himself. I knew he was a demon, but it was hardly the name of any demon I’d ever heard of before. “But that doesn’t mean I want to dance with *you*.”

“You could see if Ava or Joan would trade you partners, if you like.” Don nodded to the others on the dance floor. Ava was giggling and blushing

furiously as a brown-haired man led her in a bumbling two-step. Joan was deeply engaged in a tango with a man of her own—this one, bearing a ruddy-colored beard. “But they look rather occupied if you ask me—and you hardly seem like the type to sit on the sidelines while your friends have all the fun.”

What I should have said was: *I’m perfectly happy sitting this one out, thank you.* Then, I should have moved to one of the other chairs. There were plenty empty, now that everyone else had gotten up to dance.

Instead, when I rose up off of Don’s lap, I turned and offered him my hand.

“Okay,” I said. “But don’t go trying to charm me. I know far too many men like you already—and I can assure you, you’re not my type.”

Which was a lie. Unfortunately for me, with his gray eyes and black hair and chiseled jawline, he was *exactly* my type.

“Duly noted,” Don said as he took my hand. “But I can assure you, darling—you don’t know any men like me at all.”

THE SCENE FADED, but I knew how it ended. Gently swaying to beautiful music, dancing in Don’s arms and being held much, *much* too close.

“IS THIS SEAT TAKEN?”

I was in Limbo, the bar on the first floor of the Inferno. I didn’t even have to look up from the book I was currently devouring—*Wuthering Heights*—to know exactly who was asking.

With a voice like his, deep and silky smooth and even darker than the pint of Guinness I was currently working on, it could only be one man.

“Even if it was, would it matter?” I asked as I glanced up at Don. He wore a white dress shirt, black slacks and no tie. Somehow, being dressed down like this only made him look even more commanding than he would have been in a full suit.

“Not in the least,” he said as he slipped onto the barstool next to me. “But if you’re here with someone, I’m perfectly happy to tell him to fuck off.”

“I’m here alone,” I assured him, gesturing to the book. That way, he knew exactly what a nice thing he was tearing me away from by imposing his presence on me right now. “But before you get any wicked ideas—”

“I only have wicked ones, I’m afraid. Perks of being a demon and all.”

“I’m already promised to someone,” I told him pointedly. “Even hellhounds must realize when they’re barking up the wrong tree.”

“I don’t see a ring on your finger.” He inclined his head toward my hand. Quickly, I removed that hand from the bar and placed it in my lap instead.

“We’re not engaged yet.”

“So you’re letting some man who isn’t even your fiancé yet tell you who you can and can’t talk to?”

I scowled. That was a big accusation, coming from a man who answered to the commands of the Devil himself.

“I can talk to whoever I like,” I said. “No man tells me what to do.”

“Sounds like at least one does.” Don shrugged as his gray eyes glimmered, locked on mine.

They were the kind of eyes that were far too easy to get lost in. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t manage to tear my gaze away.

“You’re wrong,” I whispered. “I can do whatever I want.”

“Can you?” Don smirked. “Prove it.”

His lips looked so enticing, I was moving for them before I even had time to consider what a bad idea kissing him was.

When I pulled away, his smirk only widened.

Then, he took my face in his hands and pulled me back in for another kiss—an even deeper one. My pulse raced as his tongue moved against mine. Desire pounded through me, starting in my chest and reverberating through my cunt.

JUST LIKE THAT, I knew exactly the moment when Don had laid claim to my body.

Next, I knew, he’d stolen my heart.

I WAS in his bed in Nevermore Manor, naked beneath his cold, silken sheets. The muscles of Don’s back rippled gorgeously as he fastened his belt.

His scent was still on my skin. Earthy and rich. The smell of good sex.

With Don, it always was.

“Do you think the others have realized that we’re fucking yet?” I asked,

not eager to leave the bed just yet. It was too soft and watching Don get dressed was almost as fun as watching him take his clothes off.

Almost.

“Lucifer probably does. Sin rarely goes unnoticed by him.” Don turned to me with a smile on his lips. It was teasing—like he knew something I didn’t. “Is there a reason you don’t want them all to know?”

I licked my lips. Of course there was.

I was falling for him and I knew it. I’d been falling for a while now, and if I even came close to admitting it, it would make everything far too real.

No matter how I felt about Don, I’d still have to marry Simon in end. When I did, I’d lose Don. Not just for a month or a year, but forever.

Telling him—or anyone else, for that matter—how I really felt...

It would hurt way too much.

THAT WAS the thing about falling, I was quickly realizing.

No matter what I did, when I finally hit the ground, I knew it would hurt.

THERE WAS a tear in the universe sitting in the middle of my living room in Los Angeles. Through it, Don stumbled out of the Abyss. His hair was messy. His shirt was torn. He had a hand folded over his ribs. Beneath it, the white linen was stained dark with glittering demonic blood.

“Don!” I leapt up from the couch and rushed to his side immediately. He leaned on me as I led him over to the couch and laid him down. “What happened? Why are you bleeding?”

“Angels. Why else?” he rasped. His eyes met mine for a moment. He looked tired. These days, with the way the angels had been ramping up the frequency of their attacks, we all were. “Tried to follow me here. Managed to shake them, though. Don’t suppose you have anything to drink?”

“Wine,” I admitted. “But I don’t think that’s going to disinfect that wound.”

“I don’t need it for that.” Don’s chest was heaving. He was obviously in pain. But when he pulled his hand away from his wound, I could see that it was already healing on its own. Soon, it’d be completely closed. “I promised you a date though, didn’t I?”

“I suppose you did.” I rose and got the bottle, along with two glasses. “Looks like we’re staying in tonight.”

“Safer that way,” Don grunted. “Do you mind?”

“Not at all.” As much as I enjoyed our nights out, I liked our nights in even more. Thanks to Don’s efforts, the angels didn’t know where I lived yet. It was best if we kept them that way. “But...”

“If you want a man who can take you out on the town without the risk of being stabbed, darling, you’re going to have to look for love elsewhere.”

I shook my head and threw my leg over his hips, straddling him on the couch.

“I don’t know about love.” *I did.* That was a lie. “But I only want you. I’m just a little concerned, is all.”

“About?”

“Is all of this worth it?”

Don laughed, then winced. It looked like laughter would be something that hurt until his wound finished healing.

“Pour the wine, Bea,” he commanded, brushing my hair behind my ear. “If you’re only going to ask questions you already know the answer to, I can think of a few better uses for that pretty mouth.”

THE MEMORY SWIRLED AWAY, and immediately I was launched into the next.

He was right, though. I did know the answer.

Was it worth it?

Of course it was.

THE HALLS OF PANDEMONIUM, Lucifer’s castle in the center of Hell, were vast and empty. Every demon and devil was up on Earth right now, battling for the fate of my best friend’s life—and the life of her child as well.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t find Evie either right now.

“Eves?” I poked my head into yet another empty room. She wasn’t there. She wasn’t *anywhere*. Joan, Ava and I had come here to be safe with her while the battle raged above, but she’d wandered off nearly an hour ago.

Now, she was nowhere to be found.

“Bea.” It wasn’t Evie’s voice that called out to me from the hall at my

back.

It was Don's.

I turned to the sound immediately. Down the hall, Don was covered in blood. Some white and angelic, some black. His own. My chest panged as I saw the cut across his cheek and the wounds on his chest.

When I saw the look in his eyes, empty and desperate, my heart broke.

"No," I breathed, running to him. "What happened? Did we lose?"

"We won," Don panted. He took me into his arms and held me tight against his chest. As I pressed my cheek over his heart, I could feel it racing. "It's all over. Evie's safe. We won."

"Then what's wrong?" I pulled back to take his face in my hands. His eyes looked almost haunted, and the ache in my chest didn't cease. "Don. Tell me what's wrong."

"Every win comes at a cost, Bea." He shook his head. His eyes were shining with tears. I could tell how badly he wanted to look away so I wouldn't see him crying, but he held my gaze like he was looking into my eyes for the last time. "Some bigger than others."

"I'm losing you, aren't I?" My breath caught in my throat. Heat seared through my sinuses as tears welled up in my eyes as well. "Don, tell me I'm wrong. I can't lose you. Not now."

"You can, and you will, darling." Don raised his hand to my cheek and dragged his thumb across my skin, hard enough that it felt like he was trying to bruise me. I welcomed it. Gladly. If it meant that I could keep him near me, he could be as rough as he liked.

"I won't," I insisted. "I'm yours and you're mine. Forever. When I told you I loved you, I meant it."

"We cut a deal, Bea," Don said mournfully. "We had no other choice."

"Why?" I snarled at him. Tears were streaming down my face now. They shone on Don's cheeks as well. "What could the angels possibly want with us?"

"Not us, Bea. Just you. Your memories of me in exchange for Evie's life, and the life of her child. It's not fair, but—"

The anger fell from my face in an instant.

"No," I rasped with acceptance. The love of my life for the lives of my best friend and her baby. It would hurt, but yes—now, I understood. "It's fair. If you had no choice—"

"We didn't," he swore. "I would never give you up if there had been any

other way.”

I rested my head against him so he couldn't see the sob tear through my chest.

“I love you.” My words were ruined by my crying, but if there was any moment to cry, it was now. “I'm always going to love you, Don.”

“I know, darling. I love you too. I always will.” Don took my chin between his fingers and turned my face up to his. “Now, kiss me, Bea. Make it a good one. We don't have much time.”

My lips struggled to hold a pucker, but I crushed them against Don's anyway. Our mouths twisted with pain as we clung to each other. Our tears mingled until I couldn't tell which were his, and which were my own.

It was long kiss. A passionate one.

But I knew it was the last time I'd ever feel Don's lips against mine.

No kiss could ever last long enough.

DON

When Bea came back to me this time, she was crying. She didn't try to hide it. Her eyes snapped open, searching desperately for mine. Her pain was visceral to me as the tears streamed down her face.

I felt it too. Losing Bea wasn't a memory I enjoyed reliving, but she'd asked for everything and I'd given it to her.

From our first meeting to our last.

"Are you all right, darling?" I took her face in my hands and used my thumbs to wipe her tears away. "Tell me how you feel."

"Overwhelmed," she said, sniffing. She turned her face away as she rubbed at her eyes. Her adorable little nose was swollen and pink at its tip. Her eyes were puffy and a little bloodshot—and still, she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. "Sorry. I'm not meaning to cry."

"You don't need to hide from me, Bea." I smoothed her hair down and pulled her closer to me. Right now, I couldn't have her close enough. "It's all right."

Bea drew in a long breath then let it back out. "It is now. It's all true, isn't it?" Her gaze wandered back up to meet mine. "We fell in love. We were happy."

"We were." I wrapped my arms around her and held her tight. She didn't resist. Instead, she nuzzled her cheek against my chest like she'd found comfort there. It made my heart ache all over again. When her memories had been taken, we'd come so close to never having each other at all. But Bea was correct. It was all okay now. I'd make sure that would never change.

“I’m sorry that hurt you, but I’m glad you know.”

“It didn’t hurt me,” she murmured against my chest. “Or, it did, but I think it’s better now.”

“I’d never hurt you, Bea.”

She breathed a laugh. “Hurting me... I don’t think you can.” She met my gaze once more as she pulled back. “I love you, Don. I’m sorry I ever forgot.”

I love you. Those three little words could have so little meaning between humans. But while others bastardized them, threw them around so carelessly, used them when they didn’t mean them to manipulate and falsify—when Bea said them, warmth radiated through my chest.

When Bea said those words, she meant them.

They were true.

“You don’t have to be sorry for anything, kitten,” I promised her. “None of this has been your fault.”

“I’m not so sure.” Bea bit her lip, frowning. “My memories were taken to fulfill the deal you made with the angels, Don. I know now how serious that was. I love you, but I loved Evie and her baby too. I gave you up to keep them safe. And now, all this time, we could have been putting them in danger all over again.”

“Bea, I would never,” I assured her. “I care for Evie and her baby too. The angels won’t hurt an innocent child. Even if we’d lost that battle, they only wanted to take Lily to Heaven so they could raise her there.”

“Then why—”

“I told you that the prophecies about Lily said she would change things. Even when she was only in the womb, strange things were beginning to happen on Earth.”

“I remember that,” Bea said softly. “There was talk of civil war in Canada for a while a few years back, and the Sahara...it’s still in bloom. That was all Lily’s doing?”

“Maybe,” I said. “We can’t be sure. But if it wasn’t—if it was, say, the result of four humans being all tied up in the affairs of Hell instead—the angels wanted to hedge their bets. Eliminate as many variables as they could.”

“What do you think the angels will do when they find out that you’ve broken the deal, then?”

“I’m sure there will be repercussions for you and me when they find out,”

I admitted. “Which is why I think it’s for the best that they don’t. I’m more worried about demons than angels right now, anyway.”

“Right. I guess that’s true.” Bea nodded and glanced to the side.

In the distance, the dim gray outline of the gates outside of her parents’ estate loomed on the horizon. When she was ready, I would open the portal back to Earth. Thanks to Charon, one of Simon’s many cars would be waiting for us there so we could arrive at the manor convincingly as we resumed our little act.

“Are you nervous?” I asked her.

Given the danger that Simon had put her in back on Earth, she had every right to be.

“A little,” she admitted. “But I know you’ll keep me safe.”

“You’re right. I will.” I let my hands slide from her body as I turned to pull the veil between the realms apart once more. I took her fingers between mine as we stepped through.

Back to Earth.

The car was a ‘67 Mustang, pitch black with a leather interior the color of the foam on top of a well-poured espresso. I drew Bea around the side of it and opened the passenger door for her.

She sat down inside but stared up at me for a moment before she swung her legs in behind her.

“Do you think it was worth it, Don?” Her eyes shone with an innocent vulnerability.

“Was what worth it, kitten?” I knew the answer already—yes. Anything I did for her would always be worth it to me.

“Losing me. Giving me up, just to take me back.”

“I didn’t expect to reclaim you when you lost your memories, Bea,” I admitted. “In the moment, that felt as real to me as it did to you.”

What I meant was: *it had torn my fucking soul apart.*

“Why did you take me back, then?” she asked. “Just because of Simon’s deal with that demon. To save my life?”

I crouched down and rested my hands on her pretty knees where they poked out from beneath the hem of her sundress. My lips curled into a soft smile.

“Partly,” I admitted. It was true that Simon had given me an excellent excuse. “And partly so I could do this again.”

I rose up and kissed her hard, pressing her body against the Mustang’s

passenger seat and running my fingers through her hair.

Yes, I had lost her, and yes, I had taken her back. That was how it must have seemed to Bea, anyway.

But the real truth of the matter was, even when she was away from me, she was by my side. The memory of her had haunted my bed in her absence. She'd been there in my dreams when I slept. When I was awake, she was never far from my mind.

In many ways—the important ones—I'd never lost her at all.

If I had any say in the matter, I never would again.

DON

“I’ll warn you now, I’m going to drink an entire bottle of wine before the dessert course,” Bea told me as we came down from her room dressed for dinner. We’d already exchanged the pleasantries with her parents. As expected, charming them had been as easy as drinking water and breathing air.

“Hoping I’ll have to carry you up to you back up to bed?” I smirked down at her. It was a tempting idea. I rather liked having an excuse to hold her in my arms.

“Maybe,” Bea’s gaze flickered over to me. There was a smirk on her lips as well, but it faded too quickly. “But in reality, drinking is usually just the easiest way to make these dinners with my parents pass as quickly as possible. If you’re smart, you’ll join me.”

“Tempting.” Stumbling back up to Bea’s room together, drunk on wine and even drunker on each other, was a lovely thing to imagine. But I didn’t like the idea of her drinking away an entire evening just to escape it. Not while I was near. “But I have a different proposal, if you’re willing to hear it.”

“From you? Always.”

I rolled my lower lip beneath my tongue, then brushed my mouth against her ear.

“Stay sober tonight with me. Get through this without getting drunk.”

Bea scoffed. “You don’t know my parents like I do, Don. They have far too many ways of getting to me—they don’t even have to try. Staying sober when we’ve got an entire cellar of the most expensive wines known to man...

why would I want to do that?”

“Because,” I purred, “if you can manage it, when dinner’s over, I’ll reward you handsomely for your efforts.”

“Interesting.” Bea’s own tongue flicked between her lips. “Reward me how, I wonder?”

“I was thinking I’d take you back up to our room, tear this expensive dress off your body...” I plucked at the strap of her elegant black evening gown she wore. The Argentos certainly never missed a chance to dress up. “Then bend you over the balcony and fuck your cunt until you’re screaming over the rose garden. Unless...you have other ideas?”

Bea swallowed, then nodded. “It’s an interesting offer.”

“I certainly thought so.”

“And I’ll certainly consider it.” Her eyes found mine again. I caught the faintest impression of a shiver passing through her shoulders. Perfection. “But no promises. You don’t know what they’re like. Not yet.”

That may have been true, yes.

But as we walked into the dining room, I suspected I was about to find out.

“ARE YOU NOT DRINKING TONIGHT, BEA?” As we reached the main course of the meal, Bea’s mother’s brows made an effort to furrow themselves. Unfortunately, the upper half of her face was as unmoving as always. “If you’re not feeling the wine, I can see about getting you a cocktail instead.”

“You know, I’m just not feeling like it tonight.” Bea stared at me intensely. I liked the look in her eyes. Thirsty, yes. But not for wine. Not anymore. “Maybe I’ll have a cocktail later. We’ll see how the evening goes.”

I liked the way that word played on her lips: *cocktail*. She was teasing me. Blatantly. And she knew it, too.

God, I loved my wife.

“And Simon, you poor thing,” Bea’s mother pouted. “You’ve barely touched your meal! Is it not to your taste?”

My eyes didn’t leave Bea. “Oh, it’s very much to my taste.”

Bea blushed. I watched her try to fight back a smile. When she found she couldn’t, she turned her face away.

“Goodness.” Bea’s mother pressed her fingertips to her lips and laughed a little nervously. With her other hand, she fanned herself. “Marriage is

certainly suiting you, isn't it?"

"Your daughter is a beautiful woman." Beautiful, and *mine*. "I can hardly complain."

"It's good to see the two of you getting along so well," said Bea's father. "Bodes well for the future. Our clients will certainly be pleased."

"And we're so excited to be grandparents, of course," Bea's mother added.

Bea's smile vanished in an instant as she snapped her gaze back up at her mother's words.

"Grandparents? What do you mean?"

"Well, we thought it might be a few years before you started thinking about it, but seeing the two of you together like this tonight..." Bea's mother raised her wine glass and beamed. "Maybe a baby or two will be coming along sooner than we thought, hmm?"

"Can't come soon enough, if you ask me." Bea's father grunted in agreement, then tipped back the rest of his wine.

"You expect Simon and I to...have a child together?" Bea looked as surprised by all of this as I was. "Simon and I never agreed to that."

"No, *you* never agreed to that." Bea's father gave me a sidelong glance. He said *how annoying. I warned you how difficult she can be*. "Not explicitly, anyway. But Leviathan is a family company, Beatrice, and a family has children. You and Simon will need an heir to carry on the Roth family name."

"Couldn't we just...adopt?" Bea said—quite sensibly, in my opinion.

"We're not the Jolie-Pitts, sweetie," Bea's mother cooed. Through her Botox, she almost managed to make her face look sympathetic. "Adoption... it's a little gauche, don't you think?"

Bea's mouth fell open in shock. I didn't blame her. My jaw was clenched tight as well.

Adoption? *Gauche*? What was wrong with these people? Who the hell did they think they were?

I may have been a demon, but the way the conversation had just shifted was thick with a greater kind of evil than anything I was capable of. The scent of it coming up off Bea's parents' skin drowned out the smell of the meal. Now, instead of beef Wellington and wine, the room reeked of sulfur and rot.

"We need to secure our bloodline." Bea's father nodded to Bea's mother

in agreement. “You know who we are. You know there’s only one way to do that.”

“Why is this the first I’m hearing of this?” I could tell how badly Bea wanted to fight them on this. Her fists were clenched into tight little balls and her brow was furrowed with anger. “Are you even listening to yourselves?”

Of course they weren’t.

As soon as she decided to give her father exactly what he deserved—a swift punch in the throat, for starters—I’d be out of my chair to give him a kick in the ass as well.

But Bea stayed seated.

It was a shame. I was pissed off enough right now, I was practically salivating for a proper fistfight.

“Please don’t argue, Bea.” Bea’s father nodded to a servant, who brought the wine bottle over and sloshed more red into his empty glass. “Simon and I discussed this before he proposed to you. It’s already been decided, so there’s no need to try and talk your way out of it.”

“But—” Bea’s chest heaved. Her face was twisted with confusion. Betrayal. Pleading for her parents to listen to her—just for a moment.

It broke my heart, but even more than that, it pissed me off.

These people weren’t parents at all.

Bea’s father cut her off with a stern look before she could say anything more.

“This is what has to be done. You’re our only daughter. Our only child. The future of our family, Leviathan Financial, and everything we represent—all of the money we manage and the many, *many* people we employ who will be without jobs if you fail—it all rests on your shoulders now. So, it’s what you’ll do. Understand?”

“I...I understand.” Bea’s gaze dropped to her lap. Her voice was broken and impossibly small. “Whatever the family needs. Of course.”

“Good,” Bea’s father said with a nod. He smiled as he turned his eyes to me again. “You were right, Simon. She wasn’t hard to convince at all. More wine?”

I stared at Bea’s father’s wine glass for a long moment, imagining how good it would feel to smash it against the table and drive the stem right through his throat.

“Excuse me,” I said curtly. My chair scraped against the hardwood floor as I pushed it back. I stood and tossed my napkin down. “Enjoy your meal.”

I'm afraid I've just lost my appetite."

Before anyone could argue with me, I strode out of the dining room.

I couldn't stand to share a table with Bea's parents for a moment longer.

They didn't deserve my presence—nor did they deserve hers.

"Simon?" Bea called out the name as she followed me out into the hall.

"Simon!"

I didn't turn to it. I didn't react. Didn't respond.

Simon wasn't my name. Wearing his face felt like walking around in an ugly Halloween mask. Being him—pretending to be—was as unnatural to me in that moment as trying to breathe water or drink air.

I wasn't Simon fucking Roth.

I was Abaddon, King of Hell, Lord of the Abyss, and Bea was my bride. Mine and mine alone.

"Don," Bea hissed. She ran up to me and grabbed my elbow, jerking at it until I came to a stop. "What's the matter? What's wrong?"

"You know exactly what's wrong, Bea." Finally, I turned to her. Even looking upon her lovely face, twisted with worry, I couldn't deny the anger in my gaze. "You were in there. You heard them. They wanted Simon to get you pregnant, and he agreed. Without your permission. It's not fucking right. I can see it so clearly—why can't you?"

"It's not right," Bea agreed. "But this...it's my life, Don. It always has been. My parents signed up for this the moment I was born."

"This isn't the thirteenth century anymore, Bea. You're not property. No matter how they've tried to convince you otherwise."

"I'm not a normal woman, Don. I'm an Argento." Bea dropped my elbow and held her arms out in exasperation. "My family is old and powerful and has more money than most people can even imagine. And there are prices for that kind of power."

"Then they've appraised you incorrectly." My lips curled into a sneer. "Whatever they thought they were getting out of this deal, you're worth more."

"This is just how things *are*, Don! If I was a Hilton or a Rothschild or a Vanderbilt—even a fucking Kardashian—maybe things would be different."

"I don't want a Kardashian. I want you."

"This *is* me. Families like the Argentos—we don't end up on BuzzFeed lists of wealthy families, and we don't go on reality TV shows. We live in the shadows of our fortunes. In a completely different world that controls the one

everyone else lives in. As different from the one everyone else exists in as Heaven is to Hell.” She shook her head. “And in this world, I don’t have a say about things like who’ll I’ll marry or have children with.”

“Why the fuck don’t you? You’re your own person with your own free will.”

“You heard my father. If I don’t do what’s necessary to keep Leviathan afloat, it’s not just thousands of people who will lose their jobs. It’s *hundreds* of thousands. Leviathan owns too much. It’s truly too big to fail. Can’t you see that?”

Her eyes pleaded with me for understanding. She had that from me in spades. I understood the pressure she was under. I understood what was at stake.

But her gaze was begging for mercy, too.

She wouldn’t find any of that. Not from me.

I took her shoulders in my hands. A gasp left her throat as I pushed her up against the wall.

“This isn’t you at all.” My fingers curled around her throat as I lowered my lips down toward hers. “The Bea I know is stubborn and headstrong. She’d never let anyone tell her what to do—or who to fuck, for that matter. If Leviathan really is too big to fail, then it should have never existed in the first place.”

God. I’d always known Bea’s last name had come with attachments and responsibilities. But now that the truth was out in the open, I finally realized exactly what I’d saved her from by taking Simon’s place on Bea’s wedding day.

They hadn’t just wanted Bea to marry the fucker. They’d expected children as well. It made my head pound, and my veins turn to fire and ice all at once.

How dare they? How could they have so little regard for their daughter and her desires and her life?

“I don’t know what you want from me, Don.” She was shaking. Scared, maybe. But in this moment, she had every right to be. “I’m only that person you think you know when I can afford to be. Here, with my family...I’m not her at all.”

“No?” I pushed her jaw upward, forcing her lips within a fraction of an inch of my own. “Maybe you’ve just forgotten. Maybe I’ll have to remind you again.”

I forced my lips against hers. I didn't care if she kissed me back or not. I was too angry to give a damn.

As I did it, I shrugged my disguise as Simon off my body like an ill-fitting coat.

"Don," Bea gasped as she opened her eyes to find my face staring back at her instead of Simon's. "You're *you*."

"I'm always me, kitten." I raked my fingers through her hair and took her breast in my hand, squeezing it slow and firm. Claiming it for my own. "Couldn't stand to wear that bastard's stupid face for a second longer."

"That's dangerous, Don. What if we're caught?"

I glanced down the hall both ways. It was empty.

"Let them catch us, then." I locked my eyes on hers. I knew good and well that my grays were simmering with barely contained flames. "If they want you bred so badly, they should know who's doing it."

"They want a child from Simon, though, Don." Bea shook her head. "Not you."

Bea didn't need to remind me. In doing so, my anger only grew. Not at her. Never at her. But at her parents for daring to believe that they had any say in what she did with her body.

At Simon, for believing he had any right to agree on Bea's behalf.

"Too fucking bad," I growled, pinning her hips against the wall with my own. I could have torn her clothes off and take her right there. Filled her with my seed and marked her with my teeth. Maybe I should have. Maybe I still would. "You're not his to breed."

"No?" Bea's voice lowered to a whisper. Her eyes held many things—some of them fearful, some of them almost pleading with desire. "Whose am I then, Don?"

Even through all my fury, she had such a way of bringing a smile to my lips.

A wicked one.

"You're mine, Bea." I kissed her again, hard and fast, then took her hand and pulled her toward the stairs. "You're all fucking mine."

BEA

Don hauled me to my bedroom like a conquered bride. A prize that he'd won through blood and flame. When my feet struggled to keep up with his strides, a growl of annoyance rumbled from his lips—then he turned, lifted me up into his arms, and carried me the rest of the way.

In the bedroom, he threw me down onto the mattress then trudged back to the door. It closed behind him with a loud, sharp bang. Don's shoulders were tense as he shrugged off his jacket and tore away his tie.

I could only stare as he paced in front of the bed, furiously unbuttoning his shirt and cuffs.

When he glanced over to me, his eyes were dark with intensity. Mine were wide with awe.

“Take off your clothes. All of them.” He looked at me like the demon he was. Wicked, half-furious, full of sin. Like a bad man who was planning to do bad, bad things to me. “I want to see you strip for me, Bea. Do it. Now.”

I clenched my thighs together as a delicious kind of pain panged between my legs. His voice was rough and angry and deep as the night outside.

It made me weak.

But when it came to him—my husband, my demon, my fucking devil of a man—being weak was something I felt well-entitled to.

He was strong enough for us both.

I rose up onto my knees. His commands felt impossible to obey. The zipper of my dress came undone with a whisper. My tits spilled out of my top as it fell away, leaving me in nothing more than a pair of lace panties and a pool of silk all around.

His belt clanged as he undid it. He walked toward me slowly, kicking off his shoes before he crawled up onto the foot of the bed. He moved like a panther in the darkness, prowling and on the hunt. Stalking his prey.

Me. I was the thing he hunted. I was the small, trembling creature he'd take between his teeth. My heart fluttered, quick and shuddering, as he curled his fingers around my panties.

"I said all of it, Bea." He tugged them down in a sharp, quick motion. When I failed to move my body to help things along fast enough, he simply tore them apart and tossed them aside. "There. Completely fucking bare for me." He glanced down at my heels, then smirked. "Those, you can keep on. I want to feel your stilettos bouncing against my ass while I fuck you raw."

I folded my knees against my chest as his body shifted on top of mine. That wasn't what he wanted either, though.

"Spread them," he commanded, shifting up onto his knees as he took mine between his hands. "Show me your cunt. I want to see how wet you are."

Slowly, I pulled my knees apart. My heels dug into the soft bedding beneath me. My breath rose and fell far too rapidly in my chest.

Don moved his fingers between the lips of my cunt. He swiped them upward quickly, gathering warm, sticky honey at his fingertips and catching my swollen clit. A burst of pleasure shot off within me as he raised his fingers to his lips and sucked them into his mouth, licking them clean.

"Fuck. You're sweet." He closed his eyes and let out a growling breath through his nose. When his eyes snapped open again, they focused on my body with a whole new intensity. "Touch yourself, now. I want to see how you make yourself come."

"You want me to..." I blushed, suddenly unable to say the words. I wasn't normally so shy, but this was a whole new Don I was dealing with. He scared me. Excited me, too.

"To use those lovely fingers of yours to rub your clit and plunge into your sweet, hot cunt." He smirked, haughty and teasing. Like the king of Hell he really was. "I'm assuming you know how?"

"I do, but—"

"Do it, Bea. Do it, or I'll take you over my knee and blister your ass pink—then, I'll spread you open all over again and show you how to do it myself."

My hands moved to my hips, sliding down to my inner thighs. I did as he

said. I touched myself for him. My fingers moved through my dripping wet folds. With two of them, I pressed down on my clit and rolled it until I found exactly the right angle to make little sparkles shimmer before my eyes. With the other hand, I dipped lower, slipping my middle finger deep into my cunt until my hips spasmed abruptly. I pressed my finger up against my G-spot, rolling my hips along with the motions of my hands.

He unzipped his slacks, then shoved them down. His boxers went with them, making his cock spring up when the tip caught on their waistband.

He wasn't staring at what I was doing to my cunt. He was staring into my eyes, refusing to break my gaze.

Still, it didn't seem to matter what he was looking at.

For me, his cock was always rock hard.

"Yes, Bea. Good girl. Just like that."

Don's body loomed over mine as he shifted closer, stroking his cock in time to the motions of my hips. A whimper of frustration and panicked need left my lips as he dropped his hands to my wrists and pulled them away. He pinned them down at my sides then lowered his mouth to my cunt in their place.

"I'm going to ravish you now, kitten," he purred darkly. "And while I do it—don't you dare fucking come."

"Don," I gasped. That wasn't fair. I wanted to come. *Needed* to come. But there was no reasoning with him.

Not when he was like this.

My hips bucked violently against as his fingers slipped into me, finding my G-spot in an instant. As they did, his lips descended on my clit. He sucked it into his mouth, pinning it in place with his teeth while he lashed against it with his tongue.

"Fuck." I threw my head back onto the pillows and raised my eyes to the ceiling. For every sharp breath of air that left my lungs, I had to inhale twice. I tried to think of anything I could to help me obey Don's orders—but the harder I tried, the more I realized how little space in my brain there was for anything other than him right now.

Tonight, Don was angry and arrogant. Full of himself—and try as I might, I was full of him too.

He painted every inch of my thoughts with his presence. Every memory of every fuck we'd shared before my memory had been taken streamed through my mind of its own accord. In the bathrooms of five-star restaurants,

with the door locked and the waitstaff banging against the frame outside, begging us to get a room. In the alleyways behind cocktail bars, a rough brick wall at my back and my collarbone between Don's teeth. In the mud of the garden outside of Nevermore in the Abyss, riding him hard and relentlessly while the rain fell down in a torrent of gray—

My body remembered him. It always had. It always would. Every moment of our time together, my mind had lost until today—but now, as he fucked my cunt with his fingers and sucked my clit between his lips, I knew exactly why the sight of him had made me feel the way I'd felt on our wedding day.

Memories could be stolen away by angels and demons—but the body never forgot.

“Don,” I begged as the tightness in my core coiled up like a spring about to pop and release at any moment. “Don, please—I need to come. I'm *going* to come.”

Don's lips released my clit with a wet, gentle *pop!* “Are you, Bea?”

He pumped his fingers into me even harder. Even without his tongue on my clit, he managed to make the need deepen and sharpen to a new world of desperation.

“Yes.” I hissed the word at him through my teeth. “Please. Let me. I'll do anything—”

“That's exactly my fucking frustration tonight, Bea. You've never been all that good at doing what you're told.” His body moved over mine. His lips hovered mere inches away from my lips. “And remember. I know you better than anyone. So. What changed?”

My teeth ached as Don continued to pump his fingers into my cunt. I wanted his cock instead. I wanted his cum. I wanted to orgasm—to feel that blissful release that would finally let my body relax into that warmth it had only ever known when I was with him.

And Don, the bastard, wouldn't let me.

“This is different,” I panted. “Ever since I lost you...everything is different now.”

“You're right,” Don purred over me. “It is. I never wanted an obedient wife, Bea. I only ever wanted you. But this—the way you let those fuckers downstairs treat you? The way they control your life? That wasn't the Bea I know. That wasn't you at all.”

“I'm sorry.” I would have said anything in that moment. Anything at all. I

wanted to please Don, but despite his orders, it was almost as if *he* didn't want me to obey. "Whatever you want from me—"

"What I want is to break you of this bad fucking habit, kitten." His lips pulled back in a snarl. "Either that, or I'll just have to break you and breed you myself instead."

He pulled his fingers from my pussy and shifted. In an instant, his cock was at my entrance and his fingertips were pressing against my lips instead.

"Suck them clean while I fuck you, darling. I want you to know how good you taste," Don commanded. "And whatever you do—don't fucking come."

He pressed his fingers into my mouth and, all too eagerly, I wrapped my lips around them. My tongue smoothed over them and twisted between them as I tasted myself. Just like Don said—sweet. I'd never tasted sweeter.

As Don pressed his cock against my entrance, all of his sweetness was long gone.

"Look at me, Bea. I want to see the fucking panic rise up your eyes when you realize how good this is going to feel."

He took his fingers from my lips and tangled them in the hair at the back of my head.

"I want you," I pleaded with him. "I do, Don. Please—I want you so bad."

"Good to know." He steadied his cock in his fist, then forced it into me with a short, rough thrust. "But tonight, I don't fucking care what you want."

Immediately, I cried out. I felt the panic that he'd wanted immediately. My mind exploded with it as my cunt instinctively began to spasm around him. When being fucked by Don felt this good, how the hell was I supposed to stop myself from coming?

I swallowed hard as I realized the answer.

I wouldn't be able to.

And whatever Don did to me when I finally couldn't help but disobey him...that thrilled me and terrified me all at once.

I spread my legs farther apart for him anyway, allowing him to thrust deeper. My body tensed and shuddered as he worked his cock in and out of me, plunging more of himself inside of me with every roll of his hips.

My cheeks were burning. Flames sparked and fizzled at my fingertips until finally, I had to press my nails into Don's shoulders just to keep myself from tumbling over the edge into ecstasy.

He bottomed out in a matter of thrusts, and my lips fell open in a gasp. Shamelessly, his lips fell onto mine, his tongue shoving itself against my own. He stroked me with it as he fucked me. Kissing him back only made the urgency of my impending orgasm even worse, but I couldn't help myself.

It felt too fucking good to hold back.

“Don—” My voice was high and sharp when he finally pulled back, breaking our kiss.

“Don't come, Bea. Don't you fucking dare.”

“I'm going to. I have to, Don. You can't...you can't fuck me like this and expect—”

“I expect you to do what you're told, kitten. Isn't that how you like things now? Doing what you're told?”

“Fuck you.” I clawed at his shoulders and dropped my hands to pound at Don's chest. “Fuck you, and fuck doing what I'm told.”

Like the clouds parting after a rainstorm, above me, Don smiled.

“Prove it,” he said. “Don't come.”

He was all I could focus on. Don, and the pressure building inside me, dangerously close to setting itself free whether I wanted it to or not.

But I wanted to come. I didn't care what he said.

Either I would come because I let myself, or I would orgasm around Don's cock anyway because he didn't give me any other choice.

I pulled his lips down to mine, claiming his mouth for my own—and just like that, I let myself go. The threads of the tense, tight knot that had formed in my core snapped and sprang free in blinding ecstasy. With a roar, Don joined me, sowing his seed deep within me until I felt fuller than I'd been in my entire life.

He collapsed on top of me, murmuring words of praise against my skin in between hot, tender kisses.

“Perfect thing. My Bea. My bride.” His cheek was slick with sweat as he nuzzled against my breast. “That's the Bea I remember. That's my fucking wife.”

“I was always your wife, Don.” I stroked his hair and held him tight, still swimming in post-orgasmic bliss. I was tired. Spent. “I'm yours. Always. No matter who I have to be for everyone else.”

“I understand, Bea. I don't fucking like it, but...” He shifted to the side and gathered me up in his arms. “I'm sorry for that. I didn't mean to be cruel to you.”

“I married a demon, Don,” I said with a laugh, then stole quick kiss from his lips. “I don’t expect you to always be good.”

As it turned out, I liked him bad. An awful lot, actually.

“I just needed to see you again. The real you. I wasn’t ready for the person you have to be around them.”

“Well, you saw me.” We were both still hot and sweaty, but that didn’t stop me from cuddling deeper into his embrace. “I warned you, you know. You can’t pretend that I didn’t.”

“Should have let you drink that whole bottle of wine,” Don grumbled. “Sorry I didn’t.”

“Don’t be. I like seeing you too,” I promised him. “Every part you. Even the hellish bits.”

“That’s good, Bea.” Don laughed, then gave me a squeeze. “There’s a lot of Hell in me.”

I giggled, squeezing my thighs together and wiggling slightly. Don’s cum was dripping out of me. Inside me, there was an entire flood of it as well. “Thanks to you, handsome, I think there might be a lot of Hell in me now, too.”

DON

As badly as I wanted to fall asleep next to Bea, I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

Falling asleep would have required me to close my eyes. On that night, I just couldn't bring myself to stop staring at her.

She slept soundly. The nightmares of her past didn't dare rear their ugly heads. Not while I was beside her. The moonlight shimmered in through the open window of the balcony, making Bea's sun-kissed shoulder glow where the edge of the sheet kissed her skin. The warmth of the day had faded into a cool breeze that played with the curtains and rippled across the bed.

Even my temper had abated. Not entirely, but at least by half.

Despite the lesson I'd been hell-bent on teaching her tonight, I knew that in many ways, Bea had been right about tonight.

Her parents hadn't been easy people to get along with after all. While they seemed to like me—or the version of Simon that I was pretending to be—the feeling certainly wasn't mutual.

Fuck them, though. If they wanted an heir, they'd get one. The pressure Bea felt to do what she needed in order to keep the company afloat was one that I could respect, even if I disagreed with how it was coming about.

But it was my seed between Bea's thighs right now, and it would be my child that stirred in her womb when the time was right. Not Simon's. Never Simon's.

No matter how Bea's parents tried to control her, they'd already been thwarted without even knowing it.

She'd never be his.

She would always be mine.

As I smoothed the dark, silken waves of her hair out on the pillow beneath her, I heard a rustling coming from out on the balcony. At first, I dismissed it as a trick of the wind, but when I heard it again, I saw a long, dark shadow stretch across the glow of the moonlight.

Quietly, I rose and pulled on a pair of black silk pajama pants.

Hopefully, it was just Mal, coming to give me an update on how Ava was doing. Even better, it might be Lock. Maybe he'd finally managed to locate Joan.

Unfortunately, that hope was abruptly dashed as I moved out onto the balcony.

"Hello, Abaddon." The voice was dark and deep. It buzzed in the throat of the man who spoke the words.

I knew it well.

"Beelzebub. It's been a while." I keep my face neutral as I turned to face him. I had no great love for Zeb, and I suspected the feeling had always been mutual. "The door is downstairs, you know. It's polite to knock."

He may have been one of my mother's comrades among the Fallen, but in Hell, comrades weren't always allies.

When Lucifer and Evie had abdicated the throne of Hell to Lock, Mal and me, I knew it must have infuriated him.

He wasn't the kind of man who enjoyed seeing others lay claim to what he wanted for himself.

"You know me, Don. I've always been more of a fly-on-the-wall kind of man." He raked his fingers through his dark hair as he stepped from the darkness, his lips curled into something close to a smile. "Didn't want to wake your new bride's household. Congratulations, by the way—never thought you were the marrying type."

"You thought wrong." I didn't want to betray too much to Zeb, but I was surprised that he'd already heard of my marriage to Bea. It wasn't exactly something we'd sent out gargoyles bearing wedding announcements about. "Who told you the good news?"

"There's been a little buzz here and there." Zeb shrugged and held up a hand. Immediately, a fly floated in on the wind and landed on his fingers. "Word travels in Hell, you know."

"It must." To his credit, Zeb was excellent at gathering information. A fly on the wall—that was probably exactly how he'd learned. "But if you just

came here to congratulate me, I'm afraid you've broken protocol. Usually, a card would have sufficed."

"Oh, no. You know how I am, Don. Hardly the sentimental type." Zeb chuckled. "No, I just thought I'd come to ask you in person exactly what you plan on doing when the angels discover what you've done. As I recall, you weren't supposed to be cavorting around with humans anymore—but perhaps I misunderstood the terms of that ceasefire?"

"Maybe the angels won't find out at all." I leaned up against the balcony's railing. My posture was casual, but the look in my eyes was firm. "As long as meddling demons don't go around running their mouths, at any rate."

"Don't worry, Don. I'm not planning on leaking your secrets up to Heaven. But on the wings of angels...word travels as fast above as it does below, you know." Zeb clucked his tongue at me. "I have to wonder what on Earth was going through your mind to marry her in the first place."

"I didn't marry her to spite Heaven, if that's what you're asking. If the angels need an explanation, I'm happy to tell them that as well."

"For love, then?" Zeb walked to the threshold between the balcony and the room and peered inside. "She *is* very beautiful. She must have been a difficult thing to lose."

"And an even more difficult one to keep, considering the current circumstances." It felt like Zeb was building to a question. I'd let him keep flying circles around it until he was ready to land.

I had a question for him myself.

"Angelic, isn't she? Sweet enough to eat." Zeb waved the fly toward her.

I caught it in my fist and crushed it there before it could make its way into the room.

"Sometimes," I admitted. "But she's got a temper hotter than Hell itself. As do I—so I'd recommend you stop leering at my wife."

"As you wish." Zeb gave her a last, lingering stare, then turned to me again. "Was that your motive, then? An angel in your bed. Maybe splitting Hell with the others wasn't enough for you. Maybe you wanted a little slice of Heaven for yourself as well."

"My motive was keeping her alive." I wiped the dead fly on the shoulder of Zeb's suit jacket. "The man she was supposed to marry has struck a deal with a demon. The deadly kind. One has to wonder..."

"Oh, Don. Don't be so pedestrian." Zeb swatted my hand away. "I

wouldn't risk upsetting the angels' precious balance by angling for the death of a human. You're not allowed to fuck them, the rest of us aren't allowed to fuck *with* them. I remember the rules—even if you seem to have forgotten.”

“And I don't suppose you know who *would* have made such a deal?” I didn't take anything Zeb said at face value. He was an artful liar and a compelling one. Arguing with him on the point would get me nowhere. But at some point, if he was pushed sufficiently, he might let something slip by accident. I had to hope. “One of your lesser minions, perhaps. I can't imagine any of your people are thrilled about your failed ascension to the throne.”

“Do you really think me so petty, Don?”

“Yes,” I said. “Absolutely.”

“I've been too busy to go making deals with humans. While you and Moloch and Malacoda have been absent trailing after your little human girlfriends, I've been running Adversary Industries with Mammon. It's hardly a job that allows me the free time to go meddling in your affairs—and I do mean *affairs* in both senses of the word.”

“She's not just a lover,” I said with a scowl. “She's my wife now. We made our vows before the Almighty Himself.”

“While you wore the guise of the man she was supposed to marry,” Zeb reminded me.

“I don't imagine the glamors of demons will fool His watchful eye.”

“Maybe not. But like I said, if I'm your best lead on this little manhunt for demonic assassins you're half-assing, you're doing even worse than I feared. I've been making some exciting new acquisitions for the company here on Earth. It's taking up all my energy—you're lucky I even found the spare hour to meet you here tonight.”

“And you don't think new business acquisitions counts as meddling in human affairs?”

“Well, you know how it is. When the devils are away, the Fallen will play. But I didn't say they were human acquisitions.” Zeb's smile was broad and spiked with something wicked. “Stop by my office sometime. I'd be more than happy to fill you in during business hours—but I didn't come here to talk business tonight.”

“Maybe you should get to your point, then.” I'd already gotten what I needed to know from him. Like usual, he was gathering information. Everything he'd mentioned tonight told me he knew far too many things to have been relying only on his little flies.

Someone was feeding Zeb intel. Who that was—he'd never tell.

I'd have to look into that for myself.

“Just be careful, Abaddon. That's all.” Zeb glanced back into the room where Bea still slept soundly. “She really is a lovely thing. It would be a shame if you lost her again.”

Zeb snapped his fingers and vanished into a swarm of flies. I watched as they flew off into the night, then I stepped back inside—careful to shut the balcony doors tight behind me.

I didn't want any of Zeb's little creatures wriggling their way back in.

His warning felt as sinister as Zeb himself was. I didn't trust him—but he wasn't wrong, either.

It *would* be a shame to lose her.

Which is exactly why I wouldn't.

BEA

It had been a long time since I'd dreamed of the dark figure in the corner of my room. It had haunted my nightmares as child. Even into adulthood, I'd woken up terrified of it from time to time. But over the last few years, those dreams had stopped. I'd almost forgotten about it entirely—at least, until Don had reminded me of it on that first morning we'd shared as husband and wife.

On that night, I'd dreamed of it again. Seething and watching from the corner next to the mirror. Every time I tried to look away, it only grew bigger—and when I watched it, it darkened, watching me right back.

I woke up feeling like I'd barely slept at all. Beside me, Don was still fast asleep. It was unlike him. Normally, he was awake long before I ever was.

I smiled and pressed a kiss to his neck. His skin was warm beneath my lips. The earthy, clean scent of him filled my nose as I breathed him in.

He must have really tired himself out last night.

Good.

He'd worn me out too.

I put the dream of the shadow out of my mind as I got up, showered and dressed.

It was just a dream, after all. I wasn't a child anymore. Nightmares didn't scare me like they had once upon a time.

Especially not now that I knew of the far more terrifying things that lurked through the shadows here in real life.

I wore a tight pencil skirt and a soft, sheer green blouse over an undershirt. Paired with a simple gold pendant, my wedding ring, and a pair of

heels, I knew the ensemble would do me plenty of favors today.

When dealing with Leviathan Financial, it was always best to keep my assets clear in their minds. As far as the men my father worked with were concerned, a woman's best assets were entirely anchored in her looks. In my case, that meant my tits, my waist, my hips, my legs—and of course, my ass itself. I left my hair down, flowing in its natural waves. There was something that called to Veronica Lake in the way it fell over my shoulders, which was always a good thing.

The people we'd be speaking to today had never really left the 1940s in terms of social progress. If they wanted a silver screen starlet, that's what they'd get.

Don was still asleep when I finished getting dressed. I pressed another kiss to his temple before I left the room.

"I'm going to go make coffee, handsome," I whispered in his ear. "And if you're not awake to drink it with me by the time I get back, I'll just have to wake you up myself."

It was a thought that made me smile even bigger. Drinking coffee in bed with Don before we went into battle—so to speak—seemed like a normal thing that normal married people did. Our entire relationship so far had been marred with abnormality.

Angels. Demons. Reincarnation.

Lost memories.

Lost time.

We deserved a little normal, after all we'd been through. Coffee in bed sounded like just the thing.

I could have rung for one of my parents' servants to make the pour-over for me, but it felt nice to be domestic for a little while. When I'd first arrived at college, I hadn't even known how to boil water. I'd had to force Joan to show me.

Now, I could move around the kitchen, grinding coffee beans and setting up the filter with confidence and ease.

I was just about to start pouring cups when I felt another presence enter the room. I didn't hear the footsteps coming, which meant it wasn't my father. He clomped around wherever he went.

When I turned, hoping for Don, I was immediately disappointed.

The man who'd just walked into the kitchen was tall with steel-colored hair and a matching goatee. He wore a crisp, dark suit with a black shirt and

tie underneath.

He was smiling at me. He moved across the floor toward me without making a single sound.

“Oh. Hi, Levi.” I fought back a shiver as I said his name. Simon’s father had always given me weird vibes, but I could manage myself around him. Appeasing men like Levi was kind of my job. “You look...happy.”

He looked creepy, more like.

“Why wouldn’t I look happy?” Levi blinked at me with his cold blue eyes. His smile didn’t waver. Not even for a second. “You’re happy. My son is happy. Everything’s going exactly according to plan.”

“I’m assuming my dad didn’t mention to you the, ah...*awkwardness* at dinner last night, then?” I wasn’t sure why I even bothered bringing it up, except that maybe I hoped Levi could shed some light on what part he’d played in that agreement. If my dad had known, and Simon had known, it only made sense that Simon’s father did as well.

Part of me genuinely wondered whose idea it had been. Simon’s, my dad’s, or his?

“The pregnancy discussion?” Levi shrugged. “He mentioned it. I don’t see why it matters, though. You’re married now. You’ll do as you’re told. Won’t you?”

“I just didn’t realize that me getting pregnant was part of the deal,” I mumbled, embarrassed to even mention it. Getting angry or arguing with Levi would get me about as far as it had with my father—which was to say, not far at all. “I’m not sure I’m okay with how that was handled. It’s not nice being caught off-guard or left in the dark on things like that.”

Or not having a choice at all, I didn’t bother to add.

I knew that like my father, Levi wouldn’t care about what I did or didn’t want.

“What does it matter? You look, ah...*well taken care of*, let’s say.” Levi pinched my cheek, then turned away to check his phone. “Maybe you’re pregnant already.”

“What—” I started a question even I didn’t know the end of. There was something in his smile that filled my mind with worries. *What do you mean? Why would you say that? What do you know about me that I don’t?*

Luckily—or unluckily—I didn’t have to come up with what to ask Levi first.

Before I could finish, I was cut off.

“Good morning, everyone!” Simon appeared in the entrance of the kitchen—only, I knew he wasn’t Simon at all. Just Don in his disguise. “Beautiful day, isn’t it?”

It was still a little shocking to see Don in his Simon costume, especially after last night. Don’s glamor was excellent. He’d gotten every detail right, even down to the way that Simon frequently misbuttoned his shirt. I thought about fixing it but stopped myself.

We needed to be convincing today. Simon’s crooked collar beneath his suit jacket and tie would help.

It was a good thing that today, there was no such thing as a disguise that was *too* good. The only person bothered by the uncanny resemblance would be, well—me.

Most shocking of all, though, was the swollen split in Don-as-Simon’s lower lip. Like he’d rolled out of bed and right into a fist.

“D—I mean, Simon!” I was so startled, it was a lucky thing that I caught myself before blurting out Don’s real name. “What happened? You’re hurt!”

“And you’re so sweet to notice, darling.” Don crossed the kitchen to me and patted my head. *Pat, pat*. Like I was some kind of treasured lapdog instead of his wife. Maybe his lip hurt too much for a kiss? “But it’s nothing, I can assure you. I’m perfectly fine.”

“You didn’t take a swing at my dad, did you?” I bit my lip as I reached out to touch his wound, but Don swatted my hand away. “You don’t look fine. If you’re late coming down because you two were fighting...”

“Why in the world would I do that?” He smiled slowly. Normally, Don’s smiles filled me with light and warmth, but that one only put something cold and slick in the pit of my stomach that slithered around anxiously and wouldn’t stay still. “I only slipped in the shower. Clumsy of me, really. Does it look bad?”

“No,” I said, my voice full of trepidation. “It looks, um. Dashing.”

“Ah. Good.” Don patted my cheek, grabbed a cup of coffee, and started dumping sugar in. Which was strange, though I could hardly comment on it. Simon took his coffee in the exact same way, and it was Simon that Don was pretending to be right now. Don was the one who drank his black as sin. “You look lovely today, by the way. Sweet enough to take a bite out of. Maybe later, right? That’s what you like?”

“Simon...” Levi warned him, glancing up from his phone.

Don rolled his eyes, let out a huff, and turned away.

My mouth tasted tinny. I swallowed hard, but the taste wouldn't pass.

I'd spent nearly every day for two whole weeks sparring with Don in the gardens of Nevermore—and in the Abyss, some of those days had been incredibly long ones.

Don was many things. Handsome, charming, clever—and agile, too. Clumsy, he was not. I hadn't even seen him knock something over yet. Usually, I was the one who did that—and usually, he moved fast enough to catch it before it hit the floor.

Coupled with what Levi had just implied about the potential that I was already pregnant...

Something about this morning just didn't feel right.

My stomach rolled uncomfortably. I tried to take a sip of coffee to settle it, but the dark roast tasted wrong somehow. Too bitter. Definitely not the thing I needed, as it turned out. I only ended up delicately spitting it back out into the mug while Don's and Levi's backs were looking away.

"Morning, everyone," Dad grumbled as he emerged from the hall. He helped himself to the coffee and didn't even give me so much as a look. Simon, though, got a chuckle out of him. "You look like hell, son! I hope my Beatrice didn't go too hard on you after dinner last night."

Don touched the split in his lip and shrugged. "I'm all right. Just a little bump in the road. It's all taken care of now."

I stared at him with confusion. *It's all taken care of now*—what did that even mean? It didn't feel like something Don would say. It didn't make sense in regard to his excuse for his appearance, either.

In fact, if I was being scrutinizing—and Don had just left me with no other option—I'd say that it almost looked like the split in his lip didn't look fresh at all. It looked scabbed over. Like an older wound that had already started to heal.

It could just be that Don's natural demonic healing factor was showing through his glamor, I supposed. Calling attention to it would only blow Don's cover even more.

I wanted to pull him aside and ask him about it privately, but in the moment, I couldn't even get him to meet my eyes.

"The limo's waiting outside. Are we all ready to go?" Levi asked, gesturing to the door.

I supposed we were. Everyone else seemed to think so, at least.

"Come along, Beatrice." Don took my arm and looped it around his own.

Don never called me Beatrice. It was always Bea or kitten or darling—never my full name. It felt wrong even hearing it. But it was accurate to how Simon would have spoken to me. I supposed since Simon's father was here, Don was laying it on extra thick.

And he was succeeding at it, too.

No one seemed to be any the wiser that Simon wasn't actually Simon.

Everything was going according to plan.

This was good, or it should have been. If we played our cards right, after this meeting we might actually be able to fix some things about Leviathan Financial. Or at least, get started on it.

But as I glanced over at him as we walked out the door, he didn't glance back to meet my gaze. Maybe he was nervous about this meeting too?

If everything was going so well...

Why did I still feel like something was wrong?

DON

I woke up hard. Sleeping next to Bea all these weeks, that had quickly become the norm.

I rolled over, reaching for her. Maybe, if we were quick about things, I could make her come for me here in bed, then finish myself off inside her while we showered together to save time.

My body ached to be close to her. Even if we couldn't fuck before we started the day, I would have settled for her luscious lips against mine while I held her in my arms.

But to my surprise, I only found an empty mattress next to me. The sheets were rumpled. Though they were still perfumed with Bea's sweet scent, roses and vanilla, they lacked her warmth.

She must have woken up before me. Maybe she didn't sleep so well here in her parents' home.

It was kind of her, though, to let me catch a little extra shuteye. Kindness, I'd learned long ago, was one of Bea's many excellent traits.

I found a damp towel hanging up in the bathroom and water on the floor of the shower, but no steam. She'd already washed and dressed, then. Quickly, I did the same, put on the glamor that would make me look like Simon Roth, then headed downstairs.

I wanted to be near her. Now, more than ever.

After dinner last night and the warning that Zeb had left me with once Bea was asleep, I didn't like the idea of her being alone in this house in the least.

"Bea, darling?" I called into the kitchen just before entering it. The smell

of fresh coffee lingered in the air, but I didn't find my wife sitting at the table with a mug of it waiting for me.

Instead, I saw Bea's mother. She greeted me with a toothy smile that almost reached her eyes.

"Simon! Oh, good, you're finally awake. Would you like me to ring for someone to pour you some coffee?"

"I can get it myself," I assured her. Seemed ridiculous, calling someone else to pour liquid into a mug. "How are you?"

Have you seen Bea? I wanted to ask, but I knew that wouldn't be very polite of me.

And as much as I might have despised Bea's parents, I still needed to be cordial to them. If not for their sake, then for hers.

"Oh, I'm fine, sweetie. How are you?"

"Fine," I said, tipping coffee into a cup. "I'm fine. Have you—"

"I hope we didn't upset you too much last night," Bea's mother cut me off. "The way you stormed off...I'm afraid we might have said the wrong thing."

"It's Bea you owe the apology to. Not me." I took a sip from the cup. The liquid was just warm enough to still be palatable. Not so fresh after all, then. "It was jarring, to see how little regard you and your husband have for her wishes."

"Was it? But you already knew about the baby thing, honey, didn't you?" Bea's mother's eyes focused on my coffee cup. "Do you want some sugar with that? I can call someone to—"

"No," I said. Simon must have drunk his coffee so sweet he couldn't even taste it. Pity that all that sweetness hadn't managed to change his attitude. He didn't care about Bea either. He never had. "I'm cutting back."

"Good for you." Bea's mother tried to smile at me again, but it looked more forced this time. After a moment, she sighed and gave up. "I know that sometimes our world seems like a strange one. I wasn't born into this like you and Bea were, you know. I'm aware of how difficult it can be, having to do things for the greater good whether you want to or not."

"Is that so?" I feigned curiosity, keeping my eyes peeled for any sight of Bea through the doorway or out the windows. She was my focus right now, but at least I knew she hadn't gone far. Wherever she was. We had too much to do today, and Bea would certainly want coffee before we started. When she got here, I'd be sure to warm her mug up. "How do you mean?"

“I was only a model when I met Beatrice’s father. He offered me a lot of money if I agreed to marry him—and I didn’t come from much. So, I said yes. I didn’t love him, but it seemed like a smart thing to do.” She shrugged. “I didn’t expect to love him either, but eventually, we found something that worked for us. It’s not perfect, but it’s a kind of love. And that’s always been enough.”

“I don’t know that I’d describe what I feel for Bea as just a *kind* of love.” No. It was a roaring, passionate love. An all-consuming love. The kind of thing that simultaneously devoured my soul entirely and made it complete. Whole. More than whole.

“That’s why I got so excited for you two last night. I could see it, you know. I never had that myself, but I know what it looks like.” Bea’s mother sighed and sipped at her coffee daintily. “I know I haven’t been a perfect mother to Beatrice, but I’ve always wanted her to be happy.”

“As long as she does what you and your husband say, right?”

“Oh, Simon. Don’t be silly. You have to do what your father says too, and you know it. It’s just the way things are.” Bea’s mother glanced down at her phone and managed to almost look surprised. “Speaking of—shouldn’t you be leaving soon? I think everyone else has already headed to Leviathan.” She pulled her lips into something that looked almost like a frown. Her brow, like always, didn’t move. “You don’t want to be late.”

“You’re right,” I said, setting the cup aside immediately. I did my best to make it look like I’d just remembered I was in a hurry. Hopefully, it would conceal the way my heart had just skidded to a complete stop. “I should have left with Bea.”

Externally, I’d managed to keep my cool.

Internally, my body was churning with dread.

Something was wrong. Bea wouldn’t have left without me. And if everyone else had already gone...

Fuck.

Either they’d taken her by force—or she thought that I was with her now.

With her, and looking exactly like Simon Roth.

I opened the portal to the Abyss out in the garden, away from the house. As soon as I was through it, I dropped my glamor and let my wings spread wide.

They carried me all the way to the Pit. When I reached into it, searching for Simon’s ever-falling body, my fingers only clutched at empty air no

matter how deep I sought him out.

Fuck.

I pounded my fist against the ground—but I didn't even have time to fully indulge myself in my rage.

Bea was on the way to Leviathan. She was probably already there.

And she had no idea that she was walking right into what had to be a trap.

As for Simon...

He was gone.

And I suspected I knew exactly where to find him, too...

Right at Bea's side.

BEA

As soon as the door of the limo closed behind me, the feeling of wrongness intensified. Rapidly. An immense sensation of danger overtook me, and suddenly, the only thing that mattered was putting as much distance between me and these three men as possible.

Fuck.

I didn't want to blow Don's cover. Not with so much at stake. But my brain was screaming at me, *get out of this vehicle. Right. Fucking. Now.* And there was only so much ignoring of my animal instincts I could allow.

Don wasn't acting right. Or, rather, he was acting far *too* right. Before, I'd always been able to tell the difference between him and Simon regardless of appearances. But now, the line between them wasn't just blurred. It had been completely eviscerated.

Don's act was simply too good to be real.

And too real to be Don, too.

My heart pounded in my chest as I reached for the door. I didn't know what was going on, but this feeling of wrongness wasn't going away.

I needed to get back to the house. Now. And fast, too.

Once I was out of the limo, first I'd walk away—then, I'd run.

"Something wrong, Bea?" Not-Don asked, nodding at the way my fingers curled around the door handle.

"Sorry," I said with a big, shimmering smile. "I just remembered—forgot to pack tampons. That time of the month, you know? Let me just run upstairs and grab a few, then—"

I jerked at the door handle, but it was locked. There was no button to

unlock the door, either. No tab to pull, either.

I was trapped.

Not-Don reached over and uncurled my fingers from the handle. Across the limo, Levi chuckled and shook his head.

“That’s a clever lie, Beatrice,” Levi said. As the limo pulled out of the driveway, he sounded positively amused. “But it *is* a lie, isn’t it?”

I glanced to Don. Definitely *Not-Don*. He and Levi wore matching smiles.

“It’s cute that you thought you’d escaped me,” he said in Simon’s voice. With Simon’s mouth and Simon’s pale blue eyes that hadn’t shifted reassuringly into Don’s grays even once this morning. His lips dipped toward my ear, but the only shivers I felt were ones of complete and abject fear. “But I’m a Roth, Beatrice. And Roth men always get what they want in the end.”

I pulled away from him, desperately trying to swallow down the sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach. But my mouth was just too dry, and the sense of danger was all too real to push back.

No. The man sitting next to me wasn’t Don at all.

I didn’t know how he’d managed to escape whatever prison Don had been keeping him in, but this was Simon.

My fiancé. The real one.

The man who’d put a price on my life.

The man who wanted me dead.

I looked to my father, though I wasn’t sure why. Maybe I’d hoped that he would finally come to his senses and be the dad I’d always needed him to be. Fathers ought to protect their daughters from people like Levi and Simon. Not sell them away to evil, grinning men.

But my father looked zoned out entirely. His eyes stared dead ahead like he’d been hypnotized. They were empty and vacant, like his mind was somewhere else entirely.

Per usual, he would be no help in this at all.

It looked like I was all on my own.

Luckily, Don—the real one, wherever he was—had been sure to leave me with a few tricks up my sleeve.

Or, more accurately, burning bright in the palm of my hand.

Twisting my lips in anger, I shoved my hand against Simon’s face and conjured hellfire right against his skin. He yelped as his cheek began to blister and burn beneath my touch as I pushed him away.

With my other hand, I summoned a second ball of flame. This one, I aimed at the window.

Once I'd blown it to bits, I'd shimmy out of it, tuck and roll, then run like hell.

Before I could unleash the explosion, Simon lunged for me. At first, I thought he was trying to grab my hand—but then, I felt a cold length of metal encircle my wrist. He fastened it closed too quickly for me to stop him. Immediately, the flames in my palm fizzled out.

I glanced down to get a better look at what Simon had just ensnared me with. It was a gold bracelet hung with medallions bearing strange symbols and miniature dragons. Just having it against my skin made my entire body feel cold and weak.

“What did you just do to me?” I snapped at him, shoving my back against the door in an attempt to put as much space between Simon and me as I could. I clawed at the bracelet to try to pull it off, but I couldn't find the clasp to release it anymore. It was like the entire bracelet was made of a single piece of metal now, far too tight to slip off over my hand.

“What? You don't like my wedding present?” Simon sneered. He clutched at his burned cheek, where boils were already beginning to form on his scarred skin.

“No,” I spat back at him. Why couldn't I get this damn thing off? And why couldn't I use the powers that Don had given me anymore now that it was fastened around my wrist? “Not in the least.”

“It's a charm bracelet, dear,” Levi explained, watching me struggle. “Enchanted by yours truly to negate your magic. You're not going to be able to remove it. Only Simon can do that.”

“Why?” I looked to Simon. My eyes were pleading. “We grew up together, Simon. We played together as children. I was even fully prepared to marry you, for fuck's sake! I thought we were *friends*.”

“And yet, you married *him* instead, didn't you?” Simon's lips were curled into a snarl. There was nothing but hate for me in his eyes. “How long did it take you to even notice that he wasn't me?”

“You hired demons to *kill me*, asshole! On our wedding day!” I was pretty sure that fact negated anything else he had against me.

“Oh, Beatrice. Don't be melodramatic.” Levi huffed and rolled his eyes with annoyance. “You were never in any *real* danger. That was all part of a ruse. If Simon hadn't allowed Don to overhear him making his so-called deal

with a demon, we wouldn't have been able to set any of this into motion. He loves you, silly girl. Why would he want you dead?"

I blinked and drew my knees up to my chest, stunned.

Ruse. The word slipped between my ribs like a knife.

All this time, Don and I had been convinced that we were doing what was necessary to save my life.

But if Levi was telling the truth...

I'd never been in any real danger at all.

We'd played right into Levi's hands.

"Why?" I asked Simon again. Tears of uncertainty were forming in my eyes. I bit my tongue and swallowed them back. "I was prepared to marry you, Simon. I agreed to everything. Every last detail. Why put me through all of this?"

"Because, you stupid bitch," Simon spat back at me. Beneath the hand he kept folded over his cheek, his skin looked like it stung. *Good.* He deserved so much worse than just pain. "I loved you. I always have. It didn't matter if we were married or not—you were never going to be truly mine."

A terrible smile curled on his lips as he removed his hand from his cheek and placed it on my knee instead. I recoiled from his touch, but there was nowhere to retreat to.

"And now, you will be. Forever. That little bracelet I've put on your pretty wrist is just the start."

"Don wanted to kill you," I hissed. "He would have, too—but I begged him not to. I pleaded for your life."

Levi chuckled. "Yes, Beatrice. That was very kind of you." His laughter died on his lips, but his smile lingered. "But where I come from, kindness doesn't get you very far."

"And where's that?" I asked. Part of me felt like I already knew what the answer must be.

Levi Roth was certainly not your average banker. That much was clear to me now.

"The flames of Hell itself, of course." He winked at me. "But save your questions. We've still got a very important business meeting to attend, you know—and there are a few more people I want you to meet first."

THE REST of the limo ride was quiet and uncomfortable. I struggled to pick

who to focus my glare at—Simon, his father, or mine. When we left the limo, my father didn't even get out with us.

“What did you do to him?” I asked Levi.

I glanced both ways, hoping to make a break for it, but Simon kept my elbow clutched firmly in his hand. I couldn't manage to break away.

“He's fine. Just under a little spell.” Levi buttoned his suit jacket and led the way into the Leviathan building. “He'll stir from it in a few hours with only a memory of the excellent business deal he helped strike today. I don't really need him anymore, you see—not now that I have you.”

Up in Simon's office at Leviathan, there were two men waiting for us. One was tall and dark-haired with black eyes. When he shook my hand, a buzzing sound filled my ears.

“Beelzebub, at your service.” He gave me a slick, slippery smile. “They call me Lord of the Flies—but it's a bit of a mouthful. You can call me Zeb, if you like.”

I wiped my hand on my skirt when he let go of it. The way he looked at me made me feel more like calling the cops—but Simon had relieved me of my purse, and I didn't expect the police force to be capable of dealing with this situation.

These weren't normal criminals. They all wore designer suits and silk ties and expensive cologne that smelled like Hell itself.

“*Ciao, bella,*” the second man said as he stooped to kiss my hand. He didn't have to stoop far. He had tan skin and a hunched back. His kisses against my knuckles were sloppy and far too eager. They trailed all the way up to the bracelet Simon had put around my wrist. “I am Mammon. Beelzebub and I—we are members of the Fallen. You know what that means, yes?”

I jerked my hand away from him before he started sucking on my fingers. He looked like the type.

“You're demons. I'm aware.” I glanced to Levi. “Why are they here?”

“For a merger, of course. Possibly the greatest business deal ever cut here on Earth.” Levi moved to his desk and leaned against it. “Today, Leviathan Financial and Adversary Industries become one. We've already signed our parts.”

Mammon opened a black portfolio and showed me the documents. They were written in a script I didn't recognize. At the bottom, all of our names were listed, including my father's. Over every one of them but mine, a red

mark stained the paper.

It looked like blood.

My suspicion was confirmed when Simon grabbed my hand and pricked my finger with a pin. A tiny drop of blood welled up on my skin. I struggled to stop him, but it was no use. He was simply too strong.

A wisp of smoke curled up from beneath my fingertip when Simon pressed it to the paper, just above my name. The portfolio glowed dark for a moment—then Mammon snapped it shut.

“Excellent!” Levi clapped his hands and looked at me with approval. “There. It’s nice when thousands of years of hard work finally come together. Thank you so much, Beatrice. You’ve made us all so happy today.”

“I don’t even know who *you* are,” I growled back at him. I glanced to the door, hoping once again to break away and run—but Simon twisted my arms behind my back and held them tight.

“You need to pay better attention, Beatrice.” Simon hissed in my ear. “Didn’t you hear what they said? That’s Mammon, and that’s Beelzebub, and they’re—”

“I know who *they* are.” I stared Levi down with an icy glare. “I don’t know who *you* are. You’re certainly not Levi Roth.”

“Didn’t Don tell you?” Levi arched a thick, steely eyebrow. “I’m Leviathan, of course. I rebelled against Heaven with all the rest. When they fell, so did I.”

“There are only six Fallen.” I knew this. Don’s mother Belial. Mammon. Beelzebub. Moloch, who was still trying to track down Joan. Mulciber, who Don had told me was the most benign of the bunch. And Lucifer himself.

“There were seven, once.” Levi shrugged. “But when Lucifer tamed Hell, he placed himself over the rest of the Fallen. Don’s mother might have been happy with fucking demons and birthing more for Lucifer to command, but I didn’t want to play second fiddle to the Devil. Mammon and Beelzebub here agreed. They stayed to work things over from the inside while I left to make my own way on Earth. And I succeeded, Beatrice.” His blue eyes glinted with cold confidence. “In the end, I always do.”

“Succeeded at *what*, exactly?” Learn your enemy. Keep them talking. These were things that Joan had taught me, advice she’d picked up at all her self-defense classes. I’d never thought I’d have to actually use them, but now, I was glad that I’d listened to her advice.

“Tricking Heaven and Hell, first of all,” Levi revealed. “A few false

prophecies distributed to the right people. A little maneuvering to make sure the angels and demons were too busy fighting each other to notice what I was doing on Earth.”

“Which was?” My mind was reeling. Everything Don had told me about the conflicts between Heaven and Hell suddenly made much more sense—only because the whole time, they’d been lies.

They’d been played. All of them. Angels and demons alike.

“Amassing power here on Earth, of course,” said Levi. “Leviathan Financial was born out of my efforts. I’ve always partnered with a man from your family—I needed a human, you know, to help ingratiate myself with the rest of the flock. Throughout the ages, the Argentos have been kind enough to anchor me to this realm through our business partnerships. I made your family rich, and in return, they made me a *very* special creature indeed.”

“You’re not special,” I spat at him. “You’re no different from any other human man. Amassing power because you want it—that’s what any man in your shoes would have done. What was your *goal*?”

Maybe if I could get that out of him, I could figure out a way to get him to let me go. Levi had an impressive bag of tricks. It would serve him right, if I could think of a way to trick him right back.

Pulling one over on an ancient evil entity seemed like a pretty big ask—but I had a Master’s degree in International Business and Economics. I had all of my mother’s good looks and charm, and all of my father’s willingness to crush anything that got between me and what I wanted.

I’d been dealing with men exactly like Levi for my entire life.

I’d been born for this.

And if I couldn’t work my way out of this mess—if I failed—I supposed I’d die for this, too.

“I never wanted all that much, really,” Levi admitted, turning his nails over and admiring them. “Simply the chance to bring the world to an end.”

“What the *fuck*?” I breathed the question, sharp and thin. It was like he’d taken all the air from my lungs. “Why?”

“Because I know the real contents of the prophecy, of course. Once Heaven and Hell have fallen and the Earth is in ruins...well...” He snorted, like he was about to tell me the punchline of a very funny joke. “That’s when the fun begins.”

I blinked.

I didn’t know what else to say.

I didn't know what to do.

I looked to Mammon and Beelzebub, hoping beyond hope that one of them would share my revulsion to this idea. Beelzebub looked bored. He was playing with a fly while he sat in armchair off to the side, catching it in his fist and releasing it, only to catch it once more—and repeat.

When he caught me looking at him, he only winked.

“Don't look so surprised, sweetheart,” he said. “The world's been trying to end itself ever since it began. We're just looking to help it along a little bit.”

Mammon was at least polite enough to look attentive during Levi's ranting. When he caught my gaze, he smiled.

“And you're a part of it, *bella!*” He said it like it was a good thing. I couldn't even come close to agreeing. “Go on, Leviathan. Tell her.” His grin widened. “She deserves to know the role she'll play in the days to come.”

Levi only looked smug. He needed no prompting to continue his evil villain monologue. From the looks of things, he'd been waiting to tell it to someone for a very long time.

“You know, it sounded so simple, in the beginning. All I had to do was find the four human women who were destined to fall in love with demons. To live and die and live again, never to ascend to Heaven, never to fall into Hell. Caught up in the cycle of destiny and love. That was easy. All I had to do was follow the strands of fate.” Levi held up his hands and laughed. “But don't get me wrong. It's been quite difficult trying to catch all four of you reincarnated at the same time—you, especially. The others show up so much more frequently than you do. I wish I knew why. Only twice in the entire course of human history. You're a rare thing indeed, you know.”

“And what do you want with us?” I was glad that it was me here instead of Joan or Ava or even Evie. I couldn't remember her properly, but I knew she'd been a good friend. At least they would be safe from Levi's wicked plans. But I didn't like the idea of being singled out by him, either. “If I'm so rare, why focus your efforts on me at all?”

Was it because I was the most easily manipulated? The most naive?

That thought rankled me.

Don was right. I should have fought harder against my parents' wishes. The future of Leviathan Financial be damned.

From the sounds of things, it had been from the start.

“I knew I could never hope to get hold of Lucifer's bride. She has the

protection of the Almighty on her. Some things—not many, but some—are beyond even my abilities to claim. You, though...” Levi smiled. “Any of the others would have done just as well, but you were dropped right into my domain this reincarnation. Just like you were last time. And this time around, everything I need so I can set my plans into action has fallen perfectly into place.”

“You’re a monster,” I hissed at him, struggling against Simon’s grip. Before today, I’d always assumed Simon’s muscles were for looks, not strength. But as he twisted my arms behind my back even tighter, I realized that now, he had both.

“Yes,” Levi said with a chuckle. “I suppose I am.”

Slowly, he crossed toward me.

The way he moved, he looked like a predator.

Trapped as I was, it made me feel like prey.

“It was kind of you and Abaddon, really, to play your parts so well.” Levi raised his hand to my cheek. Before my eyes, his nails grew long and sharp. Like claws. Like *talons*. I winced as he dragged the tip of one from my temple all the way down to my lips. “And now that you’ve wandered right into my clutches... Believe me, Beatrice. I’m not about to let you go.”

He leaned in close to whisper in my ear.

“Especially not now that you’re with pregnant with Abaddon’s child.”

DON

I flew like hell to get to the place where the veil was thin enough for me to open a portal through it.

I let Mal and Lock know of the situation on my way.

There was no telling exactly what Leviathan was planning, but if Bea was in danger, Joan and Ava were as well. As much as I would have appreciated Mal's and Lock's assistance in the rescue efforts, I knew that they needed to watch out for their own women.

The way I wished I would have done a better job of looking out for mine.

I swore as I flew down toward my exit. I'd known that Leviathan couldn't be trusted—and now, I was paying for it.

I didn't like paying for things that I didn't fucking want.

When I reached the thin place in the veil, I tore it open and dove through it without hesitation.

Right into Leviathan's office—

And right into a trap.

My breath left my lungs in a sharp, pained huff. My ribcage was unnaturally warm. I felt something wet trickle down my abs beneath my shirt.

When I looked down, I saw a long piece of shining metal piercing through my skin. *Blessed iron*. I followed it all the way to the fist that held it. On one of its fingers was a gold ring shaped like a dragon.

Of course.

“How kind of you to join the meeting, Abaddon.” Leviathan's icy blue eyes met mine. The pain finally erupted through my body as he shoved the blade a little deeper. “Unfortunately, you've come unprepared.”

I gasped for air but found that my lungs wouldn't hold any. It was a bad sign.

Most demons couldn't even hold blessed iron without burning. But Leviathan had obviously been gone from Hell for long enough that he wasn't a demon at all anymore. I searched for wisps of smoke coming off his hand but found none.

No. He was something else entirely now.

Worse, he'd known exactly where I would arrive in his office. That meant he could sense the veil as well. He might have even been capable of forcing his way through it into the Abyss.

When I caught sight of Simon across the room, holding Bea captive in his arms, it hurt far worse than any wound ever could.

Leviathan *must* have been able to open the Abyss. There was no other way that Simon could have broken free.

He gave the sword one final shove, burying it into my ribs up to its hilt. My legs felt weak. The only thing holding me up was Leviathan's grip on the sword.

Which he must have known. I could see it in his smile.

Already, he thought that I'd lost. That he'd won.

When he let the sword go, I dropped to my knees, clutching at my wound around the edges of the blade. I looked back up to Bea and found her beautiful face contorted by a cocktail of emotions, each more heartbreaking than the last.

Rage. Agony. Fear. And somewhere in the midst of all of them...love.

"Get off of me," she snarled at Simon with tears in her eyes. She struggled viciously against Simon's grasp, but no matter how hard she tried to break free, it was no use. "I'll fucking kill you. I'll do it myself."

"Then why the fuck would I let you go?" Simon whined incredulously. "For a businesswoman, Beatrice, you really don't understand the art of the deal."

"Let her go," I rasped. I wanted to sink my teeth into Simon's throat just for touching her. I wanted to tear his neck apart beneath my incisors and spit out a mouthful of his filthy blood. "Now. If you do, yes. She'll kill you, but she'll make it quick. If you don't, then *I'll* kill you—and I'll make hurt."

"And how exactly do you plan to do that?" Levi laughed humorlessly. "You're wounded, Abaddon. Badly, I think. Face it—I've outmaneuvered you, and now, there's nothing you can do to stop me. By the time you've

finally gotten up the nerve to pull that sword out of yourself so you can heal enough to move, we'll all be gone. We'll take Bea with us—somewhere that won't be so easy for you to find. Luckily, my hiding places are much better than yours—thanks to a little help from my new friends, of course.”

He gestured over to the two other people in the room. Zeb and Mammon. Of course, they were in on this too.

“Traitors,” I snarled at them.

It was true. They were.

Zeb shrugged in response.

“Yes, Don. Demons are traitors. Big surprise.” His voice dripped with sarcasm. “Whoever would've called that one? *Certainly* not *me*.”

He scoffed and rolled his eyes, unmoved and unamused.

“I am your *king*, you petty bastards,” I growled. My hand pressed against the floor as I tried to summon the energy to push myself up, but there wasn't any to be had. Trying only made the pain even more intense.

“I've never had much love for kings,” Mammon said conversationally. He spoke like we were having this conversation on the Italian Riviera over a bowl of green olives and a bottle of red wine. “Besides, *bambino*, a king on his knees is no king at all.”

Fury tore through me, just as sharp as any blade. As searing as any wound. I'd crack open their bodies and decapitate them both with their own ribs. I'd drag them to the shores of Lake Cocytus, in the deepest part of Hell where traitors were punished. I'd force-feed them sand from the beach until their bodies could take no more.

I would do it gladly. I would enjoy every moment of their agony.

Not because they'd betrayed me, their king.

But because with their help, they'd put my wife in harm's way once more.

I would have done it then and there. In an instant.

But Leviathan was right.

I couldn't even summon the energy to draw the blade of blessed iron back out of my chest.

“Don't be so hard on them, Abaddon,” Leviathan implored as he crossed over to where his son was holding Bea hostage. “You and Moloch and Malacoda—you were in over your heads from the start. When you ascended to the throne of Hell, you inherited problems Lucifer himself didn't even know he had. Power is the currency of our world. Can you truly blame

anyone for siding with the richest man?"

"Hear that, Beatrice?" Simon purred in Bea's ear. "Not such a bad deal now, being my wife, is it?"

"I'm not your wife," Bea snapped back at him. Her eyes met mine, pleading wordlessly. *Get up. Please. Please don't leave me. Please don't die.* "I'm his."

"And soon, you'll be his widow," Leviathan quipped. "How sad."

"I should have killed you on sight when I saw you at the wedding," I spat. "I was a fool not to."

"Yes," Leviathan agreed. "But you shouldn't be so hard on yourself, either. I've been working toward this moment for a very long time, you see. My plan was already in motion before you were even a twinkle in your mother's eye."

He reached into his pocket and pulled something out. It was as small as a key in the palm of his hand at first, but as he held it before me, it lengthened rapidly into a full, sharpened spear.

It was a weapon I knew the look of well.

The last time I'd seen it, it had nearly killed Lucifer.

As Leviathan handed it to Simon, I knew it would kill me now in his place.

"Do you know what I just gave my son, Abaddon?" Leviathan asked.

"The spear of the archangel Michael." Blood was filling my mouth now. I spat it on Leviathan's expensive-looking office rug. "I know it. I'm just wondering where you got it from. In league with angels now too, are you?"

Leviathan laughed. "I had one of my agents pick it up for me from the battlefield when the angels tried to conquer Hell. I like collecting powerful artifacts. You never know when they'll come in handy." He nodded to Simon. "He's wounded. He can't hurt you. Pierce him through his heart with the point of the spear and let's be done with this." He checked his watch. "I do have other things to do today."

As Simon approached me, Michael's spear in hand, I could at least breathe a ragged sigh of relief over one blessing.

Now that he had his hands full with killing me, at least he was no longer touching my wife.

I looked past him, up to Bea.

I'm sorry, my gaze said. I've failed you. You deserved better. I hope you find it.

Tears streamed down her cheeks in return.

Her eyes were a prayer. *I love you*, they said back to me. *Please tell me you've got some final trick up your sleeve.*

I feared she'd be sorely disappointed.

The only thing left to do now was buy time and hope for a gift from above.

"You don't want to do that," I growled up at Simon. It was an idle threat. With the blessed iron still in my chest, I was in no position to stop him.

But Michael's spear was shaking in his hands, and his face was pale with fear already.

Behind him, I saw Mammon shake his head faithlessly. Zeb rolled his eyes. They saw the same thing I did.

He might have actually been stupid and afraid enough for idle threats to hit home.

"I don't?" Simon's voice was shaky as well. Pathetic. He had me right where he wanted me. All he had to do was deliver the final blow. In a room full of fallen angels and demons birthed from Hell, he was made of nothing more than tissue paper. A used Kleenex of a man. Nothing more. "And why wouldn't I?"

"Because..." Bea said. Her voice came from the window on the far side of the room. It was open—and to my horror, she'd positioned her body halfway out of it. "If you kill him, I'll jump. We're fifty stories up. I think I might actually die before I even hit the ground."

The sight of her there, with the sky at her back and her hair wafting in the breeze, was so much worse than any wound I could have sustained here today. Her words shot through me like bullets from a firing squad.

Bea, falling to her death. Bea's lifeless body on the pavement below. Bea's eyes, closed like she was sleeping, or worse, Bea's lovely brown irises, staring up toward heaven, robbed of their light.

"Bea," I panted, reaching for her. She couldn't do this. I couldn't let her. The only solace I would have in death was knowing that she'd live on. If she took that from me—no. I couldn't bear it. "Please. Please, don't."

"Listen to your husband, Beatrice." Levi took a careful step toward her.

She stared Leviathan down with a look of pure steel. "Come any closer and I'll do it now. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"*Bella*," Mammon warned. He might not have had faith in Simon's grit, but he certainly looked like he believed in Bea's.

At Mammon's side, Zeb looked intrigued. Like my wife had just done the first truly surprising thing he'd seen in a long while.

"You wouldn't dare," Leviathan breathed. But I noticed the look he gave to Simon, too. One of warning. *Be prepared to stand down.*

"Wouldn't I?" Bea held her head high. The tears were still on her cheeks, but there was no fear in her eyes. "If I die, eventually, I'll reincarnate. I'll live again. That's the rule, right? And you said so yourself—I don't reincarnate often. It could be thousands of years before it happens, and who knows where all the other cogs in your plan will be then."

"If Simon kills him now, you won't be reborn at all." Leviathan held up his hands—almost a gesture of surrender. "You'll be out of this world for good. Is that what you want?"

"Maybe I do." She smiled at him. Far too pretty of a smile, by my reckoning—though, I could hardly complain. "Maybe I'll go straight to Hell and make problems for you there. You don't want to test me on this, Levi. You have no idea what I'm capable of when I set my mind to something—but if you kill him, you'll quickly find out."

Leviathan was sweating. It was an uncanny look for him—normally, his blood ran as icy and cold as his eyes.

"You're bluffing."

"Am I?" She certainly didn't look it.

"Mm. No," Mammon mused, stroking his chin. His gaze was rapt with interest—like a man watching a car crash. "I do not think she is."

"I wouldn't try her," Zeb admitted. "That look in her eyes..."

As I stared up at her, I had to hide the admiration in my own eyes. Now that she'd explained herself to Levi, I could tell that she wasn't in any true danger. She'd seen straight through his plan—and she'd found a way to leave him with his hands tied.

God, I loved her.

I loved the way her brain worked. I loved her spirit and her passion and her perfect heart and her eternal fucking soul.

I loved her more than life itself.

And now, it was time for me to rise up to her level.

She was the most exquisite thing that had ever walked the Earth—and I was her husband.

I was ready to prove exactly why I deserved to bear that title now. Her courage gave me strength.

While the others were distracted, with an aching slowness, I began to draw the blade from my ribs.

The pain was excruciating. Nauseating and dizzying. But it was far from the greatest pain I'd ever felt.

The worst pain of all was behind me now. It was buried deep in my heart and set in the very marrow of my bones.

Losing Bea—that was what true pain felt like.

The burn of the blessed iron beneath my hands and sear of the blade as it cut me again upon exit was nothing by comparison.

A paper cut. A cat scratch.

Simon, on the other hand...

“And what about me, Beatrice?” he snapped at her. “Don't you care how this hurts me? Would you really rather kill yourself over some fucking demon instead of being mine?”

She stared at him for a long moment, then laughed.

“You know, Simon? Honestly?” She nodded. “Yes. Yes, I most definitely would.”

Poor, stupid Simon. He was only a half-demon. I knew the iron wouldn't hurt his body nearly as much as it had injured mine.

But the way he shrieked, high and ragged, as I rose up and drove the sword through his back told me that he'd never felt true pain at all.

Not until that moment, at least.

Now, he'd die with the smallest taste of how terrible losing Bea truly felt. His pain, a mere fraction of my own.

At the sound of his whimpering, the gazes of the others snapped back onto us. Simon's body slumped forward. His whimper turned into pathetic screaming as I pulled the blade back out of him. I let it fall from my blistered hand and dropped it to the floor with a clang.

“She was never yours,” I rasped in Simon's ear as I drew myself back up to my full height. Already, the wound in my side was filling in and healing over. “And now, she never will be.”

I met Levi's eyes as I took his son's head between my hands. My own gaze was cold and unfeeling. Simon let out only one last noise—a panicked yelp.

Then, I snapped Simon's neck with a sickening crack, killing him cleanly and quickly.

Levi's reaction was equally cold. Equally unfeeling. It almost made me

feel bad for Simon—almost. But not quite.

He'd tried to force himself on Bea today. She'd nearly lost her life for it.

A quick death was far better than what he truly deserved.

The silence that followed was almost deafening.

Bea stepped away from the window, her lips slightly parted in, what? Fear? Admiration? Gratitude? Shock? I couldn't tell.

Mammon and Beelzebub looked thoroughly done with this scene.

“Well met, Abaddon,” said Levi. “I think we're done here—but I can assure you, I'm very eager to repay you for that little show of force when we meet again.”

He gave me a nod, then snapped his fingers. At his side, Mammon and Beelzebub were quick to do the same.

With three puffs of dark smoke, in an instant, they were all gone.

A quick retreat, but a well-calculated one.

They all knew exactly what I'd do to them if they'd stayed.

“Don?” Bea stood across the room from me, staring as I dropped Simon's lifeless body to the floor. “Don...you killed him.”

A sudden recollection of my promise to her tore through my chest as I met her eyes.

She'd begged for his life, all those weeks ago. I'd agreed.

Fuck.

I truly was a thing of Hell.

Of all the promises I'd kept today...that one was broken now. Simon's death couldn't be undone.

“I'm sorry, Bea.” I stepped around Simon's body on weakened legs. My chest was still heaving. Inside it, my heart felt like it had been pierced by a sword as well.

I didn't feel any remorse for killing him. He'd tried to kill Bea. He'd done his best to steal her away from me and make her his.

Now, my last words to him rang true. She never would be.

But in killing him, I'd done as much damage as I had good.

Now that the deed was done, I didn't know that she was mine anymore either.

“Don...” Bea bit her lip as she continued to stare at me. I wanted desperately to hold her and tell her how terrified I'd been for her, but I didn't know if she would even let me.

I was an oath-breaker and a killer alike.

I didn't deserve to have something so perfect and precious as Bea in my arms.

"I know I broke my word, Bea." My voice was low and rough in my throat. "I don't expect you to forgive me. All I ask is that you understand that it had to be done."

"I don't need to forgive you, Don." She spoke slowly. Her voice trembled as she formed the words on her lovely lips.

I nodded. "I can accept that. Just...let me get you somewhere safe. To Ava's place, maybe. Mal can watch over you both from there. Then I'll go. You'll never have to see me again."

Raw needles of sheer agony scratched their way across my chest and a cold, dead sensation filled my stomach. My wounds were healing—but new ones had quickly formed in their place.

The kind that would never heal at all.

After all this time, all the heartache, all our struggles and losses and grief, maybe I shouldn't have been surprised. The only way I'd been able to guarantee Bea's safety had resulted in me losing her for good.

But at least she'd live on. She'd find someone else to love someday, someone else to marry and grow old with. I'd hate him, whoever he was, but as long as he was good to her, I'd suffer his existence.

I knew that whoever had her would love her. Bea was an easy woman to love. My only regret was that I couldn't be the one she loved anymore.

Not after what I'd just done.

"What are you talking about, Don?" Bea blinked, her brow furrowed with confusion. "Never have to see you again... You're my husband. You saved me. Why would you say a thing like that?"

"You said you couldn't forgive me, Bea." Of all the injuries I'd sustained today, that one had hurt the most.

And it was all my damn fault.

She stared at me for a long, awful moment. Then, of all things, she laughed. A beautiful sound, even though in the moment it felt somewhat cruel.

"I said I didn't need to forgive you." She moved toward me and wrapped her arms around my waist. When she looked up at me, there was nothing but love in her eyes. "There's nothing to forgive."

My heart spasmed. It felt like salvation. Redemption. Losing Bea was like dying. Under the grace of her absolution, I was reborn anew.

“I’m pregnant, Don,” Bea whispered. She held my gaze for just long enough to smile at the surprise that crossed my face, then folded her body against mine. “And I’m tired. Take me home?”

“You’re...” Every muscle in my body tensed. My heart was racing for whole new reasons now. I took her face in my hands and forced her to look up at me. “You’re *pregnant*? Really? You mean it? You’re sure?”

Bea laughed again. It put sparkles in her eyes as her smile broadened. “I am. Or at least, Leviathan said I am. That’s...that’s what all of this was about.” Her smile faded far too quickly. A look of worry appeared on her face in its wake. “I don’t know if he was telling the truth or not. But if he is... he wants our baby, Don. If he can’t have ours, then he wants Ava’s, or Joan’s.”

“He wants...” This was too much too quickly. Even for me. “Why? He can have children of his own. I doubt that Simon was the first—or the last, for that matter.”

Bea opened her mouth, then closed it again. When she spoke, her words trembled on her lips before they fell.

“I think he wants the child of a demon and a human to help him end the world.”

The news was still hitting me—she might be pregnant. I’d felt elated when she told me. Surprised, but thrilled. But my initial excitement was now tempered with anger and fear as well.

And urgency.

I needed to get Bea out of here. *Now*.

“He’s not going to get our baby, or his wishes.” I kissed her quickly and drew her to the place where the veil was thin. “We’re leaving. I need to take you somewhere that Leviathan can’t reach. After that...”

I paused and placed my hand against her stomach, feeling for something. Anything. Leviathan’s words were impossible to trust, but if I could only sense the smallest stirring within her...

“Do you think you’re really—” I started.

“I don’t know if I’m actually—” Bea said at the same time.

We stared at each other for a moment, then let out twin sighs.

Pregnant. We left the word unspoken between us.

Soon, I supposed, we’d have to find that out for ourselves.

“We’ll figure all of this out. Together. I promise,” I told her as I opened the Abyss once more. Then, I spread my wings, took her into my arms, and

took flight.

“*Together*,” Bea breathed, an echo. She wound her arms around my neck and cuddled her cheek against my chest. “You have no idea how good that sounds right now.”

But that’s where she was wrong.

It was one of the sweetest words I’d ever known.

BEA

“Don...where are we?” I asked as Don carried me across the threshold between the Abyss and Earth once more.

The place he'd taken me to was full of green trees and sunshine. In front of us, a beautiful, massive cabin sprawled. It looked like some kind of fancy ski resort. My parents had taken me to plenty of places just like it when I was younger—although only when there was snow on the ground.

Right now, though, the entire environment was lush and full of life.

“Safest place in the world right now, darling.” Don placed me back on my feet and took my hand in his. “As far away from the reach of Hell as we can get.”

“And...where exactly is that?”

He gave me a wry smile. “Woodstock, Vermont. This is where Luke and Evie live. Their baby, too.”

“Lily. I remember.” I'd given up every memory I had of Don to keep Lily safe. I hadn't even had to think about it. It had been instant and instinctual.

Despite all of the shit that had happened today, I couldn't help but feel a little excited. It would be nice to meet the little girl who I'd happily thrown my life into disarray over. Her mother, too.

Evie and I had been close, once upon a memory.

Maybe we would be again.

“Are they expecting us?” I glanced up at the door. “It feels a little weird, bursting right in like this. I mean...you've still got blood on your shirt.”

I plucked at the place where Leviathan's dagger had pierced Don's skin.

Beneath it, all that remained of the wound was a pinkish scar, but the shirt was still torn and stained dark with demonic blood.

“They’re our people, Bea. They’re not going to turn us away.”

With confidence, Don squeezed my hand.

I hoped they still remembered us, even if I’d mostly forgotten them.

Even more so, I hoped Don was right.

It had been a long day, and it wasn’t quite over yet. But after everything...

It would be nice, at least, to be in a place where we were safe. Even if it was just for a little while.

A beautiful Black woman dressed in high-waisted blue jeans and a Grateful Dead t-shirt that she’d knotted at her waist opened the door when Don knocked. She had a head full of dark, thick curls and slender, well-muscled arms.

She didn’t look like someone that I wanted to cross. But in a weird, distant kind of way, I felt safer already just for being near her.

She seemed like the kind of person who would take one look at a man like Levi and happily kick his ass without a single thought.

“Abaddon? What are you doing—” The woman’s dark eyes trailed over to me. Her mouth fell open, shocked. “Bea? Is that really you?”

“Well, it’s not the queen of England.” I forced a smile, suddenly all too aware of how strange this must be for her—whoever she was.

She remembered me, obviously. But since I didn’t remember her...

She must have been another one of Don’s demon friends. Someone from Hell who I’d been forced to forget.

Which meant she probably hadn’t expected to ever see me again.

“It’s good to see you, Legion,” Don said. He put his arm around me and pushed me forward a little bit, like he was presenting me to her for the first time. “Bea, this is Leigh. Leigh...meet my wife.”

“Oh, holy shit,” Leigh swore. She looked between the two of us, then nodded. “Well, come in then. It’s been a hectic morning. We’re only just now getting around to breakfast. It sounds like you’ve got one hell of a story to catch us all up on.”

“We do,” Don assured her. “And thank you. Breakfast sounds nice.”

At the kitchen table, we walked in on a beautiful scene. A handsome, dark-haired man was making airplane noises as he swooped a tiny bite of pancakes through the air with a tiny fork. He was feeding an adorable little

girl who couldn't have been more than a year old. She had dark, curly hair with a pale streak of blonde that ran through her bangs, and big blue eyes.

Lucifer and Lily. Evie's husband and child.

Seated beneath Lily was a gorgeous blonde woman in a robe and nightgown. She looked up at me as we entered the kitchen behind Leigh.

Her eyes widened as her gaze met mine.

"Oh, holy—" she started, stopping herself only a moment before she swore in the exact same way that Leigh had. "Bea. Is that really..."

I bit my tongue, narrowly avoiding telling the same bad joke twice.

"It's me," I said with a nod. My mouth opened, her name on my tongue. *Evie*. But somehow, that didn't feel right. Like I'd called her something else before, back before angels had whisked it all away. After a moment, it came to me. "Hi, Eves."

"Hi, Bea." She pursed her lips together. It looked like she was fighting back tears—but thankfully, they looked like the happy kind. "You remembered."

"Not all of it," I admitted. My eyes weren't exactly feeling dry at the moment either. "But enough. How could I ever forget you?"

She passed Lily over to her husband and rose from the table, then rushed over to me. Her arms wrapped around me tightly, like she was afraid if she didn't squeeze me hard enough I might slip away again.

"You have no idea how good it is to see you again, Bea."

I found myself smiling as I hugged her back. Something was definitely tugging at my heartstrings and tear ducts, too.

"You know, you might think that... But actually, I kind of do."

Lucifer—distantly, I recalled calling him Luke—blinked, then nodded to the table.

"Well, sit down and get some breakfast, then." He spoke with a British accent, but not a terribly posh one. It was comforting in its roughness. Like Leigh, he felt like the kind of man who would put Levi in his place. Just like Don had. He rose with Lily balanced on his hip to grab a few more plates. "If you're both here, then I imagine pancakes won't help anything—but there's plenty to go around, and a solid meal probably couldn't hurt. You can tell us everything between bites."

Legion took Lily off to play while Don started to explain. There was a lot to cover—enough, in fact, to fill an entire book. While Don talked, a chubby corgi wandered into the kitchen and sat down next to my chair.

“*Bruff!*” he barked softly. Then, he put his little feet up on the edge of my chair and nudged at my side. “*Bruff!*”

“No. *Down,*” Evie whispered. She gave me an apologetic look. “Sorry. The Beast isn’t trying to be rude—I think he just wants to introduce himself. Or...reintroduce himself, I guess.”

“His name is...The Beast?” It was an awful big name for a little dog, but in a way, it kind of seemed to suit him.

“It is,” Evie said. “I guess I’ve got a lot to fill you in on, too.”

When Don was finished catching them up on everything save for this morning’s occurrences, he sighed and reached for the cup of coffee that Luke had poured him.

I knew he’d need the extra energy. Explaining the rest of the reason why we were here today wasn’t going to be a fun task. Being the bearer of bad news never was.

“There are dark days ahead of us, I think. It’s not just Bea that’s in danger. It’s Joan and Ava too.”

Luke nodded, then called Leigh back into the room. She appeared a few moments later with Lily on her hip.

“Thank you for watching her,” Luke said with a grim smile. “But I need you to go to Mal and Lock now. They’ll fill you in on everything. See what you can do for them once you’re caught up. It sounds like they’re going to need all the help they can get.”

“Sounds like blast.” Leigh placed Lily back down on the floor, then headed to the door. “I’ll check in tonight.” She shot me a tense smile. “Good seeing you again, Bea. Try not to die while I’m gone.”

“You too, Leigh,” I said. “On both counts.”

“Will you be staying with us, then?” Luke asked, arching an eyebrow as he picked Lily up. He hauled her back over to the kitchen table and sat down to bounce her on his knee. “You’re welcome to, you know. It’s safe here, and Lily’s always happy for more playmates.”

“I’d like it, too,” Evie admitted. She reached for my hand and gave it a squeeze. “I never thought I’d see you again, Bea. We can make up one of the guest suites for you both, if you like. I mean, if you want to stay. We’re not trying to hold you hostage or anything, but it’d be nice to know you’re safe. And to have a chance to catch up, too.”

She held my gaze for a moment, then stuck her tongue out at me.

A surprising amount of laughter shook through my chest. She was

probably right—we *did* have a lot of catching up to do. But somehow at the same time, it felt like I'd never forgotten her at all.

"We might not have any choice but to stay," Don admitted. "Bea is, ah..."

He looked to me and I gave him an awkward smile.

Normally, this wouldn't even be discussed until the second trimester. But if there was really so much at stake here...I guessed we'd have to let the cat out of the bag a little early.

"I might be pregnant," I admitted. "I don't know but...we've been given reason to suspect."

"Oh my god." Evie clapped her hand over her mouth to stifle a laugh. "No way. Okay—what are your symptoms? Do your boobs hurt? Are you getting the tightness across like..." She moved her hand from one of her hips to the other. "Right here?" She narrowed her eyes. "Are your feet doing weird things?"

"My...feet?" I hadn't even realized weird foot things were part of it.

Evie winced. "Don't worry about it. If it was happening...you'd know."

"I don't have any symptoms yet," I admitted. "That's why we're not entirely sure. But..."

"Leviathan reared his ugly head again," Don told Luke.

Luke's face fell in an instant. Suddenly, he looked incredibly tired. "Of course he did."

"He seems to be of the opinion that Bea is with child. *My* child," Don explained.

"He told me that he was behind the prophecies that were delivered to Heaven and Hell. The ones about Lily." My eyes wandered down to the little girl on Luke's lap. She was doing something silly with her hands, idly touching all of her fingertips together then releasing them one by one.

"I Wiwwy!" she announced, grinning at the sound of her own name. She repeated it a second time, triumphantly and even louder as she jabbed a chubby thumb against her chest.

She was so sweet and innocent. It didn't seem fair that she'd been born into all of this responsibility. No one-year-old should have had the fate of the world hanging over her head like this.

And from the sounds of things, if I really was pregnant...

Soon, she wouldn't be alone in that fate.

Luke smoothed down Lily's dark curls and sighed. "I should have

guessed that Leviathan was behind all this. When he broke from the rest of the Fallen, I knew he'd be up to no good—but he's a hard man to keep track of, unfortunately, and he doesn't exactly like to make his whereabouts known to me. Did he happen to mention what the real prophecy claimed?"

"Lily will change the world—and she's not the only one," I told him. "Me, Ava and Joan...he seems to think we're all fated to have children with demons. He wanted my baby so he could raise it to..."

"To end the world," Don finished for me. "We have no reason to suspect he was bluffing about Bea being pregnant, except—"

"Except that anything he says could be a lie." Luke shook his head. "Figuring out what he's really planning is like peeling an onion. There's always the potential for another layer underneath."

"Exactly," Don agreed. "And we have no way of knowing when we get to the core."

"Well, there is *one* thing that we can figure out for sure," said Evie. "I've got some pregnancy tests in the bathroom. Luke and I, um..." She blushed, then laughed. "We might be trying for another baby. And if you don't trust Levi's judgment... They're supposed to be ninety-nine percent accurate, answers in ten minutes or less. That's what they say on the box, anyway. Do you want one?"

I bit my lip, glanced at Don, then nodded.

"I think that's a good idea," I said. "If this is really happening...yeah. We should do it. I want to be sure."

Even as I said the words, I could almost feel something stirring inside me. Now that all the excitement of the day was finally over and the sense of general dread was gone, I was surprised that I hadn't noticed it sooner.

I didn't want to get my hopes up—but then again, I didn't even know what I was hoping for anymore.

As Evie motioned for me to follow her down the hall, I closed my eyes for a brief moment.

I didn't pray often. For a long time, I hadn't believed in the existence of anything I could pray to at all.

But now, I believed in a lot of things.

If angels and demons were real... maybe answers to anxious prayers were, too.

Please, I called out in my mind. I didn't even know what I was supposed to ask for. A baby that would change the entire world? That seemed like a

little much. Instead, I furrowed my brow and felt out my heartbeat. *Just...let everything be okay.*

I opened my eyes again, not expecting an answer.

But as I stepped forward to follow Evie, I felt something. Gentle, so gentle I almost missed it at first...but definitely there.

The slightest weight of a hand on my shoulder, giving it a little squeeze.

When I looked behind me to see if it was Don, or maybe even Leigh or Luke, I didn't see anyone at all, though.

The space behind me was empty.

But—in the best way possible—I didn't feel alone.

Okay then, I thought to God—or the Almighty—or whatever we were calling things now. I'm glad you're here. But don't come into the bathroom with me. I'm sure you're a cool guy, and I appreciate your support—but when I pee on this baby stick, I'd like to do it private. All right?

And as crazy as it sounded, I could have sworn I heard soft, warm laughter in response. Not in the hall with me, but somewhere inside my heart.

DON

In the room that Evie and Luke had made up for us, I leaned my back against the headboard of the bed. Bea was settled between my thighs, curled up against my chest. I held her close while we both stared at the pregnancy test on the nightstand. Any minute now, it would be done.

The Beast had elected to join us. He was curled protectively on top of one of Bea's feet. Occasionally, he would grumble, then glance curiously between us and the pregnancy test as well.

It was almost like he already knew what it was going to say.

"Okay. That's time, then." When the alarm Bea had set went off, she placed her phone aside then reached for the test. Before she looked at it, she paused and turned to look at me. "How are you feeling?"

"Ready," I said with a nod. More ready than I'd ever been—no matter the results. "You?"

"I'm nervous," Bea admitted. "But I'm ready too. I know I love you. I know that if Levi was right—if I really am pregnant—I'll love our child just as much."

"What are you nervous about, kitten?" I smiled at her confidently, even though my heart rate was quickening. The results of this test would change everything for us. For the world too, from the sounds of things. "Whatever Levi told you, it's at least confirmed one thing for us."

"That we shouldn't go trusting bankers?" Bea quipped. She held the pregnancy test in her hands, with her thumbs over the screen so neither of us could peek until we were truly ready.

"No. Well—yes. But other than that." I curled my hands over hers and

gave her fingers a squeeze. “He truly believes that the way these children are raised is the most important thing in determining what effect they’ll have on the world. We know that they’re going to change things. If they’re raised with kindness and love, they’ll change things for the better. You’re going to be a great mother. I can already feel it. If you’re pregnant, I know there’s no one who can give this baby more love than you.”

“What if I’m not?” Bea bit her lip. “I wasn’t exactly raised in the worst environment or anything...but it wasn’t full of love, either.”

I laughed. I didn’t mean to be dismissive of her, but if there’s one thing I knew about Bea, it was that she had more love to give the world than most other people combined.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Bea.” I pressed a kiss to her cheek, then shifted my hands to rest over her belly. “I can feel how much love you have within you. Goodness and kindness, too. I feel it every morning when I wake up and you smile at me. I feel it every night when you kiss me before you fall asleep.”

“I hope you’re right,” Bea sighed. Her voice was tense, and her body felt even more so.

“I am. Now—let’s see what we’re dealing with here.” I glanced down at the test again, but was distracted by something shining and golden around Bea’s wrist. “Wait.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Where did you get this?” I plucked at the golden charm bracelet around her wrist. It didn’t really suit her. The charms were all ugly as sin—dragons and pentagrams and medallions bearing ugly faces. Tacky, if I was being completely honest.

“Oh. That.” Bea snorted. “Simon put it around my wrist when I got into the limo with them earlier. It did something to block my powers. I’d completely forgotten about it.”

“All that training for nothing.” I laughed. There was something funny about exercises in futility, I supposed. Especially now that we knew we’d won regardless. “As it turns out, that pretty head on your shoulders was a far better weapon than hellfire.”

“I don’t know that I’d say we trained for nothing.” Bea gave me a wry smile. “I liked fighting with you, you know.”

I smiled back at her. “I liked fighting with you, too.”

I took the bracelet into my hands and snapped it with ease. Whatever dark magic was on it, it was still only made of gold. Every chain was only as

strong as its weakest link—even the magical ones.

“Oh. Wow. That feels...a lot better. Thank you.” Bea lifted the pregnancy test up again. “Are we ready for this now?”

“Ready,” I assured her. “Definitely.”

As Bea uncovered the results, The Beast turned his head up at me and began panting. It made him look like he was smiling.

He knew. Little shit. He’d known from the moment we walked in.

And in the second just before Bea spoke, I realized I knew as well.

“We’re pregnant, Don.” Bea turned to me, holding the test up so I could see it. “We’re really—”

“Damn right we are.” I took her face in my hands and kissed her hard.

She was so surprised by it, it took her a moment to kiss me back—but when she did, my entire body felt like it was glowing. Behind my eyelids, I could see the faintest glow of a light filling the room.

I opened my eyes.

A golden light.

“What...what’s happening?” Bea stared up at me, blinking, then glanced down at her own hand. “Don...why are we glowing?”

“Because...” I breathed, my voice full of tempered awe. “The Almighty is smiling down on us. Remember what Evie said?”

“Yes, but...” Bea held her face up to her hand, playing with the light with open wonder. “What does it mean?”

“It means we’ve pleased the big guy, kitten.” I laughed. The Almighty didn’t show Himself frequently—at least, not in obvious ways. But if this was what it took for him to show his approval—a human and a demon having a baby together—then I wasn’t about to complain. “It means the three of us have His protection now. We’re going to be safe.”

He was a little slow on the uptake this time around, of course.

You could have done that back at Leviathan Financial, you know, I thought with a glance up toward Heaven. You have quite the sense of dramatics, don’t you?

I didn’t hear an answer. I supposed I didn’t need one.

Everything I needed, I had right here on this bed and in my arms.

BEA

Nine months later

We called her Abigail. Abbie for short. It was like the name of the where she'd been conceived—the Abyss.

Someday, when she was older, it would belong to her.

Just as much as I belonged to Don.

“She’s a sweet thing, isn’t she?” Luke chuckled as he tried to take his finger back from her. She grunted, clutching it even tighter in her chubby little fist. “Stubborn as hell, though.”

“She gets that from her mother.” Gently, Don unwound Abbie’s fingers, smiling down at her. His gray eyes were full of love. “Anything you hand her, you know she’s going to keep tight hold on.”

“And what have I ever held onto so tightly?” I was sitting in the living room of Luke and Evie’s place in Vermont. It had been a long labor—twenty-six hours, to be exact. We’d only just gotten back from the hospital. I was still exhausted, and the armchair beneath me was plush and comfy enough, I feared the second everyone stopped talking, I’d fall asleep in it.

“Bea has a point.” Evie perched on the arm of the chair and smoothed my hair down the back of my head. When I glanced up at her, we shared a look of amusement. I may have forgotten all the finer points of our friendship from before my memories had been taken, but over the course of my pregnancy, we’d had a chance to become friends all over again. “She gave up so much of her life to stay in the Inferno with me after I married Luke. She gave up her memories to keep Lily safe. And now, she’s given up her family’s company too. If you ask me, your wife is a *very* generous person, Don. What *hasn’t* she let go of through all of this?”

“My heart,” Don said. He stared down at me intensely. “She’s got a death grip on it. I fear she’ll never let go.”

“I fear you’re right.” I smiled up at him. “That’s mine now. You can’t have it back, either.”

“Ah, well.” Don knelt before me and dipped down to kiss my knuckles as I cradled our newborn child. “At least it’s in good hands.”

Baby Abbie’s eyes opened slightly as Don and I turned our gazes back to her. She was so small still, it was hard to tell exactly what color they would be, but if I had to guess, I’d place my bets on Don’s grays. She was red and wrinkled and a little gremlin-looking in the way that all newborns sort of

were, but her lips were full like mine. Her nose was straight and elegant, like Don's.

I knew she'd be beautiful when she grew up.

With a demon for a father and me for a mother, she'd probably be a handful as well. But like Don had said, she was in good hands indeed—and not just mine, either.

We all turned to the door as a bellow sounded from down the hall. A set of tiny, quick-moving, thumping feet followed, along with the clickety-clack of nails tapping against the hardwood floors.

“Wanna...see the...baby!” a little voice roared. A moment later, Luke and Evie's daughter, Lily, came trundling in on wobbly legs. Her brow was set into a ferocious scowl. The Beast raced behind her on its own stumpy legs, hot on her heels.

Leigh entered a moment later, looking exasperated. Her dark coils of hair flowed around her head like a storm cloud threatening to break into thunder and lightning at any moment now.

“I'm sure you do, kiddo.” Leigh placed her hands on her hips and stared down at Lily sternly. “But if you want to go talk to her so badly, you're gonna have to ask her parents first.”

Lily was blonde like her mother. Her chubby cheeks were bright pink with frustration, but her pale blue eyes softened as they fell upon Abbie and me across the room.

“Can I?” Lily blinked innocently, toddling a few tentative steps closer. “Pweeeese?”

I glanced at Don, then laughed. “Come here, then. But we have to be gentle with her, okay? She's too little to play with just yet.”

Lily crept forward, then put her little hands on my knee so she could peer down at Abbie's face.

“I'm Wiwwy,” Lily whispered down to Abbie. Her tiny voice was adorable, especially with the way she was still struggling to pronounce her *ls*, but the look in her eyes was an intensely serious one. “We're being fwends.”

There was something about the way she said it that made little pop rocks explode inside my heart. When I looked up at Evie, I could tell she felt it too.

“*Bruff*,” The Beast added, popping his paws up on the edge of the chair to sniff gently at Abbie. He seemed to be in agreement with this arrangement as well.

“Why don't you let the three of us look after Abbie for a while?” Evie

offered gently. “My parents will be here any minute, so she’ll have plenty of people to cuddle her.”

“I imagine the two of you might like to spend a little alone time,” Luke added. “It would be no bother at all.”

I looked to Don, who nodded in agreement. Then, I passed Abbie over into Evie’s capable arms.

“Oh!” Evie yelped and drew back as Abbie gave a tiny sneeze. With it came a small burst of smoke and flame from Abbie’s tiny nose.

We all stared at each other for a moment, then started to laugh.

“All right,” Don admitted. “So she might take after me a little as well.”

“I’ll say she does.” Evie shook her head, still grinning in disbelief. “These two little girls are more like their daddies than we ever could’ve imagined.”

Clinging to Luke’s leg, Lily giggled and squealed as Luke walked her out into the kitchen. Leigh followed behind, then Evie with Abbie in her arms.

I watched them go and sighed contentedly. My body felt pretty wrecked still, but my chest was warm and full of light. Full of love, too.

This was a place where love lived. Especially with Don here at my side.

“You look tired, kitten. I know you must be.” Don smoothed his fingertips down my cheek. “The others will look after Abbie for a while. Why don’t you let me carry you off to bed so you can get some rest?”

“We should call Ava first.” I fought back a yawn. As tempting as Don’s offer was, I couldn’t quite allow myself to drift off just yet. I felt safe here in Woodstock, but there were people that we still cared about out on their own in the world—and what a treacherous world it was now. “She’ll want to hear all about Abbie...and I want to make sure that Levi and his friends aren’t hassling her now that I’m out of the picture.”

“We can do it tomorrow, when you’ve had some rest. Remember, Mal’s still watching over her. He won’t let her out of his sight,” Don reminded me. “And from the sounds of things, Ava’s mother and all their friends have their own kinds of protections in place as well.”

“Joan’s still missing in action, too.” I glanced at my purse where Don had left it near the couch across the room. Within it was my phone, which was full of messages and emails that Joan hadn’t even looked at yet. The last I’d heard from her had been the day that Don and I had arrived here in Vermont, when I’d messaged her and Ava to let them know I was pregnant—and that they needed to be careful, too. She hadn’t been able to tell me where she was. She’d been completely off the grid ever since. I knew Joan could look out for

herself—but what if she'd finally run into something that even she couldn't beat the snot out of? It was a harrowing thought. "Wherever work has taken her, it must be somewhere very remote—or very secret. I hope she's all right."

"Lock will find Joan." Don pulled my hand to his cheek and nuzzled against my knuckles. "He's not the kind of man who knows how to lose."

"I worry about them all anyway," I admitted. Joan was the fiercest person I'd ever met, and Ava was incredibly clever. But still, now that I'd seen what we were all up against, I knew that it wouldn't be easy going until Levi, Zeb and Mammon were finally defeated once and for all. "I hope Mal and Lock know what they're doing. I hope we can help them—and stay safe ourselves in the process, too."

"Everything's going to be okay," he promised me. "I mean it when I say I'd give my life for you. For you both. But we have the Almighty's protection now, too. Somewhere up Above, we have a very powerful man looking out for us."

"You know, I think you might be right." I glanced back at the doorway. In the kitchen, I could hear Evie's parents come in through the side door. Immediately, the sound of delighted cooing and Abbie's name filled the air. "She has an awful lot of people who love her already—and, I mean, you saw that sneeze."

"Yes, she's going to be a very dangerous girl indeed," Don agreed. He flicked his gaze up to meet mine. "Just like her mother, I think."

"Do you really think I'm dangerous?" I asked with a laugh. "After all the trouble I've put you through..."

"Oh, Bea. You really have no idea." Don shook his head, chuckling. "You stole the heart of a king of Hell, didn't you?"

"I'll let you in on a little secret, Don." I twitched my finger at him, beckoning him closer. He obliged, bringing his face close to mine so I could whisper in his ear. "You're a very easy man to steal from. I didn't even have to try."

When Don pulled away again, there was a smile on his lips that wouldn't quit.

"No, I suppose you didn't," he agreed—then he kissed me, long and hard and just as passionately as he had on the day I became his wife. "But you've certainly got it now, kitten. I love you. With all my heart."

"I love you too," I told him. "I really do."

Then, Don made good on one last promise to me.
He scooped me up and carried me off to bed, cradled safely in his arms.

LOCK

I searched for her for what felt like an eternity.

In a way, that was far too true.

I wasn't a chaste man. Far from it. Throughout the ages, I'd had my fill of the lasses. In scores, I'd kissed them, and I'd fucked them, and yes—I'd loved them too. But unlike Don and Mal, I'd never considered myself much of a one-woman man.

At least, not until now.

Human lasses were fragile and fleeting. Even the fierce, dark-eyed warrior women who'd stolen my heart.

It hadn't struck me before now that they might all be *same* damn lass.

Not that I was complaining, mind.

My Joanie. My Joan. Ferocious and feisty and never one to back down from a battle, even when she knew there was no way she'd win. Even when she was fighting against fate itself.

I'd fallen for women just like her more times than I could count. Suppose you could say I had a type.

Her.

Now that I knew Lucifer's bride was far from the only woman who'd spent the entire history of the Earth living and dying and living again, I knew it must be true.

She was my soulmate. My destiny. And I was hers.

Course, would've been nice if she hadn't made herself so damn difficult to track down this time around.

I watched her from across the room. At the bar, she was ordering a drink.

I knew exactly what it'd be: Whiskey. Scotch. Neat.

Always loved me a woman who knew how to hold her drink.

Her hair was black as night and cropped to her jawline in a messy French bob. It made her look like one of those silver screen starlets. She was certainly pretty enough to be. Elfin and petite, like a pixie. Delicate—and all the more dangerous for her looks.

I knew why she didn't keep her hair long. When she was in the throes of a fight, it gave her opponents less to grab onto. That pretty face of hers just lured them into a false sense of security.

I liked that too—the way people always underestimated her.

I knew that look of surprise on their faces always made it all the more satisfying for her when she kicked their asses to the floor.

Her cheeks were tinged pink as she tapped her fingers against the bar—but she was no blushing belle. Her bare shoulders beneath the ties of her halter top were softly tanned, kissed by the sun. She'd just flown in from Egypt, I knew.

I'd been on the same flight, sitting just behind her in first class. From take-off to landing, I'd had to fight back the urge to catch her hand and pull her into my lap when she walked by.

The official story was that she was doing work abroad for the UN, but now that I was partnered with Adversary Industries once more, I knew the truth.

She was working for them. Tracking down ancient, powerful things and collecting them for Leviathan and all his minions. Digging up artifacts that were best left buried. If they'd been meant to see the light of day, I wouldn't have put them underground to begin with.

And now, she'd been called back to Vegas by Leviathan himself. The little merger he'd orchestrated between his company and Adversary Industries had been quite the blow at first. But now, I knew it for what it was: More destiny. More fate.

It was a good thing I was now working with Adversary Industries again as well.

“Suppose I should congratulate you, Moloch.” Beelzebub clapped me on the shoulder as he returned to our table with drinks of our own. I was having scotch, same as her. Zeb had ordered something swirling and black with a wee cocktail umbrella floating on top of it—weird fucker. Knowing him, it was probably vodka mixed with demon blood. “Glad you finally came back

to the dark—and to your senses. It’s good to be on the same side again, isn’t it?”

“Aye,” I said emphatically, nodding along. “Dinnae ken how I could’ve kept it on with the others for much longer. Not in our nature, takin’ the knee to the angels. Lucifer and Abaddon and Malacoda...ich. All gone a bit soft, haven’t they?”

“Too true,” Zeb agreed. “Far too true.”

Poor lad. Zeb was as daft as he was strange.

I didn’t mean a single word of it—but we were both Fallen. Liars from birth.

Right now, my lies were the exactly the ones he wanted to hear.

“She’s lovely, isn’t she?” Zeb commented, nodding to Joan. “Kitten on the outside, hellcat within. Angel in the streets—”

“Mind yerself,” I warned him, pointing a finger right between his eyes. “Just because I’m workin’ with ye again now doesna mean ye’ve got rights to go gawking at my woman. Ye’ll keep yer eyes and hands off her, lest I decide tae take ‘em and find somewhere more useful to put ‘em. Up yer arse, most like.”

That, I meant. Every word. The last thing I needed was for Zeb to decide that brotherhood between demons meant sharing.

When it came to her, I was a greedy bastard indeed.

I hunched over the table and glanced over at her again. She took a sip of her scotch, closed her eyes and sighed. I could practically hear her purring with pleasure from here.

It took all the strength of my body and the power of my will not to march right over there, take her whiskey-flavored lips against mine, and see what other sounds she might make.

She’d smack me for it, aye, but that was a small price to pay for reclaiming what I’d lost. What was still mine.

“Are you going to give all her memories back to her?” Zeb asked as he stirred his cocktail. My threat seemed to have struck home with him. He kept his eyes far away from her now. “Forcing them back into her mind would be quick—and it wouldn’t even be hard.”

I scoffed. “Now, why in the ever-loving’ fuck would I go and do that?”

“Two of the children who will determine the fate of the Earth have already been born,” Zeb reminded me. “You’re one kiss away from winning her back. Play your cards right, and nine months from tonight we’d finally

have the third child—on our side, this time.”

He was right about one thing—I *was* just one kiss away from making Joanie mine again.

But the rest...ach. Poor bastard. He didn't have fucking clue.

“I would,” I said with a laugh. “But that'd be too easy.”

She might have forgotten me, but I hadn't forgotten her. Not in the least.

And from my recollections, Joan liked things nice and hard.

“What's your plan, then?” Zeb asked. “I can get you close to her, but the rest is up to you.”

“Ah, a little of this, little of that,” I said with a shrug. “Reckon I'll just have to make her fall for me all over again.”

And when I did—because I would—I'd make good on that threat I'd made to Zeb whether he laid a hand on her or not. He was a danger to her, and to everyone I cared about for as long as he lived.

I'd enjoy killing him, I'd already decided that much. I'd kill Leviathan and Mammon and anyone else who'd stood between me and her.

We all paid prices in this world for the things we did and didn't do. They'd gone for far too long without chipping in what was due.

So, aye. I'd make her fall for me. I'd make her mine again.

And once that was over—well.

Like I'd said. Joan was always up for a fight.

Together, we'd come to collect.

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THE DEMON KING'S BRIDE

MARRIED TO THE DEVIL: BOOK 4

Roxie Ray & Skye Wilson

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