

A Beginner's Guide  
to  
**REVENGE,**  
*CHAOS,*  
and  
Other Absurd Escapades



*S h a n n o n M a e*

An M/M Paranormal Romance

**A BEGINNER'S GUIDE  
TO REVENGE, CHAOS,  
AND OTHER ABSURD  
ESCAPADES**

SHANNON MAE

# CONTENTS

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Content Warning](#)

[Preface](#)

1. [Michael](#)
2. [Arioch](#)
3. [Michael](#)
4. [Arioch](#)
5. [Michael](#)
6. [Arioch](#)
7. [Michael](#)
8. [Arioch](#)
9. [Michael](#)
10. [Arioch](#)
11. [Michael](#)
12. [Arioch](#)
13. [Michael](#)
14. [Arioch](#)
15. [Michael](#)
16. [Arioch](#)
17. [Michael](#)
18. [Arioch](#)
19. [Michael](#)
20. [Arioch](#)
21. [Michael](#)
22. [Arioch](#)
23. [Michael](#)
24. [Arioch](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[A Beginner's Guide to the Care and Feeding of Demons](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Shannon Mae](#)

Copyright © 2023 by Shannon Mae

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

NO AI/NO BOT. We do not consent to any Artificial Intelligence (AI), generative AI, large language model, machine learning, chatbot, or other automated analysis, generative process, or replication program to reproduce, mimic, remix, summarize, or otherwise replicate any part of this creative work, via any means: print, graphic, sculpture, multimedia, audio, or other medium. We support the right of humans to control their artistic works.

Editing by Shannon, [Aspen Tree E.A.S.](#)

Formatting & Cover Design by Tammy, [Aspen Tree E.A.S.](#)

# BLURB:

## **Arioch:**

Arioch loves his job; creating chaos and encouraging revenge is fun, and if he pranks a few demons, angels, and humans along the way, all the better. When an archangel shows up with a message from god, Arioch knows he ought to take it seriously, but what's the fun in that? Michael, the human he's supposed to help, takes everything seriously enough for both of them, and Arioch is determined to teach the guy how to have a little fun with life. If he starts to fall for the human along the way, well, another human-demon pairing can only cause more chaos, which is definitely Ari's specialty. Now he just has to convince Michael that although the two of them are polar opposites, they actually work perfectly together.

## **Michael:**

Michael has been the dependable, practical older brother his entire life; he took the weight of the world on his shoulders when he was too young to realize how heavy the burden would be. If he can guarantee happiness for his siblings, that will be enough for him, even if all he can see in his own future is loneliness. However, when Michael realizes that someone from the afterlife lied to him and attempted to cause his family harm, he is determined to do something about it. With the help of a certain demon, maybe he can figure out who targeted his family and get a little revenge. He'll just have to refrain from killing the demon that is messing up his perfectly ordered existence. When the cheerful prankster actually starts looking attractive to Michael, maybe he'll finally step out of his comfort zone and find out how fun chaos can actually be.

*Tags: Michael is serious about revenge, and Arioch isn't serious about anything; opposites attract; maybe being impractical for once in his life won't kill Michael (and if it does, at least he'll have a demon to keep him company in the afterlife); meddling families are annoying; Michael has never done that before, but Arioch would be happy to show him how it all works.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my daughter—you have been my cheerleader, and when I was stuck, you talked me through my characters and their personalities. You helped me get this book started and gave me some great advice along the way. You're pretty awesome, and I'm so proud of you and love you dearly.

Thank you to Scott, as always. I wouldn't be here without you. You dealt with all my ridiculous questions, and you helped me figure out some of my more difficult scenes, even though I had some absurd requests (like really absurd requests lol). Thank you for putting up with my nervous breakdowns and offering endless encouragement. I love you!

Jennifer Cody—you are awesome. You handled all my writing and publishing questions, shared information freely, and once again talked me through everything. You are wonderful to bounce ideas off of, and your feedback as I was writing was invaluable.

Tammy of [Aspen Tree E.A.S.](#), you continue to always be amazing. I so appreciate your help with everything, from covers, to reading and making suggestions, to talking through ideas with me, to managing social media—you are a woman of many talents, and I appreciate that you're on my team! (And that I'm on your team!)

Thank you to Nicole, my beta reader. You catch things I miss, and your opinion and advice always help me so much. I'm so glad you're a part of my team!

Finally, thank you to my readers. You guys make it possible for me to continue to spend time and energy on these books. It gives me a thrill every time I hear that someone liked my books—so thank you for continuously making my day!

I love you, and I couldn't have done it without you all! Thank you!

# CONTENT WARNING

This book is intended for mature audiences. That means there are some very steamy times between men. All sex acts are completely consensual and fully enjoyed by everyone involved. And (as always) there's a demon tail, and the demon knows how to use it.

## A Note Before You Begin

This book has been edited multiple times, but sometimes we miss something. If you notice a typo or grammatical error, please contact me! Sending it through Amazon is unfortunately not the easiest way to manage it. Feel free to email me at [authorshannonmae@gmail.com](mailto:authorshannonmae@gmail.com). Thank you!



# PREFACE

If you are reading this before you've read *A Beginner's Guide to Mistakenly Summoned Demons and Other Misadventures*, I highly suggest you go read that first, mainly because I just love Gabe and Az so much.

But if it's been awhile, or if you enjoy reading a series out of order (I admit it, I do it), then I'll let you know that Michael, Gabriel, and Seraphina are Nephilim siblings who live together in a house converted into three apartments, and they are distantly related to the archangel Michael. In the last book, Grams (who has a surprise or two herself) gets Gabe to summon a lust demon, and actual love ensues (along with lots of other fun occurrences).

Unfortunately, Michael totally acts like a know-it-all older sibling (although he has reason to, which you shall find out shortly), and he decides to call forth an angel because he thinks his brother might be in danger. Oops. His heart was in the right place, and he's really sorry about everything that happened.

That's it, you're ready to keep reading—but seriously, go read Gabe and Az's story. It even has an adorable pet frog. (Kind of. And he'll be getting his own novella, by the way.)

## CHAPTER I

# MICHAEL

Michael sat on his couch, staring at the book on his coffee table. It was a scarred but sturdy dark, wooden table. Like the couch he was sitting on, it had been planned out and purchased with thought and research.

Practical. Enduring. Steadfast.

Boring.

Michael thought maybe that summed up his entire life.

And it was all because of the book sitting in front of him. It was an old book, but it was in beautiful condition and clearly well-cared for. Not that Michael had to do anything; it seemed to care for itself. The writing on it was not in English. In fact, any scholar in the world would not be able to tell you exactly what language the book was in. Yet somehow, Michael could still read it, maybe because he was Nephilim, descended very distantly from angels.

It had not occurred to him until very recently to wonder if the book was written in an angelic or a demonic language.

It had not occurred to him until this very moment, as he sat pondering the book, that perhaps there was no actual difference between the two.

Michael had fucked up.

With that thought, which had been bouncing around in his head for the last few days, he reached up and gripped the stone that was resting against his chest held on by a leather necklace.

The stone was a warm weight in his palm. He had never taken it off. In fact, he wasn't even sure he *could* take it off.

The book and the stone had both come to him on the same day. He had only been seven at the time, and both his parents had just died, so when a figure in blinding light appeared and told him to watch over and protect his siblings, he might have taken it a little too much to heart. The figure had said that they would gift him with knowledge to guide him. He had woken up the next morning to the necklace around his neck and the book on his nightstand.

He had not thought about the fact that he had received two gifts, not one. At first he had assumed the stone went along with the book of knowledge, clearly the gift which the angel had referenced.

So Michael had tried. He had been the dependable one. He was stable, and researched everything, and watched over Gabe and Ser even when they didn't need watching over. He had worried about them and fussed over them and helped them make important life decisions, investing their money, helping them choose colleges and career paths, and even orchestrating the fact that they would all live together.

He had probably driven them crazy. Seraphina called him out on it more, but he knew when she bickered with him it was a sign of affection. She was charging through life, knocking down walls and people in her way as she went, and Michael argued with her and poked at her because she poked right back. He didn't really worry over her.

Gabriel he had worried over. His sweet younger brother; he had always just seemed so lonely.

He looked at the book again, opening to the first page, which read, "Beware the Infernal Kings of the Underworld."

The rest of the pages were filled with spells, incantations, and guidelines for the afterlife. He had read the book through many times. In his pride, and he could admit also in his annoyance that Gabe wouldn't listen to him or even talk to him, he had used the book. It had seemed like divine intervention when the book had fallen open to the incantation

to call forth a Divine Weapon of the Almighty against Infernal Kings of the Underworld.

He had used the incantation because his brother hadn't been acting like himself. He had used it because the book had told him to beware of the Infernal Kings of the Underworld, and his brother had summoned one. He had used it because he had trusted the book completely, just as he had trusted that angel who so long ago had given a child, filled with grief, a mission.

Michael closed the book again, filled with a sudden, burning anger.

Someone had lied to him.

He had trusted angels all his life, yet one had lied to him. One had misled him. This book, gifted by an angel, had purposely tried to separate his brother from love. Not even just love, according to Gabe, but a part of his very soul. His soulmate, like something out of the romance novels he occasionally let himself read, filled with guilt even as he read them, because they were *not* practical.

Michael was done being practical.

He had trusted a book over his own brother, and he had almost irreparably hurt his family because of that. Gabe had been right to yell at him; Michael did always think he knew best. He would never excuse his behavior, but he wasn't such a martyr that he didn't realize that this book had been a large part of that. After all, if you had a direct link to divine beings guiding you, wouldn't you expect to know best?

But Gabe had made him realize things. He and his siblings had been raised by Grams, for goodness sake. She had spelled demons and angels both into babysitting them, teaching them, and hanging out with them all the time. He knew there was really no difference between them. Well, perhaps the demons got up to a bit more trouble, but the angels were often annoying in their own ways.

Yet he had trusted in this book, and in a single angel who he had never even really seen, above his own brother.

It had been a powerful angel, and he had often thought over the years that it was his namesake, the archangel Michael, who had given him the book. It had never really occurred to him to ask, though. He had idolized the archangel Michael, and whenever Grandfather, as they called him, came to visit, he had looked on him with awe and tried to be just like him.

He wondered if it was Grandfather who betrayed them. He didn't like the thought, but he could rule nothing out. His practical, logical mind acknowledged that the only family he could truly trust right now consisted of his brother and his sister. He thought he could include Grams in that list as well; after all, her mission in life was to protect Nephilim, so she should act with his and his siblings' best interests in mind.

Beyond that, he could trust no one. Someone had tried to harm his family, and he would not stand for it. His name meant protector and warrior, and he would live up to that. He would find out who had tried to damage them, and he would seek vengeance for his family.

He had the urge to throw the book across the room, but he didn't. He was still practical, dependable Michael, after all, so he placed it in the hidden drawer on the underside of the coffee table.

He was about to do something very impractical, however. If he couldn't trust angels, there was one other place he could go for help.

Michael was going to summon a demon.

## CHAPTER 2

# ARIOCH

The screaming was at a volume and pitch that could probably cause mortal ears to bleed. A repetitive children's song about a shark, which had been created by a team of truly vile demons, blasted on repeat at top volume, competing with the shrieking.

There were at least two three year olds who were currently sobbing hysterically. One young girl had thrown herself on the ground, screaming that she wasn't going home as a harried mother tried to lift the child up off the ground. In an act of childhood magic, the toddler seemed to have made herself weigh double her actual weight while also remaining completely limp, so every time the mother tried to pick her up she simply slithered out of her arms.

A toddler ran out of the bathroom, without pants, screaming at the top of his lungs that he was *not* going to use the potty, repeating "You can't make me!" over and over as a dad chased after him, pants in hand, frantically calling his son's name.

Another little girl was throwing balls out of the ball pit like a champion pitcher, her parents holding their hands up as if to ward off the attack, looking utterly perplexed on how to handle the situation. Her mother kept repeating the girl's name, even as the child windmilled one ball after the other, laughing maniacally, hitting both of them with an accuracy that was quite impressive for her age.

"Who wants birthday cupcakes?" Ariocho yelled out, and he boomed laughter as all the children screamed in delight while



the parents groaned in unison. More sugar was *exactly* what all these little hellions needed.

He placed the cupcakes, made with extra icing in colors that would absolutely stain those expensive little toddler outfits, on the table and stood back. Ariocho knew better than to get between a hunter and its prey.

The children swarmed the tables, a few of them double fistfing cupcakes and running right back out to the bounce houses, much to the dismay of both the parents and the workers. Ariocho only laughed jovially again.

There was nothing like a toddler birthday party to feed his chaos.

He took a deep breath in, staring out at the complete pandemonium. It was glorious.

Ari became aware of an afterlife presence next to him, and without even looking over, he proclaimed, “Isn’t it beautiful? These kids will be up until midnight, high on sugar, throwing temper tantrums, wreaking havoc. Demons have nothing on three year olds. It makes my heart light to see such mortal chaos.”

He heard a delicate sniff and looked over, raising an eyebrow.

“Ah, if it isn’t the archangel Gabriel. To what do I owe such an honor?” he asked, throwing his arm around the angel, who was in his human form and was a full head shorter than Ari.

Gabriel shrugged off the arm and sniffed again, folding his arms over his chest and looking disapproving.

“Aww, Gabes, you aren’t still mad at me, are you?” he whined. He laughed again then; he couldn’t help it. Gabriel looked so utterly put out.

“You know my feathers didn’t grow back for *weeks*, Ariocho. That wasn’t funny,” Gabriel sniffed.

“Gabes, that was like a century ago! Dude, you still delivered your message, so it isn’t like I interrupted your very

official work,” Ari laughed.

The archangel always took himself too seriously. He guessed being the messenger of god was serious business, but really, what was the point of life if you couldn't laugh and have fun?

Gabriel just sniffed again, looking out over the chaos. “Those poor parents,” he muttered.

Ari boomed laughter again. “All their choice, Gabriel. Three year olds did not drive themselves to this party. Although, three year olds driving...” Ari trailed off, wondering to himself if he could somehow manage such a thing, even on an amusement park level. The chaos that would ensue would be truly magnificent.

Gabriel turned toward him at that, giving him a disgruntled look. “Don't even think about it. Dodgeball and bumper cars were bad enough. You don't need to go inventing anything else, Ariocho.”

Ari smiled happily; it was wonderful when you could take pride and joy in your work. Gabriel simply sniffed disdainfully.

“Bruh, do you need a tissue for that sniffle?” Ari mocked.

The archangel harrumphed at him before standing up straight and turning to face Ari.

Ari sighed. Of course Gabriel hadn't forgiven him and popped topside to chat. Gabriel was all business, all the time, and apparently Ari had somehow ended up in the same place as someone who was about to get a message from god.

“So which poor, unsuspecting schmuck is it today? Who here is receiving a message from the almighty? And will it cause a bit of chaos in their life that I should stick around for?” he queried.

Gabriel's wings appeared in an outline of light and he began glowing, his human form melting away and a heavenly white robe taking the place of the suit he had been wearing. Ari almost laughed again thinking of a man in a suit at a three year old's party. If he had thought of it in time, he would've

called over some of the sticky-fingered kids to say hello and muss Gabriel up a bit. But alas, too late for that. Gabriel would only be seen now by whichever dude was getting the message from god.

“Arioch, Infernal King of the Underworld, Demon of Vengeance and Chaos,” Gabriel began, but Arioch cut him off before he could get any further.

“Woah, woah, dude, hold up a second. You have a message for *me*? That can’t be right.”

Gabriel dimmed a bit, sighing in exasperation. He then attempted to soldier on. “You have been—” he started, but Arioch interrupted again.

“No, man, I know you take your work seriously, but you must have fucked this one up, because the almighty does not have messages for demons.”

Gabriel dimmed back to normal, folded his arms across his chest, and glared at Ari, his mouth set in a mulish line of disapproval.

Ari felt himself displace a bit. He really had no other way of describing his “seeing,” as he thought of it. It was like his mind moved out of the current time and space he occupied. His foresight was hardly ever exact; sometimes it was a vision and sometimes it was a message, although he usually didn’t even know what he was going to say until the words were spoken.

This time it was a vision, and he saw god and the devil both in a white room filled with cracks, although he didn’t think they were actual cracks. Or else no one could see the cracks? He wasn’t sure.

Then he saw the archangel Gabriel there, kneeling before god, who was telling him to deliver a message to Arioch, the Infernal King of the Underworld, the Demon of Vengeance and Chaos.

His vision cut off then, and he came back to himself to see Gabriel still staring grumpily at him.

“Dude, I guess you do have a message for me. Pretty weird, no?” he muttered. He guessed if Luce was in on the message that it had the full approval of his boss as well, so he’d go along with whatever he was told.

He chuckled a bit then. A message from god. For a demon who specialized in chaos and vengeance. This was probably gonna cause some serious shit to go down.

Ari couldn’t wait.

## CHAPTER 3

# MICHAEL

“Are you absolutely sure about this, Michael?” his chief asked.

Michael had already set his badge and gun on the desk he was standing in front of. He saw no reason to take a seat; it was all fairly straightforward.

“My cases have already been handed off, and I filled out the necessary paperwork with HR. If you need me to, I can delay my leave of absence, but I don’t see the necessity for doing so.”

His chief sighed.

He knew he had been something of a trial for the chief of police, who valued comradery amongst his men and women. The other officers in the precinct had all bonded pretty well, although of course there were petty rivalries and personality clashes. Despite that, they often went to each other’s barbecues and went out after their shifts. They celebrated birthdays and engagements and new babies, and Michael dutifully gave toward gifts whenever a collection was made, but he didn’t socialize outside of work.

He had been young when he’d joined the force, and he’d been too intent on doing his job well and on taking care of his family to socialize. Then he guessed it sort of became a habit to stay to himself. After all, there was no reason now he couldn’t go out after work. Ser didn’t need help with her math courses in college and Gabe didn’t need him providing coffee and pep talks when he was writing a late night paper.

It was sort of sad. Ten years on the force, and he doubted anyone would even realize he was gone. Maybe after a week or so someone would idly ask where he was, someone would say he went on vacation, and his name would never come up again. And it was all his own fault.

“I hope everything is ok. You know we’ll all help out in any way we can,” his chief said, staring keenly at Michael. The unspoken statement was that they’d be there for him even if he hadn’t really been a part of them. Michael appreciated the sentiment, he really did, but this wasn’t something he could drag them into, even if he had been comfortable with the thought of doing so.

“I know, and I appreciate it. Just some mundane family issues, and I want to devote my time to them right now. I’ll keep you and HR apprised of my situation. I put in for my vacation time first, and then if need be I’ll extend it into an unpaid leave of absence,” Michael explained.

The chief sighed again.

Michael almost sighed in return. God, he was tired of being such a trial to everyone, yet somehow he couldn’t seem to help it. He was stiff, and formal, and didn’t connect well with people. Outside of his family, he’d never really opened up to anyone, and his own family would probably say he was uptight and rigid and annoying. He almost laughed at the absurdity of it. All he’d ever wanted to do was help people, and yet it felt like all he did was the exact opposite.

His chief must have sensed his growing impatience and darkening mood, because suddenly he was all business, going through the logistics with Michael (which HR had already covered) and reiterating that he did not need to turn in his badge and gun for an extended vacation and possible leave of absence.

They probably both knew that there was a chance Michael wasn’t coming back, but neither of them acknowledged it.

Michael had become a police officer because he wanted to protect people, and in the beginning he had felt like he was doing that. Maybe he was burnt out on the job, or maybe it

was just recent events in his life, but he didn't feel like he was much help anymore.

With a brisk handshake goodbye (Michael knew he was not the type of person that other people hugged), he made his farewell and left the precinct. He didn't stop to chat with anyone. He had cleared out his desk earlier, and only his mug and graduation pictures of Seraphina and Gabriel had needed to be taken out to his car.

He wouldn't be missed.

By the time he was sitting behind the wheel of his very practical sedan, he was fighting off the absurd urge to cry. Ten years, and yes, he had a pension and great benefits and a sizable savings, but not a single person would miss him.

It was over twenty years since his parents had died, and he could count on one hand the people who cared about him and would miss him if he were gone.

It was pathetic.

Ok, so maybe he was having a bit of a pity party. Everyone he loved was aggravated with him, and he didn't even have anyone to go and complain to. It was his own fault; he knew that. He hadn't bothered to cultivate relationships outside of his family.

He'd thought that taking care of them was enough. When they were younger, it had been enough. But when Ser had graduated college a few years ago, he should have branched out. He should have tried dating more than halfheartedly. He should have gone out with work friends. He should have done *something*.

Instead he had been stuck in his rut, being overprotective and overhelpful and trying to fix things that didn't need fixing.

He started the car and began driving, heading to the only person he figured could help him at this point.

By the time he pulled into Grams' driveway, he was feeling lonely and depressed and generally awful about himself.



He dragged himself out of the car, and before he even made it to the front door, Grams was opening it up, almost like she'd been expecting him.

"Well, it's about damn time you showed up, Mister," she chided.

"I didn't know you needed me, Grams," he said, pulling out his phone and looking to see if he'd missed a text. Only it was silent and empty of calls or texts, just like it had been since 'the incident,' as he liked to think of it. He also alternately thought of it as 'the fuck-up,' and he figured that was probably kinder than what his entire family thought about the whole thing.

"Hmph," she scowled. "You don't call or text anyone for *days*, Michael. You stay holed up in your apartment and don't even bother Seraphina when she comes in at all hours of the night. You don't text Gabe about increased utility bills with another person living in his apartment. They're both quite concerned, you know."

Didn't that just sum up his life? His family felt his absence most keenly because he wasn't bothering them with trivial, idiotic, fussy issues.

Grams looked closer at him, squinting. He just stood on her porch, saying nothing.

"Hmph. Get in here," she commanded, grabbing his arm and pulling him in the door, through the house, and to the kitchen. She manhandled him to the kitchen table and pushed him into a seat, and he let her.

She bustled over to the stove and set up the tea pot, grumbling and muttering under her breath.

When she turned around and pointed a wooden spoon at him, he braced himself for the talking-to he knew he had coming. He'd had plenty of talking-to's over the years, although he admitted Gabe and Ser had probably had far more. Most of his had consisted of Grams telling him he needed to get into *more* trouble.

Well, he'd certainly made up for his teenage years of doing the right thing.

She stared at him, squinting, wooden spoon still pointed at him, but she didn't say a word. He just stared back. The sound of the old fashioned tea kettle whistling broke the stand off, and she turned around, harrumphing again.

She poured them both tea, then came over and sat down, handing a cup to him.

"What did you do?" she demanded.

He laughed mirthlessly. "Well, I almost ruined Gabe's chance at love..." he started, but she cut him off with another harumph.

"Yes, yes, we all know about that. But you came and got me when Gabe asked you to, and you followed my directions after that. You aren't still upset over Gabe's little yelling moment, are you? Honey, he was a little distraught. He loves you, as does Ser, and they've both been worried about you."

"Worried because I haven't been harassing them," Michael mumbled.

"Oh, hush. They love you and your worrying. Ser tried picking a fight with me yesterday, I'll have you know. She was quite disappointed in the outcome and said you were *much* more fun to fight with. You know fighting is her love language," Grams reasoned.

Michael sighed. "It isn't Ser I pissed off."

"Pshh," Grams waved dismissively. "Gabe doesn't have the ability to hold a grudge. He thinks you're getting over his uncharacteristic show of temper. He had every right to be upset, but he's over it and wondering why you aren't talking to him. They're *both* wondering why you aren't talking to them."

"Well, it's not like they're talking to me, either," Michael grumbled, staring down into his tea cup and realizing how childish he sounded.

"Ah," Grams uttered, staring at him. She sighed before going on. "In some ways, I failed you miserably, Michael."

Michael's head snapped up at that, and he literally stared at Grams open mouthed. "You have absolutely *not* failed me, Grams. Not in *any* way."

"Oh, but I did. You were such a serious little boy from the moment I collected the three of you. Do you remember what you said to me?" she asked.

Michael shook his head. Those first few weeks after the death of his parents were a blur, and the only thing that had really stuck in his mind had been the visitation from the angel, which had occurred before Grams showed up.

He'd never told Grams about that, and he wasn't sure if now was the time to do so. She was most definitely biased when it came to Grandfather, and Michael thought she'd blame him for the whole thing. He wasn't sure she was wrong, but he also knew she couldn't be objective about the situation.

"You said, 'Oh good, I'm glad you're here to help me take care of them. I wasn't sure how I would do it all on my own.' You were so young and yet you sounded so grown up, and I agreed that I was happy to help." Grams paused, staring off out the kitchen window. "You were always wise beyond your years, and in some ways I think you were right. You raised your siblings, and I helped."

Grams turned and looked at him then, taking his hand in hers. "But you were just a boy, and it should have been the other way around. My dear Michael, the reason Ser and Gabe haven't called or texted is because they're waiting on you. You're like a parent to them; you've always been the one to reach out first, to solve problems first, to deal with any conflict that arises. They have no idea what to do with silence from you. It never even occurred to them that you might be hurting, because you're the strong, protective older brother who is always right"—Michael snorted at that—"and who never needs anyone else's help," she finished.

He clutched onto Grams' hand, smiling weakly. "I don't think I would have let you raise me, Grams. I was so determined." He blinked quickly as he felt his eyes water a bit.

He was so damn emotional lately. He guessed that happened when your entire world view was flipped upside down.

“Well, Grams, I need your help now,” he stated, and he felt her hand squeeze his again.

“Oh Michael, I’ve waited more than twenty years to hear you say that. Anything I can do, I will. All you have to do is ask,” she said, and her own eyes looked a little wet to Michael.

“I need to summon a demon,” Michael announced, and he watched as her eyes flared wide in disbelief before she gave a chortle of glee.

Yup, definitely *not* the practical, boring, steadfast thing to do.

Michael just hoped it was the *right* thing to do.

## CHAPTER 4

# ARIOCH

A rioch was *bored*, and a bored chaos demon was *never* a good thing.

But really, archangel Gabes (Arioch almost chuckled thinking how annoyed the archangel would be with hearing that nickname) had told him almost a week ago that a vengeance demon was going to be summoned by a Nephilim and that he should be the demon to take the summoning.

And yet... here he was. Still waiting, working odd jobs here and there and spreading a little chaos whenever he could. He was just so tired of waiting, and little bits of chaos here and there weren't going to last him much longer. He could feel the urge to act, like an itch under his skin. The last time he let it go too long... Well, it wasn't entirely his fault that the huge outdoor concert had ended with such a chaotic mix of riots and fires. Arioch got humans going on the road to chaos, but sometimes they ended up veering off with very little help from him.

A voice interrupted his musings. "I'll have a venti caramel macchiato with almond milk, decaf, an extra pump of vanilla syrup, and extra caramel drizzle," the tall man standing at the counter demanded. "And let me have an extra one of those hot cup holders. And make that three shots of decaf espresso." He then went back to his phone conversation, barely paying any attention to Arioch, holding his card out impatiently and waiting for it to ring up.

Arioch took stock of the man. No high blood pressure, no heart condition, no other medical reason he needed decaf. It

was four in the afternoon, but perhaps this guy needed a sleepless night to think about how being rude and entitled didn't get you far in life.

Three shots of regular espresso coming right up.

When the order was up, he kinda vaguely called the guy's name, placing the order on the counter and walking away. If the guy was too busy talking on his phone to pay attention and get his coffee, then oh well.

He felt his vengeance side stir a bit, and he honed in on a conversation between two women who were sitting at a table.

"...so then I texted her, and I told her he'd been sleeping with me for the past two months and that I'd found her last text in his phone. She said she's actually been with him since before the holidays, but she thought maybe something was up. And Lexi, can you believe he told her he was gonna take her to Greece over the summer? And I was like, he told *me* he was going to take me to Spain!" the one woman said. She looked upset but also angry and determined. Ah, yes, this Ari could certainly work with.

"Oh my god, what a bitch!" the other woman said, grabbing her friend's hand.

"That's the worst part, though. She totally wasn't a bitch. Like, she had no idea that he was seriously seeing other people. I think that *I'm* actually the other woman," she sniffed. "Then she asked if I thought there were *more* of us, and Lex, I have *no idea*. He's so shady half the time. Why the hell did I fall for his bullshit?"

"What are you gonna do?" the friend asked.

Ari wandered over and bumped the table. "Oh, excuse me ladies. Sorry about that. Did I spill your coffee? Do you need a refill?"

"No, thank you, it's totally fine," the woman distractedly said. Manners too. Poor thing, getting dicked over by an asshole. It was always the nice ones who got screwed, though. Ari looked closer. The friend, though—she was a bit of a spitfire.

“You ladies ok? You look a little upset,” Ari stated, throwing some demonic power into his question.

“She is *so not ok*,” the friend fumed. “Her supposed boyfriend of the last few months has totally been playing the field and lying. Why are men such sacks of shit?”

She looked at him then, like she just realized she was talking to a man. “I mean, not all men, I’m sure, but some of them,” she backtracked.

Ari just chuckled. “Ah, ladies, people in general can be sacks of shit, not just men. Sometimes people need to be taught that they can’t walk all over others.”

“Oh my god, Joanie, that’s exactly what that sack of shit needs! To get taught a lesson!” the friend urged.

With that, Ari threw some vengeance into the air, and he strutted away while the two ladies started plotting. He listened with half an ear while wiping down tables, and he was quite pleased to see she involved the other woman in her vengeance plot. They were currently discussing cloning his phone and keeping track of all the women he was dating and then getting them together for payback. The friend was quite inventive, and he heard ideas like selling the guy’s number to telemarketers, signing his email up for every spam site possible, saran-wrapping his car and painting cheater on it, and putting tuna fish in his vents.

Ari sighed in pleasure. All wonderful ideas. The poor guy would be miserable, and the ladies weren’t planning anything that would get them in serious legal trouble. Revenge was all well and good, but he hated for it to backfire on the person exacting the revenge. Especially if the revenge was well-deserved.

With that, Ari felt a faint tug.

*Finally.*

A summoning. He displaced a bit, letting himself *see* the summoning. It was vague, only looking for a vengeance demon of any level who could help unravel a mystery. The summoner appeared to be human at first glance, but when Ari



looked closely, he could make out the faint outline of angelic wings rising up behind the guy, indicating that he was indeed Nephilim.

The guy also looked vaguely familiar to Ari, although he was sure he hadn't met the guy before. He was tall and muscular, but not overly buff. He had the beginnings of a belly that showed he enjoyed his food, but he wasn't out of shape. His face was unsmiling, and his eyes looked like those of an old soul. He was clean shaven with dark hair, and Ari could just make out some hair peeking out of the top of his polo shirt. His arms were covered in thick dark hair as well. He looked super serious and professional, wearing khakis and a polo to summon a demon. He also looked determined.

Ari had the vague thought that it would be tons of fun to see this guy mussed up a bit. He looked like he could use a little fun and levity in his life, and Ari was just the demon to bring it to him.

After all, if you couldn't have a little fun, what was the point?

With that thought, Ari cloaked himself and let his demon form come forth, wings and horns and tail included, and let himself follow the pull of the summoning. He was almost rubbing his hands in glee. This was gonna be totally awesome.

## CHAPTER 5

# MICHAEL

Michael had been adamant that he needed to summon the demon on his own. Maybe he was foolish to not ask for Grams' assistance in figuring out who had deceived him, and maybe it was also pride getting in the way of admitting he'd been misled for so many years. Nevertheless, he felt like he needed to puzzle this out on his own.

Grams had given him six pages of *very* specific directions on summoning a demon, with areas blank so he could fill in what type of demon he was summoning. He had planned it so Ser and Gabe would be at work. Az, Gabe's new partner (Love interest? Soulmate? Boyfriend? Mike wasn't sure what to call the demon) was at work with Gabe. So it was supposed to be just him.

Emphasis on *supposed to be*. Because despite his very clear refusal to have Grams come help him, despite getting written directions, and despite driving himself home and leaving Grams behind, somehow she was still standing in his kitchen, looking over his shoulder while he stirred a soupy concoction with a wooden spoon.

"Grams, I specifically said..." he started, not for the first time.

"You need to stir slightly quicker, you know. You don't want anything to settle," she directed before heading back over to the table, next to which she'd set a rather large cooler.

Michael looked back at the concoction and picked up his stirring pace before starting again. “Grams, I really am quite capable of doing this on my own.”

“Hmmm?” she murmured, and Michael turned around to see her head buried in the cooler bag, little plastic containers being placed on his table. She was muttering to herself, and he thought he heard the words “virgin” and “moonlight” and “stardust.”

He was *not* going to ask.

“Grams, you gave me everything I need already,” he grumbled.

“Oh yes, yes, of course dear. Did you put everything in already?” she asked, flitting back over to sprinkle something in the mixture.

“Yes, Grams, so I’d really appreciate it...” he began again, but she interrupted him once again.

“Hmmm. I’m not thrilled with that color,” she murmured.

“Grams, I did *exactly* what you told me!” Michael groused. He really had. He was nothing if not meticulous.

“Seventy-two counterclockwise stirs before adding the petals I gave you?” she asked.

“Yes, Grams,” he assured her, trying very hard not to lose his patience.

“Hmmm,” she murmured again before coming over and once again dropping something in the pot. “Maybe it should have been seventy-three clockwise stirs?”

“Grams,” Michael started, but he didn’t get any further before she was talking once again.

“You know, if you told me exactly *who* you’re trying to summon, that would be a great help,” she insisted. “I did such a good job on your brother’s lust demon. I’m sure I could summon you up the perfect demon. What’s your preference - boobs or butts?”

Michael sighed and ignored her. He was not going to tell her who he was summoning, and obviously trying to talk got him absolutely nowhere. So he stirred.

“Mmmm, maybe slow down just a hair on the stirring speed,” she instructed. “Now then, I think it ought to look slightly more maroon in color. Then again, that demon we summoned for your birthday party was a very maroon color, and we all know how that turned out,” she finished.

Michael shuddered. No wonder he hated birthday parties. He dutifully slowed his speed down a bit and watched as Grams dropped yet another item into the pot.

The potion got even darker in color, and she gave a grumpy harumph before stating, “Perhaps your lusty desires are a bit more dark? Hmmm? But my dear, this looks like a very dark color. I hope you’ll use condoms and safe words.”

“I did *exactly* what you said. I am on the last page of directions. I am *fine*, Grams,” Michael swore, ignoring her outrageous questions and comments on sex. He had found the best way to discourage Grams was to utterly ignore the sex talk.

“You know, if I knew *exactly* what you needed in a demon, I could make sure the color was just perfect. Also, you really must stir faster than that or it will never be mixed.”

Michael was at the end of his patience. “GRAMS!” he snapped out. He took the spoon out of the pot and pointed it at her. “So help me, if you tell me how to stir this *one more time* I’m going to dump the whole thing out, then dump *you* out the front door, and then start over!”

She stared at him with her grandmotherly look, and without saying a word Michael felt totally chastised. But he knew this was a battle of wills. If he gave in now, she was never leaving, and he really did want to summon the demon alone.

Backing down now was admitting defeat. Grams smelled weakness, and Michael had to hold firm. He was not boring,

practical Michael. No, he was summon-a-demon-alone Michael, dammit, and he would Not. Back. Down.

Although he felt rather stupid continuing to point the spoon at her.

“If you stop stirring it will all go bad, you know,” she said in one last ditch effort to distract him. He only stared at her, spoon still held aloft like he was a knight holding a sword to protect the village gate against intruders.

“Fine, fine,” she muttered, gathering up the items she’d taken out and putting them back. “I’ll be on my way. But get back to stirring, for goodness sake.”

Michael did so, keeping himself turned toward her to make sure she was actually leaving.

She did quite a bit of mumbling as she packed up. “You’d think an expert would come in handy when summoning a demon, but I suppose if a person wants to do it on their own, I ought to respect their wishes.” She looked up then, adding, “Although you should make sure to stir it a might bit quicker than that.”

“Grams,” Michael only growled.

“Alright, alright.” She came over and gave him a peck on cheek before heading toward her cooler and picking it up. “You call me if you need help. I’m not sure on the color of that. If only I knew what type of demon...” she trailed off, but Michael simply stared at her.

She sighed before heading to the door. “Call me later!” she yelled out, and before the door slammed shut she added, “And don’t stir it too fast!”

She was lucky she took that moment to leave, because Michael might have thrown the spoon at her otherwise.

He looked at the mixture. It was a very dark color, and he really wasn’t sure on that either. He didn’t remember such a color in past mixtures, but then they’d never summoned a revenge demon either. He took the last ingredient sitting on the counter next to him, stirred it in, and spoke the Latin necessary to summon a demon of vengeance.

The potion seemed to bubble a bit, and then it turned pitch black.

Michael supposed it was done.

He took the spoon out and walked over to his front window, peeking to make sure Grams had indeed left in her car. When he saw she had, he hefted the pot up and began the trek down the stairs and to the back yard.

He knew that his siblings would see the circle at some point. He doubted they'd ask what their wise older brother was up to, though. Grams was right in that he'd been a parent far more than he'd been a sibling. They weren't used to questioning him; they were used to being questioned and going to him for advice.

He hoped he hadn't ruined that with 'the incident.'

He meticulously poured the mixture out in a perfect circle, thinking of taking revenge for his family while he poured it. Grams had always taught them that intention was important, and Michael had every intention of getting justice for what some angel had tried to do to his brother.

He finished and set the pot down, watching as the center turned to dirt. Then he waited.

Then he waited some more, staring at the still empty circle.

Just when he was about to call Grams to admit he'd somehow fucked things up again (ok, so he was still feeling a little down on himself), he saw the beginnings of a shimmer in the circle.

Then the demon appeared.

And holy shit.

This one was *huge*. Michael was a tall guy, but this demon was at least a head taller. And he was *built*. His abs had abs, for goodness sake, and Mike had seen tree trunks smaller than his thighs. He wore what looked like a kilt, had no shirt on, and had skin so dark it almost shone. His wings were the same dark color, and they occasionally glinted in the sunlight, almost like they were made of metal and not feathers. He had

gorgeous dark hair cascading around his face, which was covered in a dark, sexy, short beard.

Michael stopped his perusal, mentally shaking himself. ‘Gorgeous’ and ‘sexy’? Since when did Mike think of guys as gorgeous and sexy? Never mind that, since when had Mike been distracted by someone’s looks? Not since he was a teenager with raging hormones, probably. It wasn’t that Mike didn’t enjoy sex; he was just far too practical to be distracted by sexual attraction.

“Fuck,” Mike muttered. Had he summoned a lust demon by accident? Or on purpose? Was this Grams’ idea of matchmaking after the success she’d seen with Gabe’s summoning?

“Dude, *you* summoned *me*. Quite purposely, it looks like. Vengeance and chaos at your service, bro,” the demon drawled.

Michael was speechless. He may have even been staring open mouthed at the demon, who literally chuckled at him and smiled radiantly.

“Cat got your tongue, my man?” the demon asked, chuckling a bit again. “Or is it my totally awesome wings that have you speechless?” He fluffed them out a bit at that, and yes, Mike had to admit, they *were* totally awesome wings.

In a blink, however, the wings, horns, and tail were gone, and it looked like a regular guy was standing there. Well, Michael had to admit, not really a *regular* guy—an amazingly beautiful, model worthy guy, more like.

“So, bruh, what can I assist with? Who are we raining vengeance down upon?” he asked, and he actually rubbed his hands together gleefully at the thought.

Michael felt stupid, but he *still* hadn’t said anything. With that, the demon *stepped outside the summoning circle*, all on his own, without breaking the circle, and walked up to Michael, who was having a total *oh shit* moment over the fact that the circle hadn’t held him.



The demon just came over and slung an arm over Mike's shoulders, however, like they were the best of buddies.

"Your first time?" the demon asked kindly. "That's alright, bruh, I'll help you out. I mean, I can't promise there won't be some chaos, because that's my specialty, but I'll keep you out of trouble. No worries, my man."

"Umm," Michael mumbled stupidly. The demon just chuckled again, giving him a squeeze so that Mike was practically buried in the guy's side. He wasn't used to being dwarfed by someone else. Hell, he wasn't really used to being touched by someone else. He apparently gave a hands-off vibe to most people.

He was also trying very hard not to notice that the demon smelled good. Like, *really* good. It was some kind of weird combination of leather and wood burning fire and yet also sunshine and ocean waves. It was masculine and bright and cheery all at once. It made Michael think of carefree afternoons and evenings when he was a kid.

"So, bruh, why don't you tell Ari all about your problem, and then we'll figure out how to exact some revenge, yeah?" the demon prompted. Then he pushed Michael down until he was sitting in the grass in the yard, and Ari (he guessed that was the demon's name) plopped down beside him, leaning back on his elbows and showing off all the muscles again.

The guy was sex on a stick, and Michael wasn't even really interested in guys. At least, he didn't think he was.

Michael mentally shook himself out. Work. He had work to do. He remembered his massive fuck up again, and that definitely curbed any thoughts of sex.

"Whoa, dude, so serious. Tell Ari all about it," the demon coaxed.

So Michael took a deep breath and did exactly that.

## CHAPTER 6

# ARIOCH

Ari was pleasantly surprised by the little human. He didn't usually go on summoning calls, but if someone did summon a revenge demon, they were usually bitter, angry people full of hatred. He didn't read a ton of anger or bitterness in this guy, although he did sense an unhealthy dose of insecurity and a ton of worry. There was some anger mixed in, yes, but mostly he seemed concerned, and not about himself. Ari was guessing he was exacting revenge on behalf of loved ones. This he could definitely work with.

The dude introduced himself as Michael, and he told Ari that he was Nephilim. He then told a rather fantastical story about a glowing angel appearing to him when he was just a little kid right after his parents died, and the angel telling him that he was responsible for his siblings and must protect them, including some bullshit about dangers from the afterlife seeking Nephilim and him having to always be on his guard.

Ari felt himself growing angrier as the guy repeated what he remembered of the message, and he couldn't help interrupting Michael's story. "Dude, that is some fucked up shit right there. You were seven? It's not your job to take care of your siblings. Lilith should have swooped in to take care of you guys. Some upstart fuckhead from upstairs should not have put that on a fucking seven year old," he grouched.

Michael looked a little more at ease, and he replied, "That's the thing. Lilith *did* come and take care of us. I don't really think that message was a sanctioned angel visit."

Ari reared back in surprise. “Whoa, hold up. You think an *angel* went against protocol? I mean, yeah, it is pretty douche-y to heap that on a seven year old, but angels are usually *not* the rule breakers of the afterlifers.”

“I didn’t just get the message,” Michael said, somewhat mysteriously. Then he got up and brushed himself off before looking over to Ari. “In for a penny, in for a pound. Might as well come up to my apartment and see.”

Ari was still perplexed over an angel possibly breaking rules, but he was also hella curious, so he got up and followed Michael in the back door, up the three flights of steps, and into his apartment. It was a cute little space, and Michael walked into the living room, gestured to the couch, and waited for Ari to sit down.

The couch was comfy, and Ari lounged back in it. He waited for Michael to talk, but he noticed the guy was sort of staring at him.

“Do you, uh, want some pants?” Michael asked.

Ari realized he was still in his kilt, and with a subtle shift, his cock and balls would probably be getting some fresh air and Michael would be getting a show.

The poor dude looked like he didn’t know whether to be intrigued or appalled. Michael looked up and saw Ari grinning broadly at him, and it seemed the guy settled on embarrassed, because he blushed bright red.

“Bro, not feeling the kilt? No prob,” Ari smiled, and in a blink he was wearing pants and a shirt.

The guy sighed and apologized as he sat down on the couch, muttering about someone named Ser being right about him being a stick in the mud.

Ari felt bad. Michael was a sweet guy, although he had a huge dose of anxiety going on with a little insecurity thrown in for good measure. Revenge was meant to be enjoyed, and Ari bet himself that he could get this guy out of his shell and enjoying this whole experience before they were done.

“Dude, no worries. It’s not like I’m a lust demon...” Ari sort of trailed off at that, squinted his eyes, and stared at Michael, who fidgeted a bit under the demon’s perusal.

It’s just that he looked so familiar...

With that thought, he displaced and found himself sitting in the front of a car, staring back at his pal Asmodeus and the guy he was forming a bond with. That guy looked suspiciously like this guy, Ari realized as he came back to himself.

“AH HA!” he cried out, practically making Michael jump out of his skin.

Ari didn’t give him any time to panic, though, before throwing an arm around him and laughing loudly.

“I *knew* you looked familiar! Dude! I met your brother! He hooked up with one of my bros from down under!” Ari boomed out.

“Yes, you must have met my brother, Gabe,” Michael replied, trying and failing to be nonchalant with Ari’s arm around him. The guy’s whole body had literally stiffened up; he clearly did not know how to handle a bro hug. He wasn’t pulling away, and Ari didn’t read discomfort on him; he just seemed to have no idea what to do in response.

Poor guy. He was so tightened up that he would probably shit diamonds.

“Dude, I bet you and Azzy got on like pickles and chocolate milk,” Ari guessed.

That comment seemed to startle Michael enough that he actually loosened up a little, even almost leaning back into Ari’s arm, which was still around the guy.

“Pickles and chocolate milk?” he asked, looking at Ari strangely.

“Yeah, it’s like orange juice and toothpaste. Ice cream and mustard. The two don’t mix well, you know?” Ari shrugged, letting his arm settle a little more around Michael, who seemed to have unclenched at least a bit for now.

Ari would teach this guy to relax and enjoy the chaos of life even if it killed him. Which was actually pretty impossible, him being a demon and all.

Michael sighed, turning toward the coffee table and leaning forward to pull out a book. He leaned right back into Ari's arm, though, so Ari kept it there. This guy was totally starved for affection. It wasn't even sexual, because Ari was sure Azzy would have taken care of things if it was. Maybe not on his own, since he seemed to be shackled up with a human for the rest of eternity, but he'd have gotten someone else in to do the job. Azzy was good about seeing to other people's pleasure.

This guy didn't need sex; he was just plain lonely.

Michael handed the book over to Ari then, so he took his arm from behind Michael and grasped the book with both hands.

"Dayum. This book is *crazy* old," he murmured. "It's also hella powerful. Like, I can feel the vibes on it. It has a mission. It isn't sentient, but it is controlled."

He leaned forward, placing it on the coffee table and letting it fall open. Wouldn't you know it, the damn thing fell straight to an incantation to call forth a Divine Weapon of the Almighty against Infernal Kings of the Underworld. He looked over at Michael, who sort of shrugged.

"Huh. I guess Gabe and Az went out for lunch," he speculated. "I figured out that it does that whenever Az is nearby. Although nearby is relative, because I think it only works with him up to a mile or two away. It doesn't quite reach the school where they teach, but it does get a lot of nearby places."

Ari had a notion that perhaps his presence might be affecting the book this time, but he couldn't be sure it wasn't just attuned to Azzy.

"Text him," Ari stated. "Find out where he is."

While Michael took out his phone and did that, Ari read over the incantation. It was some powerful shit and not an

incantation to be fucked around with, that was for sure. It was completely irresponsible to put this book in the hands of a human, even a Nephilim. He flipped through some other pages, ending up back at the beginning.

There was an inscription, and it had been added after the fact. It was, Ari thought, what was actually powering the book's current purpose. He brushed his hand over it and almost flinched.

"Huh," Michael interrupted. "They're at school. I wonder if it suddenly grew to have a bigger radius for sensing Az?" he wondered.

"No, dude, it senses me," Ari nonchalantly answered. He was still mostly focused on the inscription, trying to parse out a little bit of a vision.

Michael grabbed his arm, though, interrupting him. "What?" he demanded.

"I'm also an Infernal King of the Underworld," Ari explained, watching the guy's mouth practically fall open. "I know, right? What are the odds that two Infernal Kings would be summoned by your family? Pretty divine, I'd think."

"You're also an Infernal King of the Underworld?" Michael asked hoarsely.

Oops. Ari hoped this wasn't going to cause a freak out. His bad. "Yep," he replied, sort of shrugging.

He waited, but Michael breathed out, let his arm go, and looked thoughtful. Okey-dokey, thoughtful he could deal with.

Ari continued, "So it isn't specifically attuned to Asmodeus; it would do this when any Infernal King is near. Which makes sense, because the book is being controlled by this inscription in the front. This isn't a part of the original text. It was added, with intention, after the fact. It made the book guide you. It gave the book purpose. For some reason, whatever douchebag inscribed this wanted you to attempt to destroy any Infernal Kings you ran into."

"The message I was given when I was a child..." Michael mumbled.

“Yup. I’m guessing that message along with this book were both trying to get you to call forth someone to destroy Azzy. But Azzy and your bro are all good, so how did you realize the book was trying to misguide you?” Ari asked.

Michael laughed bitterly. “No, it didn’t *try*, it *succeeded*. You’d think I would have trusted my own brother over a book, wouldn’t you? You’d think I would have seen that they loved each other and not done anything rash and idiotic. However, I used the spell. Grandfather, who I guess I ought to mention is the archangel Michael, showed up with a sword. I almost got Gabe and Az killed. Or separated. Or both. I don’t know.” He paused in his story, rubbing his temple. Ari put an arm around him again, pulling him in for another bro hug.

“Dude, an angelic book gave you directions. I get it. You were given some divine-sounding mission when you were, like, seven or some shit. Then this book tells you to beware of Infernal Kings, and you can’t tell that it’s actually a directive that was added after the book was written. Why would you not trust an angel? You were fucking used.” Ari was getting worked up all over again. This poor guy had really been fucked over.

Fucking angels.

Michael breathed out and continued his story. “It was only Grams that managed to save the day. Gabe asked me to get her, and I did. She sent me to get a potion, and I guess she called forth god. I think Az also called forth the devil. Apparently they went to the underworld or heaven or somewhere and both god and the devil sorted it all out. Archangel Michael was released from his calling and Gabe and Az were told they were soulmates and could go wherever they wanted.”

“Dude,” Ari said, rubbing his hand up and down Michael’s arm. “You totally cannot be blamed for this. Stop beating yourself up, bruh. You were fucked with. This whole thing is all about fuckery.”

Michael leaned into Ari’s arm a little more, breathing out again. It was like the poor guy carried the weight of the world



on his shoulders.

“So listen, we’ll figure out who this fuckwad is and we’ll get some vengeance, yeah? I’m sure we’ll cause some chaos along the way, but that’s totally half the fun. You’ll feel better, and whoever fucked with your family will pay for it. Sound good, bruh?” Ari asked, still rubbing his arm, and maybe even getting a little overexcited at the idea of vengeance and chaos, because he was practically shaking Michael around with his excitement.

Whatever, it apparently worked, because Michael laughed. It wasn’t really carefree, but it wasn’t the bitter, self-loathing laugh of earlier.

“Yes. Yes, that’s exactly what I want. I want to fix my mistake. I want to make sure no one else tries to fuck with my brother and his soulmate,” Michael insisted, getting a little fired up himself.

“Excellent!” Ari exclaimed.

“So if you can do some investigating in the underworld, I’ll try and find out—” Michael began, but Ari cut him off.

“Nope, nuh uh, not happening, my dude. We are not separating. Angelic fuckery means we stick together. First of all, we don’t know who to trust. Second of all, we both have knowledge that will be beneficial. Don’t you ever watch Scooby Doo, my man? You never split up the gang. Bad shit happens!” Ari proclaimed. Man, this guy was a novice. Thank demons he had Ari here to lead him. He was a bad horror movie just waiting to happen.

“Scooby Doo?” Michael asked, looking a little bemused. “You watch Scooby Doo?”

“Bruh, chaos and revenge are fantastic and all, but sometimes even Infernal Kings of the Underworld need a lazy day with some television. I mean, we did invent it, after all,” he added.

Ari popped up off the couch, rubbing his hands in glee, and Michael, still looking a little unsure, got up as well.

“So I started a list...” Michael began, heading toward a desk that Ari noticed had a couple yellow legal pads with lots of writing. Like, *lots* of writing. Nope, he had better nip this in the bud too.

“Listen, bruh, I’m sure you’ve been wracking your brain, but you called me because you needed an underworlder’s help and a new perspective. So let’s leave the notes for now, yeah? Let’s get out there and do some investigating. It’s gonna be fun!” he added, grinning broadly.

“So where do we start?” Michael asked, and Ari thought he had to swallow a few times before he could ask the question. This guy was clearly not used to going with the flow.

“We start with an informant, bruh. Gather information. I know just the dude to go see,” he added, grabbing Michael’s hand and heading toward the door.

Ari chuckled happily as Michael stopped to grab his keys and his wallet. This was gonna be wicked fun; he could hardly wait.

## CHAPTER 7

# MICHAEL

Michael was currently sitting in the passenger seat of his dark blue sedan while a demon drove to parts unknown.

This probably wasn't the dumbest thing Michael had ever done. Maybe. Hopefully. If you didn't count trusting that stupid book in the first place. However, it was definitely up there.

He hadn't really done any wild things when he was younger, and anything crazy he had done hadn't been his idea. Bringing a demon to prom had totally been all Grams. He was planning to just miss prom when his girlfriend of the time broke up with him. Even the break-up hadn't been very dramatic; it was an amicable parting of ways because they were both so busy and were planning on going to different colleges. Of course, she'd then taken someone much more exciting and party-minded to prom, so maybe college wasn't the only reason she'd broken up with him.

The demon at prom had actually made the event kind of fun, although he would never admit it to Grams. Still, he had been in control, and the demon had clearly deferred to him.

Yet here he was, putting himself in the hands of a demon. He wasn't sure this was much wiser than blindly following the instructions in a book someone he had never formally met gave him when he was an impressionable seven years old.

He needed answers, though. Plus, Grams had given him this spell. She had never steered them wrong. At least not on

purpose. Even her “mistakes” seemed to involve some lesson. He wasn’t sure if that was by accident or by design.

Honestly, if all this was some lesson Grams was trying to teach him, then he probably needed to learn it. He had royally fucked up, after all.

He felt Ari’s hand land on his knee and give a squeeze, and he looked over at the demon, who was looking at him but also seemed to be driving just fine. It was a little disconcerting.

“Bruh, trust me. I know just the dude to see. We’ll figure this out,” Ari reassured Michael.

Maybe it was another mark of stupidity, but Michael actually did trust Ari. Yes, he was a demon. Yes, he was an Infernal King of the Underworld. But Az, his brother’s partner, was also an Infernal King. In fact, Ari had referred to Az as his brother, for whatever that was worth.

Michael gave Ari a smile, and the demon squeezed his knee again before removing his hand and looking back at the road.

Ari was also very touchy-feely. It was sort of nice. People didn’t generally touch Michael. He got brisk handshakes and head nods. Even the other officers in the precinct didn’t give him the back slaps and joking arm punches that they gave each other.

Of course his family hugged him, but they were quick hello and goodbye hugs. That was nothing against his family; he saw them all the time. They were affectionate, but they also had other outlets for affection in their lives.

Michael wasn’t sure what it was about him, but he definitely gave off a no-touch vibe. He realized he was kind of touch starved. It was... nice, the casual touches Ari kept throwing his way. He didn’t remember other demons being this way, but then again, he didn’t remember any other demons being quite so jovial and full of life (for lack of a better word) either.

Yeah, the constant use of “bruh” and “dude” were a little irksome, but obviously the demon was a good guy. Err, a good

demon? Whatever. If this whole thing had taught him anything, it was that angels and demons were not quite as clear cut as he had thought.

Michael was pulled out of his head as they parked in the downtown area. Ari deftly slid into a parallel parking spot that was *definitely* too small for his car, and he did it on the first try.

Now that was a demonic power that Michael could respect.

They both got out of his car, and Michael followed Ari's lead.

Quite suddenly Michael knew exactly where they were going.

"Are we here to see Cass?" he asked as they walked toward a cute little bookshop and coffee shop combo.

"Ah, dude, you know my man Cass? He is good peeps, for sure," Ari replied, placing a hand on Michael's back to guide him by a group of rowdy teenagers. He thought he saw Ari flick his other hand in their direction, but he decided he did *not* want to know if the demon had just incited a little chaos.

"Yes. I'm a police officer," Michael began, but he stopped as Ari sort of chuckled.

"Dude, that explains all the yellow legal pads," he said. He must have seen something in Michael's face, though, because Ari reached up and squeezed Mike's shoulder. "My dude, it makes perfect sense with your job. Police are all about order and logic and all that shit. But luckily you're with me now, so we can roll off the tracks a bit, yeah?"

"Yeah, I guess," Michael murmured. "I took a leave of absence anyway so I could deal with all of this. At any rate, Cass is someone I've used now and then for information. He seems to know everything that's going on in town. He's been really helpful over the years, and for whatever reason he usually asks for me." Michael sort of shrugged on the last part. He actually had no idea why Cass preferred to talk to him over the other detectives, but the fact was that he clearly did. He would sometimes call Michael to give him tips on cases that

weren't his, and where usually officers were pretty territorial, no one seemed to mind that Cass only really talked to Michael.

Michael had a pang of guilt at that. Shit. He guessed he better tell Cass about his leave of absence while he was here. He really hoped Cass would still help out the other officers.

Ari opened the door to the shop when they reached it, and they saw the owner sitting at a table in the far corner, phone in hand and bluetooth in his ear.

“Yes... Yes... I understand. I *told* you I would sort it out, didn't I? I *promise* that I will,” he stated, turning to look at Michael and Ari as they walked in. “Listen, I have to go. I'll talk to you later, but I can't chat now. I have customers. And so help me, if you pop up uninvited at my house again, I will *never* tell Val about the ring. Understand?”

With that odd statement, he removed his ear piece and placed it down, turning to face Michael and Ari.

Cass was an interesting guy. He was shorter than Michael, had light hair and fair skin, and looked much younger than he actually was. He was complimentary and seemed to be everyone's best friend, even people he just met. He didn't appear to have a shy bone in his body and loved to laugh and joke with people, but he could be completely no-nonsense when necessary.

He was also a fount of information. He'd helped Michael more than once over the years with tips and clues that had helped put some bad people away.

“Well, if this isn't one of the most unlikely pairings I've ever seen,” Cass drawled, giving a waggle of his eyebrows.

Ari boomed laughter at that, but Michael just frowned. Ok, so Ari was well-built and handsome and probably belonged on the cover of a magazine. And the demon was jovial and funny and kind. And he was carefree and laughed a lot.

Michael just frowned even more as he realized that yes, they were an unlikely pairing. Because Michael was *none* of those things.

It was as if Ari sensed his foul mood, however, because the demon threw an arm over his shoulder and dragged him closer.

“My man Mikey here is teaching me the ways of order while I attempt to teach him the ways of chaos,” Aril laughed.

Cass smiled at that, looking at Michael. “You’re going to let him call you Mikey?” he asked. “I thought for sure you were too good to hang around with riff raff like this,” he joked, gesturing at Ari.

“You two know each other,” Michael said stupidly. Duh, of course they knew each other. Ari had brought him here. “I mean,” he added, “how do you two know each other?”

Ari chuckled, his whole body shaking, and Cass gave him a dirty look that Michael knew was mostly joking.

“He didn’t tell you? Ari decided to work in my shop awhile back.” Cass shuddered dramatically. “I’m still sorting out the stock room and fixing the recipe book.”

“Bruh, it is *not* my fault that the idiot teenager *actually* followed that recipe,” Ari whined.

“Yes, he certainly lacked in the common sense department,” Cass admitted. “But really, what can I do for you two? I assume this is not a social call?”

Michael slid into the chair across from Cass and Ari sat next to him. Cass seemed to wince a bit, but the chairs felt sturdy, so Michael just ignored it. Yeah, sometimes the guy did weird stuff. That might have been why most of the precinct preferred not to work with him.

But information was information, and Michael had seen *really* weird stuff in his time, so one slightly eccentric shop owner didn’t bother him in the least.

“So we’re looking for someone who has been around, off and on, probably for...” Ari paused, looking over at Michael, squinting a bit. He then continued, “Let’s say twenty plus years, give or take. A total do-gooder, if you get my drift, but we think this do-gooder is actually not all that good.”



Cass looked thoughtful, but Michael figured the owner would need to tap into his gossip network for this. The guy was probably only in his mid-twenties himself.

“Do you have any description at all?” Cass asked.

Ari looked at Michael, but Michael just shook his head, muttering, “Bright” under his breath to Ari.

Ari nodded, and he thought Cass gave a nod too, although that made no sense. Bright was not a description anyone would actually understand.

“Nah, man, no real description,” Ari added. “Just someone who is around only once in a while. Might stand out as being uptight. Like I said, a do-gooder. Probably left a few happy occurrences in their wake. Would have been around fairly recently though, more than likely. Like within the past two weeks.”

Cass studied Ari thoughtfully. “Interesting that this ‘do-gooder’ and you seem to be around at the same time, hmm?” he asked.

“Oh, it’s definitely not Ari,” Michael interrupted, feeling a little offended on the demon’s behalf. He didn’t even really know why. It’s not like they had said what the person did wrong or why they were looking for them.

Cass chuckled at that. “Ah, no, I know it isn’t Ari. Don’t worry about that, Michael. I just wondered if perhaps Ari had a connection to this individual that he hadn’t thought about.”

“No. This person has it out for my brother. Or my brother’s boyfriend. Or both,” Michael grouched. “That’s why we need to find them.”

Cass looked thoughtfully at Michael again, and Michael fidgeted in his seat. He felt like he was being stared down by his kindergarten teacher for coloring outside the lines. He had the urge to confess all his sins to Cass, but he really didn’t want the guy calling his family to say he was hallucinating angels and demons.

Cass tapped his fingers on the table, still staring at Michael.

“Bruh, I can see that astute mind of yours hard at work. What is it?” Ari questioned.

“How do you know?” Cass questioned.

“Know what?” Michael asked, puzzled.

“I mean, how do you know he’s after your brother? You’re here, not your brother, not your brother’s boyfriend. You and Ari. This ‘do-gooder’ coincides with Ari’s most recent visit to our area. I wonder if any other visits coincide? The fact that you’re here tells me that somehow you’re involved. I’m just saying, maybe this person isn’t targeting your brother and his boyfriend. Maybe he’s targeting you and Ari,” Cass reasoned.

“But... that doesn’t make any sense.” Michael leaned forward, leaning on the table. “Ari and I only met today for the first time. We have no history and no connection.” Michael stopped as he saw a smile flit across Cass’s face.

“Are you sure about that?” Cass challenged.

Michael looked at Ari, but the demon looked just as confused as him. Sure, demons could change their forms with a lot of willpower, but they couldn’t change their personality. He would remember meeting Ari.

“Dude, he looked familiar, but only because I met his brother. I can assure you that we have never crossed paths before today,” Ari told them both, looking at Cass and then Michael.

Cass merely gave a knowing smirk, and to be honest, it was starting to aggravate Michael.

“Listen Cass, you’ve always helped me out. Helped the police department out, I mean. If you can’t help, it’s ok. This was a long shot, and I know it’s vague, and it doesn’t give you much to work with when you talk to your connections—” Michael started, but Cass interrupted him.

“You’d be amazed how much it gives me to work with,” he mumbled.

Michael just plowed on. “But we appreciate you trying to help, if you will. Trust me, though, when I say this person isn’t

after me.”

“Why?” Cass asked.

“Why what?” Michael grumbled, getting frustrated

“Why are you *so sure* this person isn’t after you?” Cass pressed.

“Because they went after my brother!” Michael yelled. He then took a deep breath, looking around to confirm they were still alone in the shop. He hated losing his temper. He felt Ari’s hand reach over and give his shoulder a quick, comforting squeeze.

Cass leaned forward. “Just listen for a minute, ok? Just listen and think past your anger. You’re smart, Michael. Logical. But you can also think outside the box. I know this. It has always been a pleasure to work with you. You’ve trusted me when others wouldn’t, and I appreciate that more than you can know.”

Michael nodded, showing his acquiescence.

“*You* are the one who is coming to me. This seems personal to you. Yes, I understand that this individual went after your brother, but somehow, you were involved, weren’t you?” Cass asked.

“Yes,” Michael ground out, self-loathing filling him. Ari’s hand went to his shoulder again, resting there this time. Cass seemed to follow the motion with his eyes, but he didn’t comment.

“I just need you to consider that perhaps there are no coincidences,” Cass reasoned.

Michael thought back, his mind flashing through images. The death of his parents. The angel’s message. The book. It had shaped everything about him, hadn’t it? He had let it shape everything about him. He had never quite trusted demons because of it. He could admit that now. Despite how he was raised, despite how much demons had played a part in his childhood because of Grams always summoning them as babysitters, he had still held some deeply rooted mistrust of demons.

If the angel had wanted to separate Gabe and Az, surely Gabe should've been the one to have the mistrust of demons. Yet Gabe hadn't been visited. Gabe hadn't been given an angelic book with purpose. Gabe had been utterly left alone.

Until Michael had gotten himself involved.

So many things had to fall into place for Michael to have inserted himself into the situation. The siblings had to live together, Gabe had to decide to tell the siblings about the demon, Gabe had to say what type of demon it was, Michael had to decide to interfere, and he had to do that without talking to Gabe first... How could an angel predict all that would fall into place?

Sure, it was a powerful angel, but as much as there might not be total coincidences, there *was* free will. Michael himself had struggled over the decision. He hadn't wanted to get involved. He hadn't known for sure what he was going to do until he did it.

But before all this, if he had met Ari? If he had found out that Ari was an Infernal King of the Underworld? He wouldn't have hesitated to use the book on him. The demon wouldn't have had to even get a word out. Even if he had casually known the demon for years and he found out who he was, he wouldn't have hesitated. He would have used the book. It had shaped him that much. The only reason he *had* hesitated was because it involved his brother.

Michael turned to look at Ari, who was staring at him patiently, hand once again gently resting on his shoulder.

"But what about Gabe and Az? If there are no coincidences, surely they're involved as well?" Michael asked.

"Perhaps. But you need to consider that they were not the primary targets," Cass insisted. "You've trusted me before, Michael. Trust me on this. Somehow you and Ari are the main purpose here."

Michael did trust him. Cass had never once steered him wrong. He hadn't ever thought to question that. Maybe the guy was psychic or something. He didn't know how that thought

had never occurred to him before, but it suddenly made sense. Heck, maybe the guy was Nephilim just like him. Stranger things had happened.

Stranger things were *still* happening.

Michael turned to Ari, suddenly scared for the demon. “How often do you visit?”

“Bruh?” Ari asked, moving his hand off Michael’s shoulder to scratch his beard.

“How often do you visit this town? In the last twenty years or so? You worked for Cass. You met my brother before. How often have you been to this town?” Michael urgently questioned.

“Uh, I don’t know. Often, I guess. I like the vibes here, ya know? When I come up here, I usually stop in. I discovered the town maybe thirty years ago or so; it’s a great place,” he added.

Ari’s hand suddenly gripped Michael’s shoulder a little tighter, and when Michael looked over, his eyes were... not right. It was almost like they were swirling, and looking at them gave Michael a sense of vertigo.

Cass must have noticed Michael’s confusion, because he told Michael, “Ari sometimes sees things, like visions.” Then he shrugged. Mike was amazed at how nonchalant he was about it.

Ari’s voice spoke then, but his gaze remained disconnected. “I first visited the day your family was at a huge office barbecue for where your dad worked. I played a great prank, and the employees were laughing about it for weeks. I can see your names on the guest list. I was here when your parents were killed. It was a car crash. I drove by it on a motorcycle. It was dark, but somehow I know it’s them. I was here... so many times. So many times over the years, all flashing in my mind. I can see you now. We never noticed each other, but we always just almost crossed paths. You are in the background, a reappearing figure, in almost every one of my visits.”

Ari's eyes came back into focus, and he looked over at Michael. "Duuuuude..." he drawled out. "We almost met *so many times*. It's cray. It's like something was pulling me towards you, or you towards me, but we never quite crossed paths."

Cass hmphed from across the table, and they both turned to look at him. "There are no coincidences," he repeated. "Perhaps your brother was... collateral damage. Perhaps *you* are the target. Or perhaps it is Ari. Open your mind to the possibilities."

"Fuck," Michael mumbled.

"Yes," Cass agreed.

The bells on the door to the shop rang, and Cass looked over as a couple walked in, smiling and laughing with one another.

"I'll be right with you!" Cass cheerfully called as they walked up to the counter. He then turned back to Michael and Ari. "I'll keep my ear to the ground and I'll find out what I can, but this is about you two somehow. I hope you figure it out, and I wish you both the best of luck."

At that, Cass nodded at both of them, got up, and walked over to the counter, starting to chat with the couple about the weather and if it was time for pumpkin spice yet.

Michael looked over at Ari, who mumbled, "Dude, I don't get pumpkin spice. It's kinda gross, ya know?"

"You should be dead," Michael whispered, horrified at the thought of what he would have done if he had run into Ari before meeting his brother's demon mate.

"Dude, I know people get really feisty about pumpkin spice, and I respect your strong feelings on the flavor, but bruh, it's just a flavor," Ari grumbled.

Michael couldn't help it; he chuckled a bit before sobering. Ari smiled at him, so he wasn't sure if the demon really had misunderstood him or if his purpose had been to lighten the mood all along.

“I feel like we’re even further from figuring things out than before,” Michael sighed.

Ari scooped his chair back, standing up and reaching a hand down to Michael. Michael looked a little bemused at that. Damsel in distress he was not, but he took Ari’s hand and let the huge demon help him up anyway. Ari gave him a friendly clap on the back before guiding him out the door.

“My dude, we know more now than we did before. And knowing is half the battle,” Ari assured Michael, winking.

“You and old cartoons,” Michael said, rolling his eyes at the GI Joe reference as he let himself be led out of the restaurant.

Ari was right, though. They might not have solved anything, but they had a different path to explore now.

It probably wasn’t Gabe and Az who had been the targets of the book and the angel who had given it to Michael. He wasn’t willing to rule it out completely, but the evidence did point to something else.

Someone wanted Ari, or perhaps all Infernal Kings, gone from the universe, and they had tried to use Michael to accomplish that goal.

## CHAPTER 8



# ARIOCH

Michael had insisted on driving back to his apartment, and although Ari was tempted to chase down another source of information, he acknowledged that it wasn't quite time yet. It was early afternoon, after all, and this source of information was best left to nighttime.

He just knew his organized, logical human partner was going to start with yellow legal pads and notes, but he supposed some regrouping would be useful.

It was disconcerting to think that someone upstairs was trying to destroy him. The book specifically targeted an Infernal King of the Underworld, and there really weren't that many of them. Most of them didn't go topside all that often, either, other than him. He had always enjoyed visiting humans; there was so much chaos to cause. Like his adorable human with his yellow legal pads. He was gonna get this cutie to loosen up if it was the last thing he did, which might be the case if someone was trying to end him. Might as well go out with a bang, though.

Mikey interrupted his musings. "We should think about what enemies you might have. I've certainly made some in my line of work, but that was all when I was older, and they were all human. As far as I know, my parents didn't have any enemies either. They laid low. From what Gabe told us recently, they still lay low even in the afterlife. So it makes more sense that this is about you than me. You've had a lot more time to make enemies," Michael finished.

“Maybe you aren’t a Mikey,” Ari mused, ignoring the guy’s train of thought for a moment. “Mikey implies a younger personality to me. You’re an old soul, my dude. But Michael is just too much of a mouthful for all the time, yeah? I don’t do the whole formal thing. You need a nickname, ya know?”

Michael looked utterly nonplussed at that. “You want to give me a nickname?” he asked. “My family calls me Mike sometimes,” he added after a moment.

“Hmmm. I mean, yeah, I guess Mike works. But kinda plain, ya know?” Ari said, turning in his seat to really contemplate the guy. He noticed that Mike frowned slightly at that statement.

“Well, I guess I’m kind of a plain guy, so it fits,” he stated, the slight frown still hovering on his face.

Poor guy. He was seriously way too hard on himself.

“My dude. You are *not* plain. You’re Nephilim. You devoted your life to trying to help other people. You’re organized, and logical, and careful, but that is not the same as plain. You’re also a total cutie. You have that whole hairy, strong, sexy vibe going on. You’d totally be cast in any cop show as the lead, and all the viewers would talk about what a hottie you are. You’re caring and kind and lack malice and evil intentions. You shine in your own way, bruh, and you should stop selling yourself short,” Ari insisted, staring at Mike as the guy’s face blushed.

“I’m not all that,” he mumbled.

Ari just smirked. “My dude, you totally are. You’re a s’more.”

Mike looked totally confused at that, glancing over at Ari as they pulled into the driveway. “A s’more? Like the campfire dessert?” he asked.

Ari got out, went over to the driver’s side, opened the door, and reached his hand down to help Mike out of the car. Mike just looked vaguely bemused the whole time.

When the guy was facing him, Ari answered, “Yeah. Like maybe you’re a little beige and a little hard and crumbly on the

outside, and some people don't see past that. But inside you're all soft and gooey and sweet and delicious. You're filled with total yumminess. Plus, you're a guy that anyone with sense will want more of. Like, once you get a real taste of who you are, it's only logical to say 'some more.' You're a s'more."

Michael looked flustered and blushed again, and Ari took pity on the guy and smacked his back, laughing. "My dude, you're awesome. It's not your fault if people can't see past your graham cracker exterior. Now let's go and start filling up some yellow legal pads, yeah?"

"Um, ok," Mike answered, still looking adorably flustered. Such a cutie. Ari seriously just wanted to cuddle the guy up.

They went through the front door and started making their way up the stairs to Michael's place, but Ari stopped on the second landing when he heard familiar voices inside.

He grabbed Mike's hand and pulled him to a stop. This was an avenue he bet his little dude had not stopped to explore. He knew Mike was still beating himself up over what happened, but Gabe and Az were valuable sources of information.

He knocked on the door, watching as guilt and hesitance flashed on Mike's face.

"They're a valuable source of information," Ari explained, and he saw Mike brace himself and nod once in agreement.

The door swung open, and his buddy Azzy was standing there, looking all domesticated with a wooden spoon in his hand and an apron on.

"We interrupting some role play time?" joked Ari.

"Arioch!" yelled Az, leaning forward to hug him. As Azzy pulled back, he apparently spotted Michael behind Ari, because he gave a head nod in his direction.

"Well this is an insane pairing. I'm afraid to even ask. Come in," he invited, stepping back and looking slightly less joyful.

Gabe walked in at that moment, and he also nodded politely when he saw the two of them. Huh. Apparently his little dude had a reason to feel hesitant. He was getting extremely nervous vibes from Gabe.

“Azzy and his human half! How you two lovebirds getting along? You got a few minutes to spare?” Ari asked.

“Um, sure, of course we do. Don’t we?” Gabe asked, turning to look at Az. Az nodded, and the two of them led the way into the kitchen, pulling out two chairs to sit down and gesturing to the other side of the table for Ari and Mike to sit.

Ari sprawled out and pulled Mike down next to him. His s’more was looking decidedly crumbly at the moment, and Ari threw an arm around his shoulders, which both Az and Gabe stared at curiously.

“What in the underworld are you doing paired up with Michael?” Az asked him. “Does he even have a clue who you are?”

“Bruh,” grumped Ari, “I may be the demon of chaos and vengeance, but I’m not in the habit of false advertising. That’s a whole different demonic department, you know that. My dude here called on me for some vengeance, and you know how much I love that shit.”

Gabe looked startled. “What does Michael want revenge for?” he asked. Ari watched as Michael practically deflated in front of his eyes at Gabe’s words, though. He obviously took them as an attack, and Ari didn’t sense that from Gabe.

Well, this wouldn’t do at all. Gabe was just crumbling his little s’more without even meaning too.

“Little bruh, maybe you should ask Michael that question. Maybe you should ask yourself why your brother would even think to summon an angel, why he was so alarmed, and where he got a spell to summon an angel with such a powerful weapon. Revenge is needed, little bruh, and we need to make sure we aim it at the right source,” Ari advised.

He sat back and watched as Gabe looked sort of confused, but Az caught on pretty quickly.

“Unholy nine hells, you’re right. We just thought of Michael summoning the archangel because they’re distantly related, but a mortal should not have had access to a spell to summon him with a divine weapon. You’re saying someone led Michael to use that specific spell,” Az realized.

Gabe still looked confused, and then he looked devastated. “Are you saying that Grandfather purposely tried to separate Az and I?” he asked, obviously jumping to the conclusion that the archangel Michael was responsible.

Az grabbed his hand, answering before Ari or Michael could. “No, my love. The spell called the archangel Michael, but we don’t know that he was the one who gave the spell to your brother. Unless we do?” he asked, looking back over at them.

“Nah, we have no clue who gave Michael the spell. It was given to him when he was just a kid,” Ari answered. “And since he was just a little kid, the dude who gave it to him just showed up all shiny like, directed him to protect his siblings, and gave him a book tasked with the intention of destroying Infernal Kings of the Underworld. My little dude here never thought to question it and had no clue the book had foul intentions.”

“But, that’s... that’s not possible. Angels cannot attack demons. It isn’t allowed,” Az insisted. “That would be... that would be, like, going against Yah and Luce directly.”

“Exactly,” answered Ari, nodding sagely. “Someone upstairs has gone rogue, and little dude and I are gonna find out who and exact some revenge.”

It had not escaped Ari’s notice that Gabe and Mike were both sitting stiffly and barely looking at one another. Sure, he loved some chaos, but that wasn’t the same as discord, and these two brothers were totally awkward with one another—like middle school girl level awkward. That needed to be fixed.

“My dudes, it isn’t Michael’s fault he used that spell, but I can also understand why Gabe was upset about it. You two

were pitted against each other by some higher power, so it really isn't anyone's fault," Ari reasoned.

"I forgave him!" Gabe interjected. "He's the one who's mad at me!"

"What?" Mike demanded, looking totally dumbfounded. "I'm not mad at you! I'm ashamed that I went behind your back when I should have trusted you. I'm so sorry for what I did," he finished, a heaping dose of self-loathing filling his little dude.

"Ah, see, no one is mad at anyone. Bro hug!" Ari boomed out, standing up and grabbing Michael and then Gabe up out of their seats before smushing them together between his arms. Az looked a little relieved that the tension was dealt with, and Ari motioned the other demon closer and grabbed him too, smushing him into the hug as well.

"See, all better! Hug it out, boys," he murmured, rocking back and forth with everyone enfolded in his arms.

"I think I'm being suffocated by your pecs," mumbled Gabe.

"Better than being buried in his armpit," Mike grouched, but he noticed his little dude was not making any attempt to escape the bro hug.

"You know, this would be a wonderful opportunity for all of us to—" Az started, but since they could all feel a certain part of Az getting interested in the bro hug, three resounding "NO!" answers cut him off before he could even finish, and the bro hug was slowly but surely disbanded.

Lust demons. Always with their minds in the gutter. Ari gave a mental shrug, ready to get down to some sleuthing and vengeance now that everyone was all made up.

## CHAPTER 9

# MICHAEL

It appeared that Grams was right, as usual, and Gabe was not in fact still mad at Michael. He felt a little stupid for ignoring his siblings, but he also still felt guilty for his actions.

Az and Gabe were apparently cooking dinner, and they went back to it as Michael and Ari asked them questions.

No, they didn't remember seeing any angels around. No, Gabe had never been visited by a messenger angel or given any directions. No, Grandfather, nor any other angel, had ever given Gabe anything. No, Az had never felt particularly drawn to this area or visited it before he had been summoned. No, absolutely nothing suspicious whatsoever had happened until Michael had used the spell in his book.

Michael sighed. "Well, this looks like a dead end," he grumbled. After they had sorted out any hard feelings and cleared the air, Michael had really been hoping that maybe they would have some clues.

"You know," Az started while stirring some rice into a pot (thankfully the spoon and apron had not, as Ari put it, been for some "role playing," because Michael really didn't want to think about what those two got up to in the bedroom). "I just can't imagine someone having the gall to go against Yah and Luce. Are you sure this wasn't a sanctioned message?"

Ari scratched his beard thoughtfully. "I can't imagine it was. Archangel Gabriel himself gave me the message to help my little dude in exacting vengeance. My sight showed me



that Yah and Luce were both in on *that* message. Why would they task Michael with destroying us and then task me with exacting revenge for trying to destroy us? Doesn't make any sense, bruh."

"No, I don't suppose it does," Az conceded.

"I mean, is this all even really necessary?" Gabe asked while slicing up some vegetables. "Az and I are just fine, and nothing bad actually happened to us. We've all hugged it out, at Ari's insistence," he chuckled, side-eyeing the demon a bit. "My point is," he continued, "why bother with revenge when nothing bad actually happened?"

Michael almost laughed at the look of sheer horror on Ari's face. The demon went so far as to open his mouth and grab his chest in alarm, gasping a bit like he was having a heart attack.

"DUDES! Not exact revenge!!! How could... I can't even... We were all DONE WRONG! *Of course* we need to exact revenge!" Ari growled.

Michael couldn't help the giggle that escaped him, which made both Az and Gabe stare at him.

Ari merely pointed at him, nodding. "Yes, exactly. It should be done in good spirits and with joy, but revenge is *always* necessary." He shook his head then, mumbling, "Not exact revenge. Of all the... I can't believe a Nephilim, of all beings, would think of not exacting revenge."

"What does being Nephilim have to do with revenge?" Gabe wondered.

"My dudes, you guys are the byproduct of angels. Yeah, I'm the demon of revenge and chaos, but angels are just naturally vengeful fuckers. They're all about "holy" punishments and all that jazz. They often take things too far, if you ask me," he griped. "I'm all about a good practical joke and some fun revenge, but the upstairs crew goes with boils and locusts and killing firstborns when they get pissed off." Ari shook his head. "I mean, you know what happened to

Atlantis, all because they pissed off the wrong angel,” he added, looking at Az, who was nodding along in agreement.

Michael could have followed that rabbit hole, and Gabe looked like he was about to ask, but Michael held up his hand to stop the total derailment of their whole investigation.

“Hold on,” Michael interrupted. “You’re saying angels are really vengeful. We obviously haven’t done anything to piss off angels, so that leaves you or Az as the target. I know Cass said this was about you and me, but it could still be about Az.”

Az snorted. “You want to talk about pissed off angels? Don’t look at *me*. I am *not* the one who goes around pissing off angels. If we’re following that train of thought, then it’s definitely Ari who was the target. But I don’t think that will help you narrow it down at all.”

“Why not?” Michael asked, looking over at Ari.

“Ah, well, I mean, I don’t think I’ve pissed off *too* many angels...” he mumbled.

Az laughed so hard his eyes actually started to water, and Ari just looked more and more disgruntled the longer he laughed.

When Az finally caught his breath, he looked over at Michael. “So, demon of revenge and chaos, right? What’s more chaotic than practical jokes? Picture a few millennia of Ari going around putting super glue on your favorite sword handle or covering your favorite robes with glitter. Then there was the feather sliming phase, and you know how everyone is about their wings. And let’s not even talk about the harp incident,” he finished.

Michael did not, in fact, know how everyone was about their wings, but he could probably guess.

“Did you hang around with too many frat boys?” Gabe joked. “That all sounds like their kind of shit.”

“Bruh, who do you think *invented* fraternities?” Ari asked smugly.

Michael rolled his eyes. They were getting seriously off task here. “While all this is fascinating, it doesn’t really get us closer to figuring out *who* we need to take revenge on. And I do have to agree with Ari here as well. Someone is after either Az or him, so we really can’t just forget about it and let it go. Who knows what else they’ll try once they figure out their plan with me failed? We can’t take that chance.”

Michael’s hand practically itched with the need to take notes, and Gabe must have sensed it, because a pad of paper and a pen were pushed in front of him. He mumbled a thanks and started jotting things down, mumbling out loud as he did.

“Targets, probably Ari or Az.” He looked up at that, stopping to ask, “Do any other Infernal Kings often come here?”

“No way, man. This can be a bit of a demonic hotspot, but no other Infernal Kings, besides Azzy, have been here in the last few decades,” Ari answered, scooching his chair closer in order to read over Mike’s shoulder. It was slightly disconcerting, but Mike just kept plowing on.

“We’re looking for an angel who knew we were Nephilim, knew Ari or Az would be visiting here, and knew our parents had been killed. Someone who shone brightly, so they had to be higher level. The message was very formal and sounded official...” he continued, writing as he talked.

“Who else sends messages to humans besides Gabriel?” Gabe interrupted. “He must have a department, or whatever, like Az does. Angels he delegates to or whatever.”

Ari snorted. “That uptight killjoy would never delegate a message. Besides, not many messages go to humans. He doesn’t need a department. He is the ‘official channel,’ in his words, for ALL Earthbound messages,” Ari finished with a mocking eye roll.

Michael reached out and grabbed Ari’s hand.

“Bruh?” the demon asked.

“Wait a minute,” Mike said, his brain still processing Ari’s phrasing. “Gabriel is the official channel? So first of all, would

he know if someone else delivered a message? Second of all, can *anyone* ask him to deliver a message?”

“Ah, little dude, I see where you’re going,” Ari answered, using his other hand to pat Michael’s shoulder.

Mike pulled his hand back from where he had grabbed Ari’s, blushing for some strange reason. Ari was just so... nice? He didn’t even know. The demon just made Mike feel... nice. Mike almost sighed at himself. God, he was boring. Even his thoughts were boring. He couldn’t even come up with a better word than “nice.”

“Little dude,” Ari said softly, “you have great instincts and you’re super smart. This is a great train of thought.”

“I don’t get it,” Gabe murmured.

Michael shook off his weird blush and moment of self-pity and filled Gabe in. “If Gabriel knows all the messages that get delivered, then chances are he knows about mine, even if someone else delivered it. If he delivers messages for any angel, then there’s a chance he was tasked with delivering my message.”

He turned to Ari, asking, “Would Gabriel clear every message with god before sending it?”

Ari shrugged his shoulders, looking over at Az. “Bro, you know more about Yah and the angels. You even met Yah. Thoughts?”

“I doubt it,” Az replied thoughtfully. “Yah is busy. The angels, even the archangels, probably don’t bring everything to them. My guess is a high ranking angel, especially someone from the leadership team, could easily ask Gabriel to send a message, and he wouldn’t question it at all.”

“True, dude,” Ari chuckled. “Gabriel is entirely too trusting.”

Az just shook his head, and Michael could only imagine what hijinks Ari had unleashed on someone who he deemed as “too trusting.” He almost felt bad for the angel.

“Clearly we need to ask him. He’s our next lead,” Michael announced, writing ‘Archangel Gabriel’ down on his pad and circling it twice.

Gabe turned off the stovetop and started getting bowls out. “Sounds like a plan to me. You guys staying for dinner?”

“Totally yes on the dinner thing, but the lead part is gonna be way harder,” Ari announced.

Gabe set bowls in front of them, and he and Az carried over a serving dish heaped with some type of stir fry that smelled delicious.

Az started spooning some into everyone’s bowl, explaining, “Demons can’t summon angels. I doubt even your grams could manage to summon Gabriel. He is an archangel, after all. Gabe and I can supposedly go into heaven, but... well, Gabe is mortal, and I don’t want to chance getting stuck in the afterlife. I wouldn’t risk him.”

Gabe and Az proceeded to make some very lovey eyes at one another and then lean in for a kiss that appeared to be getting slightly out of hand, so Michael cleared his throat.

“I do have a book I can check,” Michael murmured, thinking about the problem of getting ahold of an archangel. He couldn’t remember if such a spell existed in the book or not.

Ari interrupted his musings by pushing his bowl toward him. “We’ll figure it out, little dude, but in the meantime, let’s enjoy some food with your fam, yeah?”

Yes, there would be time for revenge and planning later. Gabe wasn’t mad at him, and it felt like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He had barely talked to his brother’s soulmate amidst all the craziness, and it was probably a good time to start to get to know the newest member of their family.

Mike pushed revenge, angels, divine books, and messages from his mind and tuned into the conversation as Ari asked the couple what they were up to. Gabe and Az regaled them with stories of high schoolers, and Ari kept the conversation naturally flowing. They ate, and laughed, and Mike realized

that his brother really had lucked out. The loving looks and casual touches Gabe and Az were giving each other made Mike realize how in love they really were.

He also found out the two were headed out of town for a long weekend away, which they definitely deserved. He offered to pet sit for Gabe, but he received some kind of stumbling answer about it being taken care of by a guy named Jon. Michael tried not to take offense, but he and Gabe had been in a weird place before they had cleared things up, so he couldn't fault Gabe.

He was happy for his little brother, even if it was a little bittersweet. He realized that he didn't need to always protect Gabe anymore. His brother now had someone firmly in his corner; they really were soulmates. It was beautiful to watch.

Sure, Mike may have had a moment where he wished for someone like that for himself, but he pushed it out of his mind. Focusing on his own loneliness wouldn't solve anything. He'd enjoy this dinner, and then he and Ari would chase down an archangel and hopefully be one step closer to solving the mystery. At this rate, they might have it figured out by tomorrow.

After all, how hard could it be to get in touch with the head messenger angel?



MICHAEL WAS ABOUT ready to start banging his head against the wall. Four days. For four whole days they had tried chasing down the Archangel Gabriel, and they were not one step closer.

Michael sat at his desk, looking through the book yet again. Ari and he had both looked through the damn thing, and although the spells seemed to move around, and sometimes new ones seemed to appear, they had not found one to call forth a messenger angel or an archangel. Although they hadn't succeeded there, the time hadn't been totally wasted, and

Michael had to admit he'd even had quite a bit of fun with his demon in the past few days.

Ari had taken to scrolling the internet, claiming that a lot of demonic and angelic stuff ended up leaked into the human world, but he hadn't come across anything useful yet. He had, however, been highly amused when he ran across an entry about a trickster demon that seemed to describe him. That had been a whole rabbit hole, and eventually Mike had needed to tell him to stop "correcting" the entry and attributing specific events to the demon. Ari was just so gleeful about the whole thing, and it had been kind of amusing to see him excited like a little kid to read about himself.

They had been back to see Cass, who had no information for them yet. Ari had made some comment about Cass being on the lookout for a "shiny dude named Gabriel," which Cass had weirdly nodded agreement to. Michael wasn't sure if Cass actually understood what Ari was asking him or if the guy was just playing along and would pass the message on to whoever gave him information. Either way, they hadn't heard back from him.

Michael had invited Az and Gabe over for dinner before they left for their trip as well, which had been really nice. He'd invited Seraphina over too, but she had apparently taken a spur of the moment trip of her own. He thought it was probably best if his siblings weren't here while he and Ari tried to solve this problem. He knew it was overprotective of him, but he couldn't help it. Some things you just couldn't turn off, and overprotective had been built into him for so long that he had a hard time letting go of it.

He had not told Ser about Ari yet. He figured she would squeal loudly enough to deafen him over the phone and then promptly cut her vacation short to come home and check out the newest demon, and he didn't need Ser distracting them both.

There was also a tiny part of him that worried about Ari meeting Ser. There was this whole soulmate business between Gabe and Az, and what if Ari was drawn here because he was drawn to his soul mate? He couldn't help but think how alike

his carefree, fun-spirited sister and Ari were. They both approached life with laughter; they were jokesters and had an almost childlike joy over things.

He flipped a few pages in the book, resisting the urge to throw the damn thing across the room in frustration. His sister was right; he was boring. She was carefree and beautiful and embraced life. She was probably exactly Ari's type of human.

Michael tried to ignore the pang he felt in his chest at the thought of the two of them. They'd make a great couple. Of course he wanted to see his sister happy. Of course he did. A soulmate would be amazing for her.

Ok, so he could admit it to himself; it would hurt to see them together. It was petty, and stupid, because Michael wasn't even interested in guys. He had only ever had girlfriends. None of those relationships had ended badly, but he knew he was boring. It wasn't that the sex was bad either, because he did just fine in that department. It was just that every relationship eventually seemed to fizzle out. There was no real passion, and he knew he was a big part of the problem there. He just wasn't a very passionate guy. Maybe he dated girls who weren't very passionate either, and maybe an eventual fizzle was inevitable, but dating also hadn't been his priority. His family had always been his priority. It would be amazing if his sister could find happiness. If it happened to be with Ari...

Michael flipped another page, blinking his eyes rapidly to dispel the weird wetness that had formed in them. He was just frustrated. That was all. Tired and frustrated.

It was like Ari could hear his thoughts, because the demon was suddenly behind him, rubbing his shoulders, leaning down to murmur in his ear.

"Hey little dude, don't stress. We'll figure it out," Ari promised.

Ari's hands digging into his sore muscles and the hot breath against his ear almost made Mike shudder in pleasure. Ari found a particularly tight spot in his neck, and the demon concentrated on rubbing it. Mike couldn't help the moan of



pleasure that escaped him. He would have been mortified, but Ari just chuckled softly, whispering, “That’s it, little dude, just let it all go.”

Mike let himself just feel Ari’s fingers rubbing his muscles, and when the touch got lighter, he enjoyed that as well. Ari was just so... touchy-feely. The demon was always rubbing his shoulders or back, throwing an arm around him, patting his arm or leg, even hugging him. Mike wasn’t used to so much physical contact, and he really liked it. He felt like a plant that was soaking up sunshine, except he was soaking up all the comfort and touches that Ari gave so carelessly.

The demon was just so attentive, too. Just when Michael was feeling his most frustrated or anxious, Ari seemed to know it, and he was there. He would miss that when Ari was gone.

“Relax, little dude, just take a deep breath and relax. There you go,” Ari murmured, and Michael took his advice. He stopped thinking and just let himself soak up the comforting touch of Ari’s hands on his shoulders, rubbing down to his arms, squeezing and caressing his muscles.

He felt Ari’s chin gently rest on his shoulder. He had a moment to think that the demon must be kneeling behind him, but he felt Ari’s breath on his ear again as the demon murmured, “Just relax.”

Michael let himself just feel, and he felt almost like he was floating in sensation. Ari’s mouth stayed so close to his head that he could feel the hot breath on his ear, and the demon continued to rub up and down Michael’s arms, eventually moving forward to his chest. When Ari’s hands grazed across his nipples, Mike couldn’t help the exhalation of air that he let out.

It didn’t stop Ari, though. The demon just kept rubbing, kept breathing on his ear, and he suddenly imagined Ari kissing his ear and flicking his nipples with those hands that were wandering across his arms and his chest. He almost moaned aloud at the thought. It was like a hazy, sensuous dream. He imagined those hands floating down, rubbing his

thighs, and then feeling the hardness between his legs and rubbing that. He could see those big, dark fingers reaching into his pants...

With a start Michael realized he was hard. Like, really hard. He shot up, the haze leaving him in a spurt of mortification. He scooped out from between the chair and the desk, keeping his back to Ari as he made a beeline for the bathroom.

“Umm, I’ll be right back,” he stuttered out, not even turning to look at what Ari thought of his odd behavior.

He practically ran into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him.

Fuck. What the *fuck* was that?

Michael didn’t like guys. He liked girls. Well, he thought he liked girls. No, he knew he liked girls. He walked in front of the mirror, grabbing the sink and staring at his reflection.

Ok, so he had been turned on. Ok. He could deal with that. He wasn’t an asshole. Gabe was bisexual. Mike had no problem with that. He wasn’t homophobic. Whoever people liked, they liked. He never saw what the big deal was.

It’s just that he was boring, predictable Michael. It had never even occurred to him that he was anything but straight. He liked girls, so that was the end of it in his mind.

He had never been attracted to a guy before, had never thought about a guy sexually. It just had never occurred to him, he guessed. Yet he had just gotten really turned on by a man’s touch. He had even fantasized about that touch taking things further.

Michael took a deep breath. Ari was touching him all the time, and he was just... nice. He was always complimenting Michael and saying sweet things to him, like that whole s’more comment, which Michael still thought about.

Michael couldn’t remember anyone ever being so sweet to him, so yeah, all the compliments and the touches—he was bound to get a little... attached.

Michael almost snorted, because getting a hard dick was a little bit more than attached.

“Michael, you’re an idiot,” he whispered to himself. Was he really so pathetic that he ended up latching onto the first person to show him affection? He was sure Ari didn’t even mean it that way; he wasn’t hitting on him. He was just a really nice guy. Demon. Whatever.

Ok. He had to stop thinking about Ari, because his dick was *still* uncomfortably hard, and he was still feeling turned on, and he did *not* want to have Ari realize.

He could just picture the demon saying something like *Bruh, sorry, I’m just a touchy-feely dude*. How mortifying would *that* be. How pathetic that he would get a crush on someone just because they were nice to him.

“Idiot,” he whispered to his reflection, and yup, he was losing his erection. Because catching feelings for a friend and having those feelings be unreciprocated was mortifying.

He was sure Ari had no idea, and he’d just have to keep it that way. They had a mission, after all. A purpose. He had summoned Ari to get revenge, and they would figure out how to do that. Maybe it was time to seek out a new lead. Get refocused. Obviously following this current lead was making him a little bit batty.

He wouldn’t let himself get distracted. They’d figure out who had set him up and what their purpose was, and they’d get the revenge they were seeking. Then Ari would head back to the underworld, and Michael would... well, he’d figure something out.

If it hurt his chest to think of the demon leaving, oh well. Best not to think of that. They had a job to do. Michael couldn’t let some uncharacteristic feelings get in the way of that.

He sighed at himself before turning on the water and washing his hands, preparing himself to head out and face Ari and pretend he hadn’t just been super weird.

He really was a stick in the mud.

## CHAPTER 10

# ARIOCH

Well, wasn't *that* interesting.

Ari stared at the bathroom door where Michael had disappeared. His little dude was just full of surprises.

So, yeah, Ari had been touching Mike quite a bit. Ari liked touching people, and his s'more was just so obviously touch starved. The dude was totally stressed too, and way too hard on himself.

He was an awesome guy, and Ari genuinely liked him. He was smart, and focused, and cared about people. He was a total sweetheart deep down. He seemed to really like Ari as well.

Ari wasn't lacking in self-confidence, but he knew he wasn't everyone's cup of tea. He was a prankster, and he was a little much for some afterlifers. Most angels barely tolerated him, and he knew there were a few demons who rolled their eyes when he showed up. He generally took the stance that it was their loss, and he had plenty of great bros who were more than happy for his company. Most of those dudes enjoyed enacting a little chaos right along with him, and they all had a good time together.

Michael, however, was like the total opposite of chaos, yet he tolerated Ari just fine. In fact, he even liked Ari. When Ari had fallen down the rabbit hole of the entry about himself on the internet—which was so freaking cool, by the way—Michael had come to find him because he'd been absorbed for

so long. It was awesomely sweet. Like, the guy actually enjoyed Ari's company.

Ari could get a sense of how people were feeling, so he made it a point to try and get Mike to relax when he started getting upset or frustrated. Ari had found he was actually really good at it, which was pretty cool. Usually he was the one causing people to get upset and frustrated, not the one calming them down.

But this, well, this had been more than the typical relaxed, calmed down Michael.

Ari was no lust demon, but he knew the taste of a human's arousal. At first, he figured he must be mistaken, and he had kept massaging Michael, but the feeling emanating from his little dude had only gotten stronger, and it was *definitely* arousal.

Which was pretty awesome. Ari thought Mike was pretty sexy, but he just hadn't thought the guy had any interest in that, which was fine. He was ok being bros and just chilling with the guy.

To find out he was interested in Ari sexually? Well, no complaints there. He was about to move things in that direction when his little dude had apparently had an epic freak out, rushed to the bathroom, and hid himself away.

"Michael, you're an idiot," he heard his little dude whisper from the bathroom.

Apparently he had forgotten that demons had damned good hearing.

Aw, his poor little dude totally felt bad about himself.

Ari had to stop himself from barging into the bathroom and giving him a bro hug. He figured now was probably *not* the time for that.

He didn't know if Michael thought of himself as an idiot because he was turned on by a male, because he was turned on by a demon, or because he was turned on when he had work to do. Ari knew that Mike had a crazy work ethic, and he could totally see the guy beating himself up over being distracted.

Whatever the case, he wasn't going to call attention to it and make things worse. Mike was obviously uncomfortable with his attraction for some reason, so Ari would do the unthinkable, something he probably hadn't done in all his years as a chaos demon.

Ari would not cause chaos. He would not call attention to the moment. He would let his little dude chill out, and he would focus on the task at hand.

Maybe after they solved this, Mike would be comfortable enough with him being a male and a demon to do something about the attraction.

Ok, ok, so maybe he would cause a teensy weensy, little itty bit of chaos with Michael. Because he sure wasn't going to stop touching the guy. And hey, if his little dude got a little turned on, that was ok. Maybe it would help Mike work out whatever feelings were bothering him.

Ari could also admit the truth. He *liked* touching Mike. He liked making the guy get all calm and loose and relaxed. He liked hugging him. It felt good. They both enjoyed it. No reason to stop.

He heard another mumbled "Idiot" from within the bathroom, then the water running. He got up from behind the chair, took the book over to the couch, and sat down, preparing himself for Mike to come out. He could do nonchalant. Act like nothing had happened. Not make Mike uncomfortable. He could totally do it. Yup, totally.

He heard the bathroom door open, and Mike walked over, looking at Ari sitting there reading the book.

"Um, why are you reading the book upside down?" Mike asked.

Ari chuckled. Yeah, ok, so nonchalant was not his thing.

"No clues came from reading it right side up, so why not try this, little dude," Ari answered, tossing the book onto the table.

"Yeah," Michael stated, coming over to sit on the couch. "I was thinking about that. It seems like we've hit an impasse,

and I think we need to try another path to find out who is responsible.”

The guy was all the way across the couch. That wouldn't do. Ari reached over, snagged his shoulder, and dragged him closer until they were half cuddled up together.

“Bruh, you are so right. Totally time to branch out and try new things, yeah? We need to find some afterlififers to talk to. Someone might know something...” Ari trailed off, thinking.

They needed afterlififers. He couldn't very well take Michael to the underworld, and he totally knew better than to split the party and go on his own, but there were afterlififers topside all the time. They just had to find some.

Michael, precious little s'more that he was, just looked at him and let him think. He didn't know many angels that hung out topside, but he did know quite a few rogue demons who enjoyed being up here, and it wouldn't hurt to ask some questions of them.

“I know just the place, bruh,” Ari assured Michael, looking at the time. It was almost nine at night. Perfect. He looked down at Mike's outfit. Yeah, that wouldn't do.

“Time to change, my man, because we are going out on the town,” Ari announced, standing up and pulling Mike along with him.

Mike just nodded, heading toward the bedroom without question.

“I'll conjure us up something, little dude. My guess is most of your outfits are a little too... tame for what I have in mind,” Ari mumbled, sizing Mike up and picturing him in different club wear.

If Mike looked a little nervous and unsure, well, he was sure he could fix that. Although they were about to step *way* out of his little dude's comfort zone.

Ari was tempted to go with leather, but he didn't want to push his luck too much, so he finally settled on some super skinny black jeans and a skin-tight black shirt for Michael, and he conjured both right onto his little dude's bed. He figured



he'd go with his black leather kilt and a nice see through shirt for himself. If it happened to turn Mike on, well, he certainly wouldn't complain.

"Outfit is on the bed, bruh. Go ahead and get changed. And trust me, it is the perfect outfit. We have to blend in," Ari assured Mike.

Mike walked into the bedroom, and Ari conjured his own outfit while he listened to Mike get dressed.

"Umm, I don't think this is the right size," he heard Mike yell from the bedroom after a bit of grunting and groaning.

"Little dude, they're skinny jeans; they're supposed to be tight. It is totally the right size." Then, because he was a chaos demon, after all, he couldn't help adding, "Do you need some help getting into them?"

"No!" Mike quickly shouted. "I mean, I've got it. Thanks," he added.

Ari just chuckled. After a bit more grumbling and groaning, his sexy little s'more walked out of the bedroom looking totally club ready. His little dude was not a skinny little thing, but the tightness of the clothes just defined the rugged manliness of him.

Michael, meanwhile, had stopped dead and was staring at Ari with his mouth slightly parted. If Ari wasn't mistaken, those tight jeans were getting even tighter on certain parts of Mike's anatomy, which was super hot.

"Did you... do you have... but you didn't..." Mike started, unable to complete his thoughts.

"Ah, yeah," Ari said, fingering his nipples through his see-through shirt. "I added some piercings. What do you think? Hot? Totally good for the club look, yeah?"

Mike stared at Ari's fingers rubbing the piercings, and Ari definitely felt Mike's arousal, but he also felt his discomfort. So, with some disappointment, he left off rubbing his nipples and walked over to sling an arm around Mike.

“We’ll fit right in, yeah? We’re gathering information. If we have a little fun along the way, though, little dude, that’s alright. Let’s not forget that revenge should always be joyous,” Ari reassured him.

Mike took a deep breath, got himself under control, and Ari felt that determination come back full force.

“Let’s go talk to some demons,” his little dude said.

Mike grabbed his keys and tossed them over to Ari as they left the apartment, and wasn’t that just another fantastic thing about his human? Ari loved driving, and once Mike figured that out, he had no problem letting Ari do it.

Once they were in the car, Mike asked, “Which club are we going to that has frequent demonic visitors?”

“Ah, well, it’s sort of a sex club,” Ari responded, and he thought he heard Mike choke a bit next to him.

“You ok, little dude?” Ari asked, reaching over and rubbing his back with his other hand still on the wheel.

“Yeah, sure, yup. Ok. A sex club. Ok. Yeah. I guess I should be thankful for the skinny jeans,” he mumbled.

Ari chuckled. “Don’t worry, Saints and Sinners doesn’t have public nudity. Well, at least not much. You might find some subtle sex occurring in dark corners, but the main club area is mostly clothed.”

“Why, exactly, are we going to a sex club? Why is that the place that demons frequent? Unless they’re all lust demons?” Mike asked.

“Nah, actually, very few of them are lust demons. It just so happens that a demon was summoned to work there when the place opened, and he ended up staying on once his summoning was complete. Demons don’t always want to head back underworld when they’re done. It can be like a vacation up here, and sometimes demons decide they want to stay for a while. It’s highly frowned upon by the leadership team, so they’re sort of on the run,” Ari explained.

“You’re an Infernal King of the Underworld. Shouldn’t you take them back if they aren’t supposed to be here?” Mike asked.

Ari laughed. “Dude, chaos demon. Why would I do anything the leadership team asks me to do? In fact, they rarely ask me to do anything, because they know I’ll probably do the exact opposite. I do have a bit of a reputation.”

Mike snorted at that before continuing to ask questions. “Ok, so a demon stayed on at the club. You think he’ll have information?”

“Possibly, but it isn’t just him. He sort of made the club a safe place for untethered demons to hang out. So we’ll have plenty of people to pump for information.”

Ari chuckled at his own wording, and he couldn’t help repeating, “Pump for information.”

He could practically feel Michael roll his eyes next to him, but the guy gave a little chuckle as well. Ari’s humor might be a little lowbrow at times, but Michael clearly still appreciated it.

They brainstormed a bit on how much to share, and they decided that telling demons they were looking for an angel who might have been around in the last twenty years or so would be enough of an explanation. Ari didn’t seriously think a demon was in on this nonsense, but you never could tell for sure. When enacting vengeance, it was always best to play your cards as close as possible.

“I don’t think we should imply it could be the archangel then, either,” Mike added. “We don’t want to lead the witnesses and have them disregard something else they think of because they’re only concerned with Gabriel. I would like to somehow ask about him, though.”

“Good point, little dude. It’s doubtful any of these demons will know how to contact him, but best to check just in case.” Ari hummed in thought before giving the steering wheel a pat. “Got it!”

“I’m almost scared to ask,” Mike deadpanned.

His little s'more knew him so well.

Ari shot him a wink, explaining, "I'll ask on the way out. Imply I'm looking to prank the dude. Everyone will totally buy that."

"Yes, I'm sure they will. Is this it?" Mike asked as they pulled into a parking lot. "It looks so... normal."

"Well yeah, little dude. Don't want to upset the vanilla crowd. Saints and Sinners totally keeps things under wraps. No worries there," Ari assured him.

He parked the car, and he heard Michael take a deep breath. Ari got out and walked over to the other side, opening the car door. Mike smiled and said thanks, and once he was out, Ari put a hand on his lower back and led him toward the club. He could totally sense his little dude's nervousness, though.

"Bruh, relax. we've totally got this," Ari vowed.

"Yes," Mike mumbled. "That's exactly what I'm afraid of."

Ari opened the door, guiding Michael in, and sure enough, the demon Samael was at the counter. Mike was sort of dazedly looking around, and Ari couldn't blame the guy. The lobby was upscale and fancy, like a super nice hotel. It definitely did not scream 'sex club' to anyone who happened to find their way in.

"Samael!" Ari boomed out, guiding Mike up to the desk. Samael looked slightly concerned, but Ari didn't let it phase him. He was used to slightly concerned looks from others.

"No worries, bruh, I am not here to cause chaos!" he added.

Samael rolled his eyes so hard the demon probably hurt himself. "I find that rather difficult to believe, you being who you are," the demon quipped.

"No, dude, I promise, no chaos today. Or not any on purpose, anyway," he added with a touch of guilt.

“Yes, because I’m sure the food fight was *totally* an accident,” Samael retorted. “And the glitter bomb. And the melted marshmallow incident. And let’s not forget the microwaveable dildos.”

Ari put his hands up on that one. “Dude, in my defense, I totally thought those were a good idea. A more lifelike experience!” he defended.

Samael looked at Mike and added, “You try explaining to paramedics how a bunch of people got burned that badly in that area.”

“Aww, no one was *seriously* injured,” Ari whined. Samael was such a killjoy.

Mike just laughed. “Yes, that sounds just like Ari. But rest assured I’ll try to keep him under control this time. As much as is humanly possible, at least,” he joked.

Samael looked at Mike more closely with that, nodding his head. “Yes, although humanly possible might not be enough.” He sighed then, asking, “So what can I help you gentlemen with? You just here to enjoy the club tonight?”

“Bruh, we’re actually here for some information. Mike here is totally in the afterlife know, so no need to be coy around him. He hangs out with Lilith,” Ari added a bit smugly. That was definitely a cool thing for his little dude, and it would earn some credibility with the demons here.

Samael, however, did not look impressed; he actually looked slightly nervous. Mike was like a shark smelling blood in the water, and the guy took a step forward, leaning on the counter a little aggressively.

“Samael, it is?” he asked, and his voice had gone all grumbly and serious. Ohhh, were they gonna play good cop, bad cop? Ari totally thought he would’ve been bad cop, but actually, he did laugh a bit too much for that, so maybe he was better as the good cop.

Samael gave Ari a help-me look, but Ari just said, “Dude, you better answer him. I can’t control this one.”

That must have been a scarier thought than Ari gave it credit for, because suddenly Samael was rambling away, giving them all sorts of random information that Ari really didn't care about.

“So we didn't know he was human. I mean, we knew, obviously, but we placed the ad for a roommate to attract a demon and *not* a human but somehow the guy saw it and you can't tell on the phone that it's a human and then we had him come to see the apartment for rent and you know how Malphas is and he let the guy in and then the hellhound apparently liked him and once a hellhound decides to adopt someone you know there's no talking them out of it so it really isn't our fault that he's renting from us and we swear we won't use him as a sacrifice or try to steal his soul or anything like that because he cooks a really good chicken casserole.”

At that point Samael must have needed to breathe, because he paused in his very long-winded explanation, and Ari just held a hand up before he could get started again.

Michael, meanwhile, was just staring at the guy. Even Ari could admit it was a little disconcerting.

“He'll stay in good health? Physically, emotionally, and mentally?” Michael asked, because obviously his little dude followed that story better than he did.

“Of course!” Samael vowed. “We *like* him! We would *never* let harm come to him!”

“Ok then, I guess we don't need to inquire further about that,” Michael conceded, and yet Ari hadn't known they were inquiring about it at all.

Samael slouched in relief and breathed a sigh.

“But,” Michael interrupted, causing Samael to straighten up again, “if you would like to retain your human roommate, we also require assistance on another matter.”

“Of course!” Samael rushed out. “Whatever you need!”

Huh. He didn't even need to play good cop. His little dude had it totally under control. As Mike started explaining the information they were looking for, Ari couldn't help but

wonder if Mike would be nearly so in control once they made it into the club area.

He almost chuckled at the thought. In charge Mike was sexy, but he wouldn't mind seeing flustered, turned on Mike again too.

## CHAPTER II



# MICHAEL

So apparently hellhounds adopted people but weren't harmful, and Samael and at least one other demon, if not more, currently had a human roommate who made a really good chicken casserole.

Mike guessed since he had taken a demon to prom he really couldn't judge. He was definitely asking Ari about human sacrifices and stealing souls, though, because if demons were up to that, he really did think he should know.

He had grilled Samael about angels in the area, and Samael had mentioned "the gray angel" coming by, but Ari had subtly shaken his head at Mike, so he hadn't followed that line of questioning any further. Otherwise, it seemed angels steered very clear of the club, and that's where Samael spent a lot of his time. He did invite them to go into the club and ask around, and so that's where they were headed.

"Human sacrifices and stealing souls?" Mike whispered under his breath to Ari as they walked in.

"Nah, totally not happening, bruh. Like, only the *really* bad dudes get their souls stolen, and they'd be going to the underworld for punishment anyway—we just get them down there quicker. Human sacrifices aren't something demons do either—that's a human thing. And a few centuries ago we got a memo stating that any and all benefits go to the one being sacrificed, not the one who is doing the sacrificing. Like, why should someone else get power from your death, right? That's why human sacrifices fell so out of practice. The people who were doing them kept dying instead or got cursed or whatever.

It was, for once, a halfway useful policy from management,” Ari finished, guiding Mike over to the bar as he sort of just gaped at the demon.

“You have corporate policy regulating human sacrifices?” Mike huffed. It was just so... insane.

“Bruh, the leadership team has policies on everything. I just don’t follow most of them,” Ari laughed.

With that, they sidled up to the bar, and Mike guessed he’d have to wait to ask for details about the “gray angel,” whoever that could be. Mike did trust Ari though, so if Ari didn’t want to pursue that line of questioning, then Mike wouldn’t pursue it. He had total faith that Ari would fill him in later.

Wasn’t that sort of a shock, too? He really did trust Ari, totally and completely. It was disconcerting. And he knew it wasn’t just his... uncomfortable feelings for the demon. He’d trusted him *before* he’d gotten a hard on, after all.

With that thought, Mike more fully directed his attention to having a good look around the club, which he’d been cataloging in his head since he walked in. He guessed he just couldn’t shut off the cop part of himself.

The club had sprawling couches, tables, and dim lighting, but not so dim that he couldn’t tell there were some illicit acts occurring off in darker corners. The central area of the club mostly had people sitting and chatting, with the occasional couple making out but doing little more. Mike supposed they knew to reserve the more risqué acts for the shadowed areas.

For the most part, it looked like a very upscale business club, except occasionally there was someone sitting on someone else’s lap. There was also the occasionally skimpily dressed guy, but most people looked stylish, with a mix of leather but also some bespoke suits in the mix.

“Ari?” Mike asked as they took their seats. “Is this a... gentleman’s club?”

Mike wasn’t sure how else to phrase it, but there did not appear to be many women at all in the place. There were a

few, but for the most part same sex male couples seemed to be the norm.

“It’s totally lgbtq friendly, little dude, so it mostly caters to that crowd. The occasional straights are visitors, but there’s a sex club on the other side of the city that caters to them, so that tends to draw that crowd. Demons don’t really care about gender—I guess we’re all technically pansexual—so we find ourselves more at home here. Plus, Samael kinda made this place what it is,” Ari finished off, knocking his fist against the wood of the bar to call the bartender over.

The bartender was a big guy, much like Ari, and he had beautiful caramel colored skin that was prominently shown off in a tank top.

“Duuuude!” the guy drawled out upon seeing Ari.

“Bruuuuhhhh!” Ari responded.

Then the two shook hands, nodded, and the guy started getting them drinks.

It may have been the weirdest exchange Mike had ever witnessed. He just shook his head fondly at Ari when his demon glanced over, and Ari just shrugged and smiled.

It turned out that the bartender was a demon, and he had also not seen any angels around, not counting “our angel.” From Ari’s head shake again, he assumed it was the “gray” angel, and Mike was really going to have to find out about this being who the demons seemed to claim as their own. As far as Mike knew, angels weren’t gray, so it begged quite a few questions.

They got their drinks, made the rounds, and talked to about fifteen demons in the next couple hours. There was a lot of general small talk, which for Ari mostly consisted of asking what chaos they’d been up to lately. Everyone seemed friendly, and Mike certainly didn’t get any feeling that anyone was hiding anything or holding back. They seemed to trust and respect Ari, although he did notice an occasional eye roll along with mention of some prank that Ari had apparently pulled.

They avoided the darker corners where couples were... occupied. Any demons in those corners must have realized Ari was making the rounds, because eventually they all ended up finding their way over to him.

After almost three hours and quite a few drink refills (all non alcoholic), Ari led them over to a booth against a wall that had some privacy and motioned Mike in, sliding in next to him.

Mike was not going to get turned on. Nope. They were here on business. Just because they'd been around sex for the past few hours, and they'd talked to people who had just been engaged in sexual acts, did *not* mean that Michael needed to think about sex.

They were working a case. He would stay focused. He would stay on task. He would not give thought to the fact that on a few occasions over the course of this evening he had gotten slightly hard when Ari had been touching him.

He was a professional. He would stay professional. He took a sip of the ice water with mint leaves floating in it, preparing himself to focus on the case.

"They have back rooms you can sign up for by the hour if you wanna fuck," Ari casually stated.

Mike almost spit his water out of his nose.

Some very unattractive sputtering, choking, and coughing ensued, and Ari vigorously smacked and then rubbed his back through most of it, leaving his arm draped over Mike's shoulders when he was done.

"They have... if I wanna..." Mike sputtered when he could breathe again.

"Yeah, but I've kept my eye on the hallway leading back there, and we already talked to any demons who did go back," Ari mentioned.

God, Mike felt like an idiot. For a minute he'd thought... he shook his head at himself. Of course Ari wasn't offering to go to a back room *with him*. The demon was just providing information.

Yet Mike had to admit that Ari had a half smirk on his lips and a little glint in his eye that usually indicated trouble.

Michael cleared his throat. Maybe Ari had sensed that he was aroused and the demon was just screwing with him. It was the probable explanation. He was a chaos demon, after all, and he probably had no idea that Mike had always thought of himself as straight—a label he was vigorously questioning right now.

If Ari had seriously offered, Mike would have taken him up on it. He would have headed to a back room to do... Well, he didn't quite know what he would have done. He supposed that the usual oral activities were possible. He also knew that anal sex was a thing. Beyond that, his education in gay sex was sadly lacking.

Well, porn was a thing. There were books. His sister talked about reading gay romances all the time, and he'd seen some of those covers. Mike never found a topic he couldn't research the hell out of, and he supposed gay sex was just another one to add to the list. If that was being a stick in the mud, well, that was who Michael was. He liked to research things. He liked to know what he was doing.

Huh. He guessed he was considering doing this then. Maybe. Depending on who offered.

He looked over at Ari, who was just patiently watching him. He blushed a bit and took another gulp of his drink, almost choking again in the process.

“Little dude, it's all good. We'll figure everything out together,” Ari promised, his voice soft and that little smirk still on his lips.

Michael couldn't help reading into that statement a bit. Maybe Ari was interested in him? Maybe the demon could sense that he was turned on? He wasn't a lust demon, but he seemed to always be very in tune with Michael's feelings.

Michael felt his blush get brighter. “I've never been to a gay club before,” he whispered.

“Well, my little dude, it’s not so different from any other club,” Ari whispered back. “Things work pretty much the same. You know we’re a partnership, and I’m here to help you figure out anything you need to know.”

Suddenly Ari seemed very close to Michael, his face mere inches from Mike’s own. Michael had the sudden urge to reach up and run his fingers through the hair on Ari’s face. It would be bristly yet soft, and he could tug a little until they were even closer, until their lips were pressing together.

“Go ahead,” Ari mumbled, and Mike reached his hand up, but he bumped it into the bottom of the table, snapping himself out of whatever daze he’d been in. He leaned back, shaking his head.

Ari stared at him for a moment before adding, “You have questions. Go ahead and ask them.”

Michael still could have read into that, but he decided staying on the case was safest. Now was not the time and this was not the place for anything else.

Mike figured he’d start with the mysterious angel that the demons all seemed so familiar with and that Ari hadn’t seemed to think was a suspect.

“Who is the ‘gray’ angel, or ‘our angel’? Because last I checked, angels can’t hang out in the underworld and don’t often associate with demons. And why is this angel not a suspect when it appears he’s been around here since at least the opening of this club?”

“Ahhh,” Ari said, running his own fingers through his beard and leaning back. “You mean Kushiel.”

Ari then raised his palm up, waving over one of the demons who they’d spoken to earlier.

“Ask Kushiel if he’s ready for visitors,” Ari directed.

Michael turned to look at him, surprised. “What? Is he here?”

“Yes, he came in when we were talking to the last demon. Samael must have let him know that we were looking for

information, because he went straight to the back room after he gave me a head nod,” Ari answered, sliding out of the booth.

Mike waited, not even fully realizing he was doing it until Ari’s hand reached out, ready to help him up. Mike placed his hand in Ari’s, letting himself be pulled up and forward.

Ari didn’t let go right away, and Mike looked up into his eyes. Ari was so beautiful. There was no other word for it. When he smiled or laughed, it was like the entire room became brighter. Mike had never felt anything like it.

“Little dude?” Ari whispered, and Mike wasn’t even sure what he was asking.

But he answered anyway. “Ok. I’ll follow, if you lead.”

## CHAPTER 12



# ARIOCH

Ari would be good. Yes, he would. He was a demon, but he could be good, dammit. He *could*.

So what if his cute little dude was staring up at him, all... trusting. People didn't trust Ari; they suspected he was up to trouble (and to be perfectly fair, he usually was). He knew he was a totally awesome dude, no question about it, but he'd never had someone have such faith in him before.

It was a little insane. He'd helped create dodgeball and those traffic circles in certain states where cars just flew on and off with no lanes or rhyme or reason. He'd created the idea of children's birthday parties and large music festivals. Ari knew chaos. He'd been creating it in every form for his entire existence.

Yet he'd never felt chaos himself until he stared down into those eyes and thought about kissing those plump lips. Because he knew, he *knew*, that it wasn't the right thing to do. His little dude was in a sex club, and there had been lots of sex (duh), and so being turned on was natural. But they had a "witness" to "interview" (his little dude was so cute with all his police speak), and Ari knew if they ended up shagging in the booth at a club that Mike would feel awful and be upset with himself and feel guilty for not pursuing the case.

That was probably the biggest kicker. Ari knew Mike wouldn't even blame him, even if he started it. The guy would totally blame himself, because that's how he was.

It took every ounce of energy Ari had not to lean down and give in to the urge to create craziness right there, right now. So he turned toward the back rooms where he'd seen Kushiel head, and he pulled Mike along with him, because he couldn't seem to let go of the guy's hand.

As they made it to the hallway, Ari stopped. Mike's last statement was ambiguous, and he knew Mike would want to go talk to Kushiel, but he also wanted to make sure his guy didn't think they were going to do something else and then get disappointed. Or sad. Sad Mike made Ari feel bad, and Ari was all about feeling good, so he was all about making Mike feel good.

That made sense, didn't it? Ari thought so. Totally.

Yes, he'd been fucking with Mike a little bit when he'd brought up the back rooms, and watching his blush had been super adorable, but then they'd had, like, a moment or something. Ari didn't want to ruin it. He hoped it meant after they talked to Kushiel they could continue with their moment.

But he knew Mike, so business first.

"Bruh, you want to go talk to Kushiel, yeah?" he asked.

Mike cleared his throat, taking his hand back to straighten his shirt (which wasn't even mussed, but his little dude was fussy like that).

"Yeah. Yes. He's back here?" Mike asked, blushing again.

"Yup, he is. He might be in his angelic form, because he usually rolls like that. All good?" Ari checked. He could totally ask Kushiel to human up if it made Mike uncomfortable, although he didn't think it would.

"That's fine. He won't be the first angel I've seen. Grandfather never appears in a human form. I didn't even know it was a choice for everyone," Mike confessed, and he seemed disgruntled that he didn't have that piece of information ahead of time. So cute.

They made their way back through the dim hallway, and Ari couldn't help looking back and grinning at Mike when someone appeared to be having quite a good time behind one

of the doors they passed. Mike just blushed fiercely and kept walking, so Ari placed a hand on his back and led on. But then Ari heard two distinctly familiar voices from behind the second to last door.

He stopped in his tracks, listening, and yup, he knew those voices. He didn't even bother knocking—he just threw open the door and rushed in with Michael in tow.

“My dudes! What the fuck?” he cried out jovially.

Luckily Adam and Minos were both dressed, because he had momentarily forgotten the whole sex club thing, although Adam was sitting on Minos's lap, and there was definitely some tongue action going on.

They broke apart at Ari's cry, and Minos shot him a very disgruntled and grumpy look, which was totally par for the course when it came to the Judge of the Damned.

“Ohmygod!” cried Adam. “Holy shit, what are you doing here? And who is the total cutie with you! Although you better not bring total cutie any closer or he'll be spilling all his biggest secrets!” Adam giggled a bit at that last part before adding, “Five minutes later and you and cutie totally would've gotten a show!”

Minos actually growled, the grumpy fucker.

“Aw, we didn't mean to disturb. I just didn't expect to hear you two! Mike, this is Adam and Minos. They're, like, the original soulmate couple! Minos is a demon—he's the Judge of the Damned. Adam died and ended up in his chambers. It was, like, a whole thing,” Ari finished.

“Yes, I sort of figured he was a demon, what with the red skin and horns and tail and all,” Mike said drolly.

“Ah, yeah, Minos doesn't really do the whole human form thing. Which totally explains why we didn't see you in the club. But my dude, why are you even topside?” Ari asked.

“Well, we heard this leadership team rumor about a crackdown on rogue demons, so since we're reconfiguring the leadership team, we decided to handle it. They were all like ‘Demons aren't working, blah blah blah.’ But, hello, it's not

like you guys take sick days, so I think a few millennia of work should totally get some accrued vacation time. So don't worry, we aren't cracking down on anything. Well, except Minos may be cracking down on my—" Adam started, but he was cut off as Minos put his hand over Adam's mouth.

Ari chuckled, Minos growled, Adam giggled, and Mike just sort of looked confused.

"Ah, that reminds me. We're sort of on our own investigation. Have you heard anything about angels sending unsanctioned messages, or about angels trying to end demons?" Ari questioned.

Adam gasped, and Minos rumbled, "That isn't possible."

"I can assure you it is," Mike declared.

"Well, I highly doubt it's anyone in the leadership team. We have our thumb firmly on them. We're getting that all straightened out," Adam assured them.

"Awesome, my dude. I love the chaos you guys are causing," Ari chuckled.

"Not that it isn't wonderful to see you," Minos said, and Ari knew the grump was *totally* being sarcastic, "but this was one door I did not ask you to knock down, brother."

"Of course, dudes, we'll let you get back to it," Ari said, waggling his eyebrows. He looked over at Mike. "We have other business to attend to as well."

Mike blushed, but before they could walk out, he asked, "You don't happen to know how to summon the archangel Gabriel, do you?"

Adam snorted. "Nope. I deal with angels as little as possible." He gave a delicate shudder. "They did *not* make my death pleasant."

Mike looked confused, but Adam and Minos were back to making out—Ari swore, those two couldn't seem to get enough of each other. He pulled his little dude from the room, firmly shutting the door behind him.

“Long story, but Adam didn’t like his angel case manager. He caused quite a bit of lovely chaos. But let’s find our angel, yeah?” Ari led Mike to the last door with that. It was closed, and Ari knocked gently on it.

No answer came from within, but Ari felt the welcome, so he opened the door and walked in first. When he saw Kushiel lounging in a large, low-backed chair, very much alone, he moved out of the doorway to let Mike enter as well.

The room looked like a nice hotel sitting room. There was a couch across from Kushiel’s chair, and although there were no windows, there were drapes along one wall to give the appearance of windows; it was all very hotel rendezvous.

“Bruh, you gonna teach some naughty businessmen some lessons on not being dirty cheats?” Ari chuckled.

Kushiel only smiled dryly.

“You... you’re *gray*,” Michael stuttered.

Kushiel was indeed in his angelic form, and his gray skin and black wings were prominent, although he was clothed in dark dress pants and a white dress shirt. Ari vaguely wondered why he’d bothered with the shirt; he personally hated having shirts on with his wings out. Kushiel was kinda stuffy and proper though, which Ari figured was the least they could expect, since he was an angel.

Ari had a momentary twinge thinking about how similar Mike and Kushiel were. Both were a little uptight, highly focused, and slightly obsessed with work. They were also both hard on themselves. They would probably get along great, and Ari didn’t like the thought of his little dude getting along better with someone other than him.

He pictured Mike and Kushiel going on a date, and he could just see the two of them at a fancy restaurant, all buttoned up and proper, and... yup, that was the end of that twinge. The two of them probably wouldn’t even manage a goodnight kiss. He could just imagine them trying to hug and fumbling over where to put their hands and whether it was

welcome or not, and then each of them feeling guilty over how awkward it would be. He almost chuckled at the thought.

His little dude definitely needed someone fun and carefree in his life. Kushiel was neither of those things. That dude took repentance to a whole new level. He needed his own fun and carefree person, just like Mike totally needed Ari in his life.

Michael was still sort of gaping, Kushiel was looking all self-tortured, and Ari realized it was up to him to get this show going. He led Mike over to the couch and sat, pulling his little dude down next to him.

“Kushiel, my man, how’s angelhood treating ya? Ready to come over to the dark side yet?” Ari joked. “Although my wings are still way cooler than yours, bro.”

Kushiel smirked at that, fluffing up his wings a bit, the show off, but at least he looked like he was in a better frame of mind.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of a visit from an Infernal King of the Underworld and a Nephilim?” he asked.

“Dude, like you don’t know all the shit. You always do,” Ari scoffed.

Kushiel merely raised an eyebrow.

“Spill, bruh. Let’s not waste time with back story, because I’m sure you’re in the know,” Ari demanded.

Kushiel sighed, looking thoughtful before replying. “I know that there are demons who have soul mates. I’m not sure how this came to pass or who sanctioned such a thing. I know that both Luce and Yah are aware of this, and they seem to have no problem with it. They have, in fact, protected the mated pairs. I do not know if that is a part of some larger plan or not.”

“Dude, everyone knows that. Get to the good shit,” Ari grumbled.

Kushiel sighed. “I know that someone was heavenbent on keeping Gabriel and Asmodeus apart. I am not sure who. I do

know that those actions were *not* sanctioned. I also know that they can be traced to an upper level department.”

“So someone in heaven was trying to keep my brother and his soulmate apart. That’s why I was given the book? It wasn’t about me or Ari?” Mike asked, leaning forward.

“The book?” Kushiel questioned sharply.

Ari briefly gave Kushiel a rundown of the angel who came to Mike as a kid, the book, and its role in almost breaking up Az and Gabe. Unfortunately, Kushiel looked hella confused and disturbed by the whole thing. Ari’s hope of getting some answers was quickly draining.

“What I spoke of all occurred within the last few weeks. I have no knowledge of something that spanned as far back as twenty years. That would take a level of foresight...” Kushiel trailed off, looking into the distance.

“Bruh, you got an idea?” Ari asked, feeling hopeful again.

“You are a bit of an idiot, Arioch,” Kushiel quipped.

“Hey!” Michael snapped, almost rising off the couch.

Aww, his little dude was pissed off on his behalf. How cute. He just put an arm around Michael, pulling him down firmly, because he looked like he was ready to get up and go hit Kushiel over the head.

Kushiel came over and kneeled down in front of the couch. Mike seemed ready to jump up again, but Ari just gave him a reassuring pat. Kushiel may be an angel, but he was totally on their side. A lot of demons didn’t give much thought to Kushiel’s position, but he knew that being half in the underworld had stripped the angel of some of his angelic attributes. He knew the guy didn’t fully belong to either world, and he also knew that the demons were a lot more forgiving of that than the angels were, since angels were uptight pricks in general. Kushiel may have technically been an angel, but he was an honorary demon as far as Ari was concerned.

Kushiel put both his hands on Ari’s face, looking into his eyes.

“Bruh, are we having a moment? Is this, like, a kissing thing? Because I gotta tell you, kinda rude to leave my little dude out when he’s sitting right here,” Ari joked.

Kushiel rolled his eyes, and Mike snickered next to him, although Ari sensed some relief in that snicker. Kushiel put off some intense vibes, and Ari wasn’t sure what he was planning.

Kushiel sighed in a rather long-suffering way, then he gently moved Ari’s face so that he was looking at Mike.

“In the time before, an angel appeared to Michael, and he delivered a message. In the time before, there was a book, and it was given intention. There are ties forming, being created, being bonded. Souls are aligning, but someone works against the almighty’s plan. What do you *see*, Arioach, Infernal King of the Underworld, Seer of Things Past and Yet to Come? What can be *known* of these things?” Kushiel intoned.

Kushiel’s voice seemed to grow more distant as he spoke. Ari was staring into Mike’s eyes. His beautiful Michael, his little s’more, so sweet and kind and caring.

As he watched, his little dude actually became... little. Like, younger. He was suddenly staring into the eyes of Michael as a young boy. Those eyes were wide, the face slack in amazement. There was no sound, like he was watching a show with the volume turned off. They were outside in the darkness, yet there was bright light emanating from where Michael was looking.

Ari turned around, because he could, and he saw an angel surrounded by such brightness that he couldn’t even make out the features. He huffed in annoyance. He knew this already, and seeing it was no help.

“Dude, this is not helpful,” he murmured.

With a snap he was elsewhere.

Heaven, if he had to guess, because everything was bright and white and sort of glowy. It seemed to be an office with lots of desks and angels fervently working. Ari had the urge to go muss everything up; it all looked entirely too orderly and neat for his liking.



Then he saw a cute looking angel whose robe was all wrinkly and who was carrying a stack of uneven papers, of all the weird things, trailing after a very uptight, put together, upper management angel in a white business suit. Ari didn't recognize the angel, but he knew power when he saw it, and this was someone powerful. He also knew chaos when he saw it, and the mussed up angelic dude *totally* did not fit in; he even saw a disparaging glance or two aimed at the dude.

The sound suddenly came on, like someone had turned the volume up, and he heard the little disheveled cutie spouting information at lightning speed. "...and with an accuracy prediction that close to infinity, it seems like the Majestic One would want the experiment to continue; however, without drawing together pieces of the original entity, the entire infrastructure is sure to collapse, but I can clearly see that certain elements would tie together neatly and help stabilize..."

"Yes, yes, whatever you think. Go ahead and work on it," the uptight prick interrupted, clearly not even really paying attention. "Just leave me alone to accomplish *actual* work," the jerk scoffed, stalking off and leaving the cutie to stand there gaping.

"Yes, ok, well then, I suppose I shall start solidifying the ties that already exist between certain souls. Should be easy enough to find the threads and make sure the meetings occur. Then the experiment shall continue uninterrupted, and the world as we know it will continue indefinitely," he mumbled, turning and heading off in another direction.

Huh. Ari supposed this little dude was at least partly responsible for this whole soulmate thing. Kinda funny to think it was an impatient angelic boss who put the whole thing in motion by accident. Ari almost chuckled, but then he was somewhere else again, and this time he could see and hear the cute angel, but he couldn't see who the dude was talking to.

Cute angel was still disheveled, and he was still entirely too excited about his work for an angel. He was so excited and enthusiastic that he clearly didn't feel the waves of menace and anger emanating from whoever he was talking to.

If Ari had to guess, the angel listening was probably the one who was responsible for trying to thwart whatever it was that cutie was trying to accomplish.

“I am so honored you are here, and it is so very kind of you to check on my labor. I have toiled for ages, and as you can see, I have set into motion a number of pairings that should be highly effective in stabilizing the current infrastructure and mitigating any further breakdown in the universal creation of current existence, although my first pairings will take decades to come to fruition due to human aging,” the cutie mumbled, pulling out papers and pointing to an apparent list.

“Of course, there is always a risk, particularly since pairings are most effective between a mortal and an immortal soul. Mortal souls have free will, so I cannot one hundred percent guarantee success. If one of the pairs were to deny their soulmate, well, I believe it would cause an astronomical level of destabilization in complete opposition to the current goal of the project,” the cutie said, pointing to one particular sheet of paper.

“But really,” he continued, “there is no reason that should occur. I have checked compatibility to the most infinitesimal level, and these pairings are a guarantee. It would take, well, I cannot even imagine what it would take for them not to work out. Success is practically guaranteed!”

Cutie continued to ramble on, and when he turned to grab more papers, a hand reached forward and took the paper he had just pointed to. In almost slow motion, it passed in front of Ari’s face, but he could only clearly see one of the names scrawled on it. Try as he might, he could not make out the second. Ari almost cursed in frustration.

And then the person who took the paper was gone, disappeared into thin air, and Ari was suddenly free to look around, not that it did him any good at this point. Cutie turned back, slowly stuttering to a stop in confusion at the empty space. Then he looked down and apparently noticed the missing paper. He shuffled through the papers frantically for a

moment before falling back into a white cushy chair that appeared out of nowhere.

“Well, fudge,” he mumbled to himself before sighing. “I don’t suppose I can report an archangel, but really, if he means to sabotage my project, I shall do something... something... un-angelic. Yes, I shall!” he blustered to himself.

He sighed again, and then a pen appeared in his hand, and he began scribbling and mumbling. “If I can manage to get a feather or something of his essence, I should be able to craft it into a talisman of protection for the human. That ought to hopefully keep in check whatever that... that... *jerk* has in mind.”

And with that, Ari was jerked back to reality, staring into Michael’s eyes once again. His beautiful, sweet s’more, who was holding his hands gently, patiently waiting for the visions to end.

Ari hadn’t realized how much he had hoped for his own soulmate until this moment. Perhaps he had not admitted it, but the desire had been there, deep within himself, even if he was afraid to give it voice. And indeed, one of the names on that paper had clearly been his.

He should have been ecstatic, yet he couldn’t quite muster the excitement, because he realized now that he didn’t want just any soulmate. He wanted his perfect match to be the uptight, fussy, organized guy sitting in front of him and patiently waiting for him to gather his thoughts.

But there was no guarantee his soulmate was Mike, was there? Because Mike didn’t have a talisman that he’d seen, and how stupid would it be for an archangel to try to have his own soulmate try to destroy him? More than likely the archangel had chosen Mike to try and destroy him because his s’more was a strong Nephilim who was young and impressionable.

Ari gripped Mike’s hands tighter for a moment, mind racing. He couldn’t hurt his s’more. He couldn’t let him know that he had a soulmate out there somewhere, because Mike would totally assume it wasn’t him, and he would end up

trying to find Ari's soulmate even while it crushed his already low self-esteem.

Fuck it. If it meant the end of existence, so be it. He was a demon of chaos, after all. Maybe Mike was his soulmate, but maybe not; either way, Ari wasn't giving him up. He was keeping his little dude, and that was that.

## CHAPTER 13

# MICHAEL

The gray angel—Kushiel, apparently—had backed away once Ari’s eyes had gone distant and a little... weird? It was like there was fog passing through his eyes, and Ari clearly wasn’t fully present anymore. Michael didn’t panic, though, because obviously Kushiel had triggered some sort of vision in Ari when he had used that seer title.

Perhaps Ari would get the answers they needed. He reached forward and took Ari’s hands in his own. They were warm and soft, and Michael just held on and waited.

He studied the demon’s face as he sat there. Ari looked so innocent, his face relaxed and at peace. Michael almost snorted at the innocent thought—Ari was anything but innocent. He loved how the demon was always looking for fun, and even causing a bit of trouble (or a lot of trouble), yet he always made sure no one was hurt by his pranks.

He’d had his fair share of practical jokes played on him by his siblings. Some of them had been fun and humorous, especially when he had, on occasion, put aside his staunch older brother role to have a bit of fun in return.

He’d never had many pranks played on him in school, but he’d seen some that were downright mean-spirited. He’d stepped in when possible to prevent those. He sometimes wondered how his brother managed to work in a school. Children could be downright awful to one another, and Michael didn’t think he could deal with it without losing his shit.

Ari, though—his pranks were always in good fun according to all the stories Ari had told him and everything he'd seen for himself. Ari never crossed that line. He always made sure people weren't hurt or truly upset. It was actually weird to look at his serene face; Mike realized he was used to seeing the demon laughing and smiling. He really did bring joy to everything he did.

If he was being honest with himself, Ari brought joy to him. Michael knew he was stuffy and a stick in the mud. (Yes, Ser's nickname for him still stung a bit, but only because it was true.) Ari made him get out of his comfort zone. The demon made him experience a bit of fun himself.

Ari was just so... loveable. He was like a big teddy bear, and Mike just wanted to snuggle up to him. The best part was, Mike didn't even have to ask to do so, because Ari was constantly initiating physical contact.

Mike thought back to first summoning the demon. He'd thought he was hot at first, hadn't he? But he'd shut it down before it could even go anywhere in his brain. Maybe he'd noticed more than once how good Ari looked in his tight pants, and maybe he'd thought once or twice about how beautiful his smile was, but he'd pushed those thoughts somewhere far off in his brain and focused on the business at hand.

And that whole time, Ari had been slowly worming his way into Mike's affections, too. Because he was just so... wonderful. He was joyous, sweet, caring, affectionate, mischievous—he was everything Michael didn't know he was missing.

So, while Ari zoned out and had some hopefully helpful vision, Mike was apparently going to have his own little epiphany. He liked the demon, and not just as a "bro." He was attracted to him physically, and he was attracted to his personality.

So, Mike liked men and women, and he only felt a little stupid that he'd never realized it. Or maybe he'd never accepted it. Either way, he was accepting it now.

He knew he didn't have to do anything with that knowledge, but Ari made him want to do something. For the first time, he felt like he could have a wild, crazy, passionate, and fun relationship with someone. In the past, he had chosen to date people just like him, and the sparks had *not* flown. No real adventure in the bedroom, and if he was honest, no excitement outside of the bedroom either. There was no fun, no passion, even in conversation. He had chosen people who were safe, not people who really interested him.

With Ari, he had no doubt there would be plenty of passion and fun. The demon didn't know how to do anything half-heartedly. Heck, there was already passion and fun in their interactions. Mike loved how silly and carefree Ari was.

Now for the hard part: if he did want to have an affair with the demon, how did he even go about it? If Ari was even interested. Based on his joking earlier, though, Mike was pretty sure the demon wouldn't mind a bit of fooling around. The trick would be to just keep things light. Mike knew he got too serious, and the last thing he wanted was Ari feeling bad because Mike couldn't control his feelings. Because Mike had to admit to himself, he was already halfway enamored. Nevertheless, surely Mike could keep his feelings to himself.

His whole thought process was interrupted when Ari took a long, deep breath in, his eyes clearing. He looked at Michael, and Mike swore there was something there. Ari looked... Fierce. Passionate. Determined. It only made Michael want to start figuring out how to seduce a demon that much sooner, although he couldn't quite forget that they had an audience and were in a sex club. (Which was probably an appropriate place for a seduction, but Michael wasn't quite ready to be that daring.)

“What did you see?” Kushiel asked, breaking the moment.

Ari took one hand out of Michael's to rub it thoughtfully through his beard as he talked. “Bruh, apparently some cute little mess of an angel did some math shit or something and decided to create soulmates to, like, save the universe or some shit. Some bigwig angel okayed the whole thing because he was too impatient to even hear the guy out. Fast forward a few



decades or so, and he was talking to some archangel, but I couldn't see who, and the guy was totally pissed off about his work and was gonna, like, sabotage it or some shit. So at least that narrows it down," Ari finished.

He gave Mike a reassuring squeeze and looked at him, adding, "The angel dude was cute like a puppy dog because he was such a mess, and angels are *not* a mess. Bro totally needs some angel lessons or some shit."

"Uh, ok," Mike replied, feeling happy but also confused. So, Mike had experienced a moment of jealousy hearing Ari call some other guy cute, but Ari thought lots of people were cute, especially when they were up to chaos, so Mike knew it didn't mean anything. Still, he felt better hearing Ari's explanation.

Mike shook himself a bit, getting up to pace and think. "You couldn't hear the archangel at all?" he asked.

"Nope."

"Shit," Mike mumbled. "That doesn't narrow it down then. It could be Gabriel, or Michael, or someone else entirely." He was really hoping they would have a better clue after this, but it still left the field wide open.

A clearing throat made Michael stop his pacing and look over.

"Actually, it narrows it down quite a bit," Kushiel said. "There are only seven archangels in existence. It is not a duty given lightly. So you are down to seven possible angels looking to end Ari's existence, if that is the goal," Kushiel finished, and he was giving Ari a bit of a strange look.

Michael couldn't worry too much about that, though, because he had been thinking of just higher up angels, but if it was specifically an archangel, then that did give them quite a bit to go on.

"Ok, that's good then. We can do some research and figure things out. Surely there's a way to start narrowing them down from there. Perhaps it's time to call Grandfather and get some

answers,” Mike mused. He wasn’t sure where else to start, so Grandfather seemed like a good choice.

“Any idea why they’d want Ari dead? Or removed from existence? What would he have to do with stopping the sabotage?” Mike asked, looking at Kushiel.

Kushiel looked at Ari, so Mike looked over at the demon as well, who looked a bit like a kid who was caught eating sweets before dinner.

“Ari, what did you do?” Mike sighed. “Tell me you’ve pranked all the archangels and this is a revenge thing for one of them?”

“Ugh, not exactly, but we’ll talk about that later, at home,” Ari said, standing up, and Mike figured that was their cue to leave.

Mike looked over at Kushiel. “Thank you for your assistance.”

The angel bowed his head. “It has been my pleasure, Nephilim.” Kushiel turned to Ari then, murmuring, “Do let me know how it all works out, my friend. I wish you all the joy of your brothers.”

Ari snorted a bit, mumbling, “We’ll see.” Mike had no clue what he was missing, but it was something. His brain was too busy trying to think of all the archangels, however, and he couldn’t quite stop himself from trying to catalog them all. The problem was that it was like counting off Santa’s reindeer—you couldn’t remember if you’d listed that one already, and they all started to sound the same after a while. He knew he was missing at least one in his list, and he certainly didn’t know everything about all of them. He was itching to do some research.

Ari seemed to sense it, because he placed his hand on Michael’s back and led him out of the room and down the hall, toward the front of the club.

“Let’s go, little dude. We’ll head back to your place, and we will figure this shit out,” he vowed.

Michael let himself be led and studiously ignored the cute guys and the sexual acts occurring in dark corners. It did get him vaguely horny and remind him, however, that archangels weren't the only thing he was planning to research. If he was going to do something with Ari, he had some gay sex research to do as well. The club might have been somewhat helpful, but he didn't think anyone would take kindly to him asking a million questions.

Ok, actually, they might enjoy that, but Mike would certainly feel awkward as hell doing it. The internet would definitely be a better assistant for that kind of research.

As they walked out through the front room, Ari gave Samael a wave, and Mike had a sudden thought.

“Samael!” he said, putting a hand on Ari's arm to stop their forward momentum toward the exit. It seemed like in the last minute or two Ari had definitely started rushing them out the door.

“Yes? I trust you spoke with everyone you desired?” the demon asked.

“You've been a great help. I just have one more question. I don't suppose any other angels ever visit? Gabriel never makes an appearance, does he?” Mike asked.

At that moment, Kushiel walked out the door of the club and into the front lobby area, and he obviously heard the tail end of Mike's question.

“He wouldn't be caught here unless he had a message to deliver, and I find that possibility rather low,” Kushiel chuckled.

“Do you know how to find him?” Mike asked. He really should have thought of asking Kushiel earlier. “Actually, do you know how to call forth any of the archangels?”

Kushiel hummed thoughtfully. “If there is a manner for mortals or demons to call forth most of the archangels, I know not of it. Gabriel, however, is the messenger. Ari simply needs to deliver a message of great import to a mortal, and Gabriel will show up to deliver it.”

“Dude, is that all?” Ari asked. “Even if it’s me, he’ll come?”

“Yes, he delivers messages for angels and demons of importance, and as a King of the Underworld, you certainly qualify. Demons just never use him, because they prefer to deliver their own messages. As for that being all, it is both that simple and that difficult. I wish you both the best of luck.” With that vague warning, Kushiel walked past them and out into the night.

Mike and Ari sort of looked at one another, and Samael just muttered, “Angels. They always have to be all cryptic.”



THE DRIVE HOME had been filled with a rather comical attempt at listing the archangels. They knew Michael and Gabriel for sure. Beyond that, they ended up down a rabbit hole, with Ari going on a rant about archangels having too many vowels and always ending in the letter L.

“Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, Sariel—dude, it’s like those people who have eight kids and make all the names start with the same letter and rhyme, only they all end the same. What the fuck was Yah thinking?” Ari had ranted, and Michael couldn’t help giggling until tears had formed in his eyes. Then Ari had realized he was also insulting Mike and his brother’s names.

“Little dude! You’re a Michael too—you end in a vowel and an L! And your brother is Gabriel! I’m so sorry, bruh! But at least there’s only two of you, because your sister does *not* end in an L. Your parents obviously had more sense than Yah!” he’d exclaimed, only causing Mike to devolve into giggles again.

Mike wasn’t sure if Ari had realized he was actually insulting the creator of all existence, and when Mike had managed to stop giggling enough to ask if they were going to be struck by lightning for his blasphemy, Ari had just replied,

“Bring it, bruh. Lightning is a good fucking time! You should see what it does to my hair!”

That, of course, had only brought the giggles back full force for Michael. When they had pulled up to the house where he and his siblings had apartments, Michael realized he hadn't laughed that hard in forever. He turned to Ari, still occasionally chuckling, and saw the demon staring at him fondly.

“Let's go, little dude. We got a list to make and a message to send,” Ari declared, getting out and shutting his door before making his way around the car to open Mike's door for him.

Mike let out a last chuckle and just smiled. If someone had told him two weeks ago that he'd be having the time of his life with an Infernal King of the Underworld, he would have called them insane. That thought got him serious pretty fast, because someone had tried to make him end Ari's existence. He couldn't imagine snuffing out such a bright soul. Demon or not, that's exactly what Ari was, a bright light of joy in a world that didn't laugh enough.

Michael let himself be helped out of the car, and he felt flutters in his stomach as Ari held onto his hand while they walked to the door and up the stairs to his apartment. Michael remembered that both his siblings were away. Not that they could really hear the goings on in each other's apartments, but still. He had total privacy. Just Ari and him. Alone together, in his apartment.

They walked into the apartment, and Mike felt himself tense up. How exactly did one seduce a demon? He guessed it was just like seducing anyone, but he didn't think seduction had ever been a strong point for him. He didn't want sex with Ari to be like a business transaction. That was if Ari was even interested in him in that way. Michael still wasn't one hundred percent sure on that, which made him tense up even more. Shit. He was totally out of his depth.

He'd sort of frozen in the middle of the living room, stress and insecurity making him unable to decide what to do next.

Try and seduce Ari? Pretend nothing happened and start researching?

Then he felt warm hands rubbing his shoulders and a hot breath on his ear. “Little dude, no worries, no stress. We’ll figure it all out together,” Ari assured Mike.

“Will we?” Michael asked, and then he groaned as Ari’s hands found a particularly tight knot in his shoulders and they pressed into it, massaging it away.

“Of course, little dude. I’m here to help in any way you need. Whatever you need,” Ari murmured.

Mike shivered at the breath against his ear, and as Ari’s hands massaged down his arms, Mike realized his nipples were hard little points and his dick was quickly plumping up as well. He didn’t overthink for once in his life, and he just leaned back into Ari, letting the demon support his weight.

“That’s it, my sweet s’more. Just let me take care of you,” Ari whispered, and it was like his hands were everywhere.

They were on Mike’s shoulders, his arms, his chest, and Mike couldn’t help a shiver and moan when one hand grazed his nipple. Ari paused in his ministrations, and Mike murmured a soft “Yes,” causing Ari’s hands to start moving again.

Mike leaned back even more, barely standing on his own, and Ari’s hand rubbed over his nipple again, and he knew he was panting, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. Then Ari’s fingers were on his nipple, gently tugging on it, and Mike moaned, because he could feel the sensation like an electric current running from his nipple down to his dick.

Ari softly tweaked his nipple, his other arm around Mike’s chest, holding him tightly against Ari’s body. Mike moaned again, wiggling a little, and that’s when he noticed something very hard and *very* large pressing into his back.

Mike froze, his brain turning on again at full speed. He felt like he was in that nightmare where he walked into a test and he hadn’t studied any of the material, because that was a really large dick rubbing against him, and Mike hadn’t had time to

do any research, and what the hell was he supposed to do with that thing?

## CHAPTER 14



# ARIOCH

One minute his little dude was a squirming, moaning, bundle of sexiness, and then the next moment he was a frozen block of nervous energy, and Ari had no idea what had caused the abrupt change.

“My sweet s’more, what’s wrong?” Ari asked, concerned. He left off the nipple play and went back to gently rubbing his little dude’s shoulders. Mike didn’t pull away and continued to lean against him, so that was a good sign at least.

“I didn’t study,” Mike mumbled, which made absolutely zero sense to Ari, but he just kept gently rubbing Mike’s shoulders.

“You feel bad for not getting work done first, my man? I promise, a little break is okay. We’ll come back to our vengeance with a clearer head for it,” Ari reassured him.

That didn’t seem to be it though, because Mike just sighed and turned so he was facing Ari’s chest. Ari wrapped his arms around his little s’more, and Mike just burrowed in tighter like he was planning on hiding in Ari’s chest.

“We don’t have to do anything, little dude. It’s perfectly alright if you aren’t interested or aren’t ready,” Ari murmured, trying to figure out what the problem was.

Mike just sighed and shook his head, so that wasn’t it.

“What didn’t you study for, my s’more?” Ari asked. Maybe that was the route to go, since that’s the only answer Ari had gotten so far.

Mike burrowed in deeper though, sighing again, before he mumbled something inaudible.

“My sexy dude, it’s ok; we can study for whatever it is together. I’m sure we can figure it out. You’re wicked smart, and I can be super helpful,” Ari assured him before asking again, “What didn’t you study?”

Mike sort of chuckled, then he mumbled again, and Ari could swear his s’more said, “Gay sex.” But that totally couldn’t be right, could it?

Ari tried to pull him back a little to see his face, but Mike was clinging to him like a barnacle. Well then, time for plan B.

Ari squeezed him close and lifted him a bit, ignoring Mike’s muffled eep of surprise. He walked them both into the bedroom, laying them down on the bed side by side with Mike’s head still pressed into Ari’s chest.

Mike breathed out and some of the tension seemed to ease out of him. Ari just kept hugging him and rubbing his back.

“My s’more, did you say you didn’t study for gay sex?” Ari questioned.

A nod of the head. Ok then. Ari was really perplexed now.

“But, what is there to study?” Ari wondered.

Then the floodgates opened, and man, he had to try his hardest not to either chuckle or squeeze his little s’more until his marshmallow filling popped out. And nope, not that kind of creamy filling being squeezed out, although... *Focus, Ari*, he thought to himself. *Think about creamy fillings later.*

“I’ve never had sex with a man, because I didn’t even know I was attracted to men, really, and I don’t know how it all works. I mean I know how it all works, but I don’t know how it all works! And I was gonna read some books and watch some porn because I know there’s oral sex and I know there’s butt stuff but I don’t know if I’m supposed to do something before the butt stuff or if everyone even likes butt stuff or what else you’re supposed to do when you’re with a man and what if I’m not good at any of it and what if I can’t even give a proper blow job because I’ve had blow jobs but none of them

were that amazing and so I don't even know what I should be doing!" Mike wailed.

Ari did chuckle at the end of Mike's rant, but he squeezed Mike close to reassure him. "Take a breath, ok? Slow your roll, my little s'more."

Unfortunately, that did not have the desired effect.

"Oh my god, you don't even want to have gay sex with me, do you? And I just word vomited all over you and you're not even interested and now I'm not just stupid, I'm also creepy! We can just forget I ever said anything, yes, just forget it and let's go research. But not gay sex! We'll research archangels! We will *not* research gay sex!" he spluttered, trying to pull out of Ari's arms, probably to run and hide, because now his little dude was feeling mortified.

That wouldn't do at all.

Ari didn't let Mike roll away, instead pulling his face up to meet Ari's, and then he did the best thing he could think of to stop Mike's "word vomit" and his insecurity.

He had every intention of keeping the kiss light, but once he got a taste of those lips, there was no stopping. Mike moaned and opened a little, and Ari couldn't help it, his tongue was in Mike's mouth, licking every inch that he could. Then Mike's tongue came out to play too, and he sucked on it, and Mike groaned, pressing his body closer to Ari, and then they practically devoured one another.

Fuck. His boy could kiss.

Mike broke off for a moment to breathe, and Ari pulled back before they could get lost in the kiss again. Unfortunately, there was some talking to do before Ari could ravage his little dude. He did not want Mike having regrets or feeling unsure in the middle of whatever they did.

Being a responsible demon was so hard, but Ari would manage it for Michael.

"First of all, I absolutely would like to do some 'gay sex' things with you, as long as you want to. So don't worry about that, okay?" Ari asked, pressing a quick kiss to Mike's lips.

He turned a cute shade of red, but he nodded his head.

“As for the research, my sweet s’more, we can figure it out as we go. It’s not like you researched sex before the first time you hooked up with a girl,” Ari commented.

Michael just buried his head and Ari’s chest again, mumbling, “Well... I might’ve looked a few things up.”

Ari couldn’t help his chuckle. “Little s’more, what exactly did you look up, and how did you look it up?”

“Well, I didn’t wanna do it wrong, did I?” Mike insisted. “I didn’t want to be a selfish lover. I wanted to make sure I could pleasure my partner. So I watched a few videos.”

“Ahhh. That could be fun. What kind of videos?” Ari wondered. The possibility of doing “gay sex” research was starting to sound quite fun.

“Well... I mean, I knew how penetrative sex worked. But I wasn’t so sure about cunnilingus,” Mike muttered, still hiding his head.

Ari tried his best not to laugh at Mike’s wording—leave it to his little s’more to make everything sexual as technical as possible. “Well? Did it help?” he asked, rubbing Mike’s back again.

Michael blew out a frustrated breath. “She didn’t even let me do it. I did all that research and I couldn’t even practice on my first girlfriend,” he muttered indignantly. “And then some people are so quiet that you don’t even know if you’re doing it right or not.”

Ari laughed hard at that, and Mike just huffed in aggravation.

“Well don’t worry, my sweet s’more, I’ll let you practice anything you want on me, and I’ll be sure to give you lots of feedback,” Ari promised.

Ari lifted Mike’s head then, so they were looking into each other’s eyes. He had to reassure his s’more, and he wanted to make sure Mike knew he really meant it.

“Listen, little dude—there is no doing sex wrong. We can find out what we like together; we can research or we can explore, ok? And if you have any questions, you can ask me. I’m sure you’ll be fine at oral sex, and if it makes you feel better, I can give you direction and tell you what to do. As for the ‘butt stuff,’ some people like it and some don’t. Some people prep ahead of time, and some don’t. There is no wrong way, only whatever way works for us. And we’ll figure that out together, ok?”

Mike blushed through most of Ari’s little speech, but when Ari was done, Mike searched his eyes, like he was checking that Ari was serious, and finally his sexy little s’more gave a nod of acknowledgement.

“You’ll really...” Mike trailed off.

“Whatever it is, I’m sure the answer is yes. But I’ll really what? If we’re gonna do it, we oughtta be able to talk about it,” Ari joked. “And believe me, massive prankster here—I have seen and heard it all. There is no conversation, no bodily function, and no question that will throw me for a loop.”

“You’ll really tell me what to do?” Mike questioned softly. “I just... I don’t like to be unprepared. I mean, I would probably have a spreadsheet with diagrams if I could. I know that’s not sexy, but I can’t help it. I like to plan and know what I’m doing,” Mike grumbled self-deprecatingly.

“If you wanna draw me some diagrams, I can assure you that it would be *very* sexy,” Ari drawled. “And I don’t know, picturing you coming up with a spreadsheet of positions and things to try... I can just imagine walking in on you sitting at the computer with gay porn on one half of the screen and a checklist on the other...”

Ari groaned, thinking of his buttoned-up little dude all serious and business-like while researching positions and techniques. He really did find it incredibly sexy. He could just imagine going in and mussing up his perfectly put together little s’more. So hot.

He took Michael’s hand in his and began pushing it down toward his very hard cock, watching and feeling out his little

dude's emotions to make sure he wasn't moving too fast. He got the definite impression that Mike wanted him to take the lead, though, and he had no problem doing that. Oh, the things he wanted to do to this man.

And if he had his way, they were gonna start doing those things right now.

Ari guided Mike's hand until it was resting on his dick, and his little dude gave a squeeze, making them both moan.

"It's so *big*," Mike whispered, and damn if that didn't make Ari's dick literally jump in excitement.

"Wanna feel it without clothes?" Ari murmured.

Michael licked his lips and nodded.

"Maybe we should both be naked," Ari suggested. "It is the logical progression of things in any kind of sex."

"Yes, umm, yeah. Naked. Ok," Mike stuttered, but obviously it wasn't a problem, because he was shimmying out of his shirt and pants at warp speed, so Ari followed suit. He could've simply wished their clothes away, but he thought that might be too fast for his s'more, so they both fumbled with their clothes for a moment, and before long they were looking back at each other. Ari noticed that Mike was very purposely *not* looking at his cock, and there was an unacceptable distance between their bodies.

He pulled Mike over to him, kissing him again, nibbling at his lower lip and darting his tongue out into Mike's mouth until his little human moaned and snuggled up against him once again. Mike's hard dick was pressing against his abs, a wet spot forming where the tip was touching his skin. His little dude was leaking precum, and it took everything in Ari's power not to glide down and suck that dick into his mouth. But his s'more needed direction, and Ari was happy to give it.

"Do you want to look at it? Touch it?" Ari whispered, and Mike groaned.

"Go ahead, my sweet s'more. You can do whatever you want. You have a dick too; you know what feels good. Go ahead and play with it," Ari murmured.

Mike reached his hand down, and seeing the contrasts between them was almost enough to set Ari over the edge; Mike's paler skin in contrast to his darker skin, Mike's hand, which seemed small in comparison to his own, encasing his very hard dick.

"Ahh, see how beautiful we look together, baby," Ari groaned.

Mike jerked a little at the endearment, but he also felt a pulse of pleasure. Ari loved how much his little dude just rolled with whatever popped out of Ari's mouth. He'd offended plenty of afterlifers and humans in the past, but Mike seemed to revel in all the nicknames Ari used, perhaps because so few people had used any terms of endearment for him in the past.

Then any thoughts about anything were flying out of Ari's head, because his sweet s'more was gliding down his body and licking his cock like it was his favorite ice cream cone. But Ari didn't let it distract him—at least he tried not to—because he had a job to do. His s'more needed directions.

"Yes, that's so good. Such a good job licking my cock. Ohhhh, demons, yes, flicking your tongue around the head of my cock like that is amazing," Ari crooned, and Michael got more bold the more Ari talked.

"Yes, baby, put it in your mouth... Oh demons, yes, use your hand to hold the base, just like that, yes... Oh shit, your mouth on me is amazing. You make me feel so good. You can use your tongue... Fuck, yeah, just like that. That's perfect," Ari panted.

Fuck. Giving directions might kill him. Michael slid his mouth up and down Ari's cock, his tongue licked around the head, and his hand moved up and down with his mouth.

"Demons, sweetheart, you are so fucking amazing at this. Feels so good. Turn, baby, and move your hips up here," Ari directed, because he didn't think he could remain coherent for much longer with how good Mike was making him feel. "Give me a taste of your cock. You're making me feel so good, my

s'more, and I wanna make you feel good. It'll be like... Fuck," Ari moaned, barely able to complete the thought.

Mike popped off his dick, asking, "I'm doing ok?"

"You're doing fucking amazing, my s'more. Slide your hips up over me, though—I wanna taste you," Ari urged.

"But I'm not done, and you're giving me directions," Mike pouted, and fuck if his little s'more wasn't the cutest fucking thing ever.

"I'll suck you while you suck me. It'll be like hands-on directions on what to do," Ari reassured him.

"I've never done sixty-nine," Mike confessed, and Ari's dick jerked in his hand, which made Mike look back down at it, which made the damn thing jerk again.

"Fuck, baby, you're killing me. Get your ass up here and let me suck that pretty cock while you suck mine. And don't you worry, little s'more, I will absolutely tell you if you need to do anything differently," Ari instructed.

That seemed to be the reassurance Mike needed, because he was rotating his body so his hips were by Ari's head, although, quite flatteringly, he didn't give up his grip on Ari's cock. Ari sure wasn't complaining, though, so he physically lifted Mike's hips up and over his face so that Mike's cock was pointed right at his mouth.

Mike gave a cute little eep in surprise, and Ari was about to suck that dick down like he was a drowning man and Mike's cum was the sustenance he needed to survive, but his sweet s'more grumbled, "I can't reach your dick with my mouth now, though."

Ahh, the height difference, although most of that was in their legs. "No fear, sweetheart. We'll make it work," Ari said, and he flipped their positions so that they were on their sides facing each other's dicks. It wasn't perfect, but with Ari shifting a bit, mouths lined up to cocks, and it made up for the difference between their sizes. He was barely done positioning them before Mike swallowed him down again.



Ari moaned and then sucked Mike's cock into his own mouth. Fuck, his man *was* sweet, and he had to stop for a second to let his sexy s'more know.

"Mmmm baby, you taste so good. I'm gonna want to suck this dick every day. You're so sexy and hard and tasty for me."

Mike groaned loudly as Ari pulled the sweetest cock he'd ever tasted into his mouth, and Ari couldn't help the moans and sounds of pleasure that fell from his own mouth. He could eat his s'more up forever, and feeling Mike's mouth on him only intensified the pleasure.

He reached a hand to massage Mike's balls with one hand while he licked and sucked, and he felt Mike's hand start to gently rub Ari's balls. He moaned even louder in appreciation. His s'more was such a quick study.

Mike tasted like everything wonderful in the world. His dick was a hard mouth full, and Ari went all the way down to the root to feel his sweet thing in his throat, swallowing around the head of Mike's cock.

Then Mike did the same, deep throating Ari's cock, and his s'more gagged on Ari's dick, but he also moaned like he was loving it.

Ari was suddenly frantic; he needed to taste Mike's cum before he exploded himself. He mumbled a "Yes, baby, so good," around the cock in his mouth, which only made Mike more frantic in his sucking. Mike thrust his hips, driving his cock deeper into Ari's throat, then he seemed to realize and stilled.

Ari wasn't having any of that, though. He groaned reassuringly, mumbling, "Mmmhmmm," to let Mike know to keep going.

Mike began thrusting again, and he kept swallowing Ari's dick down, gagging himself a bit each time, but all Ari could sense was intense pleasure from his s'more. Mike's hand was firmly gripping the base of his dick, and his tongue was rubbing against the sensitive underside. Mike's mouth was warm, wet, and soft around his dick.

Ari felt his orgasm building, and he continued to jerk Mike's dick as it thrust in and out of his mouth. He stuck his tongue into the slit, lightly pressing, and suddenly Ari's mouth was flooded with his lover's cum. It tasted sweeter than marshmallows and chocolate, and it set him over the edge. His own orgasm blasted through him like a freight train, and he spurted again and again in Mike's mouth, still swallowing down Mike's cum as he himself came.

They both moaned and swallowed, and it was like they were one being, just pleasure and joy and release. Ari hardly knew where he ended and Mike began. He was filled with such an intense ache for his s'more, and his chest almost hurt with the depth of the feeling. *I could do this forever*, he thought. All eternity would not be enough for them.

Eventually their orgasms came to an end, and when they were both done and slightly sensitive, they lay there, panting against each other's thighs. When their breathing had calmed, Ari grabbed Mike and pulled him up, both of them giggling a bit as they tried to turn Mike around and rearrange him up next to Ari.

They finally settled in with Mike's head on his shoulder, and Ari leaned down and kissed his s'more. "That was absolutely amazing. A+. Well done. You pass with flying colors," Ari praised, and Michael leaned over him, laughing, to look down at Ari.

Which is when Ari noticed the black leather cord around Mike's neck with a small marble-like stone or something dangling on it. Ari didn't know how he hadn't seen the necklace earlier. Or ever, actually, but he went to grab it in his hand, a shock of power flowed through him.

"Michael," Ari asked, "what are you wearing, and where did you get it?"

## CHAPTER 15

# MICHAEL

Michael was still in some kind of hazy sex afterglow, and the mood was light and giggly; Mike felt like he was practically floating. Sex had never been so easy and fun, but he guessed that just matched Ari, because *he* was easy and fun.

Then suddenly Ari was serious as hell and staring at his necklace. Ari went to grab it but let it go right away, and now he looked... Michael didn't even know.

Mike sat up and leaned against his headboard, and Ari scooched up and did the same, staring at the necklace the whole time. He reflexively wrapped his hand around the stone, which felt so warm that it was almost hot. It didn't matter, though; it gave him a sense of peace to hold it. He guessed that was from all the years he'd worn it—it had become a habit for him to hold it when he was super stressed or worrying, and it seemed to bring him some level of calm. He'd never thought too much about it before.

In fact, he never thought too much about the necklace at all, which was kind of weird now that he realized it. He had been given it at the same time as the book, yet he had never mentioned it in his retelling to anyone, even though he had thought about it before he'd decided to summon a demon.

That was odd.

Michael didn't realize how odd until just now. He just didn't talk about his necklace. People didn't notice it most of the time. Heck, he didn't even notice it himself half the time,

almost like it was just a part of him. You didn't notice your ears or your nose until someone called attention to them. The necklace was kind of like that.

“Umm, it's my necklace?” Mike answered, feeling a little like he was about to get in trouble. It was a silly feeling; he knew Ari wouldn't be mad at him—the demon just wasn't like that—but Michael also didn't think he'd ever seen Ari look so serious, and it was a little scary.

“You're making me nervous,” Mike blurted, and Ari looked up at his face then.

“I'm sorry, little dude,” he apologized, and he pulled Mike into his chest, hugging him and rubbing his back.

Mike relaxed in his embrace, taking a deep breath. “I don't know why I didn't tell you about the necklace. I just didn't think to, I guess. I should have. I didn't mean to withhold a key piece of information, I swear,” Mike rambled.

“Of course not, my sexy little s'more. I know that. But if you can, I'd like you to tell me about it now,” Ari prodded, his voice soft and calm.

Mike didn't know what it was about all of Ari's ridiculous nicknames for him, but it was like the last bit of nervousness fled and he could finally relax. If Ari was still calling him 's'more' or 'little dude' or whatever variation he came up with, then surely everything was fine. It was an oddly reassuring thing, but Mike didn't question it. He liked Ari just the way he was.

“I love all your nicknames for me,” Mike smiled.

“I'm glad, little dude, because you will always be my s'more,” Ari flirted.

Mike smiled against Ari's chest, just breathing in the demon's smell, which was comforting. He was still holding the necklace, even as he was snuggled up against Ari's chest, and he unclenched his fist and lowered his hand, leaning back so Ari could see it. He couldn't quite make himself take it off, though, and he figured there was no need for that unless Ari asked him to.

“I really don’t know why it didn’t occur to me to tell you. It’s kind of weird that I didn’t. I guess I just don’t think about it all that often. It showed up the same night as the book. I woke up in the morning, and there was the book, and it felt kind of scary, like a heavy obligation had landed on my shoulders. I picked up the book and I felt like it was a weight not just in my hands, but on every part of me. I don’t even know how to explain it,” Mike confessed.

“It’s ok, little dude, you’re doing fine,” Ari reassured him, but his eyes were glued to the necklace. Mike had to resist the urge to clutch it protectively in his fist again, although he knew instinctively that Ari wouldn’t, or couldn’t, hurt the necklace. Which was an odd thought to have.

“So I got the book, but the necklace was also there. It was already around my neck, and I remember picking up the book, and feeling all this responsibility and weight, and then I felt the necklace shift against my chest. I’m not even sure I’d realized it was there before that. I reached up and gripped it, and I just felt... calmer. Better. Like everything was a little less heavy. At the time I thought maybe the angel had given me the book to guide me and the necklace to comfort me.” Michael couldn’t help reaching up to feel the necklace again, and he felt less anxious doing so, almost like he was snuggled up against Ari’s chest getting a hug.

“It feels kind of like a hug,” Mike murmured. “Somewhere along the line, I don’t even know when, I stopped thinking about the necklace and the book coming from the same source. They didn’t *feel* the same, if that makes any sense. The book was clearly from the angel—I knew that. The necklace and the stone... I don’t know where that came from.”

When Mike paused, thinking about how he felt about the two items, Ari just waited patiently.

“I would have destroyed the book after everything that happened,” Mike continued. “I was so angry at the angel and the book and everything that had happened. I knew I needed it as evidence though, and it wasn’t practical to destroy it.”

“I would’ve run it over with a car, peed on it, and then set it on fire,” Ari fumed. “It brought you pain and suffering.”

Mike just chuckled. “I don’t know if it would have burned that well if it was soaked in pee.”

“I would’ve found a way,” Ari muttered darkly.

“I bet you would’ve come up with something even more creative and fun to destroy the book,” Mike smirked. His demon was fun-loving and carefree, and he took his vengeance with the same attitude

Ari hmm’d thoughtfully, and Mike could see the gears turning.

“No, we are not destroying the book. We might need it,” Mike laughed.

“But...” Ari started, a little bit of a whine in his voice.

“No!” Mike interrupted, trying to be stern while also laughing.

Ari’s eyes twinkled, and Mike leaned into him, hugging him. Ari wrapped his arms around Mike, and nothing had ever felt so much like home; Ari made him lighter just by being there.

“So, the point is, the necklace didn’t feel like that. The thought of destroying it, or even of taking it off, just feels... wrong. It’s like it’s a piece of me. It gives me comfort. It always has,” Mike finished.

Ari just hugged him tighter. “I think it’s ok, little dude. I don’t think we need to worry about the necklace, although I’d like to get a closer look at it at some point.”

Mike sort of reflexively tensed up, and Ari reassured him, “Not now, though. Let’s just bask in the excellent after orgasm glow, yeah?”

Mike laughed, and Ari scooped down, holding onto Mike the whole time, so that they were laying cuddled up together in bed.

It was lovely.

For about five minutes.

Ari was breathing deeply, and maybe he was even on his way to falling asleep, but Mike was wide awake and his mind was racing. They weren't much closer to figuring out who was responsible, but at least they had a viable list of suspects now. Mike was itching to write down all seven names and start profiling the archangels. Who would be most likely to try and destroy a demon? What motive could they have?

Sure, Ari liked to prank angels and demons, but he couldn't picture Ari doing anything truly malicious, certainly nothing that would warrant murder. Of course, that sort of depended on the person being pranked though, didn't it? He'd seen it as a cop—sometimes something that seemed innocent set a person over the edge.

Could the archangel be unstable? Could they have been teetering on the edge for some reason, and Ari's prank set them off? He needed to learn more about his suspects.

He already knew about Grandfather; he might get aggravated and roll his eyes, but as kids they'd certainly done some stupid things, and Grandfather had never once gotten angry. He just couldn't picture a prank setting him over the edge.

If that was what this was even about. Perhaps it was something else Ari had done. Or something that Ari represented. That was the problem with figuring out motive—you could look for all the usual reasons, but people, and he guessed angels, were complex.

He needed to broaden his thinking. He had no clue what went into afterlife politics, but based on various comments from Grandfather, demons, and even Az and now Ari, he had the feeling that things were pretty complex down there. Or up there. Or both. Whatever.

“Little dude?” Ari grumbled sleepily.

“Yeah?” Mike answered, still thinking about motive.

“You need to get up and brainstorm?” Ari asked.



And this was why Mike loved the demon. He knew just what Mike needed, always.

That thought literally froze him right after he had it, and Ari must have felt him tense up.

“It’s ok, little dude, we can get up and brainstorm. I wasn’t falling asleep,” Ari claimed, and Mike snorted at the outright lie, relaxing again.

Maybe Mike did love Ari, but he’d figure that out later, because right now his brain was focused on the puzzle of who was after Ari, so that’s what they’d work on.

“If you don’t mind too much,” Mike replied, already climbing out of bed.

“Mind?” Ari asked. “Bruh—it’s revenge. I will never, ever mind getting down to some vengeance.”



THEY’D STAYED up until the wee hours of the morning, and Michael’s living room wall looked like it belonged in either a precinct or else in a conspiracy theorist’s home. They’d managed to name all seven archangels, and Ari had helpfully, and quite humorously, drawn a sketch of each of them.

Michael somehow highly doubted that the pictures were accurate likenesses. Maybe caricatures was a better word for the drawings. Somehow Ari had made all the archangels look uptight beyond belief, and he’d exaggerated certain features of each. He’d even drawn little word bubbles next to some of them, and Michael couldn’t help but giggle when he looked at them.

Grandfather was drawn in armor and a helmet that was slightly crazy looking, and he was saying, “I shall both protect and destroy, because that makes totally no sense.” He was also pointing a sword rather threateningly at a cowering figure in the drawing, only the sword was probably the size of a pencil.

When Michael had asked Ari about it, the demon had just joked, “I can’t help the size of the sword he carries around,

little dude. I'm sure he makes it work. No size shaming here; I like weapons of all sizes." Then Ari had winked suggestively, and Michael had *almost* dragged him back into the bedroom, but he'd refrained. Barely.

By the time their wall of suspects was complete, they'd both been exhausted and had tumbled into bed, unfortunately without another orgasm. Michael had woken up first, and he'd slipped out of bed, careful not to wake Ari. He'd made his way to the kitchen to make some coffee, smiling as he saw the wall of suspects. He had always loved his work, but he didn't think he'd ever had such fun doing it.

Ari had given him that. As he poured himself a cup of coffee and made his way back to look at the wall, he couldn't help remembering yesterday's thought, which he had somehow pushed out of his head all last night.

Did he love Ari? He didn't know. He knew he loved being with Ari. He didn't think he'd ever laughed so much as he had since he'd met Ari. He was having fun. No matter what happened after this, he knew he would always look back on this time and smile; there were so many funny and silly memories, and Mike would cherish them all.

He also loved how Ari made him feel. He knew he was too serious. He was an overthinker. He was anxious. He worried too much. He knew all that, and he couldn't change it. But Ari didn't seem to mind any of that. His demon somehow had a way of getting him out of his head and of reassuring him. He almost snorted thinking about telling Ari about researching sex, yet the demon had made it all seem perfectly normal and ok. Michael didn't feel like he was awkward or weird around Ari.

He loved how Ari was always touching him and always calling him silly names. Maybe it didn't mean anything to the demon, because it was just his personality, but Mike would cherish every silly nickname and every hug. Ari had no idea how much those little things meant to Michael.

Michael's heart fluttered a little every time Ari put a hand on Mike's back to guide him, or every time he came over and

opened Mike's door and helped him out of the car, even every time he called Mike "little dude." Sure, it was probably silly, and some people might even be offended, but no one had ever treated Michael like he was something precious or something that needed to be taken care of. Michael had been doing the caretaking his whole life, and for the first time, he felt like someone was fully invested in taking care of him.

Of course Grams had taken care of him, but she had treated him like an equal in some ways. He didn't think that was her fault; she had loved him and taken care of him in every way that he would let her. He had been a serious child with the weight of raising his siblings on his shoulders, and he didn't think she could have changed that.

Somehow, though, it was ok to let Ari take care of him. Ari made him feel safe and loved through all the little things he did and said. Maybe Michael did love the demon, because how could he not? Ari was everything fun and lighthearted in Michael's life. He was just so... good. Which was kind of ironic, considering he was a demon.

As Mike drank his coffee, he thought about soulmates, and he wished that Ari could be his. It would be a lovely thought, to spend all of eternity with someone so playful and joyous, someone who made him feel so good. Someone who *was* so good.

Maybe he was overthinking this whole love thing, because he *did* love the person, or demon, rather, that Ari was. He loved every facet of his personality. Whether he was *in love* with Ari, well, he didn't know. He did know that Ari was right up there with his family in terms of how much he cared.

So yeah, soulmates would be awesome. But he doubted it. Because Ari sure did add a lot to his life. Ari made him loosen up and embrace fun. Ari comforted him and made him feel better about himself. Mike kinda figured that for someone to be your soulmate, things had to go both ways, and he didn't think he added much to Ari's life. He would be a better person for having known Ari. He would cherish these moments for all his life, but he kind of doubted that it was that way for Ari. The demon was kind and caring and carefree with everyone.

What could Michael possibly add to his life? In a few decades Ari probably wouldn't even remember him, which was a really depressing thought.

"Little dude, we'll figure it out. Don't be bummed," rumbled Ari's voice behind him, and then he felt the demon's arms come around, embracing him.

"I didn't hear you get up," Mike replied, holding his coffee cup up for Ari to take a sip.

"Ah, the sweet elixir of topside," breathed the demon as he grabbed the cup, slurping up some coffee.

Michael couldn't help but laugh, which was probably Ari's intention all along. He turned around in Ari's embrace and leaned up to give the demon a soft kiss on the lips, which Ari quickly took deeper.

"Mmmm, perhaps *this* is the sweet elixir of topside," Ari whispered.

Michael smiled, just resting his head against Ari's chest. Before long, though, he moved slightly so he could stare at their conspiracy board. He noticed Ari doing the same, even as the demon offered his coffee cup back to Mike. It was so damn domestic it almost killed Michael, and he was filled with a little spurt of simple contentment. He would enjoy each of these moments and try his hardest not to overthink.

"So, little dude, where do you think we should start," Ari questioned.

"Well, I do plan on calling Grandfather, and I'd like to do some research into each of the archangels. I know you don't have much knowledge of them, but I'm sure the internet has something useful—it does have a frightening amount of information about angels and demons. Before that, though, I think we should try and call the archangel Gabriel. After all, we might figure this out right away if Gabriel can tell us if he delivered the message and who he delivered it for," Mike replied.

"Totally, little dude. That ought to be easy peasy. Let's call ourselves a messenger. He's gonna be so excited to see me!"

Ari chortled, rubbing his hands together in glee.

Somehow, Michael sort of doubted that.

## CHAPTER 16

# ARIOCH

It had been three days, and Arioch was starting to get frustrated. He could not seem to call the archangel Gabriel no matter how hard he tried. Apparently any message he could think of for the various humans he knew just wasn't important enough.

If Ari didn't know how serious Kushiel was, he would think he'd been pranked. He knew his bro didn't roll that way, though, so he figured his messages just sucked. The problem was that Ari didn't really have anything important to tell any humans. He could *pretend* it was important, but obviously that wasn't cutting it.

His sexy little s'more had been using the time to be all kinds of productive; he could probably write an encyclopedia on archangels with all the research he'd done. Ari was sort of in awe at the methodical way he'd tackled the problem. His little dude could probably destroy the world if he set his mind to it. Ari actually *could* destroy the world—demon of chaos, after all—but he'd end up distracted along the way by a random conversation, and the next thing he knew, he'd have created six lane highways with on and off ramps on both sides of the highway. (He was really proud of those. The chaos was practically a work of art.)

So he hadn't actually set out to destroy the world that particular time, but he was supposed to destroy a town, or maybe it was an organization? He couldn't even remember, and that's why he didn't get jobs like that anymore. He just got

to go forth and spread chaos into the world, and he had a damned good time doing it.

“I got it!” he burst out. His little s’more looked up and nodded encouragingly, even though this was probably the hundredth time in the last few days he’d said that phrase.

“So I worked with Cass, right? He’s a respected dude. He’s got connections and shit. So he’s important! And I never told him, but I totally warded his back room so no one could bother me while I worked! I need to tell him that!” Ari exclaimed.

Then he waited for Gabriel to show up.

And he waited some more.

“Hmmm, maybe Cass already knows that somehow?” Michael asked.

Ari sighed dramatically. He really thought maybe that would work.

“It’s ok, Ari. We’ll figure it out,” Michael reassured him, getting up and coming over to hug him.

Aww, he loved that his sexy little s’more was comfortable enough now to just come over and hug him. It was so sweet. Ari hugged him back, resting his chin on his little dude’s head and squeezing him tight, which just made Mike laugh before he went back over to his computer and left Ari to brainstorm.

Ari walked over and threw himself on the couch, trying to think of something. So he hadn’t managed to call Gabriel, but the days (and nights) hadn’t been *totally* useless. He’d had other things to focus on as well—he’d been wooing his human.

Because he was pretty sure that Michael was his human. The necklace that Mike wore—Ari thought it might be a talisman. The angel who was matching up soulmates had talked about giving the other half of his soul a talisman, and the necklace felt powerful but not harmful. It felt familiar, which would make sense if it was made from one of his own feathers or some other part of his essence. So while they’d spent their days researching and joking, Ari had also spent



plenty of time flirting with his sweet s'more in the hopes of winning him over.

Ok, maybe he'd also ended up making corrections and additions on the web page devoted to the demon Arioch. And yes, maybe he'd also gotten into a heated debate with some internet troll about whether or not Arioch was responsible for natural disasters. Bruh, those were totally *not* his area, but the idiot kept arguing with him, and he'd been about to curse the dude with some boils or something, but his sweetheart had peeked over his shoulder, laughed hysterically at the entire exchange, and talked him out of unleashing a plague.

Then there were the evenings. They'd invariably fall into bed together after a day of work. They hadn't progressed past mutual blowjobs and sixty-nining, but Ari was in no rush. He would be a happy demon if he got to taste his s'more every day. Mike seemed to really enjoy perfecting his oral skills as well, and Ari certainly didn't mind being his test subject and providing lots of encouragement. His little dude was a perfectionist, and Ari wasn't complaining. Nope, not at all.

Maybe Ari should have taken a closer look at the necklace by now, but he hadn't. Maybe he also should have told Mike the extent of his vision by now too, but he hadn't done that either.

He didn't want to crush his s'more if they weren't soulmates. Plus, Ari had already decided he was keeping Mike anyway, soulmate or not. If he were honest with himself, though, that wasn't the reason he hadn't said anything.

He just kept thinking of the angel saying that humans had free will, and that a human could reject their soulmate. His s'more was so smart, so focused, so driven, and Ari... well, Ari knew exactly what he was. He was chaos and silliness. He was a whirling tornado, and Mike was a steadfast mountain. They were just so very different.

But Ari was keeping his human, heaven and hell be damned, and he was going to make sure to win Mike over before he hit him with the whole soulmate thing, because he

did *not* want to give him the chance to reject the bond. He didn't know how that worked, and he didn't want to find out.

Ari almost didn't recognize himself. Look at him, being all responsible. Thinking ahead. Or some shit like that. He wasn't gonna chance bad shit going down; he was gonna make sure that Mike was his soulmate, and then he was gonna make sure Mike cared enough about him to not deny the bond.

He looked over at his sexy human, who was still taking notes. He had no idea how his little dude could stay so focused for so long, but he appreciated it. They had a lot to work with, all thanks to Mike. Now if only Ari could complete his end of the revenge and call the damned messenger archangel.

When Ari sighed at his own shortcoming, Mike looked up at him, putting his pencil down and coming over to sit on the couch next to Ari and snuggle in. Ari lifted his arm and welcomed the snuggles.

"I think it's time we called Grandfather," his s'more declared.

Ari groaned. "Do we have to? He's such a pain in the ass. I ran into him once when we had a mutual interest, and he was all like, 'You can't start a war by dumping some tea in water, demon.' He had these detailed plans all drawn up and was apparently gonna draft some memo or something for the good of the new country. Well, let me tell you, a little chaos certainly helps the road to freedom," Ari grouched.

"Are you telling me..." Mike started, but his s'more started laughing too hard to finish the sentence.

"Things worked out, anyway," Ari grumbled. "He should have *thanked* me. Stupid uptight angel."

Eventually his little dude's giggles died down, and Mike wiped the tears from his eyes. Ari just snuggled him closer, smiling at him.

"I love how you make me laugh," Mike murmured.

Ari squeezed him tight, feeling happiness blossom in his chest. "Always, little dude. I will always try to make you laugh. I'll do anything you need. Even talk to your uptight

grandfather. But,” he added, “I can’t promise no pranks. He’s just too easy to rile up.”

Mike just giggled, and Ari loved the sound.

They snuggled for another few minutes, both of them just reveling in the moment. At least Ari was; his little dude was probably solving the world’s problems in his head, because he was sort of brilliant like that.

Mike eventually gave a bit of a sigh and sat up, disentangling himself from Ari’s arms.

“Well, I guess there’s no use putting it off. Might as well call him,” Mike admitted, and Ari sensed definite hesitance in his little dude as he climbed off the couch.

Ari got up after him. He had an idea that Mike was nervous about seeing his grandfather, so he tried to lighten the mood. “Ohhh, can I be the first one he sees? Pretty please? It’ll be hysterical! He’ll be so aggravated!”

Mike chuckled, loosening up a tiny bit. “Sure,” Mike replied, grabbing a piece of chalk out of the coffee table drawer and starting to draw on the wall. “The chalk dissipates, don’t worry,” he added.

“Little dude,” Ari admonished, “ancient runes should *always* be drawn in permanent marker, so hundreds of years from now they can be discovered by some unsuspecting busybody and all hell, or all heaven, can break loose.”

His little s’more just gave him some side eye at that, continuing to draw, but there was a little smirk there too.

Ari shook his head sarcastically. “It’s like you have learned nothing of chaos from me,” he tsked.

Michael just chuckled, finished the runes, then muttered in Latin under his breath. As he did, he stepped out of the way. Oh goody, he actually was gonna let the archangel see Ari first.

There was a pulse of magic from the runes, and then the chalk floated up into the air and dispersed, just as Mike had promised. Bummer.

Ari waited, watching the living room. Then he waited some more. Then he looked at the clock on the wall.

“Bruh, Granddaddy is late,” he grumbled.

And as if on cue, the archangel Michael appeared in front of Ari. He didn’t have a sword, but he was wearing his polished armor and looking all shiny. Ari rolled his eyes a little bit.

“YOU!” the archangel intoned, pointing his arm out all serious like.

Ari smirked. “Mikey! Bruh! So good to see you, my man!” he drawled.

“What are you doing here? What have you done with the fruit of my loins, you miscreant?” Michael demanded.

“Dude, ewwww. I ain’t doing anything with your fruit, so don’t be a dickbag,” Ari griped, then he fake gagged, because he was not getting within a mile of the archangel’s “fruit.” It had exactly the effect he wanted, though, because he heard his little dude giggle from the other side of the room.

Archangel Michael also heard, because he directed his attention toward his s’more, frowning. “Why are you cavorting with this scoundrel? Has he harmed you? I shall smite him if he has harmed a hair on your head,” Michael boomed.

Well, Ari guessed he had to give the guy a little respect. He could appreciate some overprotectiveness, especially when it came to his s’more.

“No Grandfather, I actually summoned him to help me,” Mike replied, getting serious. “It’s why I called you forth as well.”

“Surely I could have assisted you with whatever you needed, namesake. You had no need for this philistine,” the archangel sniffed, all haughty and superior.

“Hey Gramps, I like culture. Those movies about being hungover were some of my finest works of inspiration in humans,” Ari chimed in, pleased to see the archangel horrified

by being called “Gramps” by a demon. Ari plopped onto the couch and lounged back, just because he knew it would annoy the archangel even more that he was comfy in Mike’s apartment.

Sure enough, the archangel just sputtered, annoyed, looking back and forth from Mike to Ari. His attention was snagged, however, by what Mike jokingly referred to as the “serial killer wall.” He strode over to it, examining it.

Well, Ari guessed the fun was over. So like the archangel; they couldn’t even get a good roast of each other going. All business, all the time. He was so glad he was teaching his little dude the joy of joking and having fun even on a serious job. Life was too short for mortals not to laugh.

“What is this?” the archangel asked. “I can certainly guess who contributed the art,” he added, shooting Ari a dirty look. Ari just smirked.

Michael walked over to the wall as well, letting out a long breath. “We’re investigating,” Michael admitted.

The archangel’s eyebrow raised and he turned to stare at Mike. “Investigating archangels? Whatever for? They are archangels; there is nothing to investigate,” he defended. He noticed his own name and picture then. He shot Ari a dirty look, but he also looked a bit hurt, if Ari was any judge of things.

Maybe Gramps wasn’t the guilty party.

Ari cut in, “Someone set up your namesake here. Gave him a book with purpose to try and destroy any Infernal Kings he might run into. You can imagine how upsetting it was to him to find out he almost destroyed his brother’s soulmate. Imagine only wanting to protect your family and instead almost being a cause for its destruction.”

Yeah, Ari was laying it on a little thick, and he didn’t want his s’more to feel bad, so he walked over and tucked his little dude under his arm, giving him a reassuring squeeze before looking over at Gramps.

The archangel looked slightly mortified at their familiarity, but he also looked slightly guilty.

“I had no idea that they were soulmates,” Gramps defended. “I only heard that a demon of lust was plotting against one of my kin, so when Michael called me, I of course suspected the worst.”

“Where did you hear that?” his s’more asked sharply.

“I... I’m not sure,” Gramps answered, looking a bit surprised.

“I didn’t think much about it, but when I did contact you, I barely got out that Gabe was hanging out with an Infernal King of the Underworld before you said you were on your way to take care of the problem. I definitely didn’t expect you to show up with a sword, but by then things had definitely spiraled so far out of my control...” his little dude trailed off, looking back at Ari. “Do you think someone set Grandfather up as well?” he asked.

Ari looked at the archangel thoughtfully. “Someone fucked with your ‘kin,’ Gramps. Someone set you up. You really telling me you don’t remember who?”

The archangel looked back at the wall. “We were at a board meeting; all the archangels were there. Even Jerahmeel, who isn’t *quite* an archangel, was there. Assistants were there as well. It was quite the packed meeting. We discussed the state of topside and debriefed, and you know how everyone likes meetings, so it carried on for quite some time.”

“Nah, Gramps, we keep meetings to a minimum in the underworld. We invented the pointless meeting to waste time; leave it to heaven to actually *enjoy* them.” Ari gave a dramatic shudder, and Mike chuckled against his side.

“At any rate, at some point someone mentioned lust demons targeting Nephilim. I only overheard it, but my ears latched onto it, because of course I watch out for my kin. I’m not sure who said it, though. I don’t think it was one of the archangel’s. A side conversation amongst assistants, I think.

Even if I did know, I have no idea which assistant belongs to which department,” Gramps finished.

Michael ducked out from under his arm and faced off against the archangel. “You didn’t give me the book? You aren’t trying to have Ari destroyed?” he questioned.

His little dude was such a badass, facing up against an archangel and demanding answers.

“Destroy Arioch?” Gramps looked over helplessly at Ari. “Why would I try to destroy Arioch? Yes, he is an insufferable demon, but he is doing his job. We all have jobs to do, and I cannot fault demons or angels doing their job.”

Mike looked over at Ari, and Ari nodded his head. Yeah, he figured Gramps had been played, just like his s’more had been.

Ari couldn’t help but ask, though. “You aren’t trying to interfere with soul mates? You aren’t trying to...” Ari paused, thinking of what the cute little angel had said. “You aren’t trying to destabilize the current infrastructure, or some shit like that?” he finished.

He must have gotten it right, because the archangel demanded, “Where did you hear that phrase?”

“Dude, visions, remember? I *know* shit, Gramps,” Ari responded smugly.

The archangel pinched his nose, and for the first time, his unflappable nature looked... well, flapped, Ari guessed.

“There have been rumors...” he murmured. “Of course, I cut them off. No use having anyone panic. But a few have seen the cracks, and even I cannot stop the talk about the End of Days.”

“Gramps... err, I mean, Grandfather?” Mike questioned.

Archangel Michael took his hand from his face, and he looked... old. Tired. Ari had never seen him look that way.

“I am the first, you know. The Supreme Archangel. I was created from Yah before any of the other angels, and I was tasked with being the Protector of Mankind. My job is to

deliver the people from injustice, and I have worked at that job through the ages, always, and I have taken pride in what I have done. All our jobs have to do with mankind. Without mankind, we have no purpose. We have nothing.” The archangel looked back at the wall, scanning the faces of all the archangels.

“There are rumors, though, of things breaking down. Was mankind meant to continue for all eternity? Only Yah knows the answer to that. Of course there have always been rumors of an end to things, but who could wish that? We would be out of jobs. We would have no purpose. Angels exist to have purpose.” The archangel traced his hands along the wall, as if by touching each picture he could divine who they were looking for.

“If soulmates exist, Yah has willed it,” he continued. “For someone to try and thwart the will of the Creator—that is an abomination. Even taking that aspect away, for an archangel to wish for an end to mankind...” he stopped, looking over at Mike and Ari. “It would be our destruction as we know it. It would be an erasure of our purpose, and thus of ourselves. It would require such a level of disdain for the jobs we work so hard at. I cannot fathom that any angel, especially an archangel, could wish such a thing.”

Gramps looked pretty damn troubled now, and Ari couldn’t blame him. He was pretty damn troubled himself. “You think someone is trying to destroy mankind?” Ari asked.

“I think... Well, I think things are breaking down, and I think that soulmates are slowing that breakdown, somehow. It is beyond my ken to understand the specifics, but Yah has willed soulmates, and things are more... at peace since they have started finding one another. I did not see it at first, but I can *feel* it now. I do not know if that is because I am closest to Yah of all the archangels. I cannot fathom that anyone who is trying to break apart soulmates truly knows what they are doing,” the archangel defended. “Perhaps they think... I do not know, but surely they do not understand that they are hastening a breakdown.”

“Bruh, hate to break it to you, but they know. They definitely know *exactly* what they’re doing,” Ari countered.



The archangel looked at him helplessly. “What can I do?”

“Find out who gave your descendant that book,” Ari answered, and his little s’more walked over and grabbed the book from a drawer, handing it over to the archangel.

Gramps flipped it open, eyebrows raising at the inscription. He looked back at Ari and Mike then. “It was aimed at your destruction?” he asked Ari.

Ari simply nodded.

“I shall endeavor to assist, but the board does not meet for another year, so it will take some effort to find and question the other archangels. Nevertheless, I shall support you however I can. We are all quite busy, though, you know.” He lifted his hand with the book, and the book disappeared, which was kind of a nifty trick.

Ari reached over and pulled his s’more back under his arm, and Gramps just looked between the two of them. “Are two of my children blessed?” he asked.

Ari knew exactly what the archangel was asking, but he didn’t explain. He only said, “I’m keeping him.”

The archangel nodded like he understood, and perhaps he did, because he confided, “There was once a mortal I wished to keep. She is why I have kin topside. I kept her as long as I could, but mortals die.” He looked melancholy for a moment.

“Do you see her in heaven?” his s’more asked.

“I was... I was not the same then. I was driven. I was working, always. Humans need so much protecting. She was... lonely, I think, and she could not leave the afterlife. She chose reincarnation. I have searched for her soul for centuries, but I have not found it...” he trailed off, then he slipped his sadness off like a cloak and he was once again the uptight, stiff archangel that Ari expected.

“It is neither here nor there. The point is that someone works against Yah’s plans, and I shall uncover this plot against the Creator.” He inclined his head at them, and then he was gone.

His little s'more reached up and pulled Ari's head down for a kiss. It was sweet but short, then his little dude pulled away and looked him in the eyes.

“I think you better explain the vision you had, Ari. We never did go over it in depth.”

His s'more was too damn smart. Ari sighed. “Yes, I guess it is time we talked.”

## CHAPTER 17

# MICHAEL

Mike's heart had felt like it would burst when Ari had said, "I'm keeping him," but it had also felt like it was crumbling, because he was pretty sure Grandfather had just asked Ari if they were soulmates, and Ari had not said they were.

Mike tried not to jump to worst case scenarios, though. He supposed Ari might not have understood the question, or Ari himself might not even know. Obviously the demon was fond enough of him to "keep him," so that was something.

It was hard not to be greedy, though. He saw how deliriously happy his brother and Az were, and could anyone blame him for wanting the same?

Still, it was time to get answers. He had hidden his head in the sand for long enough, which wasn't like him. Perhaps it was like him when it came to his personal life, but this involved a case, and he wouldn't let his fears get in the way of protecting his family or Ari. He was missing information, and it was time to get it all out there.

Of course, when Ari said they were going to "talk," a part of Mike withered a bit inside. Didn't everyone dread those words in a relationship? They never boded well.

But he blew out a breath and walked over to sit on the couch. He was a grown man, and it didn't seem like things were totally without hope. If Ari was keeping him, he'd at least have his demon for a little while longer. Heck, his whole life was probably like a blink to Ari. Perhaps he'd have years

of happiness before Ari needed to leave. He wouldn't be selfish; he'd take what he could get.

“So what was in the vision?” Mike asked.

Ari came and sat down next to him, taking his hands, which he realized had a death grip on each other.

“Relax, little dude, it'll be ok. We'll figure it out together, yeah?” Ari assured him. “It was like I said, some little angel dude was trying to fix the universe or something, and soulmates was how he was gonna do that. Some archangel was there, and he was gonna sabotage things. He took something from the angel dude and then left, and then the angel dude muttered to himself about trying to stop the sabotage. I think I was the target, but I couldn't read the entirety of what the bad dude took. Little angel dude then muttered something about giving a talisman to the mortal who was gonna be targeted by the bad dude.”

Mike took his hands out of Ari's, reached into his shirt, and grabbed his necklace, enclosing it within his fist. It had to be the talisman that Ari spoke of, and it would explain why the necklace seemed so different from the book.

“My necklace?” he asked. “You think my necklace is the talisman?”

“I kinda do, little dude. At first I wondered if the bad dude just chose any strong Nephilim to target me, because I'd never noticed a talisman on you, but when I saw the necklace, I wondered. I should have examined it before now, but somehow it just keeps sort of slipping my mind,” Ari admitted sheepishly.

“It slipped mine too. I wonder if that's part of what it does. I don't think I've ever told anyone about it except you. Most people don't even notice it. You didn't notice it either, not until we were...” Mike trailed off, blushing furiously.

Ari smiled and winked at him. “I know, my sexy s'more. I did notice it, but then it sort of left my head again.” Ari shrugged.

“But it didn’t feel evil or ill-intentioned, right?” Mike asked.

“Nah, little dude. It felt... familiar. Which would make sense. I think the angel dude was gonna use a part of my essence to make the talisman. If it was made from one of my feathers or something like that, it would call to me, and I probably wouldn’t notice it much. It’s me, after all. If it *is* me,” he finished.

Mike sat and absorbed that. In some ways, it made sense. He had often used his necklace to give him a sense of peace. It was kind of ironic, since Ari was a chaos demon, but getting a hug from him felt warm and wonderful and soothing. Holding the necklace had given him that same feeling, if to a far lesser extent.

“So what do we do?” Mike asked, still clutching his necklace.

“I ought to take a look at it,” Ari replied, and then he let Mike absorb that.

Mike had never let anyone else touch his necklace. The thought of taking it off felt... wrong. Nevertheless, he opened his fist and let Ari lean in to look more closely at the stone. He didn’t even flinch when Ari’s hand hesitantly reached up toward the necklace. He trusted Ari.

It was just... if the necklace was a part of Ari’s essence, might that explain why the demon was attracted to him? Maybe Ari was only fond of him because he literally had a piece of the demon attached to himself. Maybe that was part of the talisman’s charm. Maybe it made them like each other.

For Mike, it might have started that way, but even if the necklace was gone, he couldn’t imagine feeling any differently toward Ari. He loved Ari. He could admit it, at least to himself. He loved how the demon comforted him and made him take a step back from all the seriousness. He loved how Ari made him laugh, yet the demon never laughed at him. He was so much better with Ari in his life.

But what about Ari? Maybe it made him a terrible person, but if Ari liking him was the work of some magical necklace, then fuck it—he'd wear the necklace until he died. He didn't care if some angel had made Ari like him; he didn't want to give it up. He almost closed his fist back around the necklace, but then he remembered that Ari's very existence was at stake. If this necklace was somehow a clue, he couldn't be selfish and risk Ari's safety.

It was like Ari sensed his worry, because his demon stopped just shy of touching it, looking up at him.

“What will happen if it is of your essence?” Mike asked hesitantly.

“Well, little dude, if it is me, then there's a good chance I can just reabsorb it,” he replied, looking at Mike's face, searching for... Mike wasn't sure what.

“We need to know, though, right? We need to know if it isn't your talisman, because if it isn't, then there's someone out there wearing your talisman who is still tasked with killing you. And if it isn't yours, then it's someone's, and maybe I was tasked with killing another Infernal King for some reason. Without knowing the archangel's exact motive or thought process, we can't guess,” Mike finished resolutely.

He thought Ari looked vaguely guilty at that, and he idly wondered if his demon had a soulmate out there. It made sense, didn't it? Maybe Mike was tasked with killing Ari so he couldn't find his soulmate, and maybe Ari knew that. The demon wouldn't tell Mike that, though, because he was too kind, and surely he knew that Mike cared for him. How do you tell someone they're Mr. Right Now, but not Mr. Forever? Ari wouldn't do that to him.

Before Mike could fall too far down that rabbit hole, though, Ari's hand was reaching out, a finger gently touching the necklace.

It was as if Mike was basking in sunshine. He closed his eyes as he felt warmth and laughter envelope him, like a hug that surrounded his very soul. In the next moment, though, he felt it drawing away from him. He almost cried out in dismay

as his eyes shot open. He watched, amazed and yet not surprised, as the stone at the end of the leather necklace he had worn since he was a child turned into a sort of liquid. The dark, roiling colors seeped into the finger that was pressed against the stone, until eventually there was nothing left at the end of the leather cord tied around his neck.

Mike felt cold. He let his hand drop, and the leather cord fell off his neck. Ari was looking bemusedly at his finger, and Mike had the urge to climb into his demon's lap. Only he didn't know if he was welcome anymore, did he?

Mike shivered; he felt like was drenched in ice water. His lip quivered and his teeth chattered for a moment before he clenched his jaw, but Ari heard the sound and looked up at him. The demon looked happy, thrilled, even, and why wouldn't he be? At least no one else was out to kill him.

"Little dude?" Ari asked, the smile not quite dimming from his face.

Mike tried to answer, to reassure Ari that he was just fine, but he couldn't seem to unclench his jaw, and without any intention on his part, a tear leaked from one eye. He used a clenched fist to brush it away, but it was replaced by another quickly enough.

He had to get ahold of himself. He'd find out soon enough if Ari still wanted him, and turning into a blubbering mess wouldn't solve anything. He couldn't seem to help it, though.

"S'more? What is it? Are you hurt?" Ari worried, grabbing Mike's hands in his own and then rubbing his arms before pulling him into a hug.

"Little dude! You're freezing!" Ari cried. "Did I hurt you? Baby, I didn't mean to hurt you. I'll make it ok; I promise I will," Ari swore, and the demon picked him up and carried him into the bedroom, placing him on the bed.

Mike had stopped tearing up. Being called Ari's s'more and little dude and hearing Ari's concern made him think that at least the demon still cared for him, so his emotions were



starting to even out a little, but he was still so damn cold. He could barely unclench his teeth to reassure Ari.

“I’m-m-m ok-k-k,” Mike managed to stutter out, but Ari was frantically pulling off Mike’s clothes, which made no sense if Mike was cold. Then Ari was frantically pulling off his own clothes, and before he knew it they were both naked and Ari had grabbed him and hauled him under the covers, wrapping his giant, inferno of a body around Mike.

It felt... heavenly. Mike snorted a bit at that thought, but Ari just kept rubbing up his arms and down his back and murmuring “It’s ok, little dude, I got you,” or some variation of that in Mike’s ear.

Eventually Mike started to feel warm again, and Ari’s hands grew less frantic. Mike felt like he could talk without his teeth clattering, but it was like the two of them were in a cocoon of warmth and happiness, and Mike had no desire to break the spell with silly things like reality.

Ari eventually let out a long breath, though, and murmured, “You scared me, little dude. You alright now?”

Mike almost wished he could say no, just because he didn’t want Ari’s hands to stop their gentle caresses.

“Yeah,” he mumbled into Ari’s chest. “I was just... really cold, and really sad, and I don’t know why.”

Ok, so Mike might have known why he was sad, but his reaction had been extreme. Ari cuddling him and calling him pet names had done a lot to ease his concern that suddenly the demon would dislike him or something, which seemed like a silly thought, now that it hadn’t actually happened.

“I was just worried,” Mike mumbled, not really thinking.

“Worried about what, my s’more?” Ari inquired.

Mike shifted around a bit, bringing one hand up to rub Ari’s chest. When he grazed over Ari’s nipple and heard a sharp intake of breath, he smiled a bit to himself.

“Little dude,” Ari warned, “you will not distract me. What were you worried about? I can’t fix it if I don’t know what it

is.”

Wasn't that just like his demon? He did always fix Mike's worries. Mike almost teared up again, but Ari's hands made it down to his butt, a firm squeeze distracting him quite thoroughly from any melancholy concerns over the future.

“I guess I just wondered if maybe part of why you were interested in me might have been because I wore your essence, or whatever it was.” Mike blushed, feeling foolish even as he admitted it. “Then when it was gone, I felt really cold and alone, and it just seemed to confirm that maybe you would be gone too, or something like that.”

Ari hmphed before pulling back and staring into Mike's eyes. “My s'more, I will never be gone from you. Do you understand? I meant it. I'm keeping you.”

Mike searched the demon's eyes—they were dark and swirling night skies, but they held total seriousness. He wasn't used to seeing them so serious; his demon was meant to look full of fun and mischief. Mike knew he was avoiding things, but he gave Ari's nipple a tweak, which made the demon moan and squeeze Mike's ass again in his huge hands.

He realized with some level of surprise that he was hard. When he rubbed against Ari and felt the demon's own hard dick pressing up against his thigh, he was suddenly overcome with desire.

“I need you,” he whispered, reaching a hand up to caress the beard on Ari's face. “I need to feel you inside me.”

Yeah, Mike was definitely nervous. He'd gotten so sucked into research on archangels that he hadn't really had time to research gay sex, and so far he and Ari had only done blowjobs. (Ok, so maybe he'd taken a quick detour and searched anal sex preparation, and most sites seemed to agree that going to the bathroom and a quick wash up were sufficient. Mike was rather mortified to discuss bathroom habits, but he was all set in that category, and he'd showered earlier, so he figured he didn't need to ask about that part of things.)

Despite any nervousness, he really wanted to feel Ari inside him. He craved it, even though he had no idea what to expect or how it would feel. He'd never really been adventurous, and he'd never done anything with his ass with girlfriends, or even by himself. He only knew he needed Ari to be a part of him. He needed it like he needed air.

"It's ok, little dude. We'll figure it out together. We'll go slow," Ari murmured, squeezing his ass again and pulling his cheeks apart a bit at the same time. He wanted those hands to move, for a finger to rub against his hole.

"I don't want to go slow. I want you to play with my ass, and then I want you to make love to me," Mike confessed, blushing a bit as he spoke. "You'll tell me what to do, won't you?"

Ari grinned widely at him, and that hint of mischief was back in his eyes.

"My sexy s'more, we can do anything that feels good, but of course I'll show you exactly what to do," he winked.

Then Ari was pulling him up to kiss him, and like he could read Mike's mind, his finger slowly began to caress his hole. It felt... wow. Mike didn't even have words. Who knew someone rubbing his ass would feel so awesome? Definitely not him.

They were kissing, tongues gently licking at each other, an occasional nibble on each other's lips, and without even being aware of what he was doing, Mike was rubbing his cock against Ari's stomach. The sensations all blended together into a lusty haze, and they stayed like that, enjoying each other, just rubbing and kissing and feeling.

Before too long, though, Mike needed more. He wasn't even sure what, but he pulled back and groaned out, "Ari."

"I know, little dude. I got you," Ari whispered into his ear, then he licked and nibbled at it, and holy shit, Mike didn't know his ear was such an erogenous zone.

Ari sat up, leaned against the headboard, and pulled Mike on top of him. Mike was glad he was pretty flexible, or he

wouldn't even be able to straddle his demon. Ari was huge and thick, and damn, it turned Mike on to be on top of him. When Ari pulled him close, he felt their dicks rub against each other, and he couldn't help the groan that escaped his mouth.

Ari's huge hands pulled him closer by his ass cheeks, and his demon leaned down to kiss Mike again. As Ari's tongue invaded his mouth, their dicks pressed together, and Mike moved his hips to feel the delicious friction against his cock.

"Please, Ari," he begged. It felt so good, but he wanted Ari's dick inside him. It was all he could think about.

Ari groaned, and then his demon's finger was back on Mike's hole, and it was gently pressing. It felt wet and slick, and Mike didn't even ask. Who needed lube, apparently, when demonic powers came into play?

A finger slipped into his ass, and Mike rested his head against Ari's chest, panting. It felt... Mike didn't know *how* it felt. Weird? Kinda good? Weird. Was he supposed to do something?

"Look at me, baby," Ari breathed, and Mike lifted his face until they were staring into each other's eyes. "Just breathe, my sexy s'more. Just breathe. You are so tight and hot around my finger. So sexy. You don't have to do anything but feel me inside you."

It was like Ari's words lit some kind of fire deep in Mike's belly. He felt hot and wiggly, and he rubbed against Ari, their dicks pressing against each other, hard and hot and wet with precum. It also made the finger in him move, and the combo felt amazing.

Then a second finger was pressing in, and Mike was staring into Ari's eyes, and his demon looked so soft and warm and... loving. He was staring at Mike with something like adoration.

"So hot and tight," Ari whispered again. "Just lay there and feel, baby. Feel me inside you, rubbing you, stretching you. So good for me."

Mike groaned, because fuck, those fingers were moving, and there was a stretch and pressure, but it also felt good, and Ari's words were only making it hotter.

"Ari," Mike groaned. He couldn't seem to stop moving his hips, gently fucking himself on Ari's finger while rubbing against his demon's cock.

"Yeah, baby? Do you feel me inside you?"

Then those fingers were even deeper, and Mike had a moment to think about how fucking massive Ari's hands and fingers were, then they rubbed against something inside him. It almost felt like he had to pee, like a pressure in his dick even though the fingers were in his ass, but it felt good at the same time. Mike couldn't process all the sensations. It was so different but so good at the same time.

"Ari!" Mike whimpered, closing his eyes and getting lost in the sensations

"Shhh, baby, it's ok. Does it feel good? Your hard cock is leaking on me and it's so fucking sexy. Do you like my fingers touching you deep inside? Think about my cock in there, baby, rubbing up against you. It'll feel so good for both of us," Ari murmured.

"It'll be too big," Mike said, his eyes shooting open to look into Ari's eyes again. He was immediately lost in their depths.

He stared into the swirling orbs, so full of love and care, as he felt more pressure at his hole. There was a burn and a stretch, and he groaned out, "God, Ari, I can't..."

"You can, my sexy s'more. You were made for me, and you can. Breathe, baby. You're doing so good. Doing everything right. You feel so good to me. Does it feel good? Tell me how it feels," Ari demanded.

"God, Ari, you have... fuck, you have three fingers in me, don't you? I feel so full. It burns, but it feels good, too... Ari, please," Mike groaned, and those fingers moved, stretching out a little.

Mike was panting as Ari was rubbing inside him. Those fingers were pressing into his inner channel, then Ari slid them

partly out, and Mike whimpered, then they were pushed back in, and holy shit. Ari was gently rocking his hips now too, and he felt the glide as Ari's shaft rubbed against his and bumped against the sensitive underside of the head of his cock. It was too much and yet not enough. He felt his orgasm close, but he wasn't ready yet.

"Please, Ari, I want you inside me. I want to make you feel good. Please make love to me," Mike begged.

"Oh my sexy little s'more—you always make me feel good. Always, do you understand? You are everything to me," Ari insisted, and Mike looked into those eyes, and he saw only truth.

He closed his eyes and lifted himself off Ari's fingers, ready to feel Ari's cock inside him. He needed Ari to get lost in pleasure too.

Ari pulled him down for a kiss, though, and it was warm and soft and sweet, and Mike almost wanted to cry at the tenderness. It was too much.

"Please," he murmured again when their lips separated, and then Ari suddenly flipped Mike over onto his back, and Mike was momentarily disoriented by the abrupt change in position. He blinked as Ari loomed above him, and he saw wings fanning out behind his demon. He would have sworn Ari was an angel, then, looking down on him with love, shining darkly, wings outstretched, the feathers so pure black they seemed to be iridescent.

"Look at me, baby. Look into my eyes while I make love to you," Ari demanded.

Mike pulled his gaze from the marvel of Ari's form and was again lost in those dark, swirling eyes. It was almost like he could see everything—all the moments between them, all the laughter and joking, all the tender touches, and mixed in with all the flashes of the past were flashes that he didn't recognize, like there were a million moments of joy and laughter and tenderness yet to come.

He heard panting, and Mike realized it was him, and Ari's cock was *huge*, and it was pressing into him, and he had a moment to think, *yup, definitely won't fit*. But then it was like he saw a million moments of them making love, of their groaning, writhing bodies. He still felt the pressure and burn, but it was a good feeling, like he was being owned from the inside out.

Ari's hands clasped both of his, and their fingers intertwined, and Mike was back in the current moment, staring into those eyes, and he could only think, *I love you, I love you, I love you*, over and over again, but no words came.

Ari was inside of him. His demon was *inside* him. Mike didn't know what he'd expected, but it wasn't this. He'd thought there would be some discomfort, maybe some awkwardness and worry, but he hadn't quite believed it would feel good. He'd wanted to give this to Ari, wanted to feel a connection, but he didn't realize how fucking amazing it would feel. He didn't realize how *owned* he would feel.

"Fuck, my sweet s'more. You're so fucking good for me. Your ass is squeezing me so good. I'm inside you, baby, and it feels fucking amazing. You feel fucking amazing. Demons, you are so fucking sexy," Ari murmured.

Ari was moving, and their hands were gripped together, and the slide in and out was... fuck, Mike didn't even have words. Then the burn faded even more, and the slow, leisurely pace Ari was setting suddenly wasn't enough.

"More," Mike whimpered, and Ari grinned wickedly at him. Mike couldn't help adding, "You're so beautiful," even though he blushed when he said it.

Then Ari was *really* moving, and Mike's dick was caught between their bodies, rubbing against Ari's hard abs, and Ari was pounding into his ass.

Mike felt like he was going to fly apart into a thousand pieces. The pleasure was everywhere. Each thrust of Ari's dick sent a shockwave through his entire body; Ari was hitting something inside him that made his dick twitch, and he groaned in bliss.

He would've played with his ass a lot sooner if he knew it felt like this. Fuck.

Mike didn't even realize he had closed his eyes until Ari growled out, "Look at me, baby."

He opened his eyes, and there was Ari, always Ari, staring down at him. He looked fierce and beautiful and fucking sexy beyond all imagining. Mike could barely contain all the feelings. It was like they were bubbling up out of his soul.

He loved this demon, with all his heart, all his soul. Every bit of his neurotic, uptight self loved and *needed* Ari in his life.

Mike felt their sweat-slicked bodies rubbing against each other, felt Ari inside of him, and it was like he was being bound to Ari, tied up with a million tiny, glowing chains with every thrust, only it wasn't constraining. It was like Mike was finally free.

It was too much, and the orgasm was rushing through Mike before he could even process it.

"Yes, baby, come with me. Look at me, and come with me," Ari growled, and Mike couldn't look away. He felt like his soul was pouring out of his cock, and he felt Ari's dick pulsing inside him and knew that the demon was coming too, and it was too much, so much, more than he could ever imagine, and the last thing he saw as his world exploded in pleasure was those dark, swirling eyes consuming him.



## CHAPTER 18

# ARIOCH

Arioch snuggled his sweet, sexy little s'more up against his chest. He would've been worried, because his little dude had sort of checked out after their orgasms, but Mike was contentedly snuffling in his sleep.

It was fucking adorable.

Ari would have said he had experienced everything there was to experience during his long existence, but he had never felt like that during sex. Never.

He supposed that's what happened when you made love to your soulmate.

Because Mike was definitely his soulmate. Ari knew it, like he knew his arm was his arm. It just was. He could feel Mike, and really, hadn't he always been able to feel his s'more more deeply than anyone else? He felt stupid that he had ever even questioned it.

Mike snuffled and curled in closer, and Ari chuckled lightly. Mike's hand gently caressed Ari's chest, and he knew his little human was waking up.

"You were so perfect, my sexy s'more. So fucking perfect," Ari murmured, and he felt Mike grin against his side.

His little s'more was playing possum, but Ari didn't mind. It had been fucking intense for sure. His little human could have all the time in the world to process things. At some point, Ari was gonna need to tell him about the whole soulmate thing. But...

Ari didn't know why he was still nervous. Surely after that, Mike would know they belonged together. Mike wouldn't reject the soulmate bond, or whatever it was, that the little angel dude had said a mortal could do. Right?

Mike had to feel the same way about him. Hopefully. Maybe. Probably?

"Mmmm," Mike mumbled against his chest, and Ari thought he ought to say something. Like, *hey little dude, we're soulmates, isn't that great?*

Only he had no idea how Mike would react. Would he be pissed that Ari hadn't given him the entirety of his vision? Would he be mad enough to reject the bond? Because Ari knew that Mike did not fuck around when it came to solving problems, and Ari had fucked around with the details. Sort of. But not on purpose!

Shit. Somehow he needed to tell Mike how he felt.

There was a flash, like lightning, and Ari yelled out, "Fuck!" He shielded his face with one arm while pulling Mike tighter against his chest with the other so his little dude's eyes wouldn't be hurt.

"Well, yes, it does appear that's what you two have been doing," a droll voice responded.

Ari opened his eyes, although he would know that voice anywhere, and Mike seemed to recognize it as well, because he pushed against Ari's arm and looked at the pain in the ass archangel, who was dressed in his usual pristine white suit and was casually standing in their bedroom.

"Who? What?" Mike sputtered.

At least Ari had pulled the sheet up to cover them when Mike had been snoozing. He really didn't care about being seen naked (he had invented streaking, after all), but he didn't need the archangel ogling his little s'more.

"Gabriel! Dude! I've been calling you to deliver a message for fucking days, and you choose *now* to pop in? Really, bruh?" Ari grouched.

Fucking archangels.

“This is Gabriel?” Mike wondered, rolling off Ari and sitting up. Luckily his little dude was modest, because he kept the sheet firmly covering all his bits.

Ari sighed dramatically. “Michael, meet Gabriel. Ruining fun and crashing parties since around 2780 BCE.”

“I did *not* crash that party, and thanks to you, Imhotep totally misinterpreted my message,” Gabriel grumbled. “And you have *not* been calling me for days. I would have heard if you *actually* had a message to deliver.”

“Hey! I had plenty of messages!” Ari argued. “*Important* messages.”

Even Mike snorted at that, and ok, maybe telling the dude at the bagel shop that his fly was down was not important enough to call forth an archangel. But hey, someone should’ve told the guy. Ari totally would have, but he had been trying to get Gabriel to pop in, so yeah, he’d let the poor guy continue to wait on customers like that.

At least the dude had been wearing underwear.

“If he hadn’t been wearing underwear, would that have been enough to call an archangel?” Ari wondered aloud.

“*Focus*, Arioch. I know how incredibly difficult that is for you,” Gabriel sniffed.

Then the archangel cleared his throat, because he was just so pretentious like that, and his wings appeared in a halo of white light as his suit melted away into a flowing, white robe.

“Dude, I have a message *to give you*,” Ari said, rolling his eyes. “No need for the messenger look.”

Gabriel just glared at him and cleared his throat again.

“Fine, fine, go ahead and ask what my message is,” Ari grumbled.

Gabriel smirked at that, and although he was an angel, there was a bit of evil behind that smile.

Fuck. That was not a good look on an archangel.

“Michael Benedict Caelius, I have a message for you,” Gabriel stated.

Mike sat up straighter. “Me? You can’t have a message for me again,” he insisted.

Again? “Fuck. Hold on. Gabriel, did you deliver a message to Mike as a child?” Ari questioned.

Gabriel sniffed again—the dude was gonna need a tissue at this rate—and said, “I deliver a lot of messages, and as usual, you have no respect for the process. I am in the middle of important work, and you can’t help but interrupt.”

“Dude, what’s more important than finding out who fucked with Mike as a kid?” Ari demanded.

Gabriel smirked then. “Well, since the message is from you, Ariocho, you must have thought it quite important.”

Aww, fuck.

Mike looked at him incredulously. “But... I’m right here? Why would you send me a message through Gabriel? Unless this is a past you? Or future you? Do messages work like that?”

“No, they do not. Now if you would kindly let me continue with the delivery, you’ll find out what the message is,” Gabriel huffed.

Yup, the archangel definitely had his feathers ruffled. Ari would’ve been proud of that fact if he wasn’t feeling so damn nervous.

“Go ahead,” Mike replied at the exact same time that Ari said, “Not necessary.”

Mike glared at him and then turned back to Gabriel. “Since he can’t seem to give me the message himself, let’s hear it.”

“Michael Benedict Caelius, your soul has been bound to that of Ariocho, Infernal King of the Underworld, Demon of Vengeance and Chaos, Seer of Things Past and Yet to Come. Ariocho has known that he had a soulmate, but he did not share this aspect of the vision with you, and he regrets that action. You have the ability to choose to reject the soul bond, although

Arioch would not like you to know this information,” Gabriel intoned.

“Fuck,” Ari mumbled, rubbing his hand across his face. “I didn’t tell you to give that message to him, especially the last part.”

Gabriel sniffed again. “It was an important message that had urgency, and for whatever brainless reason you had, you weren’t giving it, despite the fact that your soulmate is sitting *right there*.” Gabriel smirked then. “The last part is courtesy of that prank you played on me,” he added.

Aww, Gabriel had a mean streak. It was wonderfully vengeful, and Ari would’ve enjoyed it if only it hadn’t come at his expense. Ari looked over at Mike to judge his reaction, but he just looked sort of shell shocked.

“I’m his soulmate?” he whispered.

“Yes, you are,” Gabriel said, and there was a touch of warmth there.

“But...” Michael turned to him. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t know for sure. Not until right before—”

But then Mike’s hand was covering his mouth, and he was blushing, and Ari couldn’t help the smile that formed on his lips. He gave Mike’s hand a nice long lick, which made Mike look slightly less pissed. He didn’t quite laugh, but Ari thought maybe he was trying not to.

At least he didn’t look so shell shocked. His s’more took his hand away then turned back to Gabriel.

“You gave me a message as a child. You told me it was my job to watch over my siblings,” Mike stated.

Gabriel grimaced. It was an interesting reaction. “I did,” he admitted. “It was a... distasteful message to give a child, but alas, I carry out a duty, and when another archangel has a message to deliver, I perform. I do not create the messages. Speaking of...”

Then Gabriel was glowing again, and suddenly a sword appeared in his hand.

“Is that...?” Ari trailed off. It couldn’t be.

“Arioch, Infernal King of the Underworld, Demon of Vengeance and Chaos, Seer of Things Past and Yet to Come, there is a blight upon the Almighty’s plan, and you have been called to end this scourge before more trouble may be wrought. Will you accept the path that has been laid before you in the name of vengeance and chaos?”

Then Gabriel was laying the sword at the edge of the bed, and it glowed brightly for a moment before fading into a shining metal.

“Dude, are you giving me the Divine Weapon of the Almighty? Because that is some fucked up shit, my man,” Ari commented. Why would the Almighty give him, a demon, a weapon that could end any afterlifer’s existence?

Gabriel merely grimaced again. “Not my decision, Arioch. This message comes straight from the top, and rightfully so. For any angel to presume to know better than the Almighty himself—there are no words. I cannot fathom such a thing, and they ought to meet the end of their existence by your hand.”

“Wow, my man, you are a vengeful dude,” Ari said approvingly. “But who is it? Who gave Michael the message? Who tried to sabotage us?”

Gabriel paused, looking back and forth between them, his eyes soft and almost fond, and Ari blinked to make sure he wasn’t imagining that expression.

“You have no idea how blessed you are. It is beyond my ken.” Then Gabriel’s eyes turned hard, and he added, “Don’t fuck it up, Arioch.”

Ari just nodded. He would try his damndest not to.

Gabriel gave them one last look, and Ari thought he saw longing there, and then he uttered a name, there was a blinding light (damn showy angels), and he was gone.

Michael was up and out of the bed in a flash, pulling on boxer shorts. A shame; Ari loved looking at his ass. And his dick. But before he could even voice that, his s’more was out

in the living room, and he knew his little dude was frantically looking at the “serial killer” wall to find out everything about the archangel Gabriel had named.

Ari casually followed him out, muttering, “I can’t believe it’s Selaphiel. I thought he was totally this boring, meek dude.”

Mike was running his finger along the wall, reading over his notes. “I wrote down that he’s the archangel of prayer and contemplation. He’s apparently, if my research is correct, the leader of the heavenly choir.”

“Well, that explains it,” Ari snorted. “I mean, you think angels are all perfect and have great voices, but bruh, some of them are downright screechy. And since it’s the heavenly choir, they can’t be kicking anyone out. It’s worse than a group of grade school kids singing in the annual Christmas pageant.”

Mike just hmped before turning back to his wall.

Ari felt his stomach drop. Fuck. He couldn’t even get his little dude to laugh. He plopped down on the sofa, fighting off a sense of panic. Was Michael going to reject him? By not saying something, had he ruined everything? For the first time in his existence, he regretted his chaotic nature. If only he had done things differently, maybe...

“Michael?” he asked, his voice low, and he couldn’t help the tone of fear he could hear in his voice.

Michael spun around, pointing a finger at him and glaring. “Don’t you call me that! Don’t you dare, you big asshole!”

Ari just stared at him helplessly. Fuck. He really had fucking ruined it all.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I fucked it up. I just... fuck... I just can’t help being me, you know? And usually I like being me, but I never wanted to fuck it up with you, little dude,” Ari whispered, staring down at his hands. “I’ll help you with the case no matter what, you know I will, but please, please, let me try to fix this,” Ari begged.

But his little dude was muttering under his breath and stomping over, and just as Ari lifted his head up, he found his arms full of his sexy s’more.



His *angry* sexy s'more.

Mike took his arms and wrapped them around his back, looking Ari in the eyes as he fumed.

“You asshole. Don't start calling me ‘Michael’ like I'm Grandfather, because I *know* you hate him. I'm not ‘Michael.’ I'm your little dude, or your s'more, or even Mike, but not ‘Michael.’ And you did fuck up. Do you know how?” Mike asked.

“I didn't tell you—” Ari started, but Mike cut him off.

“NO!” he yelled, and then Mike put his hands on Ari's cheeks, smooshing them together a bit. It would have been comical if Ari wasn't seriously concerned about losing his sexy little s'more.

“I should've...” Ari started, but Mike just leaned down and kissed his smooshed lips before leaning back.

“You thought I would reject you.” He stopped then, staring into Ari's eyes. “I understand why you didn't tell me before the talisman thing, because obviously you weren't sure, and I know that you would never hurt me if you weren't sure about it. And then, yes, we sort of got distracted, so I get why you didn't tell me right away then.” Michael blushed at the last part, and Ari tried to smirk, but his cheeks were still smushed in Mike's hands.

Mike moved his hands off Ari's cheeks before asking, “But you weren't going to tell me right after that either, were you? Ari, how could you possibly, for even a moment, think that I would reject you?”

Ari sighed. “We're so different, Mike. Such different personalities. Total opposites. I'm chaos and pranks and jokes. You're so... damn, little dude, you're so fucking smart and organized and methodical. I know I must annoy you most of the time—”

Mike's hand came up and covered his mouth, and Ari couldn't help it, he licked it again. His sexy little s'more gave a small smile at that, at least, but then he looked serious all over again.

“Ari, we are total opposites. I’m... hell, I’m boring. I’m a stick in the mud. I plan everything and obsess and hyperfocus and I take everything too seriously. Sometimes I don’t even know how you put up with me,” Mike sighed.

“My sexy s’more, you are *perfect*. Fucking *perfect* exactly as you are, and I don’t want to hear you say otherwise,” Ari growled out.

Mike sighed again, searching Ari’s eyes. “That’s just it. Don’t you see? If we are soulmates...”

“We are!” Ari interrupted. “Don’t you feel it? The pull toward each other, like we’re wrapped up together with a thousand tiny chains? The connection between us? I feel like I would break apart into a million pieces if you weren’t here.”

“I do,” Mike whispered. “I do feel it, Ari. I’ve felt connected to you since the beginning, although that connection has only grown. And I *am* boring, but I don’t feel that way with you. You make me laugh and have fun. You remind me to find joy in the little things. You make me better in every way, and I didn’t see what I could possibly bring to our relationship to deserve you.”

“My sexy s’more, you are *everything*. I’m distracted and crazy and you focus me in the best way. I know I’m a lot, and I know I’m a little over the top, but you seem to like that about me. I can totally be myself and I know you’ll laugh with me and find me amusing. I have never been with anyone, human or demon, who didn’t need a break from me after a while. You seek me out when we’re apart. Do you know how good it feels to be wanted like that? Because I never did, not until you,” Ari finished.

His little dude was looking at him affectionately, and he hoped maybe he hadn’t totally ruined things.

“I want you, Ari. I always want you. But you’re wrong about one thing. I don’t like that you’re a ‘little over the top,’ as you said.” Michael leaned in closer so that their foreheads were almost touching. “I fucking love it, Ari. Because I love you.”

Ari let the breath rush out of his lungs, and he pushed forward to claim his little s'more's mouth. They kissed, slowly and sensuously, before Ari leaned back. He had to ask; he had to be sure.

"You won't reject the bond?" he whispered.

"Ari, how could I possibly reject the one person who makes me better? It would be like cutting out a part of my soul. Because that's what you are. You're my *soulmate*." Mike stopped and looked at Ari with awe. "How crazy is that? But that's just it, Ari—now that I know that, it's like everything is just that much better. Because we may be total opposites, but we complete one another. We are perfect together. We wouldn't be soulmates if that weren't so. I love you. I would love you even if you weren't my soulmate. Having that only makes things more perfect, because it means I'll never lose you."

"My sexy little dude, I love you too. I meant it, too, when I said I was keeping you. Whether you were my soulmate or not, I wasn't ever letting you go." Ari squeezed his little s'more tight then, barely able to contain his emotions.

Mike laughed before he squeaked a bit. Oops, maybe too hard of a squeeze. But his little s'more didn't complain.

His little dude did sigh though. "As much as I would love to drag you back into the bedroom to celebrate..." he trailed off.

"Yeah, little dude, I know. We gotta figure this shit out. There's currently a huge ass divine sword hanging out on your bed, and I really don't know anything at all about that dickwad Selaphiel, including how to find him or what he even really looks like. It's not like we hang out in the same circles. Got any ideas?" Ari asked, because his Mike always seemed to have something.

"Well, a call to Grandfather may be in order, but before that, I think we have another step. It would be helpful to know as much as possible about being soulmates, and you know they may have some information about Selaphiel as well," Mike started.

Ari hopped up—his little dude didn't even need to finish that thought. “Bruh! Excellent idea! Family meeting! Gabe and Az will totally have some good info!”

Mike smiled. “Yup. I think it's time you met the rest of my family, as well.”

“Dude, I get to be introduced to Lilith and the crazy ass sister you've mentioned? Sign me up! This is gonna be wicked fun!” Ari clapped his hands together. Oh yeah, totally wicked fun. Lilith was a fucking legend, and Mike's sister, Ser, sounded like she was a prankster after his own heart.

His little dude only rolled his eyes, though. “Ugh, why do I feel like I might regret this?”

Ari laughed gleefully again, and Mike smiled fondly at the sound.

A few Nephilim, a couple demons, the great Lilith herself, a divine sword, and conversation about a secret plot to derail the Almighty's plan—this was gonna be an epic family dinner. Ari couldn't wait for all the chaos.

## CHAPTER 19

# MICHAEL

When Mike called Gabe, it turned out that Ser was already at his place—she had stopped in to see how their weekend getaway had gone—so Mike had volunteered to go downstairs to meet them. He'd told Gabe they needed a family meeting, and his brother had volunteered to call Grams. He didn't even get the usual grumbling, although he guessed that was because everyone was itching for an update on his revenge demon situation.

When Ari and Mike walked downstairs to his brother's apartment, Az cheerfully greeted them at the door, winked at Ari, and then herded them into the living room. Grams wasn't there yet, but Ser was sitting on the floor munching some popcorn, and Gabe was sitting in an armchair. Mike would have sworn the armchair didn't fit two people, but Az joined him, and he wasn't sure if they both fit because they were snuggled up so close or because Az had worked some demonic adjustment of physics.

"Oh, aren't you sexy," Ser purred at Ari, looking him up and down.

"Don't even think about it, Ser," Mike snapped. He knew that flirtatious was Ser's default mode, but he couldn't help getting bent out of shape.

Ser put both her hands up in apology, eyes wide. She was used to bickering with Mike, but he usually lectured more than snapped. Ari draped his arm around Mike and led him over to the couch, which only made Ser's eyes get a little wider. Az just cackled in glee, and Mike shot him a look.

As they were heading to the couch, he noticed another absence from the room. “Hey, where’s Mr. Frog?” he asked Gabe.

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he regretted them. Fuck, if Mr. Frog was dead, Gabe would be devastated. He’d had that frog since he was a kid, and Gabe was totally attached to him.

He grimaced, and Gabe must have noticed, because he gave Az a look and elbowed him.

“No worries!” Az sang out. “Beel is *totally* fine! He’s just enjoying a little extended vacation with his favorite frogsitter!”

“I thought *I* was his favorite frogsitter!” Ser complained at the same time that Ari said, “Beel?”

Ari sat down on the couch, pulling Mike down next to him and resting his arm on the couch behind Mike.

Gabe hmphed, Az laughed in a slightly maniacal manner, and Ser stared at them with wide eyes while she threw some popcorn into her mouth.

“Bruh, did you say Beel? As in Beelbufo?” Ari asked. He looked a little gleeful too now, and when a lust demon and a chaos demon both looked gleeful, it was probably *not* a good sign.

“Yup!” Az answered.

“Ahh, yeah, I guess I haven’t seen that little guy for a few decades. He’s been here? As ‘Mr. Frog’?” Ari questioned.

“Yup!” Az said again, popping the last letter gleefully. “And right now he is hanging out with a sexy little shop owner, and if I have my way, there will be a fairy tale ending for the two of them.”

“Wait a second,” Ser interrupted. “Are you telling me that Mr. Frog is a demon? And that you’ve tried to set him up on some kind of weird blind date with a shop owner?”

Gabe just rolled his eyes, but Az answered with another gleeful, “Yup!”

“Well, this is weird as hell,” Mike mumbled. He knew his family was crazy, but this was a little over the top even for them. “Mr. Frog is a demon? You’ve had a demonic frog pet for twenty years? And you never realized there was something off about him?”

Gabe blushed at that. “It’s not like I was the only one who didn’t notice! None of you realized either!”

“Yeah, but he wasn’t *my* pet frog,” Ser retorted.

At that moment Grams strolled into the room holding a bag, took one look around, and went back out. She carried a kitchen chair back in and set it down before taking a seat, and then she pulled out some knitting or crocheting (Mike never could remember the difference) and casually got to work before speaking.

“I had wondered if Beel was going to stay a frog until Gabe died. Of course I could have sent him back, but poor Gabe would’ve been heartbroken, and Beel obviously had no complaints or else he would have left on his own,” Grams stated as her needles clicked together rhythmically (Mike thought maybe two needles was knitting).

“Grams!” Gabe burst out. “You never told me!”

“Well, what was I supposed to say? Sometimes there are things we ought to keep to ourselves. It wasn’t my place to out Beel. And, young man,” she said, pointing a needle at Az (which was a little ironic, because Mike didn’t think Az had *ever* been a young anything), “I do hope you haven’t gone and outed Beel to this shop owner. When he’s ready to tell people he’s a demon, he will. Before that, it’s his business. We are not in the habit of forcing people to tell others their truths. They can do that in their own time.”

Az looked slightly less gleeful. “But he totally has a crush on the shop owner—” he started, but Grams cut him off, casually going back to her knitting as she admonished Az.

“I think you’ve been hanging out in high school too much, Asmodeus. You do not need to pass notes between them like some juvenile. Let Beel sort out his own business.”



Az actually pouted at that, but he didn't say anything else.

Then Grams turned her attention to Mike and Ari, and Mike wasn't sure that was a good thing. He was also sort of mesmerized at how she just kept knitting away even though she was staring at them. It had always been a little creepy when she did that.

"Aww, look at you two. Aren't you just adorable? I certainly wouldn't have guessed that Michael needed a chaos demon in his life, but you two have certainly gotten... close." She then wiggled her eyebrows at them in a suggestive manner before looking down at her... Shawl? Sweater? Scarf? Mike didn't know what it was, but it was pure white yarn, it looked incredibly soft, and it was not small.

Ser stopped tossing popcorn into her mouth long enough to complain, "How come everyone gets a demon bestie but me?"

Grams looked at her sharply then, and Ser quickly put her hands up again. "Nope! Never mind! I'm fine! I'm happy! Life is good! I don't need you cooking anything, Grams!"

Mike couldn't help it, he grinned.

"Little dude, your family is fun," Ari smiled, moving his arm down to Mike's shoulders and squeezing him close.

"So much fun!" Az agreed, and he was back to practically cackling again.

"What is wrong with you?" Mike asked Az. Yeah, he knew it bordered on rude, but Az had been weird since he'd answered the door.

"Nothing at all! Just enjoying the vibes!" Az crowed.

Mike could feel Ari's body shaking with quiet laughter, but it took him a minute to put it together. Az was a lust demon, so if he was getting vibes...

"Creeper!" Mike yelled, throwing a pillow at Az, who only laughed.

"Hey!" Gabe yelled (and ok, maybe Mike's aim had been a little off, but those two were sitting close together).

“I am *not* giving off vibes!” Mike stammered, but Ari leaned down and pressed a soft kiss to his head.

“It’s ok, little dude. This is one of the reasons we came to speak to them, after all.” Then Ari turned back to the room. “What can you tell us about soulmates?”

The silence stretched—even Grams’ knitting needles were quiet—and everyone stared at the two of them. Mike crossed his arms and stared back. Was it so hard to believe that he had a soulmate? Or was it so hard to believe that his soulmate was the fun, happy demon sitting next to him?

“Are you—” Grams started, but Ari cut her off.

“Yes, we’re sure,” his demon insisted. “We didn’t come here for judgment or disbelief. Here I thought that little dude’s family would be, like, super thrilled that he had a soulmate, and Az looks like the only one who’s gleeful right now.”

Mike looked over at Az, and yes, the demon did look sort of gleeful. His smile was wide enough that it looked cartoonish and a bit freaky. Everyone else just looked shocked, though.

“I’m super disappointed, bruhs. I know my sexy little s’more has supported all of you, because that’s what he does—he supports everyone. In fact, he’s trying to protect this family, and he always has. And you all are sitting there looking like someone peed in your cereal.”

Mike grimaced at the last part. Eww. But Ari just squeezed him tight.

“But, you’ve only ever dated women?” Gabe asked softly. Mike would have been offended, but it was clear that Gabe was just trying to wrap his head around everything, and he definitely wasn’t mean when he asked.

Az gave a snort. “Ah, my love, you should know better than anyone that sometimes love finds us when we least expect it. Congratulations, you two. Words cannot describe how excited I am for you both,” Az beamed.

“Yes, of course, me too,” Gabe hastily added. “I’m thrilled for you guys! I was just surprised.”

“I’m sorry, Michael,” Grams added, and her needles started clicking again. “If it had come from you, well, I know you do not jest. However, I would like to remind you that the news came from a chaos demon. Of course we’re all thrilled.” She then glared at Seraphina.

“Did he seriously just call you his ‘sexy little s’more’?” Ser joked, because of course she would pick that to focus on. It made Mike’s heart feel lighter, though. Teasing was Ser’s love language.

Mike just rolled his eyes at her. He would have thrown a pillow at her too, but his aim was obviously not that great, and with his luck he’d hit Grams and someone would be impaled with a knitting needle.

“So, soulmates,” Az said, rubbing his hands together gleefully. “So exciting! Such good vibes, you two! I feel like such a great matchmaker!”

Everyone stared at him at that statement.

“Um, you had nothing to do with us getting together,” Mike had to point out.

Az just waved his hand dismissively. “Of course I did. Somehow or another. You summoned him after our whole fiasco. Plus, you had a lust demon in the same building with you guys. I’m sure I was a help. I’m just making matches all over the place! It does a demon good to see such love and lust in the world.”

“Can you please stop talking about lust? I do not need to think about that when it comes to family, thank you very much,” Ser grumbled.

Gabe ignored her and smiled fondly at Az, then he turned toward them and *finally* gave them some useful information. “So, as far as I understand it, you are linked together. Permanently. Wherever one goes, the other can go. Az and I were in Limbo together, and we were ok, and I obviously wasn’t dead. When I do die, we’ll have total access to the underworld, even heaven, I think.”

“We haven’t wanted to chance getting stuck,” Az added, “so we haven’t gone to heaven or hell. We figure we’re better off staying topside. Beyond that, we don’t know too much. Both Luce and Yah told us about it and let us choose, and both sides seemed supportive.”

“Have you discovered anything about who targeted you?” Grams asked.

“Apparently the archangel Selaphiel is responsible,” Mike confessed. “Do you know him, Grams?”

“Hmm, only a bit. He is the archangel of prayer and contemplation. His entire purpose is to bring mankind closer to the Almighty. Perhaps he thinks a demon and human pairing is against the Almighty’s plan, and thus he tried to interfere?” Grams suggested.

“Nah, that dickhead knows what he’s doing. He’s literally trying to destroy creation as we know it. I saw it,” Ari admitted.

“We also got a message,” Mike admitted.

“And this,” Ari added, and then he literally pulled the sword that had been sitting on Mike’s bed out of thin air and rested it on his lap.

Az and Grams both gasped, and Gabe asked, “Isn’t that Grandfather’s sword?”

“Nah, that dickwad Selaphiel just put it into the archangel Michael’s possession with the spell he gave Mike. It’s the Divine Weapon of the Almighty. Apparently we’re supposed to find this dude and end him before he ends creation.” Ari shrugged nonchalantly, like they weren’t literally trying to save the world.

“That is so cool,” Ser murmured, and he couldn’t mistake the longing in her gaze. He wondered for a moment if he wasn’t the wrong sibling for this job. She was the adventurous one. She was the wild one. He was all about spreadsheets and lists, not ending anyone’s existence.

“We got this, little dude. We can do anything together,” Ari whispered, and Mike knew he was right.

He blew out a breath before filling his family in. “So, obviously, we wanted to make you all aware of what was going on. We also wanted to find out anything we could about Selaphiel and about soulmates. We know *what* we have to do, but it took us almost a week to get in contact with the archangel Gabriel, and I’m not sure how we’ll find Selaphiel. I’m not even sure Grandfather would be of assistance. He implied the archangels don’t see that much of each other.”

“Can’t you guys just, like, portal up to heaven or something?” Ser asked. “Or Grams, can’t you cook something up and summon him or something? It can’t be that hard to get an angel down here. I mean, if all else fails, can we just pray him here if he’s the angel of prayer?”

Grams chuckled lightly. “Oh, my darling. If only it were so simple. There was a reason you always had demon babysitters and very rarely angel ones. Demons are always willing to explore and see what’s going on. Angels tend to be a bit more stuck in their routines and are often quite work focused. Of course, you’ve had one or two over the years...” she trailed off, and the clacking of her knitting needles paused, but whatever thought she had was brushed off as she started knitting again.

“As far as archangels,” she continued, “I do not have the ability to call them forth and demand their presence, and I’m afraid a request would only make him aware that you are onto his scheming. I don’t think that would be very good for anyone. So I’m sorry, but this is, most unfortunately, out of my area of expertise. You’ll need an angel for this, if they can even help.”

“I guess we can try calling on Grandfather again now that we have a name,” Mike mused.

Az and Ari groaned in unison, and Ser sighed. She had less patience for Grandfather, although she did care about him.

With that, Grams did something with her knitting, and suddenly yarn was falling off the needles, only it seemed to be on purpose, because the edge of whatever she was working on

didn't unravel. When she finished the last stitch, she tossed it over to Mike and Ari.

It was thick and incredibly soft, but it had no definite shape, and Mike still had no clue exactly what it was.

"Umm, thanks, Grams," Mike said, caressing the soft... thing.

"It doesn't need washing. And it isn't for either of you. You'll know who to give it to," she declared, and she tucked the needles into her bag, stood, and headed toward the door.

"You boys come over for dinner soon and tell me how it all goes. Good luck, kids!" And with that she was off, slamming the front door behind her.

Seraphina sighed. "Well, that wasn't terribly helpful." She finished her last handful of popcorn then brushed her hands off, and Mike grimaced a bit. Gabe was gonna find popcorn crumbs all over the place.

"Ser," he started, but it was like she could sense an admonishment, because she was suddenly a whirlwind of activity, babbling loudly so that Mike couldn't even yell at her.

"Yes, keep me posted too! But I have a hot date this evening, and I have to go get all sexied up, because we can't *all* have demon soulmates. Although the person I'm meeting was pretty odd, and that black eyeliner... swoon! So we'll see!" Then she gave them a saucy wink and was gone.

"And then there were four," Gabe intoned.

"I don't think your literary references will help us with this one, Gabe," Mike chuckled.

Gabe looked at him seriously then. "Really, though, I am incredibly happy for you. I'm sorry about... well, about everything, I guess. I want you to know how much I appreciate you, and I love you, and I'm so happy that you've found your soulmate. There isn't anyone I know who deserves it more than you."

"Aww, little bro, that's so damn sweet!" Ari murmured, and Mike was glad Ari said something, because he was

suddenly kind of choked up.

Of course he knew his family loved him. He knew they'd accept him and any partner he brought home—they were awesome like that. He guessed that sometimes you knew things, but you still needed to hear them anyway.

Mike cleared his throat before replying. “Thanks, Gabe. I love you too, and I’m so happy for you and Az as well.”

“And you *do* know what this means, don’t you?” Az added gleefully. “We’ll be hanging out together *for all eternity!*”

Gabe and Mike both groaned while Az and Ari both laughed.

Family. Sometimes they drove you crazy, but they could be pretty damn great, too.

## CHAPTER 20



# ARIOCH

Gabe and Az had gone on to give them as many details as they could about becoming soulmates after Ser had left (leaving out all the sexy bits, most unfortunately, but Ari thought neither of the brothers were quite ready for that level of sharing). Although informative, it didn't seem like they had anything very useful to work with in exacting their revenge. Still, Ari was glad they'd had the family meeting. His little dude was lighter and happier afterwards, even though the fate of the world still rested in their hands.

Ari almost chuckled out loud at that. The Almighty must have a hell of a sense of humor to leave the fate of the world in *his* hands. Then again, he supposed that's why he was paired with his sexy little s'more. Mike could probably save the world half asleep and with one eye closed.

Ari let Mike lead the way back downstairs, especially since he had the Divine Weapon of the Almighty slung up on his shoulder. He wasn't taking any chances with his little dude accidentally falling down the steps and impaling himself on the damn thing. No, Mike wasn't klutzy, but Ari was a chaos demon, after all—sometimes weird shit went down when he was around. He usually embraced that, but he wasn't looking for anyone to be gutted today. At least not anyone other than that prick Selaphiel.

As Mike walked into the apartment ahead of him and stopped dead in his tracks, he rather regretted the decision to let his s'more lead the way.

“What are you doing in my kitchen?” his s’more demanded, and Ari had a momentary freak out before he saw Kushiel sitting in a kitchen chair looking rather human, which explained why he’d startled Mike—Kushiel had been in full angel-mode when they’d first met at the club. Even human-looking Kushiel still had a grayish cast to his skin, though.

“Ah, Kushiel, bruh, you fucking scared me! I thought someone was here after my little dude!” Ari admonished.

Kushiel didn’t reply, however, and just continued to look all somber and shit. Mike sighed before sitting down, and Ari supposed he needed to follow suit. He really did love Kushiel like a brother, but you couldn’t take the angel out of the dude—he totally needed to loosen up a bit.

“Do you make a habit of popping into people’s kitchens uninvited?” Mike grumped.

Ari finally sat, although he didn’t put the sword down. He wasn’t sure why, but he just felt like he wanted to hold onto it, so he rested it across his lap under the table and kept one hand on it. Once he was comfy (as comfy as you could be holding onto a divine weapon, anyway), he teased Kushiel a bit.

“Yeah, bruh. First Gabe told us how you popped in on them unannounced, and now you’re popping into Mike’s kitchen. There is knocking, my dude.”

Kushiel looked surprised at that, and maybe he wasn’t topside enough to think about things like knocking. It made Ari feel sorry for the dude. It must totally suck being stuck between, like he was. Angels were pricks who probably weren’t very nice to him. Demons were more welcoming, of course, but any lesser demons would be totally awkward around such a high level angel. It was probably a lonely place to be in the hierarchy of the afterlife.

“What’s up, bruh?” Ari asked, his voice softer this time. Obviously Kushiel was here for a reason.

“I had a rather interesting conversation as of late, and in light of our discussion the other day, I thought it prudent to inform you,” Kushiel stated.

“Dude, enough with the fancy talk. Spill the tea, my man,” Ari grumbled.

Kushiel smiled a bit at that before getting serious again. “I went upstairs,” he said, and Ari flinched.

No one really talked much about it—heck, Ari doubted most demons even noticed—but Kushiel wasn’t exactly full-fledged angel material anymore. Ari didn’t think he was actually a fallen angel, but all his time in the underworld had taken a toll.

Ari knew the upstairs crew were assholes, and he also knew that at some point in the very beginning of things, some angelic dickwad had made it difficult for anyone who wasn’t deemed “heavenly” to be upstairs. It was probably some leadership team memo, because those guys usually made illogical decisions.

Whatever the reason, once it was done, it was done, and demons couldn’t go upstairs. He hadn’t asked Kushiel, but based on how the angel had frequented the upstairs less and less over time, he kind of figured it wasn’t comfortable for him to go there anymore either. Ari highly doubted that was god’s work—Yah seemed pretty cool, from the stories he’d heard, but the leadership team was another matter.

“You alright, bruh?” Ari asked.

Kushiel shifted in his chair and Ari noticed a slight grimace, but the angel only nodded his head.

“You know something,” Mike stated, and Kushiel nodded his head again.

Ari thought he looked... sad. Like, sadder than the usual half fallen angel melancholy that sort of surrounded him.

“Dude, what is it?” Ari asked again.

“It would be easier to show you, I think,” Kushiel said, and he then gestured for them to hold hands. Ari wasn’t sure why, but he’d never turn down the opportunity to hold hands with his s’more, so he grabbed Mike’s hand and gave it a squeeze.

Kushiel motioned for Ari's other hand, and he reluctantly took it off the sword sitting in his lap and reached it out to the angel.

Once their hands were intertwined, there was a flash of brightness, and Ari was no longer in Mike's kitchen.

He had never been sucked into a vision so quickly and completely. He looked around, seeing only blinding whiteness everywhere, except his little dude was with him, firmly holding his hand.

"Holy fuck," Mike whispered. "Where are we? What did he do?"

"We're in a vision, my sexy s'more. Just keep holding my hand and you'll see what I see, I guess. Pretty cool trick, honestly. I don't know how Kushiel knew about it when I didn't even know I could do that," Ari admitted.

They were clearly upstairs if the blinding white surrounding them was any indication, and it was like the scene slowly faded in. First, shadows and murmurs were evident, and before long they could see angels bustling about and hear the cadence of soft voices.

Everyone looked so industrious. Ari had the overwhelming urge to make a mess of things. He couldn't even help himself and tried knocking a tablet-like thing out of an angel's hand when they walked by, although of course he knew he couldn't interfere in visions.

Everything was just so damn organized.

"Ari!" Mike admonished. Oops. He guessed his little s'more had seen him trying to muss things up.

Ari just shrugged. "Can't help it, little dude. But no worries, we can't affect anything in visions. Since Kushiel brought us here, I'm guessing it's the past."

The voices slowly quieted and everyone turned to stare.

"Why are they staring at us," Mike whispered.

"Not at us, little dude," Ari responded, turning around.

Behind them was Kushiel, and he looked... unwell. His pallor was grayer than usual, and lines stood out on his face, like he was clenching every muscle in his jaw. He looked slightly unsteady on his feet. His wings were tucked away, despite most angels proudly wearing theirs.

A short figure bustled up to him, and Ari stepped closer, bringing Mike along with him.

“Kushiel! Come, come, let’s take this into my office,” the figure said, leading Kushiel in through a door.

Ari noticed the angel did not touch Kushiel. Ari got bad vibes from the dude for that reason alone. He seemed nice enough to Kushiel, but it was like he thought Kushiel had cooties.

Not cool. Not cool at all.

Ari and Mike followed them into a bright white office, and Kushiel half sat, half collapsed into a chair.

“Can I get you anything?” the angel asked. There seemed to be concern in his voice, but underneath that was something else, something... calculated. Ari didn’t like it.

“No, Sel, thank you. I’m perfectly fine,” Kushiel said, and his voice almost managed not to quaver.

“Is that Selaphiel?” Mike asked.

“It would seem so. He’s... shorter than I expected,” Ari admitted. “I totally get asshole vibes from him, though.”

Mike snorted but then shushed him, because the two were speaking again.

“Come now, we both know that isn’t the case,” Selaphiel stated. “You suffer, Kushiel. It is a travesty. You suffer for doing the Almighty’s will. I hear all prayers, after all, even the ones that are not spoken aloud. I know you wish to be closer to the Almighty. I know you feel outcasted.”

Kushiel looked pained and sad, but he only said, “I do my duty. I have always done my duty and never uttered a word of complaint. Someone must see if souls are ready for redemption. There must be an angel of punishment. I have

always believed that all souls can eventually be brought back to righteousness.”

“Yes!” Selaphiel agreed. “You have always worked to bring all souls closer to the divine. I have always felt kinship with you in that, Kushiel, although I have not envied the task set before you.”

“Thank you, Sel. I appreciate the kind words. They are... not often something I hear from angels,” Kushiel admitted.

“Because they are small-minded, my friend. They think only of their jobs, only of the small daily tasks. They do not see the greater good.” Selaphiel’s eyes were bright now, his face smiling, and he gave off total zealot vibes.

Kushiel looked a little suspicious as well, and Selaphiel must have noticed.

“My friend, I was created to make sure that all things are aligned with their destiny. Do you really think it is your destiny to be forever alone, doing a task that is too difficult for you, shunned by your brothers, unable to see the Almighty because of your hard work at the very job which they set forth for you? Do you really think that is your divine purpose?” the angel asked.

“It does not matter—” Kushiel began, but Selaphiel cut him off.

“But it does, my friend. It does. We were all once the divine. Every living thing was once a part of the Divine Entity, the beginning of all things. We could go back to that. We could end this unnatural division.” Selaphiel leaned forward then. “Think of an end to your suffering. Think of being one with the Divine Entity, all of us. It is what was intended from the start.”

“If it is what was intended...” Kushiel began, and then he held his hands out, like he was asking why it wasn’t so.

Selaphiel leaned back, folding his hands. “The Almighty is but a piece of the Divine Entity now. They are no longer the whole being they once were. Perhaps they have merely... lost track of the intended plan. But we can bring things to right, my

friend. We can help to align the entire universe together. Then there would be no need for punishments. No need to worry about lost souls and bringing them back to the fold. Your work would be done, my friend.”

Kushiel looked shocked, and even Ari couldn't tell if he liked the idea or not.

“My friend,” Selaphiel continued, “You would have *peace*. I know that is what you seek above all. Peace... and companionship. You would no longer be alone. Your prayers would be answered, Kushiel.”

Kushiel sat there, looking unsure and sad and in pain, and Selaphiel reached out then and touched his hand, although Ari saw the angel hesitate for a split second first. Kushiel only looked up in amazement at the contact, though.

“He's really an asshole,” Mike whispered.

“Yup,” Ari agreed.

“Brother, I need your help,” Selaphiel confided. “Together, we can see the future be as it was meant to be. You would never be alone again.”

“What must I do?” Kushiel asked.

But then it was like the sound was turning down, because they couldn't quite hear Selaphiel's answer, and the scene started to fade away, although Ari saw the archangel give Kushiel something.

Then they were back in the kitchen, and Mike was still gripping his hand, but Ari's other hand was free, and he immediately put it down onto the sword.

Kushiel had taken his hands back, and they were resting on the table in front of him. His head was down, his shoulders slumped, and he looked defeated.

“What did he give you?” Ari asked the angel.

“You know, he always called me ‘my friend.’ Right until the very end, that's what he said. That's what they all say, if they refer to me at all,” Kushiel admitted.

Ari had no idea what he was talking about, so he just repeated himself. “Bruh, what did he give you and ask you to do?”

Kushiel looked up at that, smiling for the first time. “But you—you always called me ‘bruh’ or ‘bro.’ The other Infernal Kings as well. I was ‘brother’ to all of you from almost the start. You all always accepted me.”

“Of course we did, my man. You were doing your job. You do it damn well, too,” Ari admitted. “You punish souls that can find redemption. You have always been an optimist, looking for the best in all souls. You guided those who weren’t sure, too. I know sometimes it’s hard and sucks ass, but you do good. You *save* souls. What does that prick do? Listen to some prayers and lead the choir, and I’m sure they sound like shit, too.”

Kushiel snorted at that.

“Plus, you know that his whole plan is totally *not* the Almighty’s plan,” Ari added.

“I know,” Kushiel admitted. “He preyed upon my weak points to try and get me to turn against all I know, but I am not weak. My task is not ‘too difficult’ for me. I would not betray the Almighty.”

Kushiel then pulled out a ring. “He asked me to find out what you were doing, Michael. For some reason, he is unable to see you anymore. He implied that you were in some danger. He also admitted that he cannot manage to get the archangel Gabriel to deliver a message. He seems to be ignoring Selaphiel, which pissed him off quite a bit,” Kushiel smirked.

Ari laughed at that. “Good for Gabes! I guess that dude isn’t all bad.”

“I am to check up on you, and should any ‘undesirables,’ to use his word, be about, I should whisk you away to safety. This ring will enable me to bring you to heaven with me, where he shall, and I quote, ‘guide you in your divine purpose,’” Kushiel finished.



They all stared at the ring. It was a white and shining metal, but it felt wrong somehow.

“So this ring will just bring us to Selaphiel? Dude, do you really think after all this effort that vengeance is gonna fall into our lap like this?” Ari doubted. “It seems too easy.”

Mike looked at Kushiel doubtfully. “It does seem too easy.”

Kushiel shrugged. “He is proud and he thinks he is right. He cannot fathom that I would disagree with him. He could have been trying to trick me; I have to admit it is a possibility. Perhaps you’ll put it on and it will instantly kill you, although I did not feel that from it. You must consider that perhaps he did persuade me and I am the one trying to trick you. Perhaps Selaphiel really wants you both in his clutches, and this is the way he is going to do it.”

“Bruh, I trust you,” Ari assured Kushiel. He could tell that Mike wasn’t quite as sure, but he assured his little dude. “Kushiel is good people, especially for an angel. He wouldn’t do us dirty, my sexy s’more. But he is right that Selaphiel could be using him.”

“I simply do not know for sure,” Kushiel admitted. “I wish I could tell you with certainty. But, brother, you have gifts I do not. I trust you can find the purpose of the ring. For now, I have done all I can, and I must be off. There are apparently some souls gone missing, many which were close to heavenly status, and I have a need to find them.”

Ari nodded. “Good luck, bruh.”

Kushiel nodded and stood, but before he could leave, Mike cried, “Wait!”

His little s’more took the pure white thing (Ari thought maybe it was a scarf) that Grams had knit out of his lap. Ari had sort of forgotten he even had it. “I think... I think this is for you,” Mike said, holding it out to Kushiel.

Kushiel looked at it quizzically before reaching over and taking it. He let his hands feel across it. “It’s very... soft,” he murmured.

“Yeah. I hope you’ll enjoy it,” Mike replied. He waited for Mike to tell Kushiel where it came from, but he didn’t, so Ari didn’t mention it either.

“Thank you. I appreciate your gift,” Kushiel said, and he could tell the angel was touched. With a nod, he extended his wings (which still weren’t as pretty as Ari’s), closed them around himself, and was gone.

“Well, little dude, should we check out the ring?” Ari asked, staring at it.

Mike was silent, though, and he looked over at his sexy s’more. Mike was staring at him, and he placed both his hands over Ari’s, almost as if to prevent him from touching the ring.

“We’re so close I can taste it. Part of me feels relieved, but part of me is nervous too. I love you, Ari, and I know you love me, but what if we finish this task, and then...” Mike trailed off.

Aww, his little dude was worried. Vengeance could wait a few hours if needed, because it should be completed in good spirits, not with worry and fear.

And Ari knew just how to make his sexy little s’more feel better.

## CHAPTER 21

# MICHAEL

Mike knew it was stupid. Really he did. He could *feel* the connection between them, and he knew that something had solidified that hadn't been there before.

The vision was proof enough of that. After all, last time Ari had a vision, Mike had touched him, and he hadn't been sucked into that vision. This time he was, and he didn't think it was Kushiel's doing. He figured it was a side effect of the whole soulmate thing.

So really, Mike had no reason to have doubts. But he was only human, after all, and he couldn't help his fears. Ari was the best thing to ever happen to him. He wanted to finish this task, but then what? What would come next?

Ari smiled at him and leaned in, resting his forehead against Mike's.

"My sexy little s'more. I love you. Finishing this job isn't an end to us. We are only at our beginning. We have all of eternity together," Ari reassured him.

"I know that. I guess... Well, I guess I just don't know what to expect. I don't know what comes next. I know you like to just see what happens, but I've always been a planner. I plan out everything." Ari snorted at that, but Mike just kept talking. "So what comes next? I quit my job. My family is in good shape, so they don't need my protection anymore. What will we do after this is done?"

Ari leaned back, and Mike could tell he was taking the question seriously. "Well, I am the demon of vengeance, not

just of chaos. You can be the Alfred to my Batman, yeah?” Ari started getting excited as he continued. “Or like Nick Fury—the director behind the scenes, doing all the planning and figuring shit out. Together we’ll right the wrongs done against those most needy in the world,” he finished triumphantly.

Mike couldn’t help but laugh at his excitement. “We are not a superhero movie, Ari.”

“Little dude, we could be! It would be totally awesome! Hey! We could open a private investigation office! How cool would that be! We could, like, sit in comfy chairs behind huge wood desks and wait for damsels and dudes in distress to come seek our help!”

“Ari, you have watched way too many movies,” Mike laughed, but he did feel better. “Besides, I think private investigators mostly take pictures of cheaters and insurance scammers.”

“Little dude, the point is, together we can accomplish anything. Finishing this case won’t end that. But that’s the far off future, and we’ll figure it out. And I know exactly what we’ll do in the immediate future when this case is done,” Ari smirked.

Mike wasn’t sure he trusted that smirk. Ari wiggled his eyebrows then, and Mike blushed, realizing what Ari meant. He thought of what Gabe had whispered to him as he was leaving his brother’s apartment, and he couldn’t help as his face turned burning hot. He felt totally embarrassed but also turned on.

“Sexy little s’more, what has you blushing like that?” Ari murmured, and then his demon leaned down and kissed his neck.

Mike moaned as he felt the soft scruff of Ari’s facial hair rub against his neck, and then the demon was gently nibbling on his ear, and Mike reached up to grab hold of Ari’s shoulders.

Fuck. His demon was so sexy.

“Tell me, my sexy s’more. Tell me what has you blushing. Remember, we’ll figure anything out together,” Ari murmured in his ear, and goosebumps popped up on Mike’s skin as he shivered in pleasure.

“It’s just something Gabe said, and I think... well, I don’t know... but I think...” Mike trailed off, getting hot all over.

Ari just chuckled in his ear, giving it a sharp nip that Mike swore he felt all the way down to his dick.

“What did Gabe say? Tell me,” Ari murmured again, but then his mouth was on Mike’s, his tongue licking Mike’s lips open, and they were kissing.

Ari sucked on Mike’s tongue like it was his dick, and holy shit, he got harder just from that. They licked into each other’s mouths, and Ari gently sucked on Mike’s bottom lip, adding a nibble at the end, and Mike couldn’t hold back his groan. Then Ari’s mouth moved away, and Mike leaned forward to chase it for another kiss, but Ari murmured, “Tell me.”

“Gabe said... he said, ‘Aren’t tails great?’ And then he winked at me. And I... I don’t know what...” Mike started, then he gasped as Ari kissed him again and reached down to squeeze his dick through his pants.

Then suddenly he was out of the chair and thrown over Ari’s shoulder while the demon walked. The sudden change in position made Mike yelp, and he could barely register what was happening before he was placed on the bed in his bedroom. Ari pulled Mike’s shirt over his head, and Mike fell backwards onto the mattress, shaking his head to rid himself of the vertigo from that weird trip. By the time he sat up, Ari was magically naked in front of him, only his demon had his wings and horns and tail, too.

Ari reached forward and pulled Mike’s pants and underwear off in one swift motion, but all Mike could do was stare at Ari. He couldn’t even feel shy about being naked and hard, because Ari was definitely hard too.

His demon was magnificent. His skin was so dark it practically shone, and he was so damn big. His muscles stood

out against his skin, and his wings were almost iridescent in their darkness; they were like black metal, yet they looked soft. His horns curled up from his head and looked almost ribbed, and Mike itched to touch them—he wanted to touch all of his demon.

Then Ari's tail twitched out around the front of him. Mike almost passed out from pure lust when that tail curled around and circled Ari's hard dick and gave it a squeeze, because holy fuck, that was so fucking sexy. He couldn't take his eyes off Ari's dick as his tail squeezed it again.

Ari chuckled, and Mike's eyes shot up to his face. He looked joyful but also mischievous, and Mike wasn't sure he trusted that look. Well of course he trusted Ari, but he wasn't sure he'd survive whatever Ari had planned. But oh, what a way to go.

“Do you want to find out about my tail, my sexy little s'more?” Ari asked.

Mike could only nod, his eyes going straight back to Ari's hard cock.

“You know something we haven't done, my s'more?” Ari asked, and he kneeled on the bed and crawled up toward Mike until his body was draped over Mike's.

“We haven't really tried frotting. Do you know what frotting is?” Ari murmured, and Mike could only sort of shake his head.

“Let me show you, baby,” Ari whispered in his ear.

Ari was laying on top of Mike, supporting himself with his arms, and Mike leaned up and grabbed Ari's face and kissed him. Without thinking, Mike started moaning and thrusting his hips up into Ari so that his dick got some friction. Mike groaned and panted as their cocks slid together.

“Yes baby, let me hear all those sweet sounds. You sound so good for me. So sexy. You make me so hard. Can you feel how hard you make me?” Ari murmured, and he grabbed Mike's hand, putting it on both their cocks.

“Do you feel how hard we both are? Yes, baby, squeeze our cocks. Oh devils, that feels so good. You are doing such a good job,” Ari moaned as Mike pressed their dicks together with his hand, his hips still thrusting up into Ari.

“You’re too big. I can’t... Oh god,” Mike moaned.

Then Ari’s tail caressed across his hips and circled around both their cocks.

“Holy fuck!” Mike yelled out as Ari used his tail to squeeze them together. They were both groaning and panting, and Ari tilted his head down to kiss Mike again.

Ari’s cock against his, the heads bumping together where they were most sensitive—it was bliss. They kissed and breathed each other in and let the pleasure build, but Mike wanted more. He needed to feel Ari everywhere, and it was like his demon could sense it.

Ari flipped them onto their sides and uncurled his tail from their cocks, replacing it with his hand.

“Holy fuck, Ari,” Mike groaned out.

Ari curled his tail around Mike’s body and gently rubbed the tip against his hole, making Mike groan. He threw his leg over Ari’s, wanting to feel their skin touching everywhere.

“Do you like that? Hmmm?” Ari asked. “Tails have many uses, my sexy s’more. Would you like to find out? Do you want to feel my tail inside you?” Ari asked, and Mike nodded his head. “It’ll feel so good, your ass clenching on me while our dicks rub together. You’re so perfect, baby.”

Then Ari made his tail slick and gently pushed it into Mike. Mike whimpered, but it wasn’t in pain, and Ari kept pushing further in. Ari’s tail was thin at the tip, but Mike could feel it getting wider as it went in further. He gasped, but Ari kept pumping their cocks and kissed him again, although Mike could hardly function to kiss Ari back. Then the tip of the tail was moving *inside* of him, and it was pressing against his walls.

“Ohmygod, ohmygod,” Mike groaned out as he felt sparks throughout his entire body. Ari’s tail was hitting his prostate,



making Mike see flashes behind his closed eyes. He felt it throughout his entire body.

“Does that feel good? Because you feel amazing. Your cock against mine. My tail inside you. You’re so warm, so tight, so good squeezing against my tail,” Ari whispered before groaning himself. “So good, my s’more. Always so good for me.”

Mike felt like he was floating above his body. He could only pant against Ari’s mouth. His dick was being squeezed and rubbed against Ari’s dick, and it was so fucking sexy. And that tail—it was pressing against him inside, wiggling and gently fucking in and out. Ari’s words only added to the haze of pleasure.

“Oh fuck!” Mike yelled out, and Ari clenched their cocks in his hand harder, rubbing them together.

“Let me hear you, baby. You’re doing such a good job,” Ari moaned, and Mike could hear the pleasure in Ari’s voice, which only increased his own.

Their cocks were slick with precum, and Ari’s hand squeezing them together was so good it bordered on being too much. Ari began to thrust his tail in and out, being sure to hit that spot inside Mike each time.

“I can’t! It’s so good, Ari. Fuck, I can’t!” Mike cried out, his own pleasure vast and overwhelming.

“Baby, you can. You’re so perfect. My perfect sexy soulmate. I love you,” Ari moaned.

“I love you. I love you, Ari,” Mike groaned, and Ari’s tail undulated and pressed against Mike’s prostate again as he squeezed their cocks together tightly, pumping faster and faster as the bliss built higher and higher.

“So beautiful. So perfect. So very good for me. That’s it, baby. Come for me. You make me feel so good. You are everything to me. I love you. Love you so much, my sexy s’more. So much. You’re always so good for me,” Ari panted, pleasure filling his voice.

Ari's words set Mike over the edge. His ass squeezed around Ari's tail, and his cum coated both their dick, and Ari's cum joined his in the same moment. Mike's world was exploding in light and love and joy, and he groaned as Ari leaned in to kiss him as he worked them both through their orgasms.

It could have been seconds or minutes, but eventually the pleasure receded, and their kiss softened until they were just pressed together, skin to skin everywhere, mouths just gently resting against each other. Ari eased his tail out of Mike and let go of their dicks, resting his hand against Mike's thigh.

"So good, my sexy little s'more. Always such a good job," Ari whispered.

Mike leaned up and placed both his hands on Ari's face before gently kissing him. "I love you. Thank you."

"Whatever for, my sexy s'more?" Ari asked.

"For being you, Ari. Thank you for being you," Mike answered. Then he cuddled up into Ari's chest. Yeah, they were covered in cum, and they needed to clean up. There was also a ring waiting for investigation and a showdown with an archangel waiting, but for now, Mike was content to just cuddle his demon.

There was time enough to take these few minutes of joy before they went about saving existence. After all, if Ari had taught him anything, it was that joy was what made existence worth saving.

## CHAPTER 22

# ARIOCH

Ari could've laid in bed for an age with his sexy little dude, but alas, there were things that needed to be done.

They got some excellent snuggles in, though, before he felt his s'more get restless, and Ari knew it was time to get to work.

They hopped in the shower together, which ended up being more comical than sexy. Ari was a big dude, and Mike's shower was *not* that big. But play fighting for the water and jostling each other around made his little dude laugh, and when he filled his mouth with water and spit it out onto Mike, offering to rinse him off, Mike's giggles made the tiny shower experience totally worth it.

Before long they were dried, dressed, and back in the kitchen, and unfortunately the damn ring was still there.

Thankfully, so was the sword. Ari had the urge to hold onto it again, and he didn't question it. He just kept one hand on it and one hand on Mike as they stared at the ring.

"You really trust Kushiel?" Mike asked him.

"Yeah, little dude, I really do. But like he said, Selaphiel could've been trying to trick him," Ari answered.

"I don't think so, though. I've dealt with people like that angel before. He totally believes he's right. It doesn't occur to him that he isn't. I think, based on what he knows of Kushiel and what he said, that he expects Kushiel to agree with him. He thinks if only people know what he knows, that they'll naturally agree with him. It's almost a level of narcissism."

Mike paused before asking, “How do you think he got like that?”

“I don’t know, little dude. But his job is to bring everything closer to the divine. Perhaps somewhere along the line he became convinced this was the way to do it,” Ari shrugged. Ari didn’t really care about his motivations—that was his s’more’s thing. He just wanted vengeance for what that asshole had done to Mike as a kid. And for what he’d tried to do to keep them apart.

“But he’d end his own existence if he succeeded. Why would he want to do that?” Mike asked.

“I don’t know, but I think we’ll have the opportunity to ask him,” Ari stated, and then he let his hand reach out toward the ring.

“Wait!” Mike demanded, and then he grabbed onto Ari’s arm with both hands.

“Smart, my sexy s’more.” Ari’s one hand was holding the sword, so holding hands wasn’t going to be possible if he picked up the ring, and if he was getting transported somewhere, Mike wasn’t being left behind.

Ari let his hand rest on top of the ring. He closed his eyes, but there was no vision. The ring felt wrong, but it didn’t feel malevolent. It felt like it was ready to pull him somewhere, like an engine idling and ready to move.

“Anything?” Mike asked.

“Nope,” Ari replied. “It feels a little... slimy, but it doesn’t feel harmful. I do think it’s made for transportation. I don’t think the flaw is in what it’s supposed to do. I think it feels off because Selaphiel is wrong. If these are the vibes the dude is giving off, I don’t know how no angels realized he was playing the villain.”

“I’d guess demons are much more capable of recognizing that than angels are,” Mike murmured.

That made sense. Demons were used to seeing the worst that mankind had to offer. They were probably more aware of bad mojo. They probably also weren’t so trusting. Angels

could be an annoying sort, but they could also be childlike in their naivete. Selaphiel's problem in going to Kushiel was that he was *not* the typical naive angel.

“You ready, little dude?” Ari asked.

“Do you think it will definitely take us both?” Mike questioned.

“Yes,” Ari assured him. “We’re soulmates. If it takes one of us, it will take both of us. I won’t leave you behind.”

“Ok. But we need a plan—” Mike began, but Ari was already picking up the ring, and he managed to slide his pointer finger into it while it rested on his palm.

He was kinda impressed with his own dexterity and thought about making a joke with his s’more about magic fingers to lighten the mood. He knew his little dude would prefer a specific plan, but really, they had all the information they were gonna get *plus* a magic sword—wasn’t that enough? Before he could joke, though, there was a flash of light (damn angels and their flashing lights—his s’more was gonna need his vision checked with all the damn strobe effects), and they were no longer in Mike’s kitchen.

They were in the office from Ari’s vision, it seemed, and Selaphiel was standing with his back to them, hands folded behind him, looking out a window onto a perfect, green field. Ari didn’t remember the window from the vision. Selaphiel must’ve conjured it up special for Mike’s entrance. It did look kinda pretty.

“I am so glad you could join me,” Selaphiel began, his voice gentle and welcoming, and if Ari hadn’t seen the whole thing with Kushiel, he might have thought this dick wasn’t a bad sort.

Selaphiel turned around, and he wore a warm and welcoming smile, his eyes soft and shining. Then he realized Ari was there.

The angel’s face changed and hardened, although the smile didn’t quite leave. Ari could feel Mike flinch back a bit, and

Ari didn't blame him, because angel dude did *not* look warm and welcoming anymore.

"Your presence here is not possible," Selaphiel stated, and his voice was eerily empty of emotion.

"Bruh, it totally is possible, since I'm here," Ari replied.

Selaphiel hadn't noticed the sword, since Ari had the hand holding it down at his side, and the huge, tall desk in front of them blocked it from sight. Ari just couldn't help commenting on the desk, though.

"Dude, overcompensating much?" he joked, nodding his head toward the desk.

The smile slipped then, and a look of righteous indignation replaced it. "You are an abomination to be here! You have corrupted this mortal soul, and I shall see you ended for it!" Selaphiel declared.

Ah, there were the dude's true colors. "Bruh, don't act like you didn't try to end me already. And I didn't do anything to this mortal soul, but Michael told us all about what *you* did when he was just a kid. Pretty fucked up, dude."

Selaphiel smiled again then, and it was creepy as hell. Mike was still holding onto his arm, but he edged a little closer, and Ari reached up to grab one of his little dude's hands in his own. Definitely a good time for holding hands. This dude was a creepy fucker. He played a good horror movie villain.

The angel sat down and gestured for them to sit as well. Well, maybe he was going for mobster movie villain instead.

"No thanks, dude, we'll pass," Ari snarked. "You won't even deny it? You tried to have my soulmate kill me. You put a heavy burden on a child and tried to have him end my existence."

"I did," Selaphiel remarked.

Ari was about ready to run him through at that. To act so nonchalant about ruining his soulmate's childhood. What a prick.

“Why?” Mike asked, halting Ari from acting.

“Ah, the mortal speaks,” Selaphiel said disdainfully. “You couldn’t possibly understand. But I see I have failed, since Arioach is here, as are you. You should have done your duty, Michael.”

“My duty? My *duty*? It was *never* my duty to kill my soulmate. How dare you!” Mike seethed. He almost lunged forward, but Ari clutched his hand tightly. He didn’t trust this prick. Plus, Ari was the one with the magic sword (and yes, he did almost chuckle out loud just thinking about his ‘magic sword’).

Selaphiel simply flicked his hand dismissively. “No matter. I have failed here, but there are other soulmates. I shall not fail again. Perhaps a more hands on approach is needed.”

“You won’t kill Ari,” Mike declared, but Selaphiel only laughed.

“Mortal, why would I kill Ari? Only *you* could kill Ari. My destroying him would do nothing at all. A terrible shame that Gabriel and Asmodeus came into each other’s company first. That was not how things were supposed to happen. If that whole fiasco hadn’t occurred, I’m sure you would have done what you were supposed to. You would have killed your supposed soulmate, and this entire thing would be resolved by now.” The angel sighed. “But it is no great matter to start again.”

Ari tensed, ready to act now, only this time Mike squeezed his hand before continuing to talk. Ah, well, if his little s’ more wanted the villain’s final monologue, that was ok. Sometimes that shit was amusing.

“You mean existence would be over, that’s what you mean,” Mike prompted.

Selaphiel leaned forward. “We are not meant to be separate like this. We could all be one glorious entity again. All together. Never alone. I was merely bringing everything together to the divine, as is my job. I *always* do my job.”



“Bruh, you don’t get it. If there is only one glorious entity, that is the definition of alone,” Ari argued. “That’s why this all started, you dipshit. The one glorious entity, the divine, whatever the fuck you want to call it—it was lonely. It made others so it wouldn’t be alone. And you would make it alone again.”

Ari couldn’t believe how stupid this dude was. Or delusional.

Selaphiel stood up then, anger overtaking his face. “I don’t care! Every day, every year, for all of time, I hear them pray. I hear the wants and needs of every living thing, mortal and immortal. I’m supposed to bring them closer to the divine. Words, words, words—all so fucking needy! How do I bring that which is *not* divine *closer* to the divine! So I found a way! I found a way, and you had to fuck it up! This existence was breaking down, as it *should*! I am only helping things that would happen anyway!”

“Dude, you’re like a serial killer who says everyone is gonna die anyway so you might as well kill them,” Ari snorted.

“And why not? Why not—because to be in the afterlife is to be closer to the divine! But so many souls choose Limbo or reincarnation or ghosthood! They pray for divinity and then they *go back*! It is insanity!” the angel cried.

“You think another plan will succeed? It won’t,” Mike promised.

The angel’s face turned red and spittle flew from his mouth as he yelled, “I will come up with another plan. I will find someone else. I shouldn’t have put all my faith in you simply because you were Nephilim. I see that now. I will find others, and I will *fix* this!”

Ari had heard enough, and he looked over at Mike.

“He’s insane,” Mike whispered, staring at the angel. “But he hasn’t set up anyone else to kill their soulmate. No one else is in danger.”

Then Mike turned to Ari. “I love you, my demon of vengeance,” Mike declared. It was a vow and it was an acknowledgement. Ari knew Mike was giving him his blessing.

Ari didn’t even need to act, however. It was like the words of love set Selaphiel over the edge. He lunged forward, but Ari saw the motion, and his arm shot up, the sword held firmly in his grasp and pointed at the angel. The angel’s forward momentum had him impaling himself on the sword—it slid into him smoothly, and Ari couldn’t help the thought of a hot knife sliding into butter.

There was no blood. No gore. There was a moment where Selaphiel’s face looked utterly surprised, and then there was light—not a flash this time, but a steady increase, like a light burning brighter before it burned out. The sword was glowing brighter and brighter, and it was like it was pulling the angel’s light into itself, because Selaphiel was growing dimmer and dimmer. His mouth seemed to form words, but even in his last moments there was no sign of regret.

Then he was gone, and the sword was glowing and bright, and Ari had the feeling that it had consumed the angel somehow.

“Dude, that was fucking *awesome*,” Ari exclaimed.

Mike snorted before smacking Ari’s arm with the hand that wasn’t still gripped tightly in Ari’s.

“What?!” he demanded. “Listen, my little dude—revenge should always be joyous. Sure, we ended an angel, and that sucks, but we saved lots of other people tons of heartache. Plus, he was totally a dick anyway.”

“Yeah, but now what?” Mike asked.

And it was as if someone answered his little dude’s words, because with another flash (his poor s’more’s eyes—he was gonna need to buy his little dude sunglasses the next time they had a heavenly quest), they disappeared from the office.

## CHAPTER 23

# MICHAEL

They were standing in Selaphiel's office one moment, Ari holding onto a glowing heavenly sword, and the next they were in a totally different room, and it took Mike a moment to get over his shock and disorientation. He blinked a few times to adjust his eyes, and when he could finally look around, he noticed two figures.

One figure was striking in all black. He had dark eyes, dark hair, a dark suit, and sinfully hot features—if Mike had met this guy before Ari, he would've been questioning his sexuality a lot sooner. Not to say that anyone was sexier than his demon, because Mike was firmly on team Ari. Always.

The other being was a total contrast. They were the very definition of androgynous, and it was like Mike's mind refused to box them into one gender. They wore a shining white robe that looked like water as it flowed around them, and their hair was the palest blonde Mike had ever seen. Their eyes looked otherworldly; they were a startling and magnificent blue—although the word blue didn't even do them justice, but Mike wasn't an artist to know what color they were exactly.

Based on Gabe's and Az's descriptions, he guessed this was god and the devil. They weren't drinking tea this time, though; they were just sort of sitting there smiling fondly at Mike and Ari. It was super weird, and it was like Ari read Mike's mind.

“Dude, this is hella weird. First we take a trip into heaven, and there I was, all not-pooing away or melting in agony, and

now we get an audience with the big bosses themselves. What up, dudes?” Ari asked.

Mike turned to stare at Ari in horror. “Did you just say ‘What up, dudes’ to god and the devil? Ari, seriously?” he asked.

The dark one chuckled. “You may call me Luce, and this is Yah. Trust me that we can handle a little irreverence, can’t we, Yah?”

Yah smiled, and Mike was reminded of parents and warmth and sunshine. He couldn’t help it, he smiled back.

“You have something that needs to come back to me, I think,” Yah merely replied.

“Ah, yeah, dude, you probably mean the magic sword that sucked up that dick, Selaphiel,” Ari said, holding the sword up that he was still clutching.

Luce sighed. “A *little* irreverence, Ari,” he stated dryly. “That is the Divine Weapon of the Almighty, not a magic sword.”

“Yeah, but you gotta admit that the angel dude *was* a total dick,” Ari added.

“Selaphiel was always zealous,” Yah confessed. “His creation was early enough that he knew about some of the time before, but he was not the first archangel to come into being, and he did not have as much knowledge as he thought he did. There was just enough divine in him to make him think he was all-knowing, but not quite enough for him to actually *be* all-knowing.”

“Dude, he shouldn’t have been able to fly so far off the plan,” Ari admonished, and Mike elbowed his demon. Crap. Ari was totally gonna get the wrath of god headed in their direction.

But Yah only looked sad, and the expression broke Mike’s heart a little.

“No, he should not have. Even more, I should have sensed it, and I did not,” Yah admitted.

“Come, my love, no blaming yourself,” Luce said kindly, and Mike thought his jaw probably dropped to the floor, because yeah, the devil had just called god ‘my love.’ His brother had hinted that something was going on between these two when he met them, but Mike had thought he was exaggerating. Obviously not.

Yah smiled fondly at Luce, then he looked back to Mike and Ari. “Things are breaking down a bit, but we are working to fix them. It has caused some disruptions in what I know, and somehow Selaphiel slipped through those cracks. If I had seen him I would have known, but I have not been in his presence in perhaps a century. Often angels find my presence... overwhelming. I respect their space. Perhaps I should not,” Yah admitted.

“Nah, dude, that’s cool. We dug out the rotten apple. Where do you want your soul-sucking weapon of mass destruction?” Ari asked.

Luce sighed, and Mike thought it sounded like a parent dealing with a particularly stubborn toddler. Yah just looked at Luce and chuckled a bit, though.

“He’s your creation, Luce. You have only yourself to blame for his cheekiness,” Yah smiled. He then turned back to Ari. “I will take the sword.”

“What will happen to him?” Mike asked. He wasn’t quite sure why he phrased it like that, because something had already happened to Selaphiel, after all—Mike had seen him fade out of existence—but somehow he didn’t think the angel was really gone.

“Nothing ever really dies. Nothing ever truly ends. Selaphiel was... unstable. He could not continue as he was. All the energy that made him what he was is still here, though. The universe never loses or gains anything—it only remakes things. Selaphiel shall be remade, perhaps into some lesser divine beings and some mortal souls. Clearly all that Selaphiel held was too much for him, so that burden shall be removed. I will take him back now,” Yah pronounced, holding out his hands.

Ari let Mike's hand go, and he used both of his hands to place the sword into Yah's outstretched hands. Mike noticed with some level of amusement that his demon was careful not to touch Yah. He smiled a bit at that; obviously Ari wasn't totally irreverent about meeting god.

Once the sword was out of Ari's hands he quickly stepped back and grabbed Mike's hand again, and Mike felt relief at that. He wanted to be holding onto his demon in this place.

Yah smiled at them indulgently, and the sword was suddenly gone, Yah's hands empty and being folded in their lap.

"Are you sure you want to deal with the remaking, love?" Luce asked. "You know I'd happily handle the transformation."

Yah looked entertained at the thought. "As amusing as it would be to see what things you would transform Selaphiel into, I think it best if I handle the recreation."

"Yes," Luce admitted. "You are far more able to hold your temper than me. My anger at his attempt to further the destruction of things is quite extreme."

"Yes, temperance has never been your strong point," Yah responded dryly.

Although Mike was totally rapt in watching the two of them banter, he couldn't keep his own worries at bay. "What happens now?" he asked. He was, after all, a planner.

"Yeah, my s'more worries about this stuff. I'm sure the cute little angel dude will keep matching up soul mates, and the universe will be all fixed and shit, but what happens with us?" Ari asked, squeezing Mike's hand.

"Cute little angel dude?" Luce asked, looking alert, and he glanced at Yah, who looked back at him. Yah appeared unruffled, but Mike thought there was a glimmer of surprise there.

"Uh, were we not supposed to know about that?" Mike asked. "We won't mention him to anyone."

Yah looked at Mike closely then. “No, of course you wouldn’t. It is more that Luce and I were unaware that an angel was actively working on the situation. We try not to micromanage, but clearly there are those who would take advantage of that and keep things from us. But you two are quite good at gathering information, aren’t you?”

Mike didn’t know what to say to that, but Ari was never at a loss for words. “Yup! My little dude is wicked smart! And you know me—I’ll suss out any chaos and trouble around. But the cute angel dude probably wasn’t keeping it from you—he asked permission and all from the higher up angel. The dickwad in charge just kinda wanted to get rid of him though. I’m not even sure he listened to what cute angel dude was gonna do.”

Luce and Yah shared a long look, and it seemed the two had an entire conversation without speaking a word.

“You were right, my love—they will be perfect for the job,” Luce finally stated.

“Job?” Mike asked. He was a little alarmed at what job these two could have for them.

“As Yah said, there are those who would keep things from us. You two have proven yourselves adept at ferreting out information and dealing with situations. The afterlife is not without its problems, and we think you two would be perfect for handling any that crop up. Think of it as a sort of internal affairs division of the afterlife,” Luce stated.

“Dude, we are *totally* gonna be superheroes after all!” Ari chuckled, squeezing Mike’s hand.

“Uh, what would that entail?” Mike asked. He wasn’t sure he wanted to leave his family to work in the afterlife just yet, after all. He loved Ari, and he would love working with Ari, and he didn’t know what he would do without work, but still... he loved his family.

Ari squeezed his hand again, almost like he could sense Mike’s spiraling concern.



“You two would, as needed, look into anything that we required you to. You would report only to us,” Luce declared.

“We would be here in the afterlife?” Mike asked, getting to the real concern.

Yah smiled at him. “You would have access to anywhere you needed to, but you could certainly continue your mortal life topside if you so chose. You would simply have occasional work trips to afterlife locations to deal with matters as they arose. We would not take you from your family,” Yah reassured him.

Mike looked at Ari, who was already looking at him. He looked like a little kid being offered his favorite candy—Mike was surprised he wasn’t dancing around in excitement.

“You know that Ari is bound to bring a little chaos to things,” Mike added, staring at his demon. He loved Ari, and he certainly didn’t want him to get in trouble for being himself.

“We count on it,” Luce chuckled. “A little chaos is exactly what is needed sometimes.”

Yah merely smiled, and Mike took that as acceptance.

“Little dude?” Ari asked.

Well, it did solve his problem of work. It gave them both a purpose. Best of all, they’d be together and wouldn’t have to leave Mike’s family.

“You wouldn’t mind staying topside with me?” he asked Ari.

“My s’more, as long as I’m with you, I’ll be happy,” Ari promised.

Mike looked back at the two figures who would apparently be his new bosses.

“I guess we’ll take the job, as long as there’s fair pay and benefits, of course,” he answered (because they would still need to worry about those things if they were “topside”).

He received two grins in response, so he figured that wouldn't be a problem.

“Awesome!” Ari beamed. “We'll be like superheroes and private investigators and shit stirrers all at once! Best gig ever, I can already tell!”

Mike just smiled a little at the slightly alarmed expression on Luce's face (although of course Yah remained unflappable). If he was with Ari, he knew it would all work out. Of course he'd worry, because that was what he did, but at least Ari would be there to ease his fears. For the first time, he felt lighter about the future. They had a plan and a path, and most importantly, they had each other.

## CHAPTER 24

# ARIOCH

After some farewells and final chatter, they were back in Mike's apartment with very little fanfare (luckily Luce and Yah didn't go for the whole flashy lights thing on re-entry).

Ari reached over and grabbed his sexy little s'more and snuggled him up as close as he could. Not that he was worried or anything, but still, he was glad everything had turned out ok. He definitely did not want anything happening to his little dude, and Selaphiel had been a dick.

Mike just snuggled in and sighed before saying, "That was interesting."

"You all good, little dude? It was a lot to process," Ari remarked, and Mike sighed again.

Ari was a go-with-the-flow guy, and he was still reeling a bit from all that had happened. Sure, he took great joy in bringing about chaos, but there were some things you just expected to be a certain way. Finding out that Yah was not all knowing was kind of a shock. Finding out that Asmodeus hadn't been exaggerating and that there were total lusty vibes between Luce and Yah was another shock. He hadn't actually taken Az seriously when he'd heard that; he just thought it was Az being Az and seeing lust everywhere.

Ah well. It was good to be wrong sometimes. It kept him on his toes and made life interesting.

"You ok with this whole job thing? I know I was really excited about it, but we can find something else to do. Not all

superheroes need to work for Nick Fury, you know,” Ari assured him.

“I’m not sure I want to know whether you consider Luce or Yah as the director of our covert operation,” Mike joked. “Seriously though, I think it’s kind of awesome. I was at loose ends thinking about what we’d do when this all was done, and now we have a new career. We already have a job, and I have to admit I’m kind of excited to get started.”

Ah yes, Luce and Yah had given them a bit of an assignment before the farewells. Ari hadn’t thought too much about it yet, but of course his s’more was already focused and thinking.

“Well,” Ari drawled out, “I’m sure you’re ready to do some research, but I thought maybe we could research some other things first.” Ari reached down and grabbed Mike’s ass firmly in his hands and gave a squeeze.

When Mike looked up at him, he waggled his eyebrows suggestively. Or at least he tried to be suggestive. From Mike’s snort-giggle, he may have just been ridiculous.

That was ok. Ari enjoyed amusing his sexy little dude, and he looked forward to an eternity of doing so.

“What do you say, my sweet s’more? How about you let me suck the marshmallow out of your graham cracker?” Ari teased.

“Oh my god, I cannot believe you said that. You’re ridiculous!” Mike laughed.

“But you love me,” Ari said.

Mike’s laughter died off, and he reached up to grab Ari’s face between his hands. “I do love you. With everything I am. I really do.”

“I love you too, baby. You’re so perfect for me in every way,” Ari rumbled.

Mike groaned, and then their lips were crashing together, their breaths mingling, their tongues dancing with one another.

Ari didn't bother with slow—he got rid of their clothes with a thought and pushed Mike back onto his couch. Mike's cock was already hard and leaking, and he stared longingly at Ari, his eyes focused on Ari's dick. Ari circled himself with his fist, asking, “Do you like what you see, my s'more?”

Mike nodded and licked his lips, and damn if that didn't make Ari's cock twitch in excitement.

Ari needed to taste, and he kneeled down in front of Mike and took that beautiful, sexy cock into his mouth and down his throat. Mike practically shouted in pleasure, and Ari's own dick got harder at the sound.

“Ohmygod,” Mike cried out.

Ari popped off long enough to say, “Nah, little dude, it's just me, but I bet I give better head than Yah anyway.”

“Ari!” Mike yelled, but Ari could hear the laughter in his voice too, and he smiled at Mike before he took that pretty cock back into his mouth, licking around the head and into his slit, listening to all his sexy groans.

“Please, Ari,” Mike moaned, and Ari knew his little s'more needed something more; they needed to be closer, body to body, skin to skin.

He gave Mike's hard dick one final lick before he stood, lifting his sexy s'more in his arms as he did. He let his demonic form out, enfolded them within his wings, and transported them onto the bed—he didn't think the couch would be very comfy for his wings and tail, and he had every intention of putting his tail to good use again.

Ari put himself on the bottom, his wings furred out beneath him, laying on the mattress with Mike splayed out on top of him. His little s'more seemed momentarily disoriented by their sudden change in location and position, but Ari just leaned up and caught Mike's lower lip between his teeth, gently nibbling as he thrust his hips up into Mike, giving them both pressure against their cocks.

“Ari, please. Please,” Mike groaned when Ari moved over to nip at his neck.

“What, baby? What do you want? Anything. Tell me,” Ari whispered, licking Mike’s ear.

“I want you inside me, Ari. I need to feel you. Need to feel you filling me up. Need to be close to you,” Mike whimpered.

“Yes, baby. I want to feel your beautiful ass gripping my cock. Need to be inside that perfect little hole of yours,” Ari murmured.

He reached between them, grabbing both their dicks in his hand, slowly pumping his fist up and down. They both groaned at the sensation.

“So perfect, my little s’more. I’m gonna stretch you out for my dick. Do you want that, baby? You want me inside you, a part of you?”

“Fuck yes,” Mike moaned, his hips thrusting down. Ari took his other hand and held Mike still as his tail slid around to Mike’s ass. He gently pressed the tip into Mike’s hole, feeling resistance at first, but then Mike moaned, and his tail eased further inside.

He let it undulate gently inside Mike, listening to his cries of pleasure, and then he pressed it against Mike’s prostate. His little s’more’s dick jerked in his hand, spilling out precum, and Ari groaned as it slicked the way while he pumped their dicks together.

“Yes, baby. Moan for me. Let me hear how good you feel. You feel so good squeezing my tail, your dick against mine. Tell me, my sexy s’more. Tell me,” Ari rumbled.

“Feels so good! Fuck, it’s too good,” Mike whimpered.

“You do such a good job for me. So perfect. You are my perfect soulmate,” Ari moaned.

“Please, Ari! Please!” Mike cried out.

“What, baby? What do you need? Tell me. Anything. It’s yours. I’m yours. Always yours. Forever.”

“Need you inside me, Ari. Please,” Mike moaned. “I love you so much, and I need you to be a part of me.”

“I always am, my s’more,” Ari replied as he shifted Mike up, giving him a long kiss, biting at his lip as he let his tail stretch out that sweet little hole.

Then he lifted Mike’s hips and let him get his knees underneath him, straddling Ari. Mike looked down at him, his eyes glazed with passion. He moaned in disappointment as Ari pulled his tail out.

“Do you wanna ride me, baby? Wanna sink onto my dick? You’ll feel so good on top of me. I know you’ll do such a good job riding my cock. You’ll make us both feel amazing.”

He left his hands around Mike’s hips, feeling his soft skin, and he looked up at the love of his eternity. His soulmate. His everything. He guided Mike’s hips until his sexy smore’s hole was hovering over his dick. He felt the tip press against that beautiful little pucker, and he couldn’t wait to sink inside, but he wanted to let his s’more set the pace.

Mike stared into his eyes, and Ari stared back, seeing all the passion and devotion, and it was almost too much. Ari had lived longer than memory, had seen things great and horrible, and nothing compared to the feeling of his cock being engulfed in Mike’s warm heat as his soulmate stared into his eyes. He saw all of eternity in those eyes, all of eternity with the two of them together. It was beautiful.

They were beautiful together.

“Demons, baby, you feel so good. So damn good. Love you so much,” Ari whispered.

Mike rested his hands on Ari’s chest and began to move his hips up and down, sliding Ari’s cock almost all the way out, and then sinking slowly back down and engulfing Ari in that tight channel. Ari couldn’t help it—he thrust his hips up as Mike slid down, and his soulmate closed his eyes and moaned, letting Ari know that he had hit that perfect spot of pleasure inside Mike. He continued to lift his hips, making sure to hit Mike’s prostate again and again.

“Ari!” Mike cried out.



“So perfect, baby. You do such a good job riding me. Oh, demons,” Ari moaned out, and he started thrusting his hips faster as Mike sped up, riding him harder.

He let his tail reach between them to circle around Mike’s cock. Mike’s eyes flew open and he looked down, groaning loudly at the sight of Ari’s tail wrapped around his dick.

“Ari, I can’t. It’s too good. Too much,” he cried out.

“Look at me, baby. Look at me. I love you, my perfect s’more. I love you, my soulmate,” Ari said.

Mike looked down into Ari’s eyes, and it felt like they were gazing into each other’s souls. Mike’s ass was so tight and hot and smooth, squeezing his dick with every slide, and his tail was wet with Mike’s precum, and he felt like each time he squeezed Mike’s cock, his dick was squeezed tighter inside Mike’s ass.

The pressure, the movement, the love in his soulmate’s eyes—it was a moment of pure perfection in the eternal chaos of existence. Then Ari felt his orgasm crash through him like lightning, every part of him bright with ecstasy. He squeezed his tail tighter around Mike’s cock, and cum shot out onto his chest at the same time that he was filling Mike up. Mike rode him through their orgasms, continuing to gaze at him as they came, and Ari felt tears burning his eyes at the purity of the moment.

Mike slowed, and Ari let his tail uncurl from his s’more’s softening dick. Then Mike collapsed on top of him, both of them breathing heavily, and there was no better feeling in that moment than Mike’s soft, warm weight pressing against him. Ari rubbed his hands along Mike’s back, just holding his s’more close.

“You are perfect, my soulmate,” Ari whispered into Mike’s ear.

Mike tilted his head up and smiled. “That’s only because you’re perfect for me. I love you, my sexy soulmate.”

“I love you too, my sexy s’more,” Ari promised. Then Mike tucked his head under Ari’s chin and wrapped his arms

around Ari.

He felt a soft kiss to his chest, and he heard Mike give a contented sigh. Ari had thought he knew happiness—he had done a lot of crazy and fun things in his long existence—but nothing compared to this.

He knew that soon Mike would be itching to get out a yellow notepad and start plotting out their next case. He knew that they would need to call Mike's family and fill them in, because Grams, Ser, Gabe, and Az would certainly want to hear everything that happened—it was an awesome story, after all. And Ari was super excited for all those things; he couldn't wait to hang with the crazy family or play afterlife crime solver with his super smart dude.

But for now, he just enjoyed the moment. Who knew that a chaos demon could find such joy in a moment of peace and calm. Ari looked forward to an eternity of chaos and vengeance and really great sex, but most of all, he looked forward to an eternity of cuddles and smiles and laughter.

## EPILOGUE

“That was rather less chaotic than I expected,” Yah said, looking over at Luce.

“I told you, my love, the two of them are perfect for handling things,” Luce replied. He reached his hand out, just barely, leaving it up to Yah whether or not to take it.

Yah’s hand twitched, but they didn’t reach for Luce, even though he could see the yearning on their face.

Not yet, then.

“I think they’ll handle things rather well, don’t you?” Luce asked. “Although I have to admit to being surprised that an angel has been working on the soulmate issue. Neither one of us saw that.”

“No,” Yah said thoughtfully, staring back at where their two newest employees had been standing a few moments before. “We did not see that. The idea should not have occurred to an angel. I would have expected it of one of your demons before an angel. It’s rather... curious.”

“Indeed. Perhaps we should find this angel who apparently thinks a bit like a demon,” Luce suggested.

“Perhaps we should,” Yah admitted. They looked back at Luce, and he saw longing, although Yah would never admit it.

Yah and Luce were the first and last pieces of the Divine Entity that existed before time itself; the beginning and the end to the circle. Yah thought that Luce didn’t realize that, but of course he did.

He craved Yah; he had since the beginning, although it had taken him a few centuries to understand his feelings.

It had simply taken Yah longer to realize things, or at least to admit to them, but that was ok. Luce had nothing but time, and he was patient.

Yah thought they were the only ones with memory of the infinite being that existed before time, but Luce remembered. The more he was in Yah's presence, the more he remembered. It came at a cost, but that cost was worth it.

Luce shifted, and Yah noticed his slight grimace. Yes, it was painful for him to be in heaven, but the pain was less and less as time went on. In the beginning, he had felt as if the flesh would melt from his bones. Yet he had kept coming back, even when he didn't know why he wanted to see Yah more often than their occasional leadership meetings in neutral territory.

He understood now. He understood so much now.

"You're in pain," Yah stated, and Luce felt the censure in their voice.

"It is fine, my love. It grows less and less with each visit, and even less with each pairing of soulmates," Luce reassured them. "The cracks in the universe grow less as well, do they not? We are mending things. Such work takes time, but I have patience. For this, I will always have patience."

Yah looked at him, and Luce saw love in those eyes. If only they would risk a touch. Luce knew that they had not been touched in longer than memory could serve, and he ached at the thought. He had felt the casual touch of demons—a hand on a shoulder, a hug, a brush as he walked by someone. And yes, the occasional dalliance. He was, after all, Lucifer. Such things were expected.

Yah had none of that. An eternity of being worshipped was an eternity of being alone and untouched. Luce's soul ached at the thought of such loneliness. He could barely resist the urge to reach out and touch Yah, to run a finger along Yah's cheek and feel the softness of their skin.

But perhaps Yah was right to be cautious, much as it pained Luce to admit it. There was no point in doing all this work to mend things if their touch would bring about the very destruction they hoped to avoid.

They were two halves of a whole, and yet there was a wide gulf between them. They needed a way to bridge that gulf.

“Is it Kushiel’s turn at long last?” Luce asked, breaking the building tension between them. He did not want Yah unhappy, and though they were overworked, at least it kept them from yearning too much.

Luce could yearn enough for both of them.

“Kushiel has been through much, and yet his loyalty has always been unwavering. I never would have wished such suffering on him as he has undergone,” Yah admitted, and Luce knew there was guilt there.

“Kushiel does his job, and he does it well. If there were consequences to that job, he knew of them and accepted them. His suffering is not his fault or your own,” Luce assured him.

“He has been shunned by the angelic—is that not my fault?” Yah questioned softly. “I did, after all, create this place.”

“Yes, you may have made the machine, but it took on a life of its own. That is the thing about creation—you must set it free. You made sure everyone was happy with their tasks. For millennia, that was true. If we have upset the balance a bit with our current meddling... well, we work to set it right again.” Luce stood before continuing. “No wallowing, my love. You have always disliked religions that paint you as a figure of suffering. You have too much to do to wallow.”

Yah smiled dryly at that. “I do indeed. We must set Kushiel to rights first, however.”

“Let me do that, my love. I already have a plan in motion,” Luce admitted, waiting to see Yah’s reply.

Yah inclined their head in agreement, and Luce felt happiness swell within him. To be trusted in all things—it was a gift.

He walked over as Yah stood. He came as close as he dared, and Yah did not move back. There was a time they would have, but that time had passed. He leaned in, losing himself in those impossibly blue eyes. He could see all of creation in those eyes, and he wondered what Yah saw in his eyes.

He raised a hand, putting it so close to Yah's face that he could feel the heat of their body. All Yah had to do was lean forward just the teeniest fraction. It would be reckless, but Luce wanted it anyway.

Yah looked into Luce's eyes, but they didn't lean forward. It was like the two of them were separated by a wall of impenetrable glass, so close yet just out of reach. They were spellbound by each other, and if their desires took form, there would be no space between them. The moment spiraled out, and Luce knew the time was not here yet.

"I shall see you soon, my love. Perhaps next time we will start searching for that cute angel Ari mentioned," Luce murmured, leaning back and breaking the spell.

"Yes," Yah answered.

Luce took his leave, appearing back in his own domain, sitting in his dark office in the underworld, all rich leather and dark colors, except for the cracks, of course. They were here as well, shining white light that almost blinded in its intensity. Luce waved a hand, making them disappear.

He thought again of touching Yah, of sliding his finger along their cheek, along their jaw. He thought of pressing against them and feeling their body against his, of wrapping his arms around them and gently pressing their head onto his shoulder, of finally giving them the touch and comfort they longed for. He would find a way to bridge the gap between them.

Lucifer looked out over the lavafalls and thought of sharing the beauty of this place with his other half. The day would come, even if it was not here. Not yet.

Soon, though.

Luce could be patient. He turned back around to his desk. He had work to do.

**If you're wondering exactly what is going on with Mr. Frog (aka Beel), keep reading for a preview from the novella featuring everyone's favorite pet frog in the Demonic Disasters and Afterlife Adventures Series from Shannon Mae.**

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE CARE AND FEEDING OF DEMONS

## Day 7600 (Humans Have the Weirdest Ideas)

Two weeks. He had been Gabe's pet for almost twenty-one years at this point, and he didn't think he'd ever had such an eventful two weeks.

He'd gone to the underworld. It had sucked. Most demons hadn't recognized him, which he supposed was to be expected since he'd stayed in frog form. He thought at one point he'd heard someone calling his name, but he'd hopped off before he could find out. He had, eventually, after a lot of difficulty, found Gabe's parents. They had been happily browsing the libraries of Limbo, and Gabe had been happy to hear it.

Then there'd been the whole thing with the archangel and Lilith and... well, the less said about that, the better. It had all been horribly traumatizing for Beel, and he hadn't even been there.

Everyone always felt bad for the people who faced these momentous fates and crazy quests. Or people were in awe of them. Adventurers, even unwilling ones, were always lauded as brave and courageous, and everyone lamented what the adventurers had gone through.

But what about those who were left behind? It wasn't glorious. There was no adventure or danger to distract you. You just had to sit in your aquarium and hope that your loved one would somehow make it home.

He couldn't *do* anything. It was horribly stressful, and yes, perhaps it was selfish to worry what would become of him.



But what *would* become of him without Gabe? He wouldn't be anyone's pet frog anymore, would he? He certainly wouldn't be adopted by Michael. Ser might take him, but she was exactly the sort to forget he existed aside from feeding him. There would be no movie nights with her. Grams was liable to just send him back from whence he came.

Gabe had come back, though, and Az (the nickname he had insisted Beel use for him) had told him that Gabe was living out his life topside with *all* his family, and that Beel was part of that family.

His little froggy heart had almost burst at that. Gabe considered him family. Gabe loved him. Sure, not like he loved Az, but again, eww, because he'd known Gabe since he was a wee little kid. The last thing he wanted was *that* kind of relationship with Gabe. He was more like the wiser, older brother. Only smaller. And not the same species. But whatever.

Beel sighed internally (since frogs couldn't sigh out loud). There was a thing about couples in love. Beel had seen it in movies often enough, but he hadn't *ever* believed that *his* human would fall to such lengths.

Yet here he was, listening to a monologue from Gabe, who was sitting in front of Beel's aquarium, which was now (thankfully) placed in the living room. (Beel did *not* need to know what those two got up to in the bedroom, thank you very much.)

"If you'd just tell Az what you're interested in, I'm sure we could find you a lovely partner for your aquarium. I know you're not *actually* a frog, but surely a Mr. or Mrs. Frog to keep you company would be nice. Not that we'd call a boy frog Mr. Frog, of course, because you're already Mr. Frog, but we'd come up with something. There's always the option of asking Grams to summon—" Gabe started, only to be interrupted by both Az, who was in the kitchen, and Beel himself.

Beel gave a loud croak at the same time that Az yelled out, "Absolutely not!"

Gabe did sigh then, but he didn't let it stop him for long. "I just think that maybe another lesser demon would be lovely company. You've enjoyed being a pet, and maybe there's someone from your previous life that you fancy? Someone who you would like to keep you company? Az and I don't want you to be lonely," Gabe assured Beel, even though Az gave a rather loud snort from the kitchen.

"He's fine!" Az shouted, probably louder than necessary. Beel ribbited his agreement. He wasn't lonely. He had these two to entertain him, and they were quite entertaining most of the time. And he had television shows when they were gone.

Gabe sighed again, and Beel deflated a bit. His human just wasn't going to let this go, and the *last* thing he needed was some upstart *actual* frog coming along and acting all froggy-like and stealing his human's affections.

Not that Beel was worried about that or anything. Of course not. Gabe loved Az, and yet he still made time for Beel. They still had horror night after things settled down a bit; they'd only skipped the first week Az had been there.

He didn't want to share his aquarium, and he ribbited that out quite loudly so Az could hear and translate.

"He doesn't want a roommate, my love. Another frog would steal all the best space on the heated rock," Az chuckled.

Beel hunkered down even more. It wasn't funny; it was true. An actual frog would really need a heated rock. The last thing he needed was to accidentally kill a real frog because he was a bit of a rock hog.

"Well, we'll get a bigger aquarium. And two heated rocks. Or else you guys could have side by side aquariums. I mean, some people do that, right? Like maybe you don't want to cohabitate, but you'd like to hang out with a frog friend on occasion?" Gabe asked.

Az sauntered into the room, coming up behind Gabe and squatting down to nuzzle his neck. "My love, I don't think Beel needs a companion frog. He isn't *actually* a frog, after

all. And calling another lesser demon is probably not a good idea. Beel is sort of on the lam from the underworld. We don't need to go calling attention to him. I think things are fine just as they are," Az argued.

Beel could have told him it was pointless to argue when Gabe got an idea this firmly planted in his head. His human could be quite tenacious. Beel usually respected that quality; after all, Gabe's tenacity had enabled him to have Beel as a dorm room pet in college, which had been quite the feat. Beel hadn't known that frogs could be "emotional support" animals, but apparently Gabe had argued quite convincingly for his presence.

Obviously Gabe's tenacity had never been turned on Beel in quite this manner, however. At this rate, Beel was going to end up with a pet cricket or something equally ridiculous because he didn't eat the thing fast enough and Gabe decided they were "soul mates."

If frogs could roll their eyes, Beel would be rolling his right now. Sometimes not using his demon form was a bit annoying; frogs just didn't have the facial expressions to show the emotions Beel was feeling.

So he did what he could. He turned his back on Gabe and hunched down. He did *not* need a damned companion.

"Oh, come on Mr. Frog, don't be like that. You know I just don't want you lonely," whined Gabe.

Az, the jerk, just laughed at him. "Ah, my love, I think Beel is just making his feelings clear. He does not want a companion. He's just fine with us," Az murmured, and Beel decided maybe he could take back the jerk part. He gave a little ribbit in agreement.

"But what about... you know..." Gabe whispered.

Beel turned around and gave a loud croak in response. That was most definitely Gabe's *I just summoned something I wasn't supposed to* voice. He'd lived with Gabe since he was a kid, and he knew that guilty voice and look very well. What could these two *possibly* be up to now?

Az sighed at that point and looked at Beel. “Gabe and I were planning a little weekend getaway, and he’s extremely concerned with leaving you home alone,” Az explained.

Beel didn’t see what the problem was. Michael or Ser or Grams had babysat him once or twice in the past. He got the two of them not bringing him along, really he did, because a hotel meant one room, and he was *not* rooming with them. Who knew what kind of crazy sex shenanigans they’d be up to.

He *could* stay in the bathroom... No, he cut that train of thought off. They were a new couple, even if they were soulmates or whatever, and they needed some alone time to cement their relationship. Beel *knew* that Gabe would bring him along in a heartbeat, because he was Mr. Frog, after all, and Gabe *always* considered him and his froggy feelings. But he didn’t need to be a third wheel, so he wouldn’t even broach the subject of going.

He croaked out to Az that a family member could babysit him. Not that he really needed babysitting, mind you. He was a demon, and he did have a demon form. He could easily transform and take care of himself. Still, he didn’t like to remind Gabe of that fact. He still felt a bit self-conscious about Gabe knowing who he really was, and he didn’t want his human to treat him any differently.

Az, rather than translating, sighed. Uh oh.

“Well, Gabe doesn’t really feel comfortable asking a family member. Michael has been a bit weird lately, and Gabe thinks that maybe Grams knows you’re a demon now and that she might have told Ser. So...” Az sort of trailed off and shrugged. “I tried explaining you don’t need a babysitter,” Az continued, “but Gabe insists that if you don’t have a babysitter you at least have a companion.”

Well great. Not only was his human going away without him, but now he’d be saddled with taking care of himself *and* some stupid “pet” that he would end up having to share rock space with.

Beel turned his back in displeasure again, but from the sounds of smooching he heard behind him, he guessed he was going to get a short reprieve from this absurd conversation.

Maybe Az could distract Gabe with enough sex that he'd forget about this whole ridiculous plan.

A lesser demon could hope, anyway. Well, not usually. Lesser demons didn't hope for much, but being topside and being Gabe's pet for so long had made him quite the optimist apparently.

Beel hunkered down on his rock, soaking up the warmth while he could. Maybe you couldn't take the pessimist out of the demon after all, because he had the thought that he better enjoy his aquarium all to himself while he could.

Change was coming, and Beel was not looking forward to it.

Preorder the Demonic Disasters and Afterlife Adventures novella [HERE](#).

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

Thank you, as always, for coming on this crazy ride with me. I hope you enjoyed Mike and Ari! I knew that Ari would manage to get Mike to loosen up a little, but I didn't realize how good they would both end up being for each other. I have to admit they were a little stubborn as well. Mike and Ari wanted to do things at their own pace, and I felt like I was just along for the drive. I wasn't always sure who was steering or where we were going, but we got there!

Once again, reader, your support makes this all possible. I love hearing from readers via email and on Facebook, and my Facebook group has been a continual source of encouragement (I love you all!). The entire M/M romance community continues to be amazing, and I count myself lucky that I am a part of it.

Mr. Frog is coming up next, and then Kushiel will get his story—he's going to be paired with a certain coffee and book shop owner who is much more than they seem to be. And there will be ghosts in book four. It's a part of the afterlife I haven't explored much in the books, and I think it's time.

Kushiel and Cass shouldn't be waiting too long for their story, but I have to admit that lately there's been a very cute, snarky guy who's been whispering in my ear, and he accidentally (sort of on purpose) gets turned into a vampire. His voice is just loud enough that a stand alone book may be coming next.

Finally, if you enjoyed this book, please leave a review! Please recommend it to friends and in groups! Authors appreciate reviews and recommendations more than we can possibly say.

You, my readers, make this all possible. Thank you!

Happy Reading!

Shannon Mae

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shannon Mae began her journey in the M/M romance world as an avid reader, then a beta reader, and eventually an editor who works with the unparalleled Tammy B. PA from [Aspen Tree E.A.S.](#)

When a dear friend suggested she should write her own book, she decided to do just that. She gravitates to writing paranormal romance, since that genre is her first love, and her books tend to be low-angst and filled with happily-ever-afters.

She is an unfailing optimist with a side of snark and sarcasm. When she isn't editing, writing, or working her day job, which she loves, you'll find her on some outdoor adventure or embarking on a hands-on project (that is probably slightly more complex than she thought it was).

She lives in a small, seaside town on the east coast, and she spends her free time with her eye-rolling, sassy teenage daughter and her adorably loving dog.

Life is a place full of mysteries and wonders, and she hopes to capture that joy and fun in her writing. Adding some fun, sexy times makes it all complete.

Shannon Mae loves hearing from readers!

Join [Shannon Mae's Menagerie](#) for updates and all kinds of fun things!

Visit Shannon's website at <https://authorshannonmae.weebly.com/>





# ALSO BY SHANNON MAE

**Demonic Disasters and Afterlife Adventures: (Paranormal Romance)**

*A Beginner's Guide to Death, Demons, and Other Afterlife Disasters*

*A Beginner's Guide to Mistakenly Summoned Demons and Other Misadventures*

*A Beginner's Guide to Revenge, Chaos, and Other Absurd Escapades*

*A Beginner's Guide to the Care and Feeding of Demons (A Novella)*