

A
NEW
REIGN

D. M. SIMMONS

A NEW REIGN

Children of The Fallen, Book Four

D.M. SIMMONS

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Author's Note

A New Reign is a dark fantasy, why choose romance. It is the fourth and final book in the Children of The Fallen series and should be read after books 1, 2, and 3, A Cursed Throne, Legacy in Ruin, and Kingdom of Hearts. It is told in four POVs and intended for mature audiences. It contains strong language and graphic sexual content and situations that may be triggering to some readers, including sharing, choking and breath play, primal play, wax play, blood play, praise, bondage and submission, breeding kink, violence, murder, mentions of rape, pregnancy, and depression, and MFMM situation(s). Read at own risk.

Playlist

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Delusive Bunker – LudoWoc

Fire – Keep Shelley In Athens

Tenshi – Formal One

Athena – Turbo Knight, Edictum

Ghosest (feat. Power Glove)

A Sea of Stars (Miami Nights 1984 Remix) – WOLFCLUB

Iridescent – Space Tourist

D.I.V.I.N.E. – Departure

Flying Trains - 8WS

Just Drive – WOLFCLUB

Slow Motion – Wojciech Golczewski

Hurts – Kenno

Blink of an Eye – DRYVE

End – Ashel

Memory Reboot – Narvent, VØJ, TRVNSPORTER &
Godmode

Nostalgie – Atrey

I Don't Need A Hero – Cody Crump

Sweet Gold (Ishi Rework) – Ishi, Nina Brock

Prologue

Nev

Seven years ago

14 years old

I didn't expect moving would be so exhausting, but when you've lived in one place your entire life and expected to box it up and move into another the size of your closet, things that were once trivial suddenly become important. Like where to put your journal—in the drawer of your desk, or on top of your already crowded nightstand?

“There.” I tuck it under my pillow and step back. “Safe from prying eyes.” Those eyes, of course, would be Declan, Luca and Kai.

My best friends had been waiting for this day, just as long as I have. For the past three years our age difference has separated us while they attend Locksley, and I remain homeschooled. While we have done everything we can to make sure that our friendship doesn't suffer from the distance, I'll admit, I'm glad that we no longer have to try as hard now that I am finally here with them at the prestigious academy.

Growing up together in the same community, the three of us always managed to find ourselves together, more than we did apart. Sure, when we were younger, the age difference was noticeable and there were things they could do that I could not. But last year, when I finally turned thirteen, those differences disappeared. Especially after the night Luca kissed me.

Thinking about that kiss makes my cheeks burn the same way they did that night Declan looked at me differently when we were in Bali this summer.

On our first night there, after my parents turned in early, Declan and I found ourselves alone in the hot tub. Seeing him sitting there with his arms outstretched and the moon overhead, I was reminded just how beautiful he was, and all the warm, fluttery feelings I'd had for him since I was a girl, surfaced.

I'm not sure if it was the warmth of the night, or the smell of hibiscus in the air, but I couldn't help but notice when I turned my eyes down from the my dozenth look at the night sky, the way he looked at me that night was different.

When he grabbed my hand to help me out of the tub and I slipped on the last stair and he caught me, I'm sure he heard the hitch in my breath, when our chests collided. For the briefest of moments, I thought he might kiss me, and I remembered licking my lip in anticipation that he would. Then, as if he'd been hit by something, he cleared his throat and stepped back abruptly.

That was the beginning of the summer, and the four of us had spent plenty of time together since then, of course. But last week when he, Luca and Kai headed to Locksley to get ready for their last year of school, and I began packing up my room, I found myself questioning more and more what happened that night with him, as well as what had happened between Luca and I last winter.

During that trip to Bali, Declan and I found ourselves together more and more, and the air between us always felt charged. The same way it did when Luca and I found ourselves without the others since the night of our kiss.

I wasn't blind and knew we were growing up, our minds and bodies changing with their own wants and needs. But I wondered what may happen now that we were all here together, away from the watchful eyes of my parents, and our age difference no longer obvious.

"Where do you want these?" A familiar voice asks, pulling me from the thought, and when I spin around and see Declan,

Kai, and Luca standing in the doorway, each holding a box, my lips pull into a bright smile.

I race across the room and Declan, knowing exactly what I am going to do, sets the box in his hand down, just in time for me to jump into his arms, and wrap my legs around his waist. He grunts slightly and laughs, tightening his arms slightly so he can hold onto me while I twist and turn to throw my arms around Luca, who is to his left, and then Kai, to his right.

When I realize I may be making him uncomfortable, I slide down slowly, and give him a nervous smile.

“Did I hurt you?” I ask jokingly, hitting his noticeably hard abs, as a way to deflect my own awkwardness.

I’d grown so used to him carrying me all around the island while we were in Bali and jumping into his arms had become second nature on that trip. Funny how months had passed and I hadn’t done it the rest of the summer but seeing him just now triggered it.

“Popped something is more like it.” Luca smirks and sets the box down in his hand as Kai does the same.

Declan grins while flipping Luca off. “I’m fine, princess.”

As they stand there looking at me with wide, beautiful smiles, I can’t help but notice the uptick in students that seem to pass, and how oblivious the three are to it because their attention is focused on one thing—me.

“Who is that?” I look around Declan as Kai steps into the hall to talk with two guys that have suddenly appeared.

Declan and Luca look over their shoulders and the smile on their faces fade. “The one with the dark hair is Sebastian Crane,” Declan says tightly.

“And the blonde is Logan Sinclair,” Luca adds, just as crisply. “Sebastian is in our grade but Logan is a first year, like you.”

I crane my neck to get a better look at both boys. They’re clean-cut and good looking—an apparent prerequisite, judging

by what I've seen so far of Locksley's student body—and their last names are familiar, which isn't surprising. The school was built by and for old money, and our classmates were a who's who of London society.

“If the blonde is a first year,” I pull back after getting an eyeful, “why does it seem like Kai knows him?”

“Sebastian has been bringing him to parties for the past year,” Declan says as he too, returns his focus to me. “As well as his sister, Sasha, who is also a first year.”

“Oh yeah?” I ask with interest. Maybe she and I could be friends. “Have you met her? Is she nice?”

Declan and Luca both laugh and I cross my arms, wondering what's so funny.

“You know that movie Kai made us watch a few years ago,” Luca says when he sees me waiting for an answer.

“Which one?” Kai was always introducing us to new movies, particularly his favorite genre, the 1980s.

Luca winks as if reading my mind. He was always giving Kai a bad time about his passion for movies and music. The latter, however, I understood because I too, loved music, thanks to my dad.

“The one about the girls in high school,” he clarifies. “You know, the ones that were complete assholes to the other students.”

“Um, *Mean Girls*?” I answer wryly.

“That's the one,” he snaps. “Let's just say the lead in that movie looks like a teddy bear compared to Sasha Crane.”

“Really?” My eyes widen, pushing my brows up. “That bad?”

“She's the worst,” Declan confirms. “Cruel, and vicious. I'd stay away if I were you.”

“Ah.” I lift my chin in acknowledgement getting the message loud and clear.

I didn't like society snobs. I cared little about one's name, and even less about money. In the end, neither mattered, and since I was a child of beings that knew this better than any, it was a view I'd always maintained.

"Well, duly noted. Thanks for the heads up."

"Stick with us," Luca smiles. "We'll make sure you're taken care of, baby girl. All three of us, including Kai's less than charming side. In fact..." He looks over his shoulder and I see a grin tug at his lips. "I'm sure Sebastian and Logan are getting up close and personal with him right now."

Realizing what he means, I look back over Luca's shoulder and sure enough, Kai's eyes had grown dark, and his countenance, domineering.

Kai was a sweetheart. My go to for all things fun and frivolous. But if you made him mad, Hyde, his angry side, came out, and if you're on the receiving end of *his* wrath, look out.

Kai comes back over a moment later, rubbing his hands together with a bright smile. "Alright," he claps his hands, "where do you want us, gorgeous?"

The cheerfulness of his voice and light in his gold eyes had returned. I'd seen Kai shift between himself and Hyde often over the years and was used to it. But this was the fastest flip I'd seen yet.

"What do you mean?" I ask with a smile that matches his.

"Unpacking. With all the boxes that are in the hall and those stacked up in here, you'll be doing it for weeks if you have to do it alone. Put us to use."

I chew the inside of my cheek and look around, embarrassed with how much stuff I had. "It's ridiculous. I know. But you know how my mother and Lillian can be."

Our attendant Lillian, who was more like a grandmother than an eternal member of our community, had been shopping for me all summer. It seemed like every day she was bringing

me something she'd seen and 'had to pick up for my dorm room.' Between her and my mother, I had enough clothes and supplies for all of the four years I'd be here.

"Declan flashes me that beautiful smile of his. The one that turns his gray eyes silver and makes my stomach flip. "You'll be the best dressed girl here princess, there's no doubt."

"Shit." Luca gives me a once over, which only makes my just flipped stomach flip again. "She's always the best dressed."

"I don't know about that." I look down at my cut off shorts, T-shirt and Converse. "My mother would ring my neck if she saw me right now."

"Well it's a good thing she's not here," Kai smiles, "because that Thrasher T-shirt looks good on you. I was wondering where it had run off to."

I grab the hem of the shirt and twist my fingers in it nervously. He loved this shirt and when he left it at the penthouse over winter break last year, I never returned it.

After my parents left earlier, I dug through three boxes to find it and slipped it on. It was soft, and comfortable, and soothed my nerves, which seemed to have cropped up once I was all alone. Now that the guys were here, however, I was again at ease, and felt right at home.

"Do you want it back?" I ask Kai tentatively. If he says yes, I'll pout until he gives it back. Although, I know he won't.

He runs a hand through his golden hair and grins. "Keep it. Looks better on you, than it does me."

When he says it, my body warms and it feels like butterflies are fluttering in my chest. Shit, now Kai was having that effect on me, too?

I don't know why I'm so surprised. The four of us have always shared a connection that made everything around us seem obsolete. Still, I'm sure there were lots of girls flocking

at their feet, and the idea I'll have to get used to their attention being on anyone other than me makes me feel a way I have never felt before, and not sure I like.

“He’s right.” Luca removes the shirt he’s wearing and tosses it to my bed. “Let’s get to work.”

When he bends down to grab the box he was holding earlier, I can’t help but notice the muscles in his back.

I’d seen him without a shirt countless times before. Luca was always working out. His dad was one of the legion’s best fighters, and the gym seemed to be the only place they didn’t argue because they were both too busy to talk. But his body had matured. In fact, all of their bodies had changed in ways that were making me think all kinds of thoughts.

Kai hits Deck on the shoulder, who is watching me, watch Luca, and when I clear my throat and look down, the three get to work.

As they start to move about the room, talking and laughing, I feel a mix of electricity and excitement in the air. I can’t believe I’m here. Finally, for one year, we will all be together, and I can’t help but think this will be a year to remember.

“Better get used to it,” Kai says over his shoulder as I find myself staring at Declan. I know exactly the body that hides under his loose fitting T-shirt. I salivated over it the entire time we were in Bali and wished he’d take his shirt off now, too.

“I’m sorry.” I shake my head and turn back to Kai. “Get used to what?”

“If we’re all going to live together some day,” he nods at Luca, “you better get used to that one never wearing a shirt. It’s become his thing.”

I snort while opening the box next to me and keep my focus on what’s inside instead of my three beautiful best friends. “Oh Kai, you know the three of you will probably move into some bachelor pad and start building your empire, while I’m stuck here learning math and mythology.”

“No way.” Kai sets the box in his arms down and comes over to where I’m standing and places a hand over his heart and taps it twice. “That dream we had as kids, it’s still right here. We will just put it on pause until you catch up.”

“Really?” I look at him skeptically. The four of us had always talked about building a business together and living in a huge house where we each had our own floors. It was a fun dream when we were kids, but I was pretty sure they had dreams of their own now.

“Sure,” he shrugs. “Why not?”

The way in which he says it makes me believe the four of us will have a future together. It had always been us, so why would that ever change?

I laugh and get to work, unpacking another box and then another. Every so often students pass and stare inside the room, as we laugh and talk as if we are the only ones in the world.

“I don’t know how you do it.” I plop down on my bed and watch as the guys stabilize a bookshelf on the other side of the room.

“How do we do what?” Declan asks while giving the shelf a jiggle to make sure it’s secure.

“Get anything done while being ogled.” I dip my head back and look up at the ceiling. “I think the entire student body has come by to check you out.”

“Probably,” Kai laughs. “Half the student body wants Luca.”

“And the other half?” I find myself asking.

“That one.” I look up and see he’s pointing at Declan.

Both answers make me feel something and I can’t be sure, but I think it’s jealousy.

“Not true.” Luca swipes the back of his hand across his forehead, making his abs ripple. “There is at least one after

you.”

“Oh yeah?” I ask as casually as I can, despite the way my cheeks burn at the idea of someone wanting my sweetheart, Kai.

“True story,” Declan agrees with a laugh. “Rose Whitmore. Been after Kai since our first day here.”

“So, this Rose,” I swallow. “Do I need to know her? You know in case she’s girlfriend material?” The question alone makes my fingers twitch.

The three look at one another and then me, and I don’t know why, but it feels as if the air has just been sucked right out of the room.

I’m not sure how much time passes as the four of us stare at one another, but when the air between us grows too hot and thick, I clear my throat and push up from the bed.

“Boxes,” I reach for a small one by my nightstand. “So... many...boxes.”

As I pull it to me, the guys get back to work, and when I start digging through the contents, I can’t help but think about the idea of my guys being with someone other than me. Any girl who looks at them will become enemy number one because no one will ever be good enough for them. No one but me.

After powering through two boxes of pizza and then calling it a night, I take a long, hot shower. While washing the day from my skin, I let my hands wander and touch myself the way I’ve recently started to do. Only, this time, I don’t think of some random cute guy. I think of my boys. Declan, Kai, and Luca, and imagine it’s their hands on me, and their heated eyes locked on mine.

When my body tightens like a coil and my legs start to shake, I slap my hand against the shower door and the pressure building in me springs free. Every part of my skin is on fire, and I feel alive in a way I never have before, and I know why. It wasn’t just one of them I was thinking about. It was all

three. My three best friends had just made me see stars for the first time, and they didn't even know it.

Chapter 1

Nev

My mind is spinning. Or is it the room? Maybe it's neither. Maybe I'm dead—lying lifeless on the altar back at Locksley; Sebastian having slit my neck and wrists, and bled me dry, exactly as promised. There couldn't possibly be another explanation because that would mean what I'd just heard was real—this destiny I'd been born with and the war we'd been fighting, was deeper and more twisted than I'd been led to believe.

As if learning earlier tonight Kai was the son of Luke wasn't enough, I now come to find out Declan is a son of Olympus, and Luca, Valhalla?

“Nev?” Declan places his hand on my thigh. “Are you okay?”

I turn to him, silent, yet stoic. The warmth of his hand should tell me that I'm alive, but everything I thought to be true has been flipped upside down, yet again, and all his touch does is prove that I'm numb.

“Shit.” Luca sits up, placing a steadying hand on my back. “Nev, you need to breathe. Just...breathe, baby girl.”

I can tell by the concern in his voice, he thinks I'm experiencing something like the first time he bound me—when my mind was catatonic, and my thoughts fixated on carnage and chaos. But what I'm feeling has nothing to do with my power. It has to do with the fact that not only has my entire existence been a lie, but all Declan, Luca, and Kai ever been told, too.

I draw in one sluggish breath and then another, but the air in my lungs remains lodged like a weight. A suffocating fullness that threatens to drag me down into a sea of disbelief.

All night the guys have watched me like a hawk—eyes filled with murderous rage as they drifted from the punishing bruises on my throat to the bandages around my wrists. Now, however, each of their eyes reflects nothing but concern, despite the fact they each have just learned they too, have been lied to.

Kai turns from where he's sitting in front of me and when he places a hand on my knee, the assurance of their combined touch brings the air rushing back into my lungs. My core deflates as the cold realization settles in—everyone in this room has been lying to all of us for years, and had they just told us the truth from the beginning, none of this would have happened.

Sasha's faux friendship, and Sebastian trying to sacrifice me, even the loss of Beauty, my beautiful girl, and Maren, my best friend's sister, wanting me gone so badly, she betrayed her own brother, and summoned the spirit of the Devil in his body. Each slams into me, filling me with anger and betrayal, until one hits the hardest—Hyde. My dark knight who helped me to embrace all that I was, and suddenly, everything starts to hurt.

I push up from the couch and make my way over to the bar, the weight of nearly a dozen eyes boring into my back as I reach for a glass and pour myself a drink.

As I study the amber liquid, I can't help but wonder where he is right now. Was he somewhere safe, where neither death nor darkness could reach his spirit, or was he somewhere else entirely? Knowing what he asked me to do, and what I did... I slam my eyes shut, not wanting to think about it.

Gripping the glass tightly in my hand, my mind burns with anger. This was never about an ancient enemy that was after my blood. This was about Luke and his never-ending thirst for revenge. Same story, different time. A macabre déjà vu that wasn't just a curious similarity of events, rather, an endless loop of lies meant to chip away at my very existence.

A pain shoots up my arm, making the angry wound throb, and when I look down and see I've cracked the glass in my

tight hold, I turn and hurl it at the wall. Crystal shards rain down to the floor, and I reach for another, doing the same, until one by one, I've cleared the bar of every glass.

A chilling titter curls from my lips as I reach for the ice bucket. But through the clamor of my racing heart and frenetic breathing, my father's voice breaks through. "Nev, stop."

I whip around and find his sympathetic eyes on mine as he pulls the bucket from my grasp and sets it down on the bar. "Tearing the house apart won't help," he says calmly. "Trust me, I know."

"Trust you?" I laugh bitterly. "How can I trust you after what I just heard?"

"Sweetheart," my mother says while making her way over. "If you just let us explain, you will understand—"

"Understand?" My eyes search hers. "No, mother, I don't think anything you say could make me understand the fact you have been lying to us for years."

"Nev..." She reaches for me and I pull back.

"How could you do this to them?" I shoot her an accusing look. "How could you do this to us?"

My father places a hand on my mother's lower back. The two were always a united front and the move was meant to show me who was in charge. "If you would just calm down and let us explain."

"Explain?" I laugh incredulously. "Are you serious?"

"Princess," Declan says from behind me. I turn and find he, Luca, and Kai have gotten up from the couch and made their way over. "Don't do this."

"Why not?" When they don't answer, a chill shoots down my spine. "Wait, did you know about this? Please tell me you didn't."

He lets out a short, dry laugh. "No, I had no clue."

“Me either.” Luca holds up both hands when I turn my eyes to him.

“Same,” Kai says stoically. “Clearly.”

“Then how can you be so calm? They’ve lied to you Declan, practically your whole life, and Luca since the day you were born. And Kai...” My mind spins with how many secrets my parents had been keeping.

“I’m not.” Declan rubs his chin, and now I see the tension in his jaw. “This is a shock. But I don’t know,” he shrugs. “As crazy as all this is, it does explain a few things.”

“Such as?” I place both hands on my hips, wondering what on Earth could possibly be explained by my parent’s lies.

“Well...for starters, why my father brought me here to live with you after my mother died and didn’t leave me with my uncle.”

“That explains nothing!” I throw my hands in the air. “It just means my father owed yours a favor. One big enough, apparently, it warranted guardianship of his only son.”

“Actually,” my father cuts in, and Declan and I turn to him. “You’re both right. I did owe your father a favor, Declan, but that wasn’t the entire reason he left you in my care. Why he did, is much more important than collecting on a debt.”

I cross my arms and shoot him an accusing look. “Well, it had to be pretty important for you to lie all these years. And Luca and Kai...I mean, what the hell is going on, dad?”

“Nev...” My mother grabs hold of my shoulders, and when I feel her touch, I’m reminded of the tenderness she showed me earlier. For a moment my anger fades, and all I want is to feel that way right now. Safe, warm, and cared for by my mom.

But then I remember what she just revealed and it reminds me that she has been lying to me for years and the betrayal not only stung but cut deep.

I pull away from her hold, my defenses shooting back up. “We agreed, no more secrets. But this...” I shake my head. “You went too far. These secrets hurt, more than you can possibly know.”

Luca had always mourned his mother—a woman he never knew yet felt her loss so strongly. She had been forced to forget him, just as all the mothers that sired children by The Fallen after the war with Luke, and he never forgave his father for this, even though his dad had only been following my parents’ orders.

And Declan...his mother had been the one light in a childhood darkened by his father’s legacy. He adored her. Every time he spoke of his mother, his face softened in a way it did with only her memory. I hated the idea her death had not come at the hand of his father’s enemies as Declan always believed, but at the Augury’s.

I couldn’t help but feel responsible for his mother’s death. I know everything that happened between our father’s was before I was even born, but it seemed a cruel twist of fate to fall in love with the son of the woman who was killed because of me.

Now, come to find out, not only was I the reason his mother had been taken away, but my parents had kept her true identity from Declan all this time. At what point would he stop forgiving them for all the lies?

And Kai. My sweet, loving boy, with a heart of gold, who despite being part of a family that seemed determined to put his needs last, put me, Declan, and Luca first because we had always done so with him. I couldn’t begin to imagine what was going through his mind right now. One whose spirit was so bright, had actually been sired by the darkest being to ever exist?

My mother watches me, sadness seeping into her eyes, as I step back and put space between us. “We didn’t tell you because we were trying to protect you,” she says gently. “We were trying to protect all of you.”

I take breath to steady myself. I'm about two seconds away from losing it, and given what destruction I'd already wrought tonight, I didn't want to send this building crashing to the ground.

"From what?" I ask stoically. "What was so important that warranted all these lies?"

"From a war we were trying to prevent."

"War?" I can't help but laugh. "No war, potential or otherwise, should have kept you from telling them who they are!" I point to Declan Luca and Kai and they flinch. "It was bad enough your flawed judgment kept things from me, but you had no right to keep this from them. None!"

"We were doing what we thought was best!" My mother's voice elevates to reach my own. "For you, and for them. And we didn't make the decision alone, Nevaeh."

I look at Vinny and Lila, then Viper and Caro. I'd have to crane my neck to look at David and James standing behind my father's desk, but something tells me I'd see the same thing on their faces as I see on all the others—guilt.

"All of you knew about this?" I shake my head in disbelief. "Caro...you lied to your own son?"

One by one they look down, except for Caro. He keeps his eyes locked on the four of us. "Of course I knew. Luca is my son."

"Which is why you should have told me!" Luca shouts back angrily. "All these years, every time I asked you about mom, you chastised me, and made me feel as if I had done something wrong."

"Because I had to," Caro shoots back.

"Right," Luca rolls his eyes. "You *had* to. Just like you *had* to take her away from me. And just *had* be a dick to me all these years."

"Do you think it was easy?" Caro steps forward.

“Being a dick to me?” Luca shoots back. “Yeah, I do. You didn’t give a shit about me, or my mother.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Luca. You are my son. Of course I give a shit about you. But you have no idea how I felt about your mother. You have no idea how it felt to take you away from her. But I had no choice. I did it to keep you safe.”

“Bullshit!” Luca fires back. “You did it because you were angry she left you.”

“You’re wrong.” He shakes his head. “You’re so wrong Luca, you aren’t even in the vicinity of right.”

“I’m right,” he insists.

“You’re wrong,” he says a second time.

“Give me a break.” Luca narrows his eyes. “Just admit you were selfish and did it for yourself.”

“I didn’t do it for me!” Caro shouts. “I did it for her.”

An abrupt silence fills the room as Caro looks at his son. His walls are down, and it reminds me of my earlier observation. He did look at Luca in affection once, and it was the same way that he was looking at him now.

Ever since we were kids I’ve watched Luca crave his father’s acceptance, only to see him receive little more than indifference. I knew that was the source of his bitterness toward his father. He *did* want his love and acceptance, and to think he’d been withholding it for a reason all this time hurt Luca, which hurt me. His pain was mine. Just like Declan’s and Kai’s.

The three had proven their love and loyalty for me and I’d long since let go of all that happened before I left for Paris. Our hearts had been young, but our love was not, and I knew they only did what they did because they were trying to protect me. That’s why I would protect them now because these revelations had the potential to blow each of their worlds apart and I would not let that happen.

“Honey,” my mother says softly, breaking the tense silence. “I never imagined that I would be a mother. Not in a million millennia. But the moment I became one, everything changed. You changed my entire existence.”

“I’ve heard this before,” I reply icily. “What does this have to do with them?”

“Just as I never expected to be a parent,” she looks to Luca’s dad, “neither did Caro, and the choices we made, you may not agree or understand them, but they were made to protect that which means the most to us.”

I look at her, skeptical of anything that comes out of her mouth right now. It was hard to erase twenty-one years of betrayal and I knew Luca would see it that way, too.

“While other parents worried about growth charts and sleep cycles,” she continues, “our worry was always how we could change your destiny and keep you from an existence you did not deserve. Selfishly, we did not want to tell you any of this because we wanted you to have an existence that was different from ours. Yes, we kept things from all of you, and yes, Nev, we kept the Augury and your powers from you, but we did it because all of it was the tip of an iceberg we hoped you’d never have to face.”

“Well,” I laugh bitterly, “I hate to break it to you, but the choices you made sucked. You hit us head on, just like the Titanic.”

“Oh sweetheart.” She cups my face and strokes my cheeks with her thumbs. “If there was any other way, we would have done it. But we had to keep all of you safe, and together.”

“What do you mean?” I swallow, feeling the weight of what she is about to say before she even says it. “What aren’t you telling us?”

She drops her hands and looks at me, then Declan, Kai and Luca. “Your fates are intertwined; the four of you, meant to be in a way not even we could predict.”

I'd once wondered if the four of us weren't somehow the same spirit, divided into four and sent down to Earth, destined to one day find each other again. To think the idea wasn't ridiculous, but possibly true...

"Fate or not, you knew who Declan was. You knew he was not the descendant of an Augury founder, and yet you kicked him out of our home. How could you do that if you knew it wasn't true?"

My father looks at Declan and I hold my arm out to block his piercing gaze. "Do not look at him. Look at me." My father turns his attention back to me and lifts his brows. I'm pushing my luck but I don't care. I am beyond decorum and respect right now. "You turned your back on someone you raised as your own. Someone I not only love but know you do, too. How could you do that?"

My father moves his neck from side to side; a signature move that means he's growing frustrated. "The answer is not simple, Nev."

"Try me," I shoot back dryly. I don't care if he's irritated. He fucked up. They both did and I'm not backing down. Not this time.

He looks from me to Declan and takes a deep breath before responding.

"Your mother did not sign the original treaty, Declan, but Luke did recruit her. That symbol on the paper was intended for her."

"But the folder you brought that day," Declan flicks his attention to Vinny. "All that paperwork that proved her heritage."

Vinny clasps his large hands together and grins. "That was meant to throw them off and serve as an olive branch, pun intended."

When neither Dante nor I acknowledge his little joke, Vinny tries to explain himself as if we didn't understand it, missing the fact we did, but just don't find it funny right now.

“Olives are Greek. Declan is Greek.” When we still don’t say anything, he waves his hand for us to continue.

“It was meant to throw *who* off?” Declan turns his attention back to my father.

“To understand everything you first need to know who your mother was, Declan. But I think you already know. Deep down, I think you’ve always known. From her name to the ring she wore, who she was is in every memory you have.”

Declan looks down and closes his eyes, nodding slowly. “I never wanted to believe...”

“Believe what?” I reach for his hand.

He looks up, holding my gaze while gripping my hand tight. “Who she was.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, looking from him to my parents. “Who was she?”

My mother looks from me to Declan, and what she says next, is beyond any answer I expected.

“His mother was Athena, goddess of war, one of the twelve ruling gods of Olympus. And you Declan, are not only her son, but heir to one of the greatest armies to ever exist.”

Chapter 2

Declan

I shake my head in disbelief as memories of my mother rush through my mind. Her strength and beauty, and uncanny knowledge of Greek mythology. All the signs were there, but I ignored them because they were just stories. Athena, nothing more than a legend.

Then I remember the way my father used to look at her. Like she was his own personal deity. He called her his goddess, and I thought it was a pet name, like the one I gave to Nev when we were kids. A term of affection for the girl that won his heart. But he called her that because that is what she was—a goddess.

“Ilia Athene Draven,” Nev’s mother says gently. “That is the name on your birth certificate. But she is, and always will be, Athena, goddess of war, and it is through you, her legacy lives on, Declan.”

I run a hand through my hair, mind reeling. “I don’t understand. What legacy?”

“When you assumed control of your father’s network, you claimed your birthright,” Nev’s father replies.

“My father’s network?” I look at him, confused. “What does that have to do with my mother?”

“The army of Olympus,” Diablo says proudly. “You command it.”

I close my eyes, trying to process what I just heard. “Come again?”

“It was never your father’s network,” she explains. “It was your mother’s army. But she turned it over to your father for safekeeping...for you. And that is why he brought you to us.

Dante *did* owe him a favor, but your father knew we were the only ones that could keep both you and your birthright safe from the Augury.”

“But what would the Augury want with me?” I look from her to Nev’s father. “And how did my father even know who you were?”

Nev’s father takes a step toward me. “In your father’s study he had a painting. Do you remember?”

“Of course,” I nod. “Gustav Dove’s interpretation of *Paradise Lost*.” My father loved that painting. I would sometimes find him staring at it in silent contemplation.

“Mm-hmm.” Nev’s father folds his arms over his chest. “And do you remember what you said to your father the first time we met?”

I think back to that day he and Vinny visited my father. I was so young but remember it clearly because when I saw them both sitting in my father’s study, I recall thinking to myself that they looked just like the angels in that painting.

Before leaving my father to tend to his business, I whispered that very observation into his ear. At the time I thought the smile he gave me was one of humor—a grown man, showing his son that he believed him, no matter how crazy the idea. But thinking back to the memory now, I realize the look he had given me was one of affirmation.

“I told my father you should be in the painting,” I say with recollection. “Because you looked like you would fight for not just your freedom, but anyone who needed protection.”

When I say it, he grins. “I couldn’t believe it. In all my time on Earth, not once had a child seen what we were.”

“You knew?” I shake my head in disbelief. “But how?”

“The day you came to live with us, your father gave me the information in that folder.” He nods to the coffee table, and I turn my attention to it, nearly forgetting the folder entirely. “He told me to read through all of it. It was his only request.

So I did, of course, and when I was done, I had learned a great many things, including who your mother was and why he was leaving you in our care.”

As a child I never understood what could make my father leave me with a family I did not know. But as I got older, and realized how much I cared for Nev, I began to. If anyone ever hurt her, I would want to rip them apart. But leave my child behind for the sake of vengeance? That I didn’t understand... until recently.

With my desire to have a baby with Nev growing stronger these past few weeks, the answer to what I would do if someone took her from me had grown more complicated. I could imagine being so stricken by grief that I would want to tear the very world apart, but I could not imagine leaving our child because that would be like leaving a piece of her.

“What’s in the folder?” I swallow over the lump in my throat. The idea of losing Nev makes me feel a lot of things, and none of them good. “And what does any of this have to do with what is happening now?”

Nev’s father grips his chin and draws in a deep breath, letting it out slowly before answering. “That day I came to visit your father, I told him I was about to become a father and the only way my child and her mother would be safe, was to end the one who wanted to take them from me. In a letter your father gave me when he left you with us, he said he knew that day I came to see him, what I was and who he believed Nev would be.”

My throat tightens and my lungs become heavy, making it hard to breathe. “And that was?”

“Your destiny,” he answers simply.

I draw in a sharp breath, and turn to Nev, eyes wide. “It is why we welcomed you into our home and our hearts,” Nev’s mother says, reaching for my hand. “The moment we read that letter and saw what was in that folder, we had no choice but to

believe who you were and vowed to do everything in our power to protect you.”

I shake my head, trying to fit the pieces of this puzzle together. “So what...they believed I would one day fall in love with your daughter?”

“Yes.” She lets go of my hand and clasps her own together. “But it is more than that. Much more.”

“Then tell me.” I reach for Nev’s hand, holding it tight. “I want to know everything.”

Nev’s mother indicates for me to take a seat. After making my way over to the couch, I sit down slowly, and Nev sinks down next to me.

“On the night before your mother was to sign Luke’s treaty,” her mother begins, “she consulted a seer and they saw in a vision two roads for her: one of love, and one of power. The road of love would lead her to a son whose destiny would lead him to the daughter of Heaven. While the road of power would lead to an existence where her greatness would be painted in the stars.”

“My mother left Olympus for love?” I ask in disbelief. “That’s why she didn’t sign Luke’s treaty?”

“Power grows old,” Nev’s mother smiles. “And what is infinite power when you can have one lifetime of love?”

“But the Augury, and Luke’s treaty,” I counter, the math obvious. “That was a thousand years ago?”

“After your mother left Olympus, she waited for your father, and when they finally met, she knew the seer was right. They shared a love that was beyond anything she ever experienced on Olympus and then...they had you. Those years with you and your father were worth more than a thousand lifetimes to your mother, Declan.”

“How do you know?” I ask, throat thick with emotion as memories of walks in her garden and stories at bedtime, play in my mind.

“Your father is not the only one who left us a letter. Your mother did as well, and she left one for you, too. Everything you need to know about her army, your legacy, and the birthright she passed to you, is in that folder.”

I look at the folder, stunned. So often over the years I longed to hear my mother’s voice. To think there was a letter with her words, as well as those of my father—a man I realized I’d misunderstood for far too long—sitting right before me, rocked me to the core.

“What is my birthright?” I swallow. Needing to ignore the pain of the past and focus on what it means to the here and now.

“You are the son of a god, Declan. One of the twelve rulers of Olympus. You not only command her army, but the blood in your veins makes you a demigod.”

The moment she says it, I freeze, my focus shifting, entirely. While I’d taken a Greek mythology class at Locksley with Nev, Luca, and Kai, my mother told me the stories of the gods at bedtime, and she had a particular fondness for those of the demigods—the half divine, half mortal offspring of the gods. Now I know why, and realizing what it means, a shift in my core happens, pulling the connection between Nev and I tighter.

“I’m immortal,” I turn to her and smile.

“You’re...what?” Her eyes search mine.

Forever had always been in the stars for Nev and I because I was eternal just like she, Luca, and Kai.

“That’s why you said no whenever I asked to be an attendant, isn’t it?” I look at her parents, already knowing the answer. “You could not make me what I already was.”

“Yes,” her mother confirms. “When you were born, your mother passed her immortality onto you.”

The idea I would one day leave this Earth had been the reason I was so desperate to have a child with Nev. But now

that I knew we were forever, I wanted it even more. I wanted to give her something no one else could, and it was still possible because my father's blood—true mortal blood, that which drew out the power in Nev's own—still coursed through my veins.

The idea of eternity with her and our child, perhaps children, sends my heart soaring. Yet, as soon as I start to rush of joy, another implication of the revelation hits me.

“What do you mean she passed her immortality to me?” I ask. “Demigods are eternal.”

“Not entirely,” her mother shakes her head sadly. “Demigods can be killed, which is why your mother gave you her immortality. She wanted you to be protected.”

I don't believe it. Nev and I will have our forever because my mother gave me the life force that could have saved her. She was a god. One of the greatest to ever exist. And Luke should have never been able to kill her. But he came for her when she was mortal. He waited until she made her greatest sacrifice for me, to punish her for defying him.

Suddenly, I am six years old again, and I am losing her all over. The pain rips the air from my lungs, making it hard to breathe. “She lost her life because of me. I cost her everything.”

Nev grips my hand and holds it tight. “She loved you. You were worth every sacrifice.”

Her mother offers me a soft smile and places a hand on my cheek, just as she did the day I came to live with them. I was a sad boy who had just lost his mother and the only thing that brought me comfort was her touch.

It would be a few years before Nev's parents would tell me why my sadness seemed less heavy when her mother's green eyes looked into mine, but once I learned, I believed it without hesitation. She was still an angel, not Fallen, and use her very nature to comfort me.

I would forever care for Nev's mother like she was my own because she selflessly welcomed me into her home and drew my grief into her when I could not bear it alone.

"Your mother was not happy on Olympus, Declan," she says gently, knowing I need that same comfort now. "She never loved or felt love in return. The only thing she knew for countless millennia was war and rule. But she longed for something more, and Luke used that to get her on his side."

"How did he do it?" I ask tersely; anger coursing through me at the idea of the Devil manipulating her.

"He promised the same thing he did The Fallen, as well as the gods that did sign the treaty—an existence that was her own. One where anything was possible, including love."

I shake my head and look down, the weight of regret and grief heavy on my heart. My father lost the love of his life, and when he went to avenge her because Luke had taken the dream she gave up everything for, I lost him.

I needed to know her sacrifice was worth it. That she had at least been happy. "Did he hunt her the whole time, or did she ever truly know peace?"

"Luke did hunt her." She drops her hand and sits back. "But your mother was the goddess of battle strategy and eluded him for over a millennia. And in those years she spent with you and your father, she knew true peace. When you are ready, you should read her letters. Her words will tell you everything."

I look at the folder, both wanting to read everything, and also needing time to process all this.

"So if you knew who his mother was," Nev tightens her hold on my hand, "that she did not sign Luke's treaty, and that Declan was in fact meant for me, why did you kick him out that night?"

Nev's mother looks to her father who pushes up his sleeves and answers. "After you were kidnapped that night at *Styx*,

Caro and Vinny learned someone was leaking information to the Augury.”

“My sister,” Kai says tightly.

Nev’s father looks at Kai and shakes his head slowly. “We knew it was someone who had access to the four of you, but we did not know it was her yet.”

Nev’s eyes fill with tears, bringing the focus back to me. “You knew what the four of us had been through and everything he had done for me, and yet you abandoned him. How could you do that?”

Her father flicks his attention back to Nev and I. “You know why I did it. You both do.”

He’s right. I do know. I’ve always known the lengths Dante would go to keep his daughter safe because I felt that same compulsion the first time I saw her. She was only three, and me, six, but there was something about her blue eyes and precious smile that stirred a staunch protectiveness in me I had never known before that day.

I always chalked it up to the kind of affection one would have for a sibling, but over time, what I felt for her changed from brotherly into adoration, and I wanted her happiness and safety more than I wanted anything.

That’s why I understood why her father did what he did that night, and why I never found myself hurt or angry by it. I knew he was trying to protect her, and I would never begrudge him for that.

“But you’re wrong about one thing,” he says soberly. “I never abandoned him. Not for a minute. The night he left I ordered the legion to keep an eye on Declan.”

Nev wipes under her eyes with one hand while the other grips mine even tighter. “You spied on him?”

“I wasn’t spying,” her father scoffs. “I knew his network would watch over him, but I needed to make sure he was safe so we watched over him, too. Just as we have since the day he

came to live with us. And I was right to do so, seeing as you were sneaking out to see him at night. There's no telling what could have happened.

Nev gulps, her cheeks turning a beautiful shade of pink. "You knew?"

"You forget, dear daughter, I am a daemon, and know the instincts of one that is told no better than any."

She straightens her back, clearly irritated by the fact her father was one step ahead of her the whole time. "Well, I don't know why you bothered. You clearly didn't give a damn about his safety or you would have never kicked him out."

"I did give a damn," he counters.

"You didn't," she pushes back. "Everyone is dispensable when it comes to me."

"Not everyone, Nev."

"Yes, everyone. And why wouldn't they be? Declan's not your son, so who cares if he was exposed to danger, right?"

"You're wrong!" he roars. "He is my son in every way that matters except for one—that which makes it possible for him to be your destiny and love you as he does!"

Our mouths fall open, her father's response surprising both of us. I'm not ashamed of how I feel. I love Nev, and will tell anyone, all day, until the end of time. But hearing her father say it out loud is a first, and frankly, a little jarring.

He closes the space between us, and places a hand on my shoulder, and squeezes. Despite my own strength, his grip is intimidating, yet something I need.

"You may not be mine by blood, Declan, but you were destined for not only Nev, but this family. You have the same drive that I do to keep the ones you love safe and it is how I knew you would not give up on my daughter, no matter what I said or did. And I was counting on that."

The room grows quiet and when he hugs me and pats my back, the lingering tension from that night in the country fades away.

“Sweetheart,” he says to Nev once we pull apart. His eyes and voice are soft in the way he reserves only for her. “I trust Declan with my life...and yours. You have to believe me when I say this was the only way.”

Nev is like her father in so many ways, including never backing down from a fight. I loved this about her, but also knew she would continue to fight until one of them called a truce. Knowing her father as I did, what he just said was as close as it would get.

“Princess.” I bring her hand to my lips and kiss it. “Let it go. It’s time to forgive. We’re together, and that’s what matters.”

She looks at me and sniffs, then turns to her parents. It takes a moment but when she takes a step toward them, they throw their arms around her, and hold on tight.

Luca, Kai and I look at one another and let out a silent breath of relief. I know they’re as glad to see Nev and her parents bury the hatchet as I am.

Once they pull apart, the room feels lighter. “Did my fa... did Sam know you suspected Maren?” Kai asks.

I notice the way he stopped himself from saying father and can’t help but wonder how he’s feeling right now. Kai’s been through a lot and likely struggling.

“He didn’t know,” Caro replies. “Loyalty is a funny thing. Especially when it comes to your child.”

“Is that so?” Luca scoffs.

“Yeah,” his father shoots back. “It is.”

“And you know this based on what exactly? Because from where I’m standing, it means nothing where you’re concerned.”

Caro shakes his head and takes a step toward Luca, but Nev's father puts a hand on his chest and stops him. "There will be time for you two to talk. But just...hold off right now. Before one of you says something you'll regret."

Luca's father steps back and pushes the sleeves of his shirt up, and nods. When Nev's father turns his attention to Luca it takes a second, but he does the same.

My brother is pissed. I can feel the heat radiating off him from here. But the last thing he would ever do is disrespect Nev's father. He has a lot he wants to say, I can tell, and when the time comes, he will.

"Alright." Nev's father moves his head from side to side, neck bones popping. "Where were we?"

"My traitorous sister," Kai quips. "And if Sam knew that you suspected her."

"Right." Nev's father eyes him carefully. "He did not know. We kept our suspicions to only a few because if it turned out that it was your sister, it would make things difficult. That's how we came up with the idea of a ruse. One where we suspected Declan's mother of being a descendant of the Augury. We figured if anything would force her hand, it would be that. She was close to you four and that would certainly be information she'd slip to the Augury if she was the informant."

"That's why you did it?" Nev asks in disbelief.

I look at her reassuringly before turning to her father and nodding. "That was smart."

"And did she take the bait?" Kai asks.

"Eventually," Nev's father confirms. "And tonight, when Declan's uncle informed us what had happened, we had no choice but to tell Sam. That is why he was there. To help talk her off the ledge."

"Ares?" I straighten. "He knows about all of this?"

“Ares and I have been in contact from the moment you came under our care,” Nev’s mother answers.

“As your guardian,” her father adds, “there were decisions that needed to be made with your father’s estate that he advised, and after everything happened that night in the country, I called him to let him know what was going on. He told me where you were and made sure Nev got home safely that first night. He’s also been helping us keep an eye on the Augury and Sebastian and filled us in on what was happening tonight. But we did not know Maren’s endgame wasn’t turning Nev over to Sebastian, but rather, Luke. That she hid well.”

“She always hated me,” Nev says quietly. “I just didn’t realize how much until tonight.”

As much as I hate to admit it, she’s right. I’d always detected a hint of jealousy toward Nev when Maren was around, but I knew now it was much more than jealousy. She never got over the loss of her mother and blamed Nev for it. Enough to want her to pay with her existence.

“She was a master liar,” Kai grits out. “I’ll give her that.”

“Of course, she was,” Nev replies bitterly. “She learned from the best.”

I’m not sure if Nev is talking about her parents or Luke but something tells me she meant for the comment to be intentionally vague.”

“Actually,” Luca corrects. “She learned it from my dad. He is, after all, the biggest liar here.”

The room falls eerily quiet as all of us turn our eyes to Caro, who stands by the fireplace with his hand gripping his chin.

“You’re right,” he says honestly. “I did lie to you. So how about I tell you a truth?”

“Alright,” Luca shoves a hand in his pocket. “Go for it. Take your pick.”

“How about your mother? Both who she is, and how you play into all this.”

Chapter 3

Luca

Did you ever have that dream where you're standing in front of the class naked, heart beating violently in your chest, while every breath you take echoes in your ears? Well, this is like that. Only, I am never embarrassed about being naked in that dream. My confidence has never, nor will it ever, be an issue. The issue in said dream, is always the dozens of sets of eyes boring into me and the idea they can see my deepest truth.

Immortal or not, every being needed a parent that wanted them, and that was the one truth I never wanted anyone to uncover. The parent who hated me, took the one who loved me away, and it was a hurt that cut so deep, nothing soothed it.

Nev and the guys were the only ones who *really* knew just how much it pained me to be raised without a mother, and being loathed by the very being who ensured I would never see her again, always felt like a cruel joke.

But while they knew how much it pained me, they didn't know what it felt like. Not really. Sure, Declan lost his mother, but he had known her for a spell, and Nev's parents had always adored her. Kai didn't have his mom, but at least one parent needed him, even if it were to keep an eye on Maren. And being needed was better than being hated.

"Luca?" Nev's hand on my arm brings me back to the here and now. "Say something?"

I look from her to my father. "No," I shake my head stubbornly. "We're not doing this right now."

"Luca..." My father starts to respond, but I stop him before he can continue.

"No," I say for a second time. "This night has been too much already. Declan *just* found out the truth about his

mother, and Kai...shit my brother found out he is the son of the Devil, not to mention lost a part of himself tonight.” Nev flinches, and I reach for her hand, and rub my thumb along the top. It skims the bandage around her wrist, reminding me exactly where my focus needs to be. “And Nev was maimed, not to mention nearly raped and killed. So how about we *not* fucking do this tonight, alright?”

Her parents eyes both widen, and as they flick to their daughter, I see shock, and then anger.

Shit...while Nev was with her mother upstairs earlier, she must not have told her what happened in the chamber before they arrived. In fact, the look of murderous rage in her father’s eyes tells me Nev didn’t tell them anything. Well, it was a good thing Sebastian had been killed otherwise her father would have done it himself.

Her mother reaches for her father’s hand and gives it a squeeze, clearly trying to calm him. “He’s right,” she says simply.

I look from Nev to her mother, stunned anyone is listening to me, especially our leader. “I’m...what?”

“You’re right,” she smiles fondly. “It’s been a long night. There is much you need to learn and much we need to share and you four have been through enough tonight.”

Declan looks to Nev, then me and finally Kai. I can tell by the look on his face he has more questions, but his mind is spinning and there is nothing he wants more right now than for the four of us to be alone, and I feel the same way.

“Thank you,” I exhale. “I’m sorry about the outburst,” I add. Nev’s mother deserves respect, no matter what lies she’s told.

“No need to thank me.” Her eyes flick between her daughter and the three of us. “You four should rest and tomorrow we will answer all of your questions.”

“Even mine?” Kai asks weakly.

I turn to my brother, hating the way his voice sounds. I can always count on the quirky dick to make me laugh. But out of everyone, he lost the most tonight, and I can hear it in his voice. He's numb.

"Of course." Viper comes over from where she has been standing next to Caro and stops in front of Kai. "Why would you even ask that?"

He looks from Viper to Nev's mother. "We just learned I'm Luke's son. That changes things."

"How so?" Viper crosses her arms.

"Isn't it obvious?" He lets out a tired breath.

"No," she smirks.

"I am the Devil's son, Viper. I was sired by the one who has lied to, and hurt, everyone in this room."

Nev shifts her attention to Kai and I can see she wants to go to him. "Go on," I whisper and kiss the side of her head. "He needs you."

She closes her eyes when she feels my lips on her temple and when I pull back, she squeezes my hand. "I love you," she says low enough so only I can hear.

"I know," I whisper back. "And so does he. So go."

I give her a quick wink and she slips away from my side and makes her way over to Kai.

"And you don't care?" he asks numbly as Nev slips her hand into his.

"Have I ever?" Viper quirks a brow.

He shakes his head, confused. "What do you mean?"

Viper steps forward and places a hand on his shoulder. "I have known who your real father is since you were in diapers, kid."

The pupils of Kai's eyes widen and it's the first real expression I've seen out of him since before this nightmare

began—when the four of us were home, lying in Nev’s bed, basking in the afterglow of what we shared together.

We hadn’t even talked about *that* yet. That epic, mind-blowing experience that made my dick hard just thinking about it, despite everything that was going on. Shit, it was hard to believe that night and this one were the same.

“Look,” Viper squeezes his shoulder. “I was bound to your father after The Fall. I chased his fealty for thousands of years. We were oil and water. Couldn’t be in the same room sometimes. But I knew him as well as one could.”

“Couldn’t have known him too well,” Kai tosses back. “He betrayed you and Nev’s parents. In fact, his duplicitous nature is the entire reason any of this is happening.”

“No,” she drops her hand, “it’s not. And if you think that, then you’re not as smart as I thought you were.”

“Meaning?” He snaps his head back, clearly insulted because well, my brother is one of the smartest in this room. In any room, really.

I look at Viper, awaiting her response, and that’s when I see it. She may be one of the strongest in the legion, but she, too, lost something tonight and her response isn’t one of sass, it’s one of sadness.

Viper was the first to take a knee when Nev’s mother broke the contract that bound The Fallen and became its new leader. But there was a camaraderie between her and Sam that had formed over five thousand years. It was the same with all The Fallen and the undecided to which they had been bound, and that bond ran deep.

Sam may have betrayed Nev’s parents once, but they forgave him because of Viper. It was she who urged Nev’s father to forgive Sam, which in turn led him to search for the rest of the children sired by The Fallen. She saw how important Sam’s daughter had been to him and had she not cared and convinced Nev’s father to also care, we’d all be out there somewhere, clueless of our birthright.

That very thought sends a foreign pain cutting right through me. The idea of not being part of this community was something I couldn't imagine. Not knowing my brother's or Nev would be an existence I didn't want. Yet, the fact it could have been had my father not taken me away from my mother, sends me reeling in the way one eighties do.

I wasn't expecting to get into the subject of Kai being Luke's son tonight. He just lost his father, sister, and a part of himself, and my brother doesn't need this right now. None of us do. This was all just way too fucking much to deal with after everything that happened.

I clench my jaw, grinding my molars to the point I'm surprised they don't crack. "When I said we were done, that meant Kai as well."

"Look..." Viper ignores me and continues, speaking directly to Kai. "Your father...Sam," she corrects before he can. "He messed up years ago but made up for it by keeping you and this entire community safe."

"Oh yeah, how?" Kai tosses back, his response dripping with sarcasm. "By making me my sister's keeper? Not exactly the act of a hero, V."

"That's not what he was doing. He was making sure that *this* didn't happen."

The ironic smile on Kai's face starts to fade and his eyes narrow to the point they become slits. "Making sure *what* didn't happen?"

The two stare at one another, and then as if he's been electrocuted, his eyes widen and brows push to his hairline. "You knew this was possible, didn't you? You knew I was a connection to Luke and that he could return using me."

Viper holds up her hand and takes a step forward. "Now hold on."

"No," he steps back. "Answer the question."

She doesn't answer, which in my experience, always is one.

Kai looks from Viper to Nev's parents. "He'd just betrayed you. How could you let him bring me here? For all you know, I was just another one of his deceptions. Placing the son of the Devil in this community so I could take you all down when the time was right."

"The only duplicitous one in all this was Luke," Viper says tightly. "He's the son of a bitch who fed into your sister's anger and twisted the truth of what happened to your mother to stoke it."

"Oh, you mean the mother who had sex with the Devil and had me?" Kai shoots back caustically.

"Yeah," Viper says matter of fact. "Then killed herself because she couldn't face the fact she hurt the one person who ever truly cared about her."

Declan, Nev and I draw in a sharp breath. We always believed Kai's mother was taken from him and Maren the same way mine had been. It's why Maren aligned herself with the Augury and wanted Nev dead. She believed Nev was responsible for why she lost her mom. To think that *wasn't* the case sent me for a loop, and I know I'm not alone. The look of shock on Nev and Declan's face is clear. But it's nothing compared to what I see on Kai's.

"My mom is dead?" he asks weakly. "Everything we just went through was all because of a lie?"

Viper takes a deep breath, and I can see she's both angry with herself for what she's just said, and concerned because Kai looks two seconds away from either crying or losing his shit. I can't tell, and with Hyde no longer a part of him, there's no telling how that's going to look.

"Kai, you have to believe me when I say Sam loved your mom and she loved him. But Luke manipulated her because he knew he could and out of it came you, and you're amazing, Kai. And Sam saw that the first time he met you. It's why he

brought you here. So if you want someone to blame, blame Luke. Don't blame the one who chose to be your father."

The hand at Kai's side curls into a tight fist. "The way I see it, the only choice he ever made was lying to me because he never acted like my father. He always chose Maren, and now I know why."

"He was not forced to raise you," Viper shakes her head sadly. "As soon as Sam learned what happened to your mother, he went to Luke and asked him to find me so that I could watch over Maren, but he already had her...and you. *That's* why Sam betrayed the legion."

Viper takes another step toward Kai, the silence that had fallen over the room, deafening. "He was trying to save his daughter, yes, but the moment he learned your mother had you, he wanted to save you, too."

"But why?" Kai swallows. "Clearly, he knew I wasn't his son."

"Why do you think? You were the son of the woman he loved and lost. He could never let you be raised by Luke. He was undecided, Kai. It was not in his nature to turn his back on anyone. He wanted to protect you, from whatever Luke had planned."

Kai cocks his head. "What do you mean, what he had planned?"

I wish the floor would open and swallow all of us because the minute he asks the question, the tension from earlier returns, and it's stifling.

"Flesh of his flesh," Kai murmurs, eyes darting back and forth, while trying to read the stoicism on Viper's face. "That's what Luke said earlier tonight. He sired me as an insurance policy. I was a backup plan, wasn't I?"

Viper flicks her eyes to Nev's mother and when she does, Kai does the same. "He was hedging his bets," Nev's mother responds cryptically.

The moment she says it, Kai closes his eyes and steps back. “Why?” He shakes his head. “Why would you risk having me here? He had just tried to take Nev from you. If you knew I was his son and that he could return through me, why would you let me anywhere near her?”

It’s strange to hear the emotion in Kai’s voice. He’s always been our laughter. The one Deck and I counted on to lighten things up when our world became too heavy. I hated to think what this was doing to him.

Nev’s mother takes a step toward Kai and he watches her warily. He’s always admired and respected Nev’s mom, to the point Deck and I used to give him shit for having a crush on her. We knew it was admiration, of course, and not anywhere close to the way he felt about Nev, but it was fun to rib him, nonetheless. I can’t help but wonder now if that affinity wasn’t his, but Luke’s.

We all knew Luke was obsessed with Nev’s mother. He masterminded The Fall and created the contract that bound The Fallen all so he could have her. When that failed, he kidnapped her and tried to do so a second time while she was pregnant with Nev. One didn’t go to those lengths if they weren’t obsessed. Kai was right to question why her parents would let him near their daughter if Luke using Kai to return was a possibility.

Nev’s mother smiles at Kai, eyes full of warmth. “You were just a boy when you first arrived. You were so sweet, but you were scared, and I didn’t blame you. This place was in shambles, and there was debris everywhere. You clung to Viper’s leg as she stood at the door to that room right across the hall. You were too young to remember, but I do. Like it was yesterday.”

Nev’s mother casts her attention toward the open study doors, and I can almost see the memory because we’d all heard the story of that night. It wasn’t just a legend. It was the basis from which we now existed—the night Earth’s angel

vanquished the Devil, and gave birth to Nev, the child of Heaven.

“You made your way through the broken glass,” she continues, turning her attention back to Kai. “This beautiful boy with golden eyes and hair the color of honey, waded through a sea of battered legion members and around downed beams, and came right over to where I lay with Nev. And do you know what you did?”

Kai shakes his head numbly and Nev’s mother smiles wider, green eyes glistening like polished emeralds. “You looked down at Nev and did something I will never forget. You placed your tiny hand on her head and then bent down and kissed it. When you pulled back you had this bright beautiful smile on your face, and when you stuck your finger out, she reached for it.”

“True story,” Vinny says from where he’s sitting on the couch, with Lila’s head on his shoulder.

Nev blushes and looks down and my heart swells with love for her. She wrapped Kai around her finger that day, just as she did everyone. We all adored her. It was impossible not to.

“That is who you are, Kai.” Nev’s mother places a hand on his chest. “That is who you have always been. The little boy, who despite the chaos and carnage all around, saw only our girl—and the boy who slid into our hearts that day as well. That will never change. No matter who your father is.”

Nev looks at Kai, the tears in both of their eyes clear. Declan may be destined for her, but Kai and I also shared a connection with her, and my brother needed to hear this, especially now. She is the only thing that can stop him from spinning off into the ether.

“She’s right.” I clear my throat and look at my best friend. “No one gives a shit who your father is, Kai. You’re our brother. Nothing’s going to change that.”

“You can say that again,” Declan agrees. “You’re the best of us, brother.”

“Sam knew you deserved better,” Viper echoes her earlier sentiment. “And *that’s* why he raised you as his own. You can slice and dice it any way you want, but that’s the truth. You are one of us. Always have been. We know who you are, and who you are destined to be, and that is what matters. Not who sired you.”

“And who is that, exactly?” he asks.

“You four are going to—”

“Tomorrow,” Nev’s mother reaches for Viper’s arm, cutting her short. “We will tell them everything tomorrow. As Luca said, it’s been a long night, and I quite agree.”

Viper nods but turns her insistent eyes on Kai. “Before you judge Sam, all I ask is that you listen to the whole story. Okay?”

I didn’t know how Kai would see the man who had lied to him all these years in a different light, regardless of *what* the story turned out to be. He still raised Kai to be his sister’s keeper, and Kai always resented this. Hiding the truth about who his real father was would likely only add to it.

Kai nods but doesn’t say anything more as the four of us say goodnight and head out of the study.

Before we hit the stairs, I hear my father call my name. I stop abruptly, not wanting to hear anything he has to say right now.

“It’s late,” I bite out.

Nev looks over my shoulder and when Declan and Kai do the same, I turn around slowly. My dad is standing in front of me, hands shoved in his pockets.

“We’ll talk about this tomorrow, Luca. It is important you know the truth. It’s important all of you know everything.”

“I don’t run when things get tough,” I smirk. “You didn’t pass that trait to me, *dad*. I’ll be here tomorrow for fucking answers, you better believe it.”

I turn back around and nod for the others to head up the stairs but stop as I hit the first step. “Actually,” I spin around, suddenly curious. “I do want to know one thing.”

“Anything,” he nods once, and frankly, his response surprises me. He’s always been one second away from fighting me on anything and everything and my response just now would have warranted a firm grip of my neck in the past.

“Did you care about her?” I ask simply. “Did my mother mean *anything* to you?”

“No.” He looks down, shaking his head and a fire flares in my chest. I’m ready to punch the smug bastard, but then he looks up and the sadness I see in his eyes rocks me. “I loved her, more than anything.”

“That’s why you were a dick to me all these years... because you loved her?”

“Yes,” he says matter of fact. “But...it’s complicated.”

“Complicated, huh?” That’s what Nev’s father said at *Styx*, the night I helped him with Marco. He said there was more to my parent’s story than I knew and that it was complicated.

My father moves his neck from side to side and like a switch that’s been flipped, he pulls his hands out of his pockets and straightens. “It’s time you stopped hating me for what you don’t know and start respecting me for the truth. And tomorrow, you will get it.”

Dropping my head back, I blow out a frustrated breath before turning my eyes forward again. “Why is it I can’t help but think the truth will be a story that makes *you* look good?”

“Think what you want,” he takes a step toward me, “but here’s the thing.” I lift my jaw to look him in the eye. I hate the inch of height my father has on me, but never more than I do at this very moment. “I loved your mother, but she couldn’t give me what I wanted. Only what she could.”

I narrow my eyes, wondering what my mother could have possibly given my father that he would appreciate. “And that

was?”

“You,” he says simply, then turns around and walks back to the study, leaving all of us staring after him, mouths open, my own included.

Chapter 4

Kai

When we hit the top of the stairs, the four of us stop and look at one another. I know we're all thinking the same thing. Do we head to our rooms separately—Declan and Nev's childhood rooms down one hall, and the guest rooms Lillian made up for Luca and me the other—or stick together?

Right now, I don't want to be alone. I just want to surround myself with what I know to be true—my brothers, and our girl. My mind was hazy, and Declan's was no doubt racing, and Luca...what the hell was that with his father just now? I'm sure it threw him for a loop to have his father suddenly acting like he gave a shit.

Yet, I couldn't help but think it paled to how Nev was feeling. Tonight had been harrowing no matter how tough our girl was, and I wouldn't be surprised if she were hanging on by a thread.

She'd been tormented and tortured and the idea some of it had been at my own hand made me sick. But anytime she fidgeted with the sleeves of her shirt or reached for her neck nervously, I had to look away instead of comforting her as I wanted to, because if Hyde caught a glimpse of the bandages around her wrists, or bruising around her throat, I could only imagine what he'd do.

Then, like whiplash, the thought was cut short, as the painful reminder of his sacrifice slammed into me. I'd lost not only a father and sister tonight, but a part of myself, and while neither would have won any best sibling/parent contest, the fact they were gone was hard to believe.

The loss of Hyde, however, I couldn't begin to process. How would I get over losing that part of myself? A part I'd

always begrudged, and only recently began to truly accept and understand.

I'd never known a day without Hyde. His voice had been inside my head for as long as I could remember. And while I may have told myself all these years that I hated what he did when he was in control, I no longer did because now I knew everything he'd ever done was to protect the girl we both loved.

In fact, what he did to save Nev, I can't help but think he should be the one here right now, and not me. He sacrificed himself for her, and that selfless act was so instinctual, it makes me wonder if perhaps he loved her most of all.

I would do anything for Nev, and I know every breath in Declan's lungs and Luca's effortless smile were for her as well. She is our world, and we know what it feels like when she isn't in it. But because we do, none of us can stand the idea of being without her, and not one of us would ever leave her. Not now.

Not one of us could have done what Hyde did. Hyde was a hero, and heroes deserved to live. And me...I was just the bastard that was too weak to stop him from sacrificing himself and breaking Nev's heart.

"Kai?" Nev places her hand on my arm. "Did you hear me?"

I turn and find Nev's blue eyes peering up at me. "Hmm?"

"I want the three of you to stay with me tonight. I don't want to be alone."

I look up to Deck and Luca who wait for me to answer. When they give me a silent nod of agreement, I turn my attention back to her. "Won't your parent's mind?"

"I don't know," she shrugs. "And honestly, I don't care. I can't bear the thought ..." Her voice trails off and her lower lip starts to tremble, and that's when I know she needs us as much as we do her.

Luca places his hands on her shoulders and kisses the top of her head. “Whatever you need, baby girl, we got you. Right brother?”

The look he gives me tells me he knows that I’m struggling but right now, I need to man up and do what’s right for her. “Of course,” I force a smile. “Anything for you, gorgeous.”

She shoots me a smile, then looks over her shoulder. “Deck?”

“Come on, princess,” he winks. “What do you think?”

We make our way to Nev’s room, and while she’s getting ready for bed, the guys and I strip down to our briefs. We’d each showered in our own rooms earlier while Nev was bathing, so I hadn’t seen what the effects of this night had been on them, until now.

Declan has a couple of bruises on his left side, and a cut above his sternum, while Luca’s knuckles are grazed, and he has a few welts on one shoulder. The marks around their wrists are similar to Nev’s, but not nearly as deep—the zip ties used to keep them strapped in the chairs back in the chamber, not anywhere close to as damaging as the iron cuffs Nev was in.

“Did I do that to you?” I’m not sure what I will do if the answer is yes. If somehow, during the night, Luke pushed me so far into the recesses of my own mind, that I didn’t know what I was doing, and hurt my brothers.

“No.” Luca grips my shoulder and squeezes for reassurance. “It was Maren’s little freak show of friends.”

I shake my head and look down as his hand falls away. Any regret I may have felt about her death before, was now nonexistent. She hurt my brothers and Nev. Maybe not by her own hand, but certainly on her orders, and I was glad the bitch was gone. In fact, I hope she was burning far beneath the Earth’s crust.

Declan lets out a low whistle. “That’s a lot of language coming from you.”

“What?” I look up and find his eyes wide with surprise.

“You just unleashed a string of bad words, my man.”

“I did?”

“You did,” Luca smirks. “And might I say, well done man. Couldn’t have said it any better.”

I look from him to Deck and grin slightly but it’s short-lived. “I need to know what happened. Tonight, after the four of us, how did we go from...”

“A heap of post-coital bliss to that shitshow at Locksley,” Luca says wryly.

Memory of the four of us flashes in my mind, and heat floods my body. Tonight may have been the worst in my existence, but I wasn’t dead. What happened with the four of us...it was in one word, epic.

“Well, yeah,” I clear my throat, “to put it bluntly.”

“What is the last thing you remember?” he asks with a waggle of his brows.

I roll my eyes. Leave it to Luca. He was as Nev said once, down to fuck or fight, day or night. “I meant, after that.”

“Well...” Declan rubs a thumb over his jaw, eyes flicking from Luca to me. “Luca and I went downstairs to grab something to eat so you and Nev could be alone. You were both passed out and...”

“And, what?” I nod for him to continue when he pauses.

“We figured you’d need some time to process everything,” Luca finishes for Deck. “We’ve shared her but weren’t sure how you would feel about it.”

“Clearly, I was okay with it,” I shrug.

“Well, I see that now,” Luca grins. “But we didn’t know how you may feel about it then, so we went downstairs, started to make dinner for all of us, and that’s when Maren arrived.” My eyes narrow when I hear her name. “I let her in, and while

I was making my way back to the kitchen, dozens of Augury stormed the house. We fought them off, but we were outnumbered by about a hundred to one.”

“After throwing hoods over our heads,” Declan continues, “they threw us in a car and that’s all we remember. Next thing we know, we were waking up in that chamber, and saw Nev unconscious on that fucking altar and Maren standing there, and that’s when we realized she was working with them.”

I scrub my hand down my face, remembering the look of fear in Nev’s eyes when Luke removed the hood he’d been using to cover the fact it was me who was standing next to Maren. What a shock that must have been.

“What do *you* remember?” Luca asks, folding his arms over his chest.

I blow out a tired breath while running a hand through my hair. “It was like a switch had been flipped. I went from what felt like the best sleep I’d ever had to awake and what looked like a movie.” Memory of Nev recoiling in fear sends a lance of pain shooting straight through my chest. “Luke was saying some really messed up stuff and when Hyde and I screamed for him to stop, I realized it was me who was saying it. Only, it wasn’t me. It was the most bizarre feeling.”

Declan brings a fist to his chin, listening intently. “Then what happened?”

I flick my eyes from him to Luca, knowing they’re going to freak when I tell them.

“He choked her,” I say so quietly, I can barely hear myself. “Then Maren came into the room and someone injected Nev with something and she passed out.”

Declan’s eyes glower as the muscle in Luca’s jaw ticks. “Did anyone else touch her?” Luca asks.

I shake my head no. “Luke wrapped the sheet around her and carried her out of the house.”

He looks down, and balls both hands into fists “Son of a bitch.”

“What happened next?” Declan asks. I can tell he is doing his best to remain calm but also know he wants to rip the room apart because I’ve felt the very same way before when I saw Nev had been hurt. The morning after she and Hyde first... connected.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I take a breath and when I open them, continue. “After that, he loaded her into the back of a car. It wasn’t the same one the two of you were in. I didn’t know where you were, honestly, but Maren was in it, and she was quite the talker. On the way to Locksley, she filled Luke in on all she’d done to prepare for his arrival and that’s when I realized she wasn’t just in on it, but the ringleader.”

“Did she say how she did it?” Declan pops the knuckles on his fist; muscles of his forearm, flexing with the movement. “Summoning Luke.”

I shake my head, while thinking of a possible answer. One I’m sure he’s already considered. “Maybe she didn’t have to. Maybe Luke has been a part of me all this time.”

Declan shakes his head. “We would have known. Or at least *you* would have.”

“Would I?” I look away, considering another possibility. One I hated to consider.

Luke was a master manipulator. He could have done anything to me. Maybe he was the one that created Hyde.”

“Hey,” Luca says and my eyes whip up. “You heard Nev’s mother. They all knew Luke was your father and never worried about her safety. That has to mean they never considered he was part of you, and we don’t either.”

I want to believe him, but right now, I can’t help but think anything is possible. “And Maren?”

“What about her?” Declan asks tightly.

She had been the one helping Sebastian all this time. I heard everything on the way to Locksley. She used me, used all of us, to get information about Nev, then sold it to Sebastian so he could work his way into her life, and once there, use her for his own ambitions.

“How could I not have known my own sister was conspiring against us? Working not only with Sebastian but somehow also in communication with Luke? Which by the way, I can’t even begin to understand how that was possible.”

Luca and Declan exchange a look and I know they’re asking themselves the very same question. We created an entire business around secrets. We should have seen this coming.

But neither Maren’s duplicity nor the fact that Sam wasn’t my father bothered me as much as the way Luke used me to get to Nev.

He entered my consciousness during one of our most intimate moments and touched her, and the idea of anyone besides me and my brothers laying a hand on her fills me with rage.

“He touched her,” I say quietly. “He touched her and said ___”

“My fear tasted like my mother’s.”

The three of us swing our heads in the direction of the bathroom at the sound of Nev’s voice, and our mouths fall open when we see her standing in the doorway. She’s wearing a red satin chemise which skims the top of her thigh, and despite the Hell she’s just been through, looks like a vision.

Nev is the embodiment of perfection, and I will never tire of looking at her. But it’s not her endless legs or how confident she is in her own skin that silences us. It’s the bandages on her arm, ankles and wrists, and black and blue ring around her neck, which fills each of us with silent fury.

I’m angry she’s hurt, but I’m even angrier my hands played a part. But I don’t know how to control the emotion.

Anger had always been Hyde's department, and like that morning I destroyed my room, I felt the same frenzied energy coursing through me now.

Nev makes her way across the room and as if she can hear my thoughts, stands in front of me. "It wasn't you." She places a hand on my cheek and her eyes search mine. "Do you hear me? It was Luke who did this to me."

I lean into her touch, wanting to believe her. "He touched you, gorgeous."

"It was you." She wraps her arms around my neck and draws my head down. "It was your hands that touched me and your lips that kissed mine."

Declan and Luca stiffen. They weren't there, but the combination of both what I told them, and her own words just now, it's clear what happened and they're horrified.

"I hate that he did this to you and he used me to do it."

"I know." She grabs hold of both arms. "But we will get through this. We've gotten through worse."

"Worse than the Devil?" I arch my brow just slightly.

"Being away from you three for years was its own kind of Hell. This...it's just a walk in the park."

The way she says it makes me want to hold her and never let go. She has always been strong, but right now, I think she may be stronger than the four of us combined.

We look at one another for a moment, then she presses up on her tiptoes and gives me a gentle kiss. "I love you," she whispers. "We will get through this."

There is still so much to unpack about this night, but right now, all I care about is in front of me.

"Baby girl," Luca places a hand on her lower back. "What do you need?"

She drops her arms from my neck and turns to face Declan and Luca. Whatever Augury members remained were going to

die for what they did to her. I could see the promise in both their eyes as they look at her. I feel that same conviction as well. Yet, I can't help but think she is safer with my brothers than she is with me. All I seem to do lately is get her hurt.

"If you want me to stay away for a while, just to make sure...."

"Make sure of what?" She swings her head back around and looks at me.

"Aw, gorgeous..." I reach out and brush her cheek with my finger, then drop my hand. "You may not be safe with me."

"You three are the *only* ones I feel safe with," she says with fierce determination.

"How can you look at me and not see him?" I say what my head is thinking, and my heart hates to consider.

She reaches for my hand and pulls it to her chest, while placing her other hand on my own. "Because I know this heart. It's how I knew it was you when you finally broke through his hold."

I want to believe her. The last thing I want to do is be apart from her or my brothers. But I'm just so scared he is going to ruin us all.

"He's a bastard," I grit out, but it's followed by a laugh; the irony is hard to ignore. "Actually, I guess that's me."

"No," she corrects. "You are who you have always been. A part of us, and me."

"She's right, man," Luca says in agreement. "You're not going anywhere."

I flick my eyes to Declan, his affirmation, the one I need most. "He's right," he nods. "You're not going anywhere. You stay with us, always."

Nev looks to Declan and then Luca, and lastly me, and for a moment, we're back in her room together, satisfied and at peace.

As if sensing where all of our minds are, Nev shifts on her bare feet and nibbles her lower lip. “Can we go to bed now?”

Declan wraps his arms around her from behind and leans into her neck and draws in a deep breath. “Is that a hint?”

She smiles but it doesn’t completely reach her eyes. “Just sleep.” She reaches up for his neck and pulls him close. “Is that okay?”

I can’t help but notice the way her body betrays her words. Beaded nipples press against the silk of her nightie, as she squeezes her legs together. I’d seen her do the same thing in those weeks before we’d crossed the line. When in the heat of making out, I felt those same sweet, hard pebbles pressed against my chest.

Shit, even after a night like tonight she wants us, and there isn’t a doubt in my mind they want her because I do. But her heart is fragile right now, and she just wants to feel safe, and I will always want what she does.

“Alright then, sleep it is.” Declan pats her on the ass and gives her a flirty smile. “To bed we go.”

Her cheeks flush as she turns on her heel, and while she makes her way over to the bed, the three of us watch her, mesmerized.

Declan runs a thumb across his chin and shakes his head. “She’s just been through hell and yet, our girl is still the hottest being in existence.”

“I know, right?” Luca lets out a charged breath. “I don’t know which end is up right now but that ass is driving me wild.”

They’re right. The world is upside down, and inside out, and yet, being here with her and them reminds me just how grateful I am to be here at all. Maren is lucky she’s dead, because I would have choked her with my bare hands for trying to take this from me.

“Go on,” I nod for them to crawl into bed. “I’ll get the lights.”

They flash me a thumbs up and make their way over to the bed—Declan climbing in on Nev’s right, and Luca her left. She curls up against Declan’s chest, as Luca snuggles close to her back and drapes an arm over her waist.

After I turn off the lights I climb in between her and Declan, shimmying down so my head is against her stomach and her knees in my chest. As we lie there, Nev’s hand finds my hair, and my body eases as her fingers twine through it delicately. The room is quiet—a pin could drop and it would sound like a bomb detonating—and just as I’m about to drift off, Luca laughs.

“Bet you never thought we’d be in your childhood bed like this, did you baby girl?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” Nev yawns.

Luca pushes up on his elbow and looks down at her. “Did you?”

She looks over her shoulder. “A good girl never tells.”

It may be dark, but even I can tell by her response she’s grinning. “And what about wicked ones?” he teases.

“Her lips are closed for the night.” She turns back around and snuggles into Declan’s chest. “And no, not those lips,” she adds before Luca can say what we all know he was about to.

Luca lays back down and it’s not more than two minutes before Nev is now the one to break the silence. “Definitely didn’t plan to wake up from last night the way I did, though.”

We all tense up, but when she laughs dryly, Luca laughs too, and it’s followed by Declan’s and my own. It’s not our usual carefree laughter; it feels raw, with a hint of edge, and when it dies down, we all snuggle closer together.

“You got any wise ass remarks before we go to bed?” Declan nudges my back with his knee.

“Sure,” I answer without missing a beat. “I’m hoping I don’t roll over in the middle of the night and find your dick in my face.”

“You’ll be fine,” Luca pats my head with a laugh. “There are worse things to wake up to than Declan’s dick. Just stay tucked against our girl and you’ll wake up in Heaven, brother.”

This time, Nev giggles and my chest tightens. It’s such a welcome sound after everything.

“Alright,” she says with authority. “Go to bed.”

“Alright boss,” Declan yawns. “Goodnight love.”

“Goodnight,” Luca, Nev and I all say in unison.

Declan may have had his story confirmed this evening, and his connection to Nev clearer than ever, but something tells me there was still so much more that we didn’t know. For tonight, however, my brothers and girl were safe, and we were together, and that was all that mattered. That was all that would ever matter.

Chapter 5

Nev

My racing heart sends me shooting up in bed, waking me from a dead sleep. The room is pitch dark thanks to the blackout curtains that run down my windows, but I can see light peeking through the sliver of space where they don't quite meet the wall, which tells me it's well past morning.

I could tell by the way the light entered my bedroom what time of day it was. The rays of the morning sun danced across the far side wall, while the midday light shone brightly through the floor to ceiling windows opposite the bed. It's what drove me to request those very curtains years ago, after being woken up early, one too many times. If I had to guess, it was around three or four in the afternoon. It was well past two in the morning by the time we finally crawled into bed, and my body felt as if I'd slept, but not long enough.

Checking on the guys, I look down to my right and find Declan and Kai still asleep. Declan is lying on his stomach, face turned to the side, with both hands shoved underneath the pillow, while Kai is between us, one hand over his head, and the other on his chest.

Seeing them together makes my stomach flip. We've all slept in the same bed before, but what we are to one another now, is so much more than sleepovers when we were kids, and knowing the three of them are mine, fills me with fiery possession.

I'd been in love with Declan nearly my entire existence; my feelings for him so deeply ingrained in my heart, loving him didn't seem to be a choice. Maybe that's how destiny worked. You couldn't fight who you loved because to do so would be fighting a force beyond your control. And if there

was one thing I learned tonight, it was that Declan and I were destined. An ancient seer proved it.

But Kai...I never realized how much I cared for him until we too, found our way to one another, and now that he was a part of my heart, I couldn't imagine my existence without him. He'd always been our light, and my spirit needed him, as well as Hyde, his dark side.

It didn't seem fair for the rug to be pulled out from under us so quickly. Kai, Hyde, and I had only just begun *our* story. But I didn't know how the fallout of what happened at Locksley was going to impact it.

Then there was the issue of Luke. Learning he was sired by the Devil hadn't been easy for Kai. I knew it had thrown him for a loop because I could see it. All night he had been subdued—eyes heavy, as if with each layer we unraveled, he was being pulled down further into the abyss—and I knew he worried that Declan, Luca, or I would blame him for what happened.

We didn't, of course. I could never fear one that I loved. But I did fear he would let it eat away at him, and it's partly why I wanted us to stay together last night. I worried if we let him think too hard, or be alone too long, he'd withdraw from not just me, but us, and I couldn't let that happen. I would do everything in my power to make sure that it didn't.

I let out a tired breath and when I turn to Luca, find him propped up on one elbow watching me.

“What are you doing awake?” I whisper.

“You okay?” he whispers back.

I could lie and say yes, but why bother? Luca knew me as well as Declan and Kai, and if he could see my eyes right now, he'd know why I was awake.

My Fallen blood was burning thanks to all that happened last night tumbling around in my mind. And if he could see my eyes right now, he'd know that. While his eyes turned dark green when his Fallen blood burned, mine turned dark blue—a

color he said was like moon's light on the ocean at night—and I was sure right now, they were a shade of that blue that was darker than ever before.

“No,” I finally admit. There was no use lying to him. Luca may be my wicked boy, but at the center of his wily spirit, was a beautiful being who vowed to never kiss another girl after giving me my first kiss, and he would always be my safe spot.

“Bad dreams,” he says knowingly.

“The worst,” I nod.

He reaches for me and after shoving one hand under the pillow and draping the other over my hip, pulls my chest flush against his. “Better?”

I curl my hands into fists and hold them between us. “Mm-hmm,” I murmur, while snuggling closer.

We lie there quietly together, my breathing falling in time with his, and the burning in my blood starts to subside.

Luca mastered how to tame the anger in our Fallen blood. While chains were his preferred method—and honestly, mine now, too—there were times when you can't just, ‘hit and quit it,’ as he would say. ‘You've got to master that burn baby girl, because it can come on at a moment's notice, and sex in public while hot, is not always convenient.’

While on one hand he was right, there was a certain kind of erotic fascination with being watched while having sex, I couldn't very well climb into his lap earlier in the study when the burn in my blood flared.

While Declan's voice may have pulled me out of the rage that sent me hurling every crystal glass at the bar against the wall, it didn't extinguish the burn in my blood entirely, and in the depths of my sleep, it returned, twisting memories of tonight, into dark, angry nightmares.

“Sorry for waking you.” I run the pad of my fingers along Luca's contoured chest. “I still need to practice managing the burn I guess.”

“You didn’t.” He yawns gently, breath stirring the strands of hair around my face. “I was awake. But hey,” he pulls me closer, “I will practice controlling that burn with you anytime, baby girl.”

I place my hand flat on his chest and close my eyes. His skin is hot and his muscles tight, a sign his own blood is boiling. “Couldn’t sleep either, huh.”

I know Luca’s angry about what happened to me. He and Declan had been tied up and forced to watch as Sebastian teased his plans to drain me of my blood. But the look in their eyes when he threatened to rape me while doing so, would forever haunt my dreams. There isn’t a doubt in my mind, had either of their hands been free, they would have pulled him apart, limb by limb.

But I knew Luca was dealing with something else as well. Something he’d wrestled with his entire life.

Luca always wondered about his mother, asking his father question after question over the years. But what little Caro shared never satisfied his curiosity. To think tomorrow he would finally get the answers he’d been asking his whole life, had to be messing with his head.

Bringing his free hand to my chin, he tips my head up, and with our faces only inches apart, I don’t have to see the irises of his eyes to know they are the color of grass at night. The heat of his breath tells me the burn in his blood is bad, and he needs me right now, just as I do him.

If we were home and alone, I’d know just what to do, and exactly how to help both of us. But I didn’t want to wake Declan and Kai. While I knew Declan wouldn’t mind watching Luca and I go at it, I wasn’t sure yet how Kai felt about it.

Sure, last night at the house, before our worlds were tipped upside down, Kai had been a very willing, very enthusiastic participant when it was the four of us. He had absolutely no problem showing Declan and Luca he too owned a piece of

me. But passion could break down any walls and insecurities and I wasn't sure how he really felt about what happened because we never got the chance to talk about it. We hadn't even talked about Hyde.

Just thinking about him stirs an ache in my chest and I close my eyes, not wanting to think about what I did to him. Instead, remembering the welts I'd seen earlier on Luca's collarbone, I decide to focus on who is with me now.

Placing a series of kisses on his chest, I can't help but notice how my touch makes his chest quiver. But when I draw small circles with my tongue around the welts, his hold on me tightens, along with every muscle in his body.

"Does it hurt?" I ask softly.

There were hours I could not account for last night. Time between the house and Locksley I didn't recall, which I could only assume meant I had been drugged. And I wanted to know everything. I wanted to know every Augury member that laid a hand on him and Declan because if they hadn't died in that chamber, I'd kill them with my bare hands when I got the chance.

"I'm fine," Luca says as if reading my mind. "You should have seen the other guys."

While his confidence is legendary, it's warranted. That's one thing his dad did well...taught Luca how to fight. There was no doubt in my mind the other guys had got their asses handed to them.

"Do you want to talk about what had your heart thrumming like a jackhammer earlier?"

"Not really," I murmur against his pec while licking his skin.

He places a hand over the one I have resting on his chest and lets out a little moan. "Are you...sure?" he rasps, breath growing noticeably ragged.

So much happened tonight that all I'd have to do is throw out any one of the horrific moments and it would answer his question. But there was something they did not know and that too, was weighing on me. I know I'll have to tell them but I'm not ready.

I stop what I'm doing and let out an uneasy breath. "I don't know what was worse—thinking I might die, knowing you and Declan would be the ones to witness it and have to tell Kai because Luke had done who knows what to him? Or the idea I would never see you again? The blade Sebastian tore through my arm hurt, but that idea of never being together again...it was an agony worse than death."

In the dark I can see his eyes and they are angry and tense. "No one will ever touch you again. Do you hear me? The three of us will sacrifice our very beings before we ever let that happen."

I draw in a quick breath, and when he realizes what he's just said, he sighs and pulls me close. "Aw, shit. I'm sorry, baby girl."

I lean into his chest, trying to hide the sobs working their way up my throat, but it's no use. They spill free and rock my shoulders, as the salt of tears stings the cut in my lip from Sebastian's teeth. I'm desperate for everything I'm feeling to go away. All of the pain and fear and guilt.

Running my hand up to the back of his neck, I grip it tight as he whispers in my ear. "I wish I could show you how much I love you right now."

I whimper at his words; my need for him, hitting me hard. It felt like it had been forever since it was just Luca and me, and I knew it wasn't a coincidence he was the one that was awake right now. He was the only one who could take my anger away, and I needed that. I needed *him*.

Returning my lips to his chest, I trail kisses along his skin, and this time the moan they elicit rouses the ache in me.

“Fuck,” he runs his hand to the back of my own neck and grips it tight. “Don’t start something we can’t finish.”

“Doesn’t it burn?” I rasp, feeling his now rock hard erection pressing into my leg.

He tightens his hold and draws my face so close the heat of his lips burns my ear. “I always burn for you, baby girl. Day or night, I want to be inside you. But right now,” he sucks my earlobe and grazes it with his teeth, “I want to level their world for what they did to you, and you are the only one who can make that burn go away.”

Sliding my hand down his chest, I slip it under the waistband of his briefs, and when I find his eager cock waiting for me, I wrap my hand around it. “Then let me take away your burn.”

I run my thumb over the tip of his cock, and swiping a bead of precum, bring my hand down his shaft.

“You’re really going to do this, now?” he punches out when I reach his balls and trail my pinky along the delicate skin.

I run my hand up and down his cock, picking up the pace, stroking him just the way I know that he likes. “Got a better idea?”

Grabbing hold of the back of my nightie with his other hand, he pulls it up and runs his hand under the lace of my underwear and caresses my bare ass. “Spread your legs,” he demands, while moving his hips up and down, fucking my hand.

His hand slides between my legs and when he slips two fingers into my wet heat and presses his thumb down on my clit, I bury my face in his chest to stifle the moan it draws from me.

Goosebumps shoot down my arms as the heat of my Fallen blood flares to life. As I jerk him off, and he fucks me with his fingers, it’s not long until we’re both panting.

“Shit, I’m going to come if you keep that up,” he pants.

I yank his briefs down with my free hand, and when they are at his feet, he pushes them to the foot of the bed. “Why are you even wearing underwear?”

“Didn’t want my brothers getting jealous,” he blows out a charged laugh.

“You know damn well none of you have any reason to be jealous of the other.”

“You’re right,” he chokes out. “And you take all of us so well, baby girl. Fuck, seeing us all together last night was better than my wettest dream, you know that?”

I think about the way it felt to take all three of them—how each filled me and made me feel wanted and adored. The memory of them each filling and worshiping me drives my climax and when I widen my legs, and stroke him harder and faster, my breath comes out in airy, raspy puffs.

“Fuck this. Get on top of me, now,” he commands voice low and urgent.

Letting go of his cock, I wiggle up his body, and grabbing my thighs with both hands, he yanks them up. Hooking my legs on either side of him, he slides his cock in me until he’s balls deep, and starts fucking me slow, and deep.

Making sure we haven’t woken Declan and Kai, I look over, and seeing both are still asleep, turn back to Luca. He crashes his mouth down on mine and when our tongues meet, he picks up the pace, fucking me with measured intensity.

“Grab my wrists,” I whisper against his lips as my pussy grips his cock greedily.

“No,” he blows out with equal heat. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

”Grab them,” I insist. “Above the bandages.”

I would not let what Sebastian did ruin what only Luca could give me. Those steel cuffs that tore into my skin

restrained in greed and anger. But Luca's hold...his chains, bind me trust and love, and make me feel secure. I want the lacerations carved into my wrists to remember who I belong to and who has the right to bind me, and who does not.

"Please," I beg as his cock swells inside me, and both of our climaxes race toward release.

I hold my arms together in front of his face and seeing I'm not going to take no for an answer, grabs both at the forearm and pulls them over his head.

Devouring my tits while holding my arms stretched out, he fucks me harder and faster, slamming into my g-spot with reckless precision. "Fuck, Luca, just like that. Don't stop."

Crashing his mouth down on mine again to silence me, our tongues dance, and I push down, as he thrusts up, and it's not long before my heart is racing, and warmth spreading through my body.

I'm seconds away from coming, my pussy clamping down on his dick like a greedy whore, and when he hears my breath firing in rapid succession, he bites my jaw and orders me to look at him. "Eyes on me baby. I want to see you come undone."

I look down at him, and when a powerful orgasm tears through my body, I have to bite down on my already pulverized lip to stop from screaming.

"Yes," he groans, holding my forearms tight. "That's it, soak it baby. Soak my fucking cock and squash that burn."

As wave after wave of my climax drags through me like the powerful undertow of the ocean, he shoves his cock so far into me, our hip bones start to grind. Thrusting hard and fast, his heart starts to race and when he crashes his mouth down on mine and groans, I know he is coming, too.

Letting go of my arms, he grabs hold of my hips, and we ride our climaxes together, bodies fused.

Once our breathing has slowed and hearts beating at a more normal pace, he eases out of me and I pull my arms down slowly. As I do, he fingers the bandages around my wrists, before kissing each.

“You good?” he asks when I roll off him and lay along his side.

I nod and look up. “I’m perfect. You?”

“He kisses the top of my head and pulls me close. “Better now.”

Laying the flat of my cheek against his chest, it isn’t long before our breathing falls in sync. “Luca,” I whisper as he runs a hand through my hair.

“Mm-hmm,” he murmurs.

“Are you ready to learn about your mom?”

He draws in a slow breath, pausing for a moment, before letting it out slowly, and kissing my forehead. “Get some sleep, baby girl.”

Chapter 6

Luca

“Luca!” Declan calls out. “You ready?”

I swing my head in the direction of his voice and lift my chin. “Yeah. Grab Kai and we can go.”

After flashing me a thumbs up, he heads to the pool where Kai is doing laps, and I turn back to the mirror.

Getting a workout in had been a good idea. We’re all on edge from what happened last night, and even though Declan had gotten answers, there’s still a lot Kai and I don’t know.

Last night when Nev asked if I was ready to learn about my mother, I didn’t answer because truthfully, I wasn’t sure. My whole life I wanted to know more about her and now that I am about to have answers to questions I’d been asking since I was a kid, I was anxious, and didn’t like the way it made me feel.

I’d always been confident, and unfazed by drama, and it makes me angry as fuck to know my father had been lying to me since the day I was born. I shouldn’t be surprised, I guess. That’s one thing he has always been good at—making it easy to hate him. That’s why I know what I’m feeling right now stems from the fact I’m about to finally learn my parents’ story and the idea I could learn something that might change my feelings about him, has me on edge.

While I couldn’t imagine anyone falling for my father’s surly ass, I’d always felt compassion for my mother because her child had been ripped away from her. But what if it turns out my father wasn’t the villain? That won’t just fuck with my mind. It will fuck with my very core.

That’s why I was wide awake last night, mind racing like a vortex, and had Nev not woken up, I would have been sucked

into the chaos of my Fallen blood. Thankfully, however, she needed me, just as I did her, and I wasn't left to rub one out in the bathroom to keep myself in check.

It had been more than a few days since Nev and I had been alone, and even though Deck and Kai were sleeping next to us, last night it was just her and I, and it was just what I needed. She squashed that burn in me faster than ever before and when she fell asleep on my chest, I knew I'd done so for her, too.

"Alright," Declan claps when he returns with Kai. "Ready?"

"Yup," I lift my chin. "Good swim, brother?"

Kai slicks his wet hair back as we make our way out of the gym and down the hall to the elevators. "It was good, yeah."

Deck flicks his gaze to me, question in his raised brow. Kai has been quiet all day. Not at all his usual chatty self. We're both worried about him, and hope whatever we learn tonight doesn't send him into a downward spiral.

"So are you ready?" Declan asks me when we hit the lobby and press the up arrow.

"Yup," I nod with confidence when the elevator arrives and we step inside. "How about you?" I look at Kai.

"I don't know," he shrugs. "About as ready as one can be when they're about to learn how they became Satan's Spawn, I guess."

I know his response was meant to be light-hearted, but it sounded anything but.

"Hey." Declan puts a hand on his shoulder. "No matter what you learn tonight, you're our brother. Nothing will ever change that. You, me, this asshole," he smirks at me and I flip him off, "and our girl. The four of us...that's what matters. Nothing else."

Kai takes a deep breath and nods, and when the elevator arrives at the penthouse, Declan gives him a pat on the back as the doors open and we get out.

“Think Nev did anything fun while we were at the gym?” I ask as we climb the stairs.

Declan runs a hand through his hair and blows out a heavy breath. “I hope so. I don’t even care if it wasn’t fun. As long as it takes her mind off things.”

Kai and I mutter in agreement. I know it can’t be easy to forget a night like last night when evidence of what happened is staring back at you every time you look in the mirror.

“Alright.” I hike a thumb down the hall to mine and Kai’s rooms. “Shower, change, and meet in Nev’s room at five to eight.”

Declan gives me a clipped nod. “Sounds good. We’ll head down to the study from there.”

I wasn’t sure what tonight had in store, but as long as we faced it together, we’d be okay. Four walking into a lion’s den was always better than one.

I push open the doors to the study, my swagger and confidence on point. “Ready for round two of this is your life, featuring yours truly?”

My father watches me with a scowl on his face. His silent disapproval is clear but I don’t give a shit. While showering I decided we’re not going to be walking into a lion’s den...we were going to be the lion tamers. Whatever they threw at us, we’d take it head on.

Everyone that was here last night is again tonight. In addition to my father, there’s Nev’s parents, Viper, Vinny and Lila, as well as David and James.

Declan and Nev excuse themselves to greet her parents who are with Vinny and Lila by the bar. Once they make it over, Nev’s mother sets her drink down and greets Nev first,

with a kiss on each cheek, then does the same with Deck. When it's her father's turn, he hugs Nev, then shakes Declan's hand, and brings the two shoulder to shoulder.

It's nice to see them together. They'd been the only family Declan had known for so long, and I was glad everything that happened between them was nothing more than a ruse. Still, last night was a whirlwind, and her parents were clearly trying to assess how he and Nev were doing since they hadn't seen us all day.

After waking late afternoon, we ordered takeout, which Nev retrieved using the back stairs, then laid low watching a movie until the guys and I decided to work out. We'd purposefully kept to ourselves, in preparation for tonight.

After a couple of minutes, Declan and Nev make their way over, alongside her parents. Her mother greets us with a warm smile and an embrace.

"I promise everything will be fine," she whispers while hugging me. "And if it isn't we'll have Viper put him in his place."

I bark out a laugh, which has my father swinging his head in our direction. When she pulls back and looks over her shoulder, I can't help but smile back at him smugly.

Nev's mother has always treated Deck, Kai and I like we were her own. That is why I can tell by the way she hugs Kai next she is concerned about him because she holds on just a little longer.

She whispers something to him while rubbing his back, and when she steps back she gives both of his hands a squeeze.

"Alright, angel." Nev's father kisses the top of her mother's head. "Are we ready?"

She looks up at him and nods. "As ready as I'll ever be."

The two make their way over to the fireplace as Declan, Kai, Nev and I make our way over to one of the two leather couches facing each other in front of it. They sit next to one

another, while I perch on the arm of the couch with both feet planted firmly on the floor.

Vinny and Lila also make their way over and take a seat on the couch opposite us, while David and James remain by the desk on the other side of the room, just as they were last night. Either they're giving us space or taking root there. Who the fuck knows.

"So..." My father is surprisingly the first one to speak. "Where should we start?"

"How about who my mother is and why you took her away from me?" I answer, cutting right to the chase. "You teased it last night. So go on, out with it then."

"I didn't take her away from you." He crosses his arms as if he's bracing himself. "She asked me to."

"Right." I tip my head back and laugh. "Because I believe that."

"Whether you believe it, or not, it's the truth."

"Really?" I turn my head back down and level my gaze on him. "My mother asked you to take me from her. And why is that?"

My father looks to Nev's parents and when her mother nods at my father in encouragement, he turns back to me and continues. "Well, unlike Declan's mother, yours *did* sign Luke's treaty. She was one of the founders of the Augury, and her first mortal child *was* a member of The Calamity."

The moment he says it the skin on the back of my neck pricks. "You're lying."

He shakes his head firmly. "I'm not. You saw the agreement that night Dante showed it to Declan. Your mother's symbol was a falcon. Talons wrapped around a sword, is the symbol for Masks and Shields. That was her descendant's line."

I swallow tightly, not liking the confirmation in his voice. "If that's true, Nev's parents would have tossed me out that

night in the country, not Declan. Actually, I would have been tossed out as soon as the umbilical cord was cut.”

My blows out an irritated breath. “If you’re not going to listen...”

“Oh, I’m listening. But all I’m hearing is bullshit.”

Viper shakes her head and laughs and my father whips his head around in her direction. “What’s so funny, V?”

“Nothing,” she shrugs, “only he’s just like you.”

“She’s got you there,” Vinny laughs. “Like father, like son.”

My father shoots Vinny a dirty look. “If I wanted any lip from you Vin, I’d rattle my zipper.”

“Come on,” Nev’s father says with a seriousness that doesn’t quite match the expression on his face. “We all know Vinny would knock you on your ass before you could even reach for your zipper, Caro.”

Vinny looks at Nev’s father and the two start to laugh. Viper follows seconds later and I don’t believe it, but Nev’s mother joins in, too.

As I watch the four of them cracking up over a joke that’s decades old, I realize they’re doing what my brothers and I do when shit gets tense...blowing off steam. Well tough. They’re not supposed to ease any tension they may be feeling. They’re supposed to feel as uncomfortable as we are each time a new truth is revealed.

“My mother,” I press, folding my arms over my chest. “How did you meet?”

The smile on my father’s face fades when he hears the question and the rest of the laughter dies as well. “I met your mother while working with David to track down an artifact for Dante.”

”What kind of artifact?” Nev asks.

“Well...” My father grips the back of his neck. “Luke was obsessed with mankind because Heaven was, and his interest in their treasures was kind of a...”

“Pissing match,” Vinny says with a hearty laugh.

“Exactly,” my father drops his hand. “Anything Heaven wanted, Luke did, too.”

“And you wanted to be involved in said pissing match?” Nev asks her father dryly.

It’s no secret her father used to be one of Luke’s most loyal. Anything that would flip a middle finger to Heaven would have been his thing, too. But the moment Luke went after Nev’s mother, that loyalty died in an instant.

“No,” he deadpans. “I wanted it so I’d have an ace up my sleeve.”

She tilts her head, curious. “Why did you think you’d need one?”

“Because he had something I wanted.”

Nev’s father looks at her mother and everyone in the room knows exactly what that something was. He once infamously sought her mother’s fealty, in the millennia when The Fallen were divided into sides: the legion, those who were loyal to Luke, and the undecided. Nev’s father would have done anything to secure her mother’s loyalty, and judging by the stories I’d heard, he had.

“And the artifact you were searching for,” I address Nev’s father. “My mother had it?”

“She did,” he confirms, while shoving a hand in his pocket. “And she had a security team whose strength was legendary.”

“So my dad was there for backup.” I nod with understanding. He may be an asshole, but my father was one hell of a fighter. If Vinny or Viper weren’t available, it made sense my father would be called in to help.

“Just imagine if the legion’s real muscle would have been available to make that trip,” Vinny laughs. “I could’ve been your daddy, Luca.”

“Or me, your momma,” Viper smirks.

Vinny sticks his fist up and Viper bumps it with her own, as Lila swipes his arm. “Aw, come on,” he wraps his arm around her shoulder and tucks her into his side. “Everyone knows I only had eyes for you, baby.”

Lila squeezes Vinny’s thigh and he laughs and kisses the side of her head while motioning for me to continue.

“So,” I shift my attention back to my father, “you went as backup and that’s when you met her?”

“Yes,” he confirms.

“Then what happened. You fell for her?”

“Shit yes.” My father laughs and the smile on his face hard to ignore as genuine. “She was beautiful, smart, and didn’t take my shit.”

He pauses for a moment, and I lean forward, needing to know more. “So, then what happened?”

He rubs his chin while taking a deep breath, and I can tell we’ve reached the part of the story where things get complicated. “She got pregnant.”

“Clearly,” I roll my eyes.

“And that’s when she told me who she was.”

“Who was she?”

“Freya,” he says without hesitation.

“Freya...what?”

“Freya,” he says for a second time, as if her name needs no explanation.

Kai brings the foot resting on his knee down to the floor and straightens. “Are you talking about Freya, Norse goddess of love?”

“One and only,” my father confirms proudly.

Kai looks at me, brows pushed to his hairline. “What?” I ask when I see Nev and Declan also staring at me.

“You don’t know who she is?” Kai asks in disbelief.

“I wasn’t a dork in school, brother. I had other things to do.”

“Hey.” Nev hits my leg and gives me a dirty look.

“You know what I mean,” I give her a quick wink. Nev was a striking combination of beauty and brains, and it was a huge turn on. But I’d always given my brother shit for being smart. It was our thing.

“Luca,” Declan looks at me. “Your mother is a legend.”

“More so than yours?” I fire back.

“Well,” Kai considers the question. “They’re comparable. Deck’s mom was one of the twelve to rule Olympus, and Freya ruled Fólkvangr, a place of similar importance in Norse mythology.”

“Wait.” I close my eyes. “Back up. My mother was a Norse god?”

“Not just a god,” Kai laughs. “She was also the queen of the Valkyries. But I guess you can say she wore many hats, including goddess of beauty, fertility, and sex, which makes sense given your...um...” Kai’s voice trails off as I stare at him and will him to shut the fuck up.

Normally I’d be all about his verbal diarrhea. He’d said more in the last two minutes than he had in the past twenty-four hours, and it’s good to hear his voice. But I’m also aware everyone in the room more or less knows Nev is with Declan, Kai, *and* me, and the last thing I want any of them to be thinking about, especially her parents, is how, exactly.

“So how is Luca an heir to Valhalla when she ruled Fólkvangr?” Kai asks, catching the hint and changing the subject, thankfully.

My father looks at Kai, clearly impressed by his knowledge. Yet, when he looks back at me, I can see the answer is not one he wants to give. “Before she was your mother, she was Odin’s wife.”

Kai lets out a low whistle. “One of you has Zeus as a grandpa, and the other, Odin as a stepfather.”

“He is not Luca’s stepfather,” my father bites back. “Luca has one father...me.”

The way he says it surprises me. It’s almost territorial, which is strange, considering my father had shown over the years, he didn’t give two shits about me.

“Two goddesses that commanded great armies whose stories still stand,” Kai marvels. “That is who her guards were, wasn’t it? The warriors that had been brought to Fólkvangr.”

“It was,” my father confirms. “And you’re right... in controlling the Valkyrie’s she commanded the greatest army among the Norse gods. And now, that army is Luca’s, just like Declan’s mother’s army is his.”

I sit back, mind reeling. I have an army of my own... “Well shit,” I shake my head and can’t help but smirk. “I guess the Norse god in this group has been me all along.”

Nev’s cheeks redden and Declan nudges her leg with a soft smile. She’d once said Kai looked like a Norse god and we never let him forget it.

For a moment, things feel lighter. There’s a tingle in my scalp and a crackle of energy in the air. But then I think about what my father just said. Declan commands his mother’s army because she is dead, which can only mean... “Luke killed my mother too, didn’t he?” I ask, although I know the answer.

The muscle in my father’s jaw ticks. “We do not know who killed your mother, but we suspect it was the Augury carrying out Luke’s order.”

I keep my voice even, despite the way Nev’s hand on my back makes my chest constrict, making it hard to breathe.

“What happened? If she signed the treaty she didn’t defy him. There was no reason to target her.”

“You were the son of a god, sired by one of The Fallen. That made you a liability.”

“A liability?” Nev’s eyes widened. “How?”

“There is a cosmic hierarchy. Heaven at the top and then its kingdoms. If Luca’s mother raised our child among The Fallen, it meant she would be aligned with the legion and we would control her army. She knew Luke would never accept that.”

I push up from where I’m sitting and start to pace. “But he had her army long before I was even born. Not to mention his plans backfired when Deck’s mom didn’t sign his treaty.”

“His plans may have failed but that did not mean he gave up. On the contrary, his plan with all the gods that *did* sign was to remove them once they produced a mortal heir and siphon the power that heir received, while leaving them to believe the seat they possessed on the Calamity could one day be used to control mankind.”

“But then Nev’s mom vanquished him,” Kai cuts in and my father nods.

“Luke targeted your mother shortly before that night. He called for her army to collect Diablo but she could not do it because she had already given her command of the Valkyries to you.”

Ironically, I find myself asking the same question Declan asked last night. “Why did she give me her army when she needed them most?”

My father looks at me, and I see a weight in his eyes I’d never seen before. This is the first time he has spoken of her and I can see how much it pains him.

“I may have fallen for your mother, but the moment you were born she fell for you, and that is why she gave you the

Valkyries. For your protection. And she made me promise to do whatever I needed to in order to keep you safe. So I did.”

I sink back down onto the arm of the couch, knowing exactly what he means. It is where my story began. Or at least, the story I’d always been told.

“When Luke learned your mother had passed her army to another child other than the mortal one she sired in honor of their agreement, he was furious. The only way we could ensure Luke did not use your mother to find out who you were, was to make her forget that you even existed.”

My father and I stare at one another, and I’m so stunned, I don’t know what to say.

The reason I’d fought him on everything over the years was because I never let go of my anger that he had been the one to take my mother away from me. To know that she asked him to in order to protect me...that he wasn’t the villain, he was the fucking hero? I was right—this night not only turned a part of my world upside down, but me inside out.

“That’s why you started wiping the mind of every mother to sire a child with The Fallen,” Nev says to her parents. “Isn’t it?”

“Yes,” her father confesses. “The fewer who knew about this community the better.”

My father makes his way over to me, and when he puts a hand on my shoulder, I freeze. “Your mother and I may have happened fast, but she was the only one in five thousand years that ever truly saw me. I would have done anything she asked. I even let her choose your name.”

“Luca?” My eyes search his. “That’s not exactly Norse.”

“No.” He grips my shoulder and laughs good naturedly, and I don’t believe it, but it pierces my chest and squeezes my heart a little. “She named you Loki.”

“Now that makes sense.” Kai laughs and hearing it pulls me out of my state of numbness.

”What’s so funny?” I look at him, confused.

“Loki was the Norse god of mischief,” Kai grins. “I mean, hello pot, meet kettle.”

If it weren’t so good to see him smile, I’d tell him to fuck off. But I am a wily fucker, there’s no doubt about it, and knowing my mother somehow knew who I would be, made me feel connected to her in a way I had never been before.

“So, why did you change it?” I look back at my father.

“I didn’t,” he smiles at Nev. “She did.”

“Me?” she asks, sitting up straighter. “I never asked him to change his name.”

“When you were little you couldn’t pronounce his name correctly, and when Luca heard you say it for the first time, and it came out as Luca not Loki, he insisted everyone call him that.”

“What?” I look from Nev to my father, wondering why I can’t remember that.

Then I look back at my blue-eyed girl, and a memory hits me, clear as day. I am around five years old, which makes Nev two, and the little girl everyone adores has just said one of her first words. It’s my name, and I don’t have the heart to tell her it’s wrong. So I just smile and say, “*That’s right baby girl... Luca.*”

Despite my state of numbness, I can’t help but feel a rush of warmth. She’s always been my baby girl, long before I even knew what love was.

“Is that why Luke came back?” I ask not wanting to go down a Nev adoration spiral because no one needed to see me get a hard-on right now. “Because I have my mother’s army, and Declan his, and our loyalty is to Nev?”

“Not entirely.” Nev’s mother shakes her head. “He knows who Declan is, but he has no right to his army because his mother did not sign the treaty. That is why Luke never targeted Declan. Making a god turned mortal pay was easy. Targeting a

boy that is immortal and protected by the army of Olympus and the legion, was not.”

“So how do the two connect?” Nev asks. “Their armies and my power?”

“Well...” Nev’s mother weighs her response. “When Declan, Kai, and Luca connected with each of your bloodlines and drew out your power, it bonded you to them, as well as their armies. If Luke were to claim your power, he would have access to both, which would give him the power he needed to challenge Heaven.”

“Well it’s a good thing he’s gone then, right?” I look from Nev to her mother.

Nev’s eyes widen and when she turns to her mother, her mother looks up at her father, and something tells me we’re about to fall further down the rabbit hole.

Chapter 7

Kai

Nearly a dozen sets of eyes stare at me, making me feel like an animal that's been cornered. The last thing I want to do is listen to just how it is, Luke is my father. Yet, I know that is exactly what's about to happen because we cannot talk about how he returned or can again, without talking about the fact he was able to do so because he sired me.

Being sired by the one who divided Heaven and tormented Nev's parents seemed like a cruel joke. I was nothing like Luke. Light was my nature. I even created a separate part of myself because darkness was foreign to everything that I was.

"Kai..." Nev's mother says gently, breaking the awkward silence. "I know this must be hard for you."

"That's an understatement," I say with a bitter laugh.

She eyes me carefully as I push up from the couch, and step away from everyone needing a moment to breathe. Running a thumb over the scar on my palm, I feel my connection to Nev embedded in the faint white line and use it to comfort me as I always have.

"Why did you keep this from me?" I ask finally. It's the one question I want answered more than any.

"Everyone in this room, and Sam, rest his spirit, felt it was best to keep the truth of your father, as well as Declan and Luca's mothers, for all of your safety."

"But why?" I can't help but ask, following it up with the painful truth we'd been dancing around since last night. "I am Luke's son, and it is why we almost lost Nev last night."

Nev's mother shakes her head adamantly. "That was not because of you. That was because of Luke."

"Yes..." I nod in agreement. "And he used me to do it. I was completely powerless when he held that knife to her throat, and I can't even imagine what could have happened had you not arrived when you did."

Surprisingly, her response to what I've just said is not anger, but curiosity. "So, you were conscious while he was in control?"

"Yes," I confess, locking my eyes on Nev. I hate that we're in a room surrounded by others right now because my answer confirms not only did I witness the horror of Luke's actions, but so did Hyde. His last moments were spent watching her suffer and knowing this pains her, I know, because it does me, too.

"Do you remember when he entered your consciousness?" Nev's mother asks carefully.

"No." I turn back to her. "I was conscious one minute and the next he had taken over."

I wasn't sure what Nev overheard last night while she was in the bathroom and the guys and I were talking, but I did know she deserved to know everything about last night, including when Luke assumed control. Right now, however, wasn't the time. It was something the four of us should, and would, discuss in private.

"Has that ever happened to you before?" Nev's father asks. "Aside from the usual?"

"Never." I shake my head.

Hyde was not a secret to anyone in this room. In fact, it was Nev's mother who sat me down to explain why I blacked out the first time I got angry and Hyde appeared.

I still remember the warmth of her voice and the kindness in her eyes when she said to me... *We all get angry sometimes,*

Kai. The important thing is to remember who you are. That will always bring you back.

I can't help but wonder if her words had been a talisman for Hyde all these years. An anchor he held onto when he was ready to sink back into my consciousness after protecting our girl.

"Did you ever wonder if that part of me was Luke?" I look from Nev's mother to her father.

"No," she says, at the same time Nev's father says yes. She turns to look at him brow raised.

"Come on angel," he shrugs. "How could it not?"

"Because..." she drawls. "From the moment he arrived, Kai has done nothing but adore our daughter."

"I'm aware," Dante agrees. "But Luke adored you, too, and look what happened there."

Matching her father's stance, Nev's mother folds her arms tightly over her chest and purses her lips. "It's not the same, Dante." She reminds me so much of Nev, it's unnerving. Beauty, strength, and fire. Like mother, like daughter.

"You're right." Nev's father lets out a flat, bitter laugh. "Last time, Luke wanted you. This time, he wanted our daughter."

"Oh come on you two!" Vinny rolls his eyes. "Both times Luke wanted what he will never get his hands on because no one fucks with this family. So whatever this is," he wags his finger between her parents, "fuck it out later because we have a lot to cover tonight."

"You mean figure it out," Diablo blushes.

"No," Vinny grins. "I meant what I said."

The three look at one another, and slowly, a smile breaks out on Nev's father's face.

Vinny and Lila went to Hell with him to save Nev's mother, and both were there for her after Luke shot Nev's

father and he fell into a vegetative state for months. There were no secrets or minced words among the four; between them was a bond that was impenetrable.

Nev blows out a frustrated breath and Vinny turns to her, shrugging. “Sorry buddy, you know how they are.”

“Yes,” she replies crisply. “I do. But can this be about Kai right now, and not them?”

Caro laughs, as does Viper. “Alright,” Vinny holds up a hand. “Point taken, Dante junior. Carry on.”

Vinny sits back and Nev’s mother turns her attention back to me. “The first time that side of you presented itself, you were just a boy. We didn’t think it was Luke because he hadn’t made himself known and we didn’t think his spirit had survived.”

“That, and the fact you left him in a pile of ash,” Vinny laughs.

When Nev’s mother drew Luke’s Hellfire into her spirit, her wings eviscerated Luke and protected her and Nev in utero. But sadly, they were incinerated in the process.

“Did you think he could return someday?” I cross my arms, more curious now, than anxious.

“Of course,” her mother responds. “Luke was the most powerful of the archangels and combined with the power that he had already taken from The Fallen, there was no telling what kind of backup plan he had devised.”

“And you never worried he might try to use me as part of that back up plan?”

“We didn’t believe he would try while you were young. And certainly not through spirit transference.”

“Spirit transference?” I straighten. “Is that how they did it?”

Some cultures had been using the exchange for thousands of years to communicate with the spirits of loved ones and

deities. Clearly, the Augury had been using it to communicate with Luke since they knew about Nev and the legion.

But communing with a spirit was one thing. To call it back into a living being was another. It required experience, as well as access and knowledge of both parties. The kind of access and knowledge of a family member...like a sister.

“While searching Sam’s flat earlier, we found a journal in Maren’s things,” Nev’s mother says as if reading my mind. “From what we can tell, she has been communicating with Luke for many years.”

“How long?” I swallow.

“Three...shortly after Nev left for Paris.”

“Do you know why she started trying to bring him back then?” I ask stiffly.

Nev’s mother draws in a deep breath. “We believe it was a matter of experience. She simply did not possess the strength or knowledge to do it sooner.”

Spirit transference made sense. It is the only way Luke could have entered my being. Yet, something he said last night made me think there was more to it.

Now baby girl, is that any way to treat the one who gave you fire? Baby girl...Luca’s name for Nev. Luke’s use of it, coupled with the inferences he’d made of what she and Hyde shared, was evidence he’d been observing me in a way that did not involve transference.

“Is it possible he could have been watching me somehow?”

She cocks her head and answers my question with her own. “Do you think he was?”

How could I tell Nev’s mother I suspected Luke had been watching me, without revealing intimate details about her daughter’s life with us?

“He knew things,” I say with vagueness. “Things no one else would know.”

Nev’s mother considers my question. “Maren had been observing you since you were a boy, Kai. Perhaps she knew more than you realized and shared that knowledge with Luke.”

The idea Maren had been using me all these years had rocked me as much as finding out Luke was my father. But knowing all those times she called or texted pretending to need me had been nothing more than a way to find out what I was doing or who I was with so she could feed it to Sebastian or Luke, filled me with a profound sense of betrayal.

“He’s been playing the long game all along,” Nev’s father says when the room grows quiet.

The skin on the back of my neck pricks and I straighten, pinching my shoulder blades together to stop it. “What do you mean?”

“Thanks to Maren’s journals, we now know that she was the one who told the Augury about Nev’s powers, and the one who sent us those letters every year on her birthday.”

“She *what?*” Declan grounds out.

“Luke guided Maren every step of the way. He told her what to say and do, helping to lay the trap that would end the very order he created.”

“What trap?” Luca asks the question on the tip of my tongue.

“He never cared about the Augury,” Nev’s father laughs bitterly. “Just as he never cared about giving the angels free will. We were all pawns on his chess board.”

“Wait.” I hold up my hand. “Augury, the group *he* created, Luke cared nothing about?” That didn’t make sense.

“We warned him,” Caro says angrily. “Whenever he used the legion to reign them in, we told him that they were growing too greedy, too selfish. But he wouldn’t listen. He insisted they were necessary, and they were. They were his

sacrificial lambs, to be called in for slaughter when the time was right.”

“And last night was that time?” Nev asks stoically.

“It was,” her father confirms. “Luke knew we would do everything in our power to remove any threat against you, and he was counting on it. The Augury no longer served their purpose and he needed them gone. But in order to do so, he needed as many under one roof as possible. That is how he came up with the idea of using Sebastian’s thirst for power as a way to get you *and* the Augury to Locksley. He ends those at the head, we end the rungs, and he claims your power. But he didn’t count on one thing...that we too, had a plan of our own. One of Heaven’s own creation.”

Slowly, every eye in the room flicks to Nev. “Me?” She straightens uncomfortably when everyone is staring at her.

Her father gives her a warm smile. “You were Heaven’s back up plan. To stop Luke should he try another uprising. But he only knew part of your destiny.”

“What do you mean, part of it?” Nev balls her hands into tiny fists.

Her father turns his attention to the other side of the room. “To answer that question, we should bring in the expert. David?” He motions for him to join us.

Declan, Luca, and I turn our attention to the attendants standing next to Nev’s father’s desk as Lila sits up. “Finally,” she says excitedly. “You’re up, Indy!”

Vinny rolls his eyes as Lila scoots over and makes room for David next to her as he makes his way over, tablet in hand. Neither he nor his partner James said much last night. However, both were important members of this group, and didn’t have to say anything to be here.

David was a modern day Indiana Jones—hence Lila’s nickname. A well-known historian and relic hunter, he was the one who translated the contract which bound The Fallen and discovered the prophecy of Nev’s birth after the battle in Eden.

James on the other hand was a heralded scientist, and the one who discovered Diablo was pregnant and helped deliver Nev when her mother went into labor after vanquishing Luke.

David takes a seat and sets the tablet down on the table between us. “Well, where do I start?”

“How about the beginning?” Nev’s father suggests, while I make my way back over to the couch and sit down next to Declan, across from David.

“Not enough time in the universe for that, brother,” Vinny says with a hearty laugh, to which Nev’s father can’t help but laugh back.

“How about we start twenty-one years ago?” he suggests.

“Alright.” David presses his elbows into the tops of his thighs and clasps his hands. “Let’s start with what I said to Nev’s father the night I translated the contract that bound The Fallen...about the war to come.”

“What war?” Nev takes the question right out of my mouth.

“Well...there are some circles that believe The Fall wasn’t the great war of Heaven.”

“The shit it wasn’t,” Caro quips, eliciting a smile from Viper, Vinny and Nev’s father.

“There are some,” David continues, ignoring Caro, “who believe a bigger battle is yet to come. One that will rival all others, basking not just the world, but the universe, in darkness or light. Those same folks also believe the angel in the sketch that hangs in your mother’s library is the one who will start it, and I too, believed that once. When she vanquished Luke, it certainly appeared to be true.”

We’d all seen the sketch David was referring to. It was drawn by JJ, her parents’ attendant and close friend of the legion, when he was mortal and witnessed the angels fall to Earth.

“So what changed your mind?” Nev asks tightly.

“Well...” David considers the question. “I guess you can say you did.”

“Me?” She uncurls her fists and rubs her hands down the tops of her thighs. “How?”

David reaches for the tablet, taps on the screen, then holds it out to her.

“What’s that?” she asks.

“You need to read it,” he encourages.

Nev looks at it for a moment, then reaches for it and pulls it to her lap, as Declan, Luca and I look over her shoulder.

“It’s a copy of the journal entry that prophesied your birth,” David explains before any of us can ask. “Why don’t you read the passage highlighted in yellow at the bottom?”

She takes a breath and when she lets it out, starts to read. “A child born with the blood of man, fires of Hell, and spirit of Heaven will end the war still to come.” She stops abruptly and shakes her head. “I know this already. We *all* know this.”

She looks up at him, hesitant, and when he nods for her to continue, she looks back down at the tablet and continues. “With hair like the night, and eyes the color of the darkest sky, she will bridge kingdoms divided by war and bring peace.”

“Tap the screen to continue,” David instructs when Nev reaches the bottom of the page.

As she taps the screen and continues, her voice slows, noticeably. “Under her they will align—one from the stars, another from the sky, and one with the power of fire. With them she will reign, through heirs peace will prosper, and with a destiny fulfilled, the children of Heaven will be free.”

When Nev finishes reading she looks up, hands shaking. “It’s you,” David smiles. “The four of you.”

Declan, Luca, and I are quiet as we stare at the tablet, the irrefutable proof of what we’ve always known, staring back at

us. The four of us were connected by a power beyond definition—that of fate.

Seeing Nev has grown totally still, Luca pulls the tablet from her hands gently and places it on the table.

“That second page was not in Dee’s journal that prophesied your birth,” David continues. “Only the first. So I, along with your parents and everyone else in this room, believed if the day should ever come when Luke returned, you would be Heaven’s weapon to end his tyranny. But then something happened.”

“What?” she asks, her voice barely a whisper.

“Declan came to live with your parents, and when he did, your father showed me the letter he received from his father. At first when I read it, I couldn’t believe it. I knew both Luca and Kai’s parentage, of course, so it wasn’t the idea that he was the son of a Greek god I didn’t believe. Rather, it was the fact he arrived at all. Four children with unique birthrights brought together by coincidence... Well, it stirred a curiosity in me, so I went to work trying to satisfy it and that is when I found that second page.”

“Where was it?” Declan asks.

“Your mother’s belongings,” David replies with an ironic smile. “It had never been seen by anyone other than her, your father, and the man who gave it to her...John Dee.”

Nev’s eyes flick from David to the tablet. “But it says angel. I’m not an angel.”

“Technically, you are.” David runs a hand over his chin. “You possess the blood of The Fallen, and we know through James’ research, that blood is different from mortal blood. In fact, it is unlike any other composition known to man.”

“Okay.” She grips her knees, knuckles turning white. “How about my eyes? They’re blue. Like my father’s.”

“Not when you summon Hellfire,” I correct. She turns to me, eyes wide.

“That is why we have done all we have to make sure the truth of your parents stayed safe,” Nev’s mother says when the four of us grow eerily quiet. “Luke knew Nev would possess the kind of power he needed to end Heaven. Power he lost when Athena did not sign the treaty, and Freya passed it to you, Luca. But he did not know together the four of you would have the power to both end him *and* free The Fallen. And Nev...if you stop him, if you protect Heaven, that is what will happen. Your father, Vinny, Lila, and all of the legion, they will be freed from the guilt they have carried for five thousand years.”

As the enormity of what Nev’s mother has just said hits me, I can feel the weight of it, and when I look over at Declan and Luca, see they can, too.

“Your wings?” Nev asks quietly. “Will they return?”

“No. What was taken, can never be returned. But this was never about our wings. This was about freedom. The chance to live without pain or regret.”

“And if we fail?” Nev asks so quietly, I can barely hear her.

“You won’t,” her mother says with confidence. “Because when he returns—and make no mistake about it, he will—you four will use your power together to stop him once and for all.”

“Power?” I ask, confused. “What power do I have?”

Nev’s mother turns to me, face serious. “Hell is yours, Kai. It always has been. Just as Declan’s father was mortal and connected Nev to her mortal bloodline, and Luca a son of The Fallen, connecting her to that one, you connect Nev to the fires of Hell. Her third bloodline. That is why she was able to draw Hellfire that morning of the stable fire.”

Seeing Nev staring blankly ahead, Declan grabs her hand and holds it tight. “So how do we stop him?” he asks.

“As long as there is one of his flesh, he can return,” her father says simply. “But that’s okay. We need him to. We will

go to Eden and draw him out. With your armies, he will be unable to run, and with Nev and Kai's powers, there's no way he can gain the upper hand. This time he will be ended for good."

Declan tightens his hold on Nev's hand, as Luca places a hand on her back. "Why all the lies?" she asks tightly. "Why not just tell us this from the beginning?"

"You were so young when we learned all of this," her mother says gently.

"And when I was older?" Nev's eyes flash, as she looks first to her mother and then her father. "When you asked my best friends to turn their backs on me, the thought never crossed your minds then? Or how about when you promised me no more lies. What about then?"

"Oh sweetheart." Her mother shakes her head sadly. "You may be your father's daughter, but you are mine too, and we knew if we told you, you'd do exactly as either of us would—fight back and not let anyone control your fate. And we couldn't do that. Not with the destiny the four of you had and the connection you so clearly shared."

"And Declan's birthright?" Nev challenges "Surely you knew he'd find out that he's immortal sooner or later."

"I planned to make him an attendant," her father confesses. "Just as I promised him I would, in Prague."

"You mean go through the motions and lie," Nev corrects.

Declan looks at her parents and then back at Nev. "Princess," he pulls her hand closer. "It's okay. Forward, remember?"

"No." She yanks her hand away. "It's not okay. All this time...my existence, my heart...they weren't mine."

"Sweetheart." Her mother looks from us to Nev with a puzzled look on her face. "What do you mean? Of course they were."

“They weren’t,” Nev shakes her head feverishly. “They didn’t choose me. I was forced upon them.”

“Nev.” Luca reaches for her, but it’s too late. She’s already jumped up, and raced out of the study, leaving everyone in the room to stare after her, wondering what the hell just happened.

Chapter 8

Declan

The three of us watch Nev tear out of the study and when Luca starts for the door, I stop him. “Let her go.”

“What?” He looks down at the hand I’ve placed on his chest and back up. “No way, man. We have to go after her.”

I shake my head and pull my hand back, crossing it over my chest. “We don’t. She needs her space.”

“I assume that means you’ll be taking your own advice then?” Luca takes a step toward me. “Or does it not apply to you?”

The muscle in my jaw ticks as I curl the hand tucked under my arm into a fist. “It does, as much as I hate to admit it.”

Luca studies me, eyes narrow. “What’s going on in that mind of yours, alpha?”

I lean in and look down at him, using the slight height difference to my advantage. “What’s going on is she just found out a lot of shit that makes her think the one thing she always believed to be true, was a lie.”

“What are you talking about?” His angry eyes search mine.

“Us,” I blow out with frustration. “She thinks we care about her not by choice, but by providence.”

“That’s crazy,” he rolls his eyes. “We care about her because we do.”

“I know that and you know that, but she doesn’t. Not with everything she’s just learned.”

“So that’s why we have to go after her and make sure she knows.”

“No.” I shake my head in adamance. “She needs to cool off. She’s angry and upset.”

“Well,” he smirks, “considering how that worked in your favor last time, I’d assume you’d be all over running after her. Nothing a few scratches can’t fix, right brother?”

“And on that note.” Vinny claps and pushes up from the couch as Luca and I swing our heads in his direction. I’d completely forgotten for a moment we weren’t alone and judging by the looks on everyone’s faces, they heard every... fucking...word.

“Great,” I mutter under my breath. Fucking Luca.

“I say we covered a fair share for one night, don’t you think?” Vinny looks around the room, garnering nods from everyone, except Nev’s parents.

I keep my eyes averted, wanting to look anywhere right now but at her father. I’m sure it was a little weird for him to know his daughter was with all three of us, and the last thing he needed to be thinking about was just *how* with her we were.

“I think there’s a couple of pizzas and beer waiting for us in the dining room, no?” Vinny hikes a thumb over his shoulder. “Shall we pick this up, say...never.”

Caro and Viper both laugh nervously, and even David and James make a beeline for the door, clearly wanting to be anywhere but in this room.

Nev’s mother studies us for a moment, and seeing Luca, Kai, and I clearly in need of some privacy, turns to Nev’s father. “Why don’t you go on with Vin and I’ll catch up. I’ll go check on Nev and make sure she’s okay.”

He continues staring at the three of us for a moment, then kisses the side of her head. “Try to keep it calm,” he says with his eyes still on the three of us.

She places a hand on his chest and he wraps an arm around her shoulder, guiding her to the door. Just before they step into

the hall, Nev's mother stops and turns around to look at us. "A word of advice?"

I brace myself knowing her tone well. It's both motherly and authoritative. Please don't let this be anything remotely related to what Luca said, I think to myself.

"What is meant to be will be. But do not underestimate the power of that which is hard earned."

When she's done bidding us goodnight, Dante pulls her close to his side and looks back at the three of us over the top of her head. Judging by the look in his eyes, he definitely heard what Luca said, but given all that's happened, he's acting like he didn't.

We've earned a pass, or ten. But Nev will forever be his little girl, destiny or not, and no father wants to know just how a man worships his daughter, let alone three, and we would be wise to remember it.

With a clipped nod, he steers Nev's mother into the hall and once they're out of earshot, I turn back to Luca and press my forehead to his. I am beyond irritated by both what he let slip, and that I have to spell things out for him.

"Listen to me you cocky little shit. Her parents just told her that you, me, and Kai weren't just friends that found one another. That we are pieces of a puzzle put together by a jigsaw master."

"First of all..." He presses his forehead back against mine, flashing me a wily grin. "There is nothing little about me, as our girl knows. And second, what are you—"

"My mother was told her son would fall for the daughter of Heaven," I cut him off. "And Luke, knowing about Nev after losing both my mother's army and yours, sired Kai as some fucked up back up plan. Sorry brother," I add quickly.

"None taken," Kai quips. I know out of the three of us he's got the most shit to unpack and I don't want to add to it. But I hope I'm not the only one who has put two and two together and figured that out. Judging by his response, I wasn't.

“And there’s no doubt in my mind,” I continue, “had your mother visited a seer, or whatever the Norse gods used to look at the future, she would have been told the same thing because it was foretold in that fucking journal entry. So, are you picking up what I’m putting down, *brother?*”

Luca’s eyes dart back and forth and when I see what I’ve just said finally sinking in, he draws in a breath and steps back. “Shit,” he lets it out slowly.

Relieved he finally gets it, I step back, too. “Exactly.”

The girl we adored just learned the four of us were fated. And not in the way you see it in the movies, but quite literally, pushed together because of forces out of our control. It was yet another example of her existence being not her own, and my heart ached knowing what Nev was likely thinking right now—that we didn’t choose to love her. That we were forced to. But she couldn’t be further from the truth.

When we turned our backs on Nev, she picked up and moved to another country. She started over, got a job, made new friends, and created a world where she was truly in control for the first time. But that turned out to be a lie. A lie we knew about and played a part in helping her to believe, and it fed her to the wolves.

Sebastian fucking Crane, that piece of shit that hurt and nearly raped our girl, worked his way into her life and made her a pawn in his own little power play. And for what...he was a disposable part of Luke’s master plan.

Nev’s destiny, one that already sat on her shoulders like a weight, was more complex than she was led to believe. Every moment of her existence had been following a road that was already laid for her. A road that no matter what choices she made, was part of a larger design that was out of her hands.

Power was one thing. But to hear you and the three you loved were a unit meant to stop the Devil wasn’t easy. No matter how confident Nev was. No matter how much she

loved each of us, she would no doubt question the reason for that love, and *that* was why she ran.

But if there was anything I'd learned the last few months, it was that Nev was much stronger than I, or anyone else, gave her credit for. This was not one of the times she needed us to tell her everything would be okay. She needed to know that on her own and she could only do that if she had time and space to remember everything we'd gone through. Then she'd remember just how real the four of us were, destiny be damned.

Nev's mother was right. The four of us fought hard to get to where we were, and Nev knew that. Deep down, she knew fate or not, what we shared, what we felt, was real.

"Look..." I grip the back of my neck to ease its tightness. "We all love her. Each of us would do anything to spare her from any pain. But she has to go through whatever she is feeling right now."

"He's right," Kai says and Luca looks over his shoulder. "Just give her space. She'll be back when she remembers what she already knows."

I look at Kai and give him a grateful nod. "And when she does," I flick my gaze back to Luca, "we'll be there to reiterate it."

Luca nods as I talk, and while I know he hears me, I see the concern in his eyes.

Last night she destroyed the Augury by bringing down the whole damn chamber on them, but they still had members out there. They may be in disarray now, but they would no doubt regroup and be out for revenge.

I reach into my pocket for my phone and just as I'm about to send a text to the security team I've had on Nev, to tell them to keep an eye out should she try to leave, I see a text from her father. He has already alerted the legion to do the same and wants us to know she's okay and talking with her mother in the garden.

While I'm blowing out a breath of relief, another message comes in. Her father has added Luca, Kai and I to the thread they have with their inner circle. They want us to know the elimination of all remaining Augury members has begun.

Apparently in Maren's things, they also found a thumb drive with lists of every Augury member around the world and last night after we left the study, Nev's mother gave the legion the order to eliminate them. Come morning, the Augury would be extinct, and the minds of every Cog erased, forgetting that the Augury even existed.

"Nev's fine." I shove my phone back into my pocket. "She's with her mom and the team I have on her, as well as the legion, are keeping an eye out should she try to leave. And...if you check your phones, you'll see we've been added to the legion thread. Removal of the Augury began last night.

Kai and Luca reach for their phones and when they see the message I just read, shake their heads and look up, speechless. I know what they're thinking. This is what we've been waiting for—the Augury to be gone and Nev safe. It hardly seems real since it's what's been driving us for years.

Knowing they were a precursor to a much bigger threat, however, has thrown all of us for a loop. War was coming. One where the winner takes all, and we can't fail. If we do, all of this will be for nothing. Our families, our love, all of it will be gone, and Luke will see to it there is no one left to even tell our story.

"How about we grab a bite and dig into those folders?" I ignore that possibility; the idea so unfathomable, just thinking about it makes it hard to breathe. "We can order a couple of pizzas of our own, crack open some beers, and hole up in the sitting room across the hall and wait for her to come back. Maybe we can even get a start on those folders that we've been ignoring."

We didn't touch them last night, our minds reeling and not in the space to process anything more than what we'd already

learned. But I think we were ready now. At least I know I am. I'm anxious to read the letters from my mother and father.

"Yeah, alright," Luca agrees. "That sounds good."

"Kai?" I quirk a brow. "What do you say, dive into the Devil's work?"

He laughs, but his smile doesn't quite reach his eyes. "May as well," he shrugs. "He is, as they say, in the details."

I can't help but grin. Leave it to Kai's wry humor to lighten the mood. The fact he was able to crack a joke tells me he is going to be okay.

"That it is brother, that it is."

The guys and I are holed up in the sitting room—each of us spread out on one of the couches, folders in hand—when Nev returns. When I see her, I set my folder aside and give her a warm smile.

I may have acted like I was fine with her leaving, but inside I was a fucking wreck. I knew she was safe. Actually, she was probably safer here at the penthouse than anywhere. Still, I wanted to jump up the minute she entered the room and squeeze the hell out of her and remind her how loved she is so she never doubts it. And I know I'm not the only one. The moment they see her, Luca and Kai also set their folders down on the cushions next to them and watch her cross the room.

She's quiet as she sinks down in an empty chair and looks from me to Luca and then Kai. "How's it going?" she asks tentatively, glancing at the folders.

Luca rests his forearms on his knees and presses his fingertips together. "Honestly...it's a lot."

He wasn't joking. The contents of each of our folders was both overwhelming and awe-inspiring. Our entire childhood

had been documented, as well as our mother's history, with every academic report we'd ever received—from private tutors in the years before Locksley, to our transcripts from the academy—as well as notes and pictures from our parents, growth charts, and proof of our birthright in the form of lab results.

James had been studying the legion since Nev's mom first became pregnant, and in the years since, researching the genetic coding of The Fallen and their children. When I compared my lab reports to Luca and Kai's the three of us looked at one another in amazement. Sure enough, we each were a carrier of a gene James had isolated and proven to be that of immortality. He would never share these findings with the world, of course, but holding the proof I was immortal, like my brothers, was kind of awesome.

"It is what it is," Kai says, closing his folder. "What I want to know is how *you* are?"

Nev shoves both hands between her thighs and shrugs. "Honestly...I don't know."

"What don't you know princess?" I ask gently.

She looks at me and I see her eyes turn glassy. "Back at Locksley, right before leaving, my mother made the comment that she gave you to me. And after everything we learned earlier, I started to wonder if they didn't force your hands in a fight that was not yours."

"How so?" Luca sits up straighter.

"Well," she draws in a shallow breath. "Maybe they forced us together as a way of making you care so that you'd have to fight for me, and not your birthright. You never had a chance or a choice."

The moment she says it, a tear rolls down her cheek. It wrenches my heart. I was right in knowing why she left, but clearly that time away had given her perspective and not clarity. I get up from where I'm sitting, about to fix that.

Dropping down on my knees in front of her, I slide my hand to her cheek, staring into her watery blue eyes. “You’re right. I never had a choice.”

She closes her eyes at my confession, and another tear spills free, rolling down her cheek. “So...you agree it was out of your control?” she asks, the hurt in her voice, undeniable.

“Oh yeah.” I lean in, needing her to know that my answer is not what she thinks. “Because the moment I realized my heart belonged to you, that was it for me.” Her eyelids open slowly and her lip trembles. “Princess, I am so in love with you it hurts. I’ve been in love with you since we were kids.”

I’m not naïve to believe that destiny didn’t play a part in bringing me into Nev’s world. But I know without a doubt this girl sitting in front of me I love with all I am because of a thousand and one reasons, and not one of them is destiny.

Her laugh, and wit. The way her eyes dance when she’s excited, and her cheeks flush when she sees me. Even the way she hiccups when she drinks too fast or scrunches up her nose when something puzzles her. The ways in which I adore her are endless because she makes every day, good or bad, filled with light. When she is with me I feel complete and at peace, like I am home, because that is what she is for me. My home, and center, and I cannot survive without her. Not because my existence depends on it, but because I do.

When I was a boy, and couldn’t sleep, it was Nev who tiptoed into my room at night and curled up next to me, listening to the stories of my life before I came to live with her. And when we were older and the legacy of my father’s network came knocking, and the weight of obligation made it hard to breathe, it was she who helped push those panic attacks aside, by sliding her hand into mine, and reminding me that my life, my future, was mine, and no one else’s.

In the years that she was gone, and it was just my brothers and I doing all we could to keep her safe, it was every memory of her and I and the four of us that reminded me that anything worth having, anything worth loving, was worth fighting for.

Seeing the tattoo on my hand staring back at me, I can't help but smile. For her, I did everything, and will continue to. Not because of destiny or fate but love. I fucking loved this girl more than I ever thought possible, and that was the truth.

Her eyes search mine, and when I bring my face closer to hers, her breath hitches. "I'll tell you what I believe, princess." I never want her to doubt the truth. She has had enough lies. Enough heartache for this existence. I am going to make sure she knows exactly how I feel and never doubts it, not for a single second. "I don't care what blood runs through my veins, or what deal the stars made. I love you, with all of my heart. You are in my every breath and dream. Did destiny connect our roads? What if they did?" I shrug. "Doesn't matter. I'd follow that road until the end of time and longer as long as you were with me."

Nev's eyes glisten as I bring my other hand to her face and cup it delicately. Pressing a kiss to her forehead, her nose, then her lips, I let my mouth linger on hers for a moment. "This shit we've gone through wasn't easy," I whisper against her lips. "But we made it through. And we always will. That's love, Nev. It's filled with moments of fucking and fighting and forgetting those fights, and putting that love first, always, no matter what."

She throws her arms around my neck and leans into me, pushing me off balance. I stumble back for a moment, then straighten. As I do, she wraps her legs around my waist and holds on tight as I squeeze her neck with one hand, while holding her to me with the other.

"Shit," Luca claps. "That was epic, man. I mean, you had me at hello."

Kai laughs. "And you say you don't know pop culture."

"Shut up dick, everyone knows *Bridget Jones's Diary*."

"Right actress, wrong movie."

Luca rolls his eyes. "What are you going on about?"

Nev laughs and when my own laughter shakes my shoulders, we both turn our heads. “It was *Jerry Maguire*,” we say in unison.

“Whatever,” Luca huffs. “Tom Cruise...right?”

“Yeah man,” Kai claps his back. “You got that one.”

Nev and I watch Luca and Kai bicker like an old married couple and when we turn back to face one another, the way she’s looking at me stills my heart.

“And they love you too,” I whisper low enough so only she can hear. “The three of us adore you with every last breath. Never doubt that.”

“I won’t.” She grabs my face in her hands and kisses me again, then slides down from my hold, and makes her way over to where Luca and Kai are sitting.

After wiping the back of her hand against her tear-stained cheeks, she takes a seat between them. “So,” she looks from one to the other. “Fill me in on what you’ve learned.”

“Wait.” Kai turns toward her. “Before we dive into this, how did it go with your mother?”

“Oh,” her face falls slightly. “Well...”

The way she draws in a deep breath, tells me it didn’t go well. Nev and her mother had gone through so much these past few months and I was glad to see them getting closer. I hated the thought of it being on shaky ground again.

“She mentioned meeting up with us for breakfast and having more of a discussion,” she air quotes, “versus them talking at us. There’s apparently things we need to discuss about how Declan and Luca are supposed to claim their armies, and Kai, how she will help you harness the power of Hell.”

“And you’re not ready for that?” he asks.

“No,” she shakes her head. “That’s not it. I understand the four of us need to stop Luke and save The Fallen, and to do

that we need to harness the armies you command. But I'm tired of being talked to."

"What are you thinking, baby girl?" Luca places a hand on her thigh.

Nev looks from Kai to Luca and then me. "I think it's time to take control and do things our way. Get the answers *we* need."

"Fuck yes." Luca squeezes her leg. "That's our girl."

"I'm game." I agree and look at Kai. "You?"

Luca and Nev turn to Kai, and feeling the weight of our collective stares, he shrugs. "I'm in. Anything is better than being a circus freak."

"Aw, come on brother." Luca reaches around the back of Nev and hits Kai's arm. "You're not a circus freak. You're a powerful freak."

Without missing a beat, Kai hits back. "You're such a dick."

"What?" Luca laughs. "If you're not gonna own that shit soon, then I will. Nothing wrong with being sired by the most feared being in existence."

"He's the worst," Kai corrects.

"Oh, I don't know about that," Luca says with a laugh. "You could have done worse."

"Like? There is literally no one worse than the Devil, Luca."

"Sure there is. How about that douche with the wings on his feet? What was his name, Achilles?"

"Hermes," Nev, Kai and I all say in unison.

"Right," Luca waves. "That guy."

Kai shakes his head but at the same time he's smiling and I'll take it. "You really should have paid more attention at Locksley."

“You know,” Kai looks at me. “I’ve been thinking about it, and it seems to me like all we learned at that place was training us for this very moment. Do you think it’s possible our classes were manipulated by the legion?”

“You mean my parents?” Nev asks. “Yeah, I not only think it’s possible. It’s more than likely true.”

The four of us are quiet for a moment, then Nev reaches for the folders on the table, bringing them to her laps. “So, who wants to fill me in first?”

I cross my arms over my chest and watch our girl with my brothers as they fill her in on what they’ve learned. Nev’s mother was right when she said love was a power that was stronger than any in the universe. It’s the force that helped her and Nev’s father break Luke’s contract, and it is what brought the four of us back together. Still, I am man enough to admit that in addition to fate, grace also played a part.

When we turned our backs on Nev we hurt her terribly. While I know now, the depths of that hurt was because of how much she loved us, she let us back in when she could have made us grovel for years. And I would have. I would gladly have spent eternity reminding Nev just how much she is loved because she was why we did everything and not one of us would ever take her for granted again.

Thankfully, that is in the past and in the present, it appears we’ve entered the final inning of the shit show. I still had questions on how the war would start or what exactly we were going to do to corral and then end Luke. But one thing I did know was it would be a cold day in Hell before he ever got his hands on Nev or Kai again because I would protect her and my brother at all cost.

It was still a bit of a mind-fuck to think the four of us were together but it felt right. Did I regret how selfish I’d been in wanting to claim Nev first? Nope. Did I hate that they had a piece of her heart too? Not at all, because I know there is more to the four of us than just being in love with the same girl. We

were one force and when one was threatened, the others would always have their back.

I knew how much Luca and Kai adored Nev, and she, them, and I didn't feel jealous or resentful when her need for them came before her need for me.

That's why last night, as much as I wanted to roll over and join her and Luca, I pretended to stay asleep. The combination of their breathy pants and heated whispers, made my dick strain against my boxers. But I let them have their time together because she needed him, and him, her.

Still, even I can't deny the current of sexual fluidity that existed between the four of us and wouldn't say no if the three of them needed me, because I would always need them.

"Deck?" Nev calls out. "Are you going to show me yours?"

Adjusting the way I'm standing so my semi-hard cock doesn't give me away, I smirk and take a seat next to Luca. "I'm always down to show you mine if you show me yours."

"Oh no," Kai groans. "Please tell me you two aren't about to go at it?"

"Problem with public displays of affection?" I waggle my brows.

Luca looks at me and grins, then turns to Kai. "Seemed fine with it the other night."

Nev's cheeks turn the brightest shade of red I've seen yet, and I shoot her a knowing wink as Luca hands her his folder and starts to fill her in.

Nev was an intoxicating combination of sexy and sweet, and I didn't want her to ever feel ashamed of her wants and needs. That is what we were here for. To satisfy and serve. As long as we had her adoration, we would do the rest, starting with putting an end to that fucker that brought this upon us. No one fucked with my family and got away with it. There would

be Hell to pay, and I would gladly be the mother fucking reaper.

Chapter 9

Nev

I sit up in bed, and look around, wiping the sleep from my eyes. Luca and Kai are sound asleep on either side of me, but Declan is gone. Wondering where he might be, I slip out of bed gingerly, careful not to wake Luca and Kai, and reach for my phone on the bedside table. Five o'clock. Sun will be up soon.

I start to consider the possibilities of where Declan could have gone, when I see light peeking out from under the closet door. Making my way over, I open it quietly and see Declan rifling around in the bag he stashed in here earlier.

With the three of them sleeping in here the past two nights, it didn't make sense for them to run down the hall to shower and change. We were consenting adults, and clearly, everyone knew the four of us were together. What anyone else may think or call it, I didn't know, and didn't care. Not to mention, we'd be heading back to their—our—house in the next day or two and making a mess for Lillian to tend to in the other rooms didn't seem right.

Stepping into the closet, I pull the door closed behind me, and tip toe over to him. Snaking my arms around his waist, I press my cheek against his back and inhale—the smell of orange and sandalwood filling my lungs, stirring memories. No matter where I am, the combination will always remind me of him.

When I first moved to Paris and stumbled upon a little shop that made customized soaps and lotions, I had a handful made, each in scents that reminded me of home, including the one that always reminded me of him. It invoked safety and warmth and filled me with the sweetest memories—curling up next to him in bed when we were kids when a storm hit, the

smile I'd see at breakfast every morning growing up, and all we shared that night in the stables on my eighteenth birthday. The moments Declan and I had shared over the years were woven so tightly in the fabric of my being they were inextricable. He was in my every breath.

"What are you doing?" I ask quietly and press my lips to his back.

He turns around and looks down at me, smiling softly. "I need to see Ares. Go back to bed. I'll be home later."

I wondered when the two might talk. Declan was no doubt angry that Ares knew about his mother and his birthright all this time, and considering there were still unanswered questions for both he and Luca, Ares seemed a good place for Declan to start.

"Did he call?" I ask as he wraps an arm around my waist and pushes my hair back to run a finger along my bare shoulder.

Noticing the goosebumps his touch elicits, his lip hitches and he pulls me closer. "I sent him a text and he's waiting for me. So go back to bed where it's warm and I'll be back later."

"That's cute." I shake my head with a gentle laugh.

"What do you mean?" He looks at me, confused.

"That you think you're going alone."

He trails his finger down my arm and up again. "I'll be fine, princess."

I place both hands on his chest and tilt my head up, hair skimming his arm that's curled around my lower back. "From now on, it's the four of us. Where you go, we go."

He fingers the hem of my nightie, sending a fresh crop of goosebumps down my arms. "Does it have to be?"

I stare into his beautiful gray eyes and smile mischievously. "I thought you were a fan of sharing. In fact,

you were pretty enthusiastic the last time it was the four of us.”

“Bedtime last night?” he winks. “If I recall, that was anticlimactic.”

My grin widens. He’s right, bedtime was mild last night. Like the night before. With the exception of a little burn control the first night with Luca, nothing more than sleep had been happening in my bed.

Knowing that he’s being cheeky, however, I decide to play along. “No,” I reply coyly. “Not last night, but the night before.”

“Oh,” he leans in and nuzzles my neck. “You mean, the night twenty-four robbers came knocking at our door.”

I let out a short, flat laugh. Oh, the irony Mother Goose.

The guys filled me in on what they remembered from the hours between our house and Locksley, and apparently a couple dozen Augury members *had* stormed the house. They’d fought them off admirably, hence the bruising and scratches Declan and Luca had, but it could have been much worse.

“That’s exactly the night,” I confirm with a bit of a shiver, knowing just how lucky we were to all be here right now.

“Ah yes.” Declan blows out a charged breath, warmth fanning my cheeks and lips as his hand runs back and forth along my lower back. “When the four of us fucked like there was no tomorrow?”

The heat in his voice makes my stomach plummet and pussy throb. “That would be the one.”

He leans in and kisses my neck, stirring the ache between my legs. “Well now, if that’s what you’re talking about,” he whispers, “then yes, I do like sharing.”

His lips trail down my neck to the soft skin of my pulse point, sending it flickering wildly as he makes circles around it with his tongue.

“Watching you take my brothers the way you do, princess...” A moan curls up his throat as the intensity of his kiss increases. “Fuck, princess, it’s a beautiful thing. But make no mistake about it,” he pulls back and looks at me, “I am a greedy bastard, and there is a time to share, and a time to remind you who you belonged to first.”

The look in his eyes is one of hunger and possession and sends heat shooting up my spine. “Care to remind me?”

He pulls me closer, holding me so tightly, the breath between us is not his nor mine but ours, and when he runs a finger under my chin and tips my head up, his eyes flash, meeting my challenge.

“Remember when they didn’t know about us yet, and we were sneaking around?” he asks hotly. “Hearing you scream my name that night I fucked you on the desk...shit, I can still hear and feel it. So needy. So desperate for me, and only me.”

He licks his lips, and the memory of those weeks swirl around in my mind.

Declan had been the first to break down my walls when I first came home. While I should have made him grovel longer, he made it hard to not give in. The way he commanded my body and made me feel things I hadn’t felt before, made me want to forgive and forget much faster than I anticipated.

“That first morning in your room,” he continues huskily as I grip his forearm, while running my other hand up his muscular back. “When you said you wanted me to bleed, I wanted to bleed. For what we did to you, and the way it felt to live without you those years.”

I swallow at the memory of his beautiful body hovering above me; eyes locked on mine in a gaze that said everything. My mind had been reeling with hurt and anger, but I also yearned for him.

I would forever thirst for Declan with a hunger that was all its own. He was the one I trusted with my body as my first lover, and that morning I learned the truth, the one I trusted to

satisfy the hurt and anger I was feeling, in the way that I needed.

When I dug my nails into his chest and drew blood, the way it made me feel was wanton and wicked. But when I saw the desire in his eyes as I carved those tracks into his skin, I realized he too shared the same need.

“I do,” I whisper hoarsely, my throat thick with anticipation.

I’d been holding so many emotions back since Locksley. Last night, Luca helped me release the burn I’d been feeling, but I needed to let go of so much more. I needed to feel the pain and draw blood, and Declan could see this because he needed it, too.

“What about the time you saw Cat DeMarche on her knees in the office?” He rubs his thumb across my mouth. “Did you like that, princess?”

“I did.” I grip his upper back, digging my nails into his skin. “Especially when she ran out of the office with her tail between her legs like a bitch.”

He lets out a heated laugh and licks his lips. “And you took what belonged to you. Shit, my dick gets hard just thinking about it—you on your knees, beautiful blue eyes locked on mine as you took every inch of me.”

I craved the moments like this, when it was just Declan and me, letting out our passion and pain. I wanted more. I needed it.

Taking advantage of the fact he hasn’t slipped a shirt on yet, I run my hand down his washboard abs, and finger the waistband of his pajama pants, while toiling my other hand in his hair. “Tell me more.”

He groans and presses his broad frame against me, and I can feel every inch of him wants this, just as much as I do.

“As much as I want to satisfy every teenage dream of mine and fuck you while the house is asleep, you and I both know

once this starts, it's not stopping until someone is screaming. And I hate to wake your parents up with you screaming my name."

"Well, love, there are two things wrong with that comment." He quirks a curious brow and I can't help but grin. "First, my father had the penthouse reinforced after my mother's battle with Luke, and every wall in this house is layered with concrete, plywood and steel sheathing. Anyone could scream until their lungs were raw, and no one would hear."

"And the second?" he asks, voice low and guttural.

"It won't be me that's screaming."

The moment I say it he crashes his mouth down on mine and backs me up to the wall, pulling the spaghetti strap of my nightie down over one shoulder, while trailing his lips down my neck to the soft spot where it meets the other. Nipping at the skin, he grazes it gently with his teeth, sending a lance of pleasure straight through me.

"Shit," I hiss, grabbing a fistful of hair while arching my back.

"Tell me who will be screaming again?" he growls, trailing a finger under the other strap of my nightie and pulling it down, while grinding his hips against mine.

The straps slide down my arms and my breasts spill free, silk sliding over my taut nipples, and down my body, until it pools at my feet.

Raking his eyes down my naked body, his need for me is clear as I yank down his pants and his cock springs free. Seeing him ready and eager for me, I lick my lips hungrily. But before I can drop to my knees and take what's mine, he's already on his. Gripping the sides of my panty, he peels it down slowly, and once off, grabs both thighs, pulls my legs apart, and leans in, eyes on mine as he feasts on my pussy.

I throw my head back, one hand on his shoulder, the other grabbing a fistful of his hair. But when he grabs my ass cheeks

with both hands and pulls me closer, while shoving his tongue further into my wet heat, I draw in a sharp breath and grab his head with both hands. “Fuck, yes,” I moan. “Just like that.”

Declan is an incredible lover. He is attentive and thorough, making sure I get what I need before he takes what he does. But his mouth...his perfect, salacious, skilled mouth, is a work of art.

Swirling his tongue around and around like he’s enjoying an ice cream cone on a hot summer day, my hips start to move in time with his strokes, and it’s not long before I feel my climax racing toward release.

“Eyes on me baby,” he orders, and when I look down and meet his heated gaze, he sinks two fingers into my throbbing pussy.

“Shit,” my legs start to shake as he slips them in and out of me while sucking my clit, and when it feels like I can’t stand any longer, he grabs one leg and drapes it over his shoulder, then leans in, pinning me to the wall, so he can do the same with the other.

While still on his knees, he devours me as if he’s a man that’s been starved, and the way he keeps his eyes on mine as he sucks and finger fucks me, is positively primal, driving my closer to climax.

“I’m going to come,” I pant as my body tightens like a coil, and when I pull my hips back and then buck forward, my climax hits hard and fast.

Warmth shoots through me as my pussy clenches and clit pulses, and while my heart races, and blood whooshes in my ears, my breath comes out in short, heated puffs.

As I come down from the high, my legs slide from his shoulders, and I sink down onto his lap where his eager cock awaits me. My satisfied pussy flutters around his girth as I take him slowly, and when he bottoms out, he kisses me passionately. We stay like that for a moment, his heated mouth covering mine, then he thrusts up gently, and I slide back

slowly, and we ease into a rhythm that we've perfected as ours.

It's not long until I'm bouncing up and down on his cock, aroused by the taste of myself on his tongue, while his fingers dig into my hips, and with the sounds coming from the two of us, we probably will wake half of London but I don't care. We feel just too good.

"Fuck!" I throw my head back. "Just like that, Deck. Just...like...that."

"Who would be screaming who's name did you say?" he rasps, while thrusting up harder, and faster as I grip his shoulders and dig my nails into his skin.

I slap a hand over his mouth and savor the warmth spreading through me as my second climax builds. "Shut up and fuck."

Pushing up to his feet while I'm still riding his cock, he presses my back against the wall, and grabbing my hands from his shoulders, he kisses the bandages around my wrists tenderly, before pinning them over my head, by gripping my forearms.

His muscular thighs hold me easily as he thrusts up over and over, lowering his mouth to one breast and sucking it, before letting it go with a wet pop, and doing the same to the other.

I know part of the reason Declan has no problem sharing me with his brothers is because his possessive side likes claiming me as he is now. He likes to remind me who I belonged to first, and who I will belong to always. But no matter how hard he fucks, there is love in every touch, and I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, all he feels for me, mirrors that which I feel for him.

As he lets go of my arms, I drape them around his neck, and when he shifts his pace from feverish intensity to a mind-numbing rhythm, he locks his eyes on mine and cups my neck with one hand, while cradling my ass with the other.

“Don’t ever think I don’t love you of my own volition,” he rasps. “I love you so much, princess. You are the reason I breathe. I would kill for you. I *have* killed for you. Anyone who hurts you, anyone who touches you, they pay the price.”

As Declan’s heated gaze focuses on mine, all my enemies come to mind. Those who had hunted and manipulated me, saw their end. But there was one whose fate had been unknown...until now. Because as I look into his eyes, I realize those aren’t just words. He has killed for me. One who touched me *did* pay.

Logan...I told Luca that day we ran into Sebastian that he touched me while I was chained up in that room at Locksley after he and Sasha kidnapped me. He must have told Declan, so his brother could have revenge, just as he had that night at *Styx* with Marco.

The heat...the possession...the absolute feral instinct to protect what’s his, at all costs...knowing he would and had done anything for me, pries my climax right from my body.

“Don’t...stop,” I pant, as it races through me, igniting every nerve. “Don’t ever fucking stop.”

“Never,” he promises and I throw my head back so hard it will either make an indentation in the wall or crack my skull.

The way he’s pounding into me while my pussy spasms and my heart pounds, is too much and yet not enough.

“Feel that baby,” he growls, while gripping my neck tighter. “That’s every ounce of my devotion. Every ounce of just how fucking insane I am with love for you.”

I drag my nails down both arms, struggling to breathe. It feels like I’ve been shot into the sky and landed among the stars—all of my power coursing through me. Fire, and light, and all of the elements...I feel them all not only in my core, but at a cellular level. I am in the center of creation and I see everything.

His eyes search mine as my heart races as nebulas surround me; the light of stars, some new, others ancient,

shining brightly as I feel something I've never felt before. A force...a connection...a pull toward an all-consuming energy.

“Take...all of me,” I pant. “I want you claim every part of me that's yours.”

As he eases his hold, I bring one leg down, followed by the other, then he turns me around, and presses his chest against my back. Placing both hands on the wall, he bends at his knees, and swipes a finger through my slick folds, then brings it to my puckered hole, and massages the tight bud.

A jolt shoots through me as he works the hole, and when he can penetrate me easily, he spreads my ass cheeks and eases into me. I draw in a sharp breath as the tip of his cock breaches the tight space, and after sliding in and out of me a couple of times, my body opens up to him.

While burying his cock in me, he moves his hips in a slow, rhythmic motion, and grabbing my breasts with both hands, pulls me back, fusing my body with his. “God damn your ass is perfect,” he puffs, as his balls slap my ass. “I want to stay buried in it forever.”

Feeling the muscles in the wall of his chest constrict, I know his climax is building, and when he bites my shoulder and shoves into me while gripping my hips tight, he lets go and fills me.

The two of us stand there, panting and sweating, hearts hammering in one frenzied rhythm, and when he finally pulls out, his release seeps out of me and trickles down my leg.

He swipes his finger up the trail, and pushes it into my pussy, swirling his finger around and around, coating the walls of my pussy with his cum. “Can't let this go to waste,” he says wickedly, as he kisses my shoulder where he bit me and smacks my ass playfully.

“Think they heard us?” I ask when he's done.

“I'd say so,” he grins. “But payback is a bitch, as they say.”

“Payback?” I turn around and look at him confused.

“After hearing you and Luca last night, I needed to claim what was mine. What can I say,” he shrugs, “I’m a possessive bastard.”

I lean against the wall, the way he’s looking at me making me feel both sexy and adored. “So you heard us last night. That’s what this was about?”

“No.” He runs a hand through his hair and steps toward me, placing a tender kiss on my lips. “This was about loving you.”

“Well, I feel loved.” I run a hand down my stomach. “Truly.”

He smirks and scoops up my nightie and holds it out to me. “Think you dropped this.”

“Why are you handing it to me?” I can’t help but laugh. “We need to shower and get dressed so we can go.”

He shakes his head with a smile. “That was epic, but exhausting. Go back to bed and get some sleep.”

I push up from the wall and grab the nightie from his hand. “I meant what I said, Declan. Nothing good happens when we’re apart. We figure this out together. Starting with Ares.”

He trails a finger along my collarbone and down my breast, brushing a thumb across my nipple. “How did I get so lucky?”

The way he’s looking at me, eyes smoldering, contoured chest pulled tight, makes my stomach flip. It’s the ‘I will slay dragons and burn the world for you’ look, and it always makes me swoon.

“Well now...” I toss my nightie into the laundry basket. “I do believe I am the lucky one. I did, after all, snag the heart of a demigod.”

Knowing Declan and I were forever made my mind race with possibilities. It’s the only really good news out of

everything we've heard so far.

“By the way...” He bends down to scoop up his pajama bottoms and tosses them into the laundry basket as well. “There’s something I want to ask you.”

“Okay...” I drawl, while arching a brow. “And that is?”

“Hyde,” he says simply.

I draw in a quick breath, and my heart skips a nervous beat. “What about him?”

“Well,” he studies my reaction curiously, “I’ve been thinking about what your parents said about Luke. They seem convinced he will return and it got me to wondering, if he can return, is it possible Hyde could, too?”

“Deck...” I straighten, not wanting to talk about this right now.

He holds up a hand and stops me. “I know it’s painful for you to hear his name. I can see it in your eyes. But we have to talk about it. What if it’s possible?”

I don’t want to think about whether it was possible because honestly, I wasn’t ready to. I was afraid if I did I would have to face the truth—that I had the opportunity to end Luke and use the power that had been entrusted to me, but when push came to shove, I failed because I let my heart override my head.

I didn’t sacrifice Hyde. When the Devil came for me, I chose to save someone I loved. I’d been holding onto the truth from the moment we left Locksley, and it had been eating me alive the past two days because the decision I made may have sealed all our fates.

There was a very real possibility everything we were about to go through could have been avoided had I only smashed Luke’s spirit like Hyde told me to. I had the power to destroy him. We knew that because of the prophecy. But we’ll never know.

I couldn’t end someone I loved. Instead, I shoved both of their spirits into the deepest part of Kai’s and bound them to

me—just as I’d done with Sasha—so I could find them again when I figured out a way to save the one I loved and end the one we loathed.

Now, however, I didn’t have time to figure it out. The four of us were destined for a war we’d only just learned about and wondering where Hyde was or if he could return only reminded me of what I’d done and the fact everyone I cared about may pay the price, because I didn’t have the courage to do what could have ended all of this before it even began.

“Why does it matter?” I ask stiffly. “You didn’t like me with Hyde. I know deep down you didn’t. Not really.”

He grabs my chin and locks his eyes on mine. “It matters because you love him and I love you. That is why I accepted the idea of you with Hyde. He was a part of you, and therefore a part of us.”

“And I love you.” I fight back the tears that threaten. I know I need to tell him what I’ve done. But I can’t. Not yet. “I want a forever with the three of you, but we can only have that if we focus on what is happening here and now, and that is getting answers so you and Luca can take control of the armies you wield, and Kai his birthright, so we can stop Luke. If we don’t, we will lose everything. Do you understand that?”

He grips my neck and pulls me to his chest. “I know, princess,” he kisses the top of my head, “I know.”

We stand in silence as he runs a hand through my hair while holding me protectively. “We will go and see Ares together,” he says finally. “The four of us. And we will do whatever it takes until we have everything we need to stop Luke and save The Fallen. Nothing is more important. Do you hear me?”

I nod and look up and when I see the conviction in his eyes, I wrap my arms around him and hold on tight.

Nothing is more important than stopping Luke. If Luke succeeds, everything we care about, all that we are, will be

lost. Never before has destiny felt so fatalist, and not in a good way. In the worst way possible.

Chapter 10

Declan

“Ares!” I call out as I push through the double doors; the guards stationed at the front entrance, keeping their eyes forward as I pass.

I’m sure they’d heard worse over the years. My father was a fucking tyrant. Or at least, I thought he was. Turns out, he was just a man that was protecting the woman he loved, and I was no different. My voice is rooted in the same urgency I’d heard in his own when I was a kid as I shout into the quiet estate. “Ares, I need to talk to you, now!”

If there was anything I learned in studying the contents of the folder Nev’s mother gave us, it was knowing my father lived his life for me and my mom. Even when it was time to let me go, he did it for us. I just wish I could see him one last time and tell him I understood.

A love like theirs, an unlikely pairing of beauty and fire, it was rare, and losing her had broken his heart. But making the bastards pay that took her from us, was his way of giving me something to be proud of. And I was. After years of anger and loathing, every emotion I once felt for him had melded into one—respect.

The tattoo above my pec, the first one I ever got—a raven with a hood over its head—had taken on a new meaning. Where it once stood for what I didn’t want to be—a man whose very name meant death—it now honored him. I was proud of the name and would never begrudge him or his legacy again.

Nev’s father had always encouraged me not to judge the actions of those who were not here to explain themselves. I never got it, but I do now. In the 11th inning of the game, I

finally fucking got it. Love hard, don't apologize, and do whatever needed to be done to protect your family. That was it. It was how my father lived, how Nev's did, and now it would become the way I did, too.

That's why I'm here now. Getting answers from the one who knew more than anyone so that I *could* protect them. My uncle, the god of war. One of the twelve original ruling gods of Olympus. He knew everything I needed to.

It's a good thing I encouraged Nev to show Luca and Kai the grounds while Ares and I had our little talk because the more I thought about him on the drive here, the angrier I got. We needed more than a few minutes to unpack all the shit he'd kept from me.

Nev's parents had to keep the truth from the four of us for more reasons than I could count. It stung, but I understood. They were trying to keep us safe. But Ares...he was my mother's brother. A fucking Greek god himself. He could have told me *something*.

Instead, he sent me texts every birthday and made me believe he was simply the brother of a woman who had been killed because of my father's network. All the while knowing it wasn't my father's enemies that got her killed, but the Augury, and that network was in fact an army. *Her* army.

I storm down the main hall, looking from room to room, and when I see a figure staring out the window in the study, I stop, turn, and stalk across the room.

"You knew!" I cross the space angrily and come to a stop on the other side of the mahogany desk. It's the only thing separating us and he's lucky. My uncle is big as fuck, and I've seen him tear through a dozen men in minutes, but I'm so angry, I could fight a thousand and keep going.

Pressing both hands down on the desktop I lean in, my voice an angry growl. "You knew who my mother was all this time, and you said nothing. Nothing!"

Ares turns from the window and looks at me with the same eyes that stir memories every time I look in the mirror. They're the color of a Grecian sky. A blue so light they're gray.

After my mother's death, it was painful to look at my own reflection because they reminded me of what I'd lost. Admittedly, seeing them staring back at me now, makes my anger wane slightly.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I lean in, wood of the desk wincing under the weight.

He studies me, crossing his broad arms over his chest. "I promised your mother I would keep you safe, which meant keeping who you were hidden from the world. Exactly as Nev's parents have done."

"That's bullshit!" I push back.

"It's not," he pushes back. "It's what your mother wanted. That is the reason I left you in their care."

"You're a Greek god, Ares. You could've hidden me from the entire world."

"I could not, and fighting for your guardianship would have gone against what your mother wanted. She knew you had a destiny to fulfill, and making sure you found your way to it was the most important thing to her. I hated to stay away, but I had to honor her wishes."

"And my father?" I cross my own strong arms over my chest. "Were you two *really* friends as you said?"

"That determined SOB was the best man I ever knew," he says with a melancholic laugh. "He was my brother in every way that mattered, and I miss him to this day. I miss them both. But he was adamant in honoring her wishes, too."

I turn away from his powerful stare, wanting to be angry, but I can't. I'd been safe and loved with Nev's family, her mother warm and caring as my own mother. She gave me

space those first months with them when she could see that I needed it and didn't back away when I needed guidance.

The truth was, I loved being a part of their family, even if I hated the circumstances that brought me into it. While I did always wonder why I was the only mortal allowed to know what The Fallen were, I was glad that I was. Living with them I felt safe and believed the monsters that took my parents would never come for me.

“Declan, I’m sorry all of this has been kept from you. But now that the truth is out, it’s time for you to claim what’s yours and be where you belong.”

“I belong here,” I counter. “With my family.”

“I am your family,” he points to his chest. “Sure, they raised you and guided you. But it was me who gave up my seat on Olympus to watch over you, and I will do everything I can to make sure you get what’s yours.”

“You...what?” I shake my head. “Why would you do that?”

“I wasn’t the best brother to your mother,” he turns to the window and looks out over the back of the estate, “but I thought watching over her only son and making sure you were in your rightful place would make up for it.”

I come around to the other side of the desk and stand next to him. “What do you mean my rightful place?”

“The cast of characters that are in there now make a mockery of all my father built. But you are a direct descendant of Zeus. You are the one that is destined to rule.”

“I don’t want to rule.” Ares turns and stares at me, noting the indifference in my response. “I want to save Nev and my brothers and the community that raised me. They are the only thing that matters to me. *She* is the only thing that matters! Do you understand that? I could give a shit less about Olympus’ problems.”

“You must care about them,” he counters. “Because those problems will determine the fate of those very things that matter to you.”

The warning in his words, makes the hair on my arms stand up. “What do you mean?”

Ares takes a deep breath and turns, making his way over to the bar on the other side of the room.

“You have always been just like your mother,” he says fondly, “smart and quick to defend those you deem worthy of protection. So don’t choose now, of all times, to be like me.”

“Like you?” My eyes narrow as he grabs two glasses and starts to make a couple of drinks. “How so?”

“There is a time for power and a time for strength.” He drops a couple of ice cubes into one glass, and then does the same with the other. “But now is not the time for either. Now is the time to use your mother’s greatest gift.”

“And that is?”

“Strategy.” He pours a bit of whiskey into both glasses and then makes his way back over and holds one out to me. “The gods of Olympus may be no more, but twelve now sit where the gods once did and two believe their blood entitles them to the seat that rightfully belongs to you.”

“Is that so?” I take a sip of my drink and can’t help but wonder who has the audacity to think they can take what’s mine.

“Heed my words, Declan. You need to take back what is yours before commanding your mother’s army.”

“What do you mean take back? It is mine by birth. My father’s network *is* her army, and they already listen to me. I didn’t fight my way through all of Europe to have them disobey me now.”

“It is.” He nods and takes a sip of his own drink. “But you must sit in her seat, before they will fight for you with the power of the gods.”

“Okay then.” Sounds like a technicality that is easily fixed. “I will go to Olympus and take it back. Nothing I haven’t done before...taking what belongs to me.”

“It will not be that easy,” he cuts me off. “Politics and power are a dangerous combination. Those who have nothing to lose are willing to use both without consideration for who gets hurt. Just as long as it is they who come out on top.”

“Look.” I blow out a frustrated breath. “I don’t care about politics or power. I only care about—”

“You must care,” he cuts me off a second time. “You need your mother’s seat to beat Luke, and you need to think like her to get it. I’m telling you, those who rule Olympus now are selfish and spoiled and will resort to games of blood and malice to keep what they feel is theirs. You will need to keep a level head and outsmart them.”

I grip the glass in my hand and stare into my drink. “You are the son of Zeus. Surely you can tell them where to go and how to get there.”

“Maybe once upon a time,” he admits. “But not any longer.”

“Why?” I finish my drink and set it down on the desk. “What did you do?”

He studies his own drink before shooting it back and setting the glass down on the desk next to mine.

“I was arrogant and foolhardy and when I left, I was absolutely reckless. They were glad to be rid of me because in their eyes I was a tyrant and no one cared what the lesser child of Zeus had to say. Your mother was beautiful, and smart and everyone adored her, including our father.”

I make my way over to one of the two chairs opposite the desk; a powerful wave of déjà vu hitting me when I take a seat. The weight of this conversation reminds me of the day Nev’s father came to see mine, and something tells me the gravity of this one is more or less the same.

“So you pissed off your father, and he what...disowned you?”

“No,” he shakes his head. “He made your mother the heir to Olympus. Not me.”

I sit back, rocked by the revelation. “My mother’s seat is that which rules all of Olympus?”

“Our father never gave up hope she would one day return,” he says while taking the seat next to me. “But one by one the gods expired, taking their power with them, and when it was his turn to go, and she still hadn’t come back, he decreed only the heir of Athena could restore the true power of Olympus.”

“Why should I care about the wishes of an expired god and a power that means nothing in this world?” I sit back. “My life is here. My *love* is here.”

“My father was a lot of things, but first and foremost he was a god. His legacy was not only written in the sky, but his power drawn from it.”

I turn to look out the window and see Nev, Luca, and Kai in the distance. Luca has just snuck up behind Nev and hoisted her over his shoulder as Kai laughs while he spins her around and around. Her happiness is my happiness and I can’t imagine ever being without her, or them.

“The air is Zeus, Zeus earth, and Zeus the heaven, Zeus all that is, and what transcends them all,” I say to myself.

“[Aeschylus](#),” Ares says with pride, clearly hearing me. “See, the blood of the gods does run through your blood.”

I turn back to my uncle, remembering the day I learned that quote. It was in Thompson’s mythology class, Nev’s first year at Locksley. I was so mesmerized watching her as the teacher wrote it on the chalk board, that I didn’t hear him calling on me until she snapped her fingers in front of my face and snapped me out it.

“No,” I shake my head, “Locksley taught me that. The world I was raised in, thanks to the Augury taking my

mother's from me. Then again, when it comes down to it, they are my world." I nod to the window. "Always have been and will do whatever it takes to protect them."

"So that is even more reason to take back what is yours," Ares says with fervor.

The muscle in my jaw ticks and I sit up straight. "Luke has to be stopped. I need to know everything. How to get there, who is in my seat, and what I need to do to get it back."

"I will tell you everything, including all you need to know about your niece, and my grandson."

"Your grandson?" I look at him in surprise. "And my niece? *That's* who's sitting in my seat?"

"Yes," he nods. "And mine. They are two of the twelve."

"But how do I have a niece? My mother did not have any other children."

"She did not," he confirms. "But she did adopt a child that she considered hers, and their offspring has formed a very unlikely alliance with my grandson."

"So, what...my cousin and niece are in cahoots to take over Olympus?"

"Power is a heady thing, Declan, and once you've had a taste of it, hard to give up. I know because I once craved it more than anything. The very idea aroused me more than gold or flesh. And those two who covet your mother's seat, feel it is theirs by right. They won't let it go easily. Not after they've tasted what it means to be one of the rulers of Olympus."

The way he says it with antipathy and regret, tells me there's a story there.

"Why don't you want your descendant to rule? He has just as much of a right to be there as I do."

Ares gets up and reaches for our glasses, then makes his way over to the bar. "You do not defy the gods, and when he

helped your niece take your mother's seat, he defied an order from Zues himself."

I push up from the chair and make my way back over to the window. Save my girl and free The Fallen. It's the only two things I care about because doing so saves everyone I love. For my family I would play any game of the gods. But for Nev...I would wrestle Zeus' thunderbolt from the sky myself.

"If I do this," I place a hand on the glass, "will you help me?"

"I cannot. I am considered an outlier. Zeus's blood still runs in my veins, so I am welcome, regardless of who sits in the twelve seats now. But I do not have power. Not anymore."

"But you commanded an army last night?" I question.

"They followed me when I left, and they are part of your father's network as I am. But my army is no good on Olympus. They too, are outliers."

Shit, we were on our own. Maybe it was for the best.

"Alright," I nod with new resolve. "How do we get there?"

Ares makes his way back over, standing shoulder to shoulder with me. "You go to the highest peak in all of Greece and among the clouds you will find it."

"Mount Olympus." I look over and shake my head. "Really?"

"Sometimes the answers are really that simple," he pats me on the back. "That's where the rocks over the tunnel entrances at Locksley were from. Those that correspond to the Calamity seats of power that originated with the Greek gods that signed the treaty are from the steps to Olympus."

The moment he says it, I think about that seventh tunnel at Locksley. That which was bored and never used. It was supposed to be my mother's. A seat of power she chose not to wield.

“On the eastern slope of Mount Olympus,” Ares continues, pulling me from the thought, “there is a path detectable to only one with the blood of the gods. You will follow it until you reach the gates guarded by the Horai. They will test you, and upon passing, the gates will open and the stairs to Olympus will appear.”

“How long does it take?” I rub my chin.

“The trail from Litochoro is about an hour, and once the gates are open, the stairs take you straight up, past the peak of Mytikas.”

“You said the Horai will test me. How?”

“That I do not know,” he shakes his head. “It is different for everyone and meant for you and you alone.”

I nod and consider another question. “Back at Locksley, you appeared to know Luke. How?”

“He came to Olympus and tried to recruit both your mother and me. We shared some words that apparently he never forgot.”

The two of us fall quiet and when I place a hand on his shoulder he turns to me. “For what it’s worth, thank you. For all you have done.”

“No need,” he replies proudly. “I would have done anything your parents asked.”

I drop my hand from his shoulder and turn my attention back to the window. “I’ll call Nev’s father and fill him in.”

“You should plan to leave as soon as possible,” Ares advises. “You can stay in my place in Litochoro. It’s in the foothills and has quick access to the path you will need to take. Snow is common this time of year but do not worry about bringing winter gear. I will have it waiting for you.”

“Thank you.” I run a hand through my hair, eager to fill Nev, Kai, and Luca in on all I’ve just learned.

“My pleasure. Just remember,” he places a hand on my chest, “you are the son of Athena *and* grandson of Zeus. You have more right to sit on Olympus than any of those who currently do. Claim your seat and no one will ever challenge you again.”

“And when I get there, if they do?”

He flashes me a smile. “Then challenge them back until they break.”

He pats me on the back again and makes his way to the door. “I’ll make us dinner. Tonight we can rest and talk. But tomorrow you should be on your way. There is no time to waste.”

The way he says it, with unyielding strength and focus, I can see the warrior he is, and a hint of the one my mother was, and I can’t help but feel their blood in my veins.

“Ares,” I call out as he reaches the door. He stops and turns. “Why didn’t they come for me...after they killed my mother?”

He considers the question, then grins. “Because they knew you would destroy them, whether you were aware of your birthright or not.”

“How?” I shake my head.

“Because you too, have lightning in your veins.”

I hold out my hand and stare at it. “I...what?”

When I look back up, he’s watching me. “Honor her memory and take back what belongs to you, and you too will command the power of the sky. Just as she and I both did, once.”

I stare at him, speechless, as he turns back around and makes his way down the hall.

Chapter 11

Luca

I stand at the top of a slight hill and look around. Nev wasn't kidding when she said Declan's place in the country was like its own kingdom. The grounds expand for acres on either side, just as her parents' place, and other estates in the area. Only, it doesn't feel like I'm in the English countryside, but another world entirely. There are trees I've never seen before, and flowers that fill the air with rich sweetness—even the sun appears warmer and brighter.

“Man, this place is sick.” I shake my head in awe. Our place in London was ridiculous, and Nev's parent's place straight out of a movie, but this was next level.

“Told you.” Nev comes up behind me and leans her chin on my shoulder. “It's magical at night, too.”

I turn and run a finger along her jaw. Her skin is warm and eyes sparkling in the midday sun. “Can't wait to see it.” I lean in to kiss her gently, and the slight hum she lets out as my lips linger, sends a fiery lance of need straight through me.

Turning to face her, our lips part for a moment, and when I lean in and claim her mouth again, I move it slowly, yet possessively over hers. It's the kind of kiss I know she craves. The kind that tells her this kiss and all my others, are for her and only her.

When I promised myself that Nev would be the only girl I ever kissed, I meant it. Sure, when we first arrived at Locksley there were sloppy beer-soaked make out sessions, but that day I kissed Nev in her father's secret room and gave her the best damn first kiss one could have, I vowed then and there to never kiss another girl again because my best friend, the girl

who was turning into a beauty right before my eyes, was the only one I wanted to kiss forever.

I kept that promise. Not once did I let a girl near my lips after that night in her parent's secret room. Mouth on other parts of my body? Sure. But the raven-haired beauty that I can't stop kissing now, has owned every one of my kisses since her first one.

"Olive," Kai says from behind me.

"What?" I ask slightly irritated as I pull my lips from hers. The spiral we're plunged into when we kiss is one that makes it hard to breathe once we come up for air. My heart is pounding and my dick is hard and if he wasn't here, I know exactly where that kiss was headed, and judging by the look in Nev's eyes, she does, too.

"That's what these are," he says while nodding at the tree next to me. It's mid-height, with a canopy of silver-green leaves and tiny white flowers. "His mom must have planted them since they're not native to England. How they took root in this soil and why they're blooming in winter, however, is beyond me."

"Well thanks for solving that mystery for me." I roll my eyes. "As you could tell, I was *totally* thinking about that."

Kai smirks and winks at Nev. "Sorry not sorry. Now come on. Let me dazzle you both with more horticulture smarts."

"I'd rather be doing the horizontal limbo with our girl." I reach out to pull her into my arms once more, and Kai cuts in front of me. Nev laughs and brings her hand to her mouth, masking a grin. "Get out of the way."

Kai folds his arms over his chest and stares at me, defiant. "No."

"Dude." I step into him so our chests are touching. "Get the fuck out of the way, Kai. Or should I say, Luke Junior?"

His eyes flash and yet, he's calm and in control. "Well alright," I pat his chest. "Just checking."

I would never cock-block one of my brothers from our girl. We each needed her and she us. But I didn't know when Luke would return, but I had to make sure that tricky fucker wasn't in my brother right now. Thankfully, he wasn't.

"I know you were," he leans in. "Which is why I didn't knock you on your ass."

He grabs my face in both hands and grins wide, then plants his mouth on mine, kissing me Mafia-style. Nev barks out a laugh and when he lets go and winks at me, he grabs Nev's hand and points to the path ahead. "Let's roll."

I scowl and run the back of my hand over my mouth, as we make our way through the paths that lead through groves of what Kai points out, are cypress and pine trees, as well as clusters of purple, pink, yellow and blue flowers that fill the air with a dizzying sweetness.

At the end of the path we reach a circle of columns, with vines twisted around it and purple grapes. Kai plucks one off and pops it in his mouth, as Nev and I take in the fountain. It has blue-green tiles in the basin, and water so clear it looks like you're staring into the Aegean Sea.

"It's like she created her own Olympus," Nev says in wonder, while running her hand through the water. "Seeing it during the day...it's incredible."

"Almost like we're in Greece," Kai agrees.

"Do you think it looks like this? Mount Olympus," I add when both he and Nev look over at me.

"No," Kai smiles. "It's unlike anything we've ever seen before."

"Tell us," I challenge, and give Nev a playful smile. Knowing full well what I'm doing, she takes a seat on the edge of the fountain, and places both hands on her knees, waiting for Kai to answer.

Like a bee to pollen, Kai takes the bait. "The mountains were once the daughters of Gaia, a titan," he begins. "And it

was on these peaks, Gaia and the other Titans made their thrones. But when Zeus challenged the Titans and won, he took over Olympus and transformed it into a palace for the gods. It is there the twelve presided—Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Demeter, Hermes, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, Apollo, Artemis, and Hestia, who gave her seat to Dionysus. And of course, Deck’s mom and uncle.”

He stops to take a breath, which is surprising, because I’ve seen my brother rattle off information before like an encyclopedia and he can go minutes without stopping.

“There is a great room,” he continues, and I sit down next to Nev, and throw an arm around her shoulder. “Crystals line the walls, and of course the room where the assembly room of the gods takes place. And banquet halls,” he snaps, “with tables piled with food, extending as far as the eyes can see, filling Olympus with the sweet smell of nectar and ambrosia.”

“Wasn’t the disagreement over Athens decided there?” I ask casually.

When he hears the question, Kai looks at me, clearly surprised. “You remember that from Thompson’s class?”

“Impressed?” I smile cheekily.

I actually didn’t remember it from Thompson’s class. I may not have studied much at Locksley but that didn’t mean I couldn’t, and last night when Nev was cooling off after everything in the study, and again this morning on the way here, I took one hell of a crash course in Greek and Norse mythology.

Since our entire existence was rooted in Luke and Hell, and most of what was in Kai’s folder had to do with his mother, I focused on learning as much as I could about the gods of both my and Deck’s heritage.

With the Augury gone, and the final showdown about navigating the twisted web of history and our role in it, I stayed up well after everyone went to sleep, scrolling through my phone.

Now, however, feeling the effects of pulling a near all-nighter, I can't help but wonder how Nev and Kai did it at Locksley. Thanks to being awakened by her and Deck banging it out in the closet, my eyes felt like there were pebbles in them.

"I know you're trying to figure out how I know that, so I'll save you the trouble." I rub my eyes and yawn. "I may have studied up on the mythology of my and Deck's people."

"Oh yeah?" Nev swings her head in my direction.

"Yup." I pull her close and kiss the top of her head. "I want to know all there is about the slippery fuckers we may encounter."

"That was smart," Kai shoves a hand in his pocket. "Because there is no doubt in my mind Deck is getting more than what's in that folder right now."

The three of us look up the estate and know somewhere inside, Deck is unleashing on his uncle.

"He's probably going to be busy for a while," I agree, and turn back to Nev and Kai. "Do you two want to visit paradise in paradise?" I waggle my brows.

Nev laughs at the suggestion and the sound of it makes my chest twinge. It was good to see her smile. The past few days had been an absolute shit-show and I worried about the toll it had taken on her.

Cuts and bruises were one thing. Waking up naked in bed with the Devil...fearing you were about to be raped in front of those you loved...*ending* one you had were just starting to care for...it was a lot for even the strongest of hearts.

"Later," she suggests. "There's more to see."

"Oh yeah?" My brows lift. "Did Deck build a surprise playroom for me?"

She shakes her head and I give her my best, sad puppy face. "There's no secret about it. He has rooms for each of us. Just like the house in the city."

“Are you kidding?” Kai asks, clearly surprised.

“Nope.” She looks back at the house. “He restored this place in honor of his mother, but it is also for the four of us.”

“Shit. If I didn’t have a hard-on for him before, I sure as shit do now.” Nev tilts her head and stares at me. “What?” I pinch her hip playfully.

She shakes her head and flashes me a curious smile. “Nothing.”

“So how come we never knew this place existed?” I stretch my arms overhead. We knew the countryside like the back of our hand. Seems weird we never ran into this place before and that Deck never told us about it.

“I don’t know.” Nev chews the corner of her lip while considering the question. “I think it might have been too hard for him. I mean, look at this place...I never met his mother, but even I can see she’s everywhere.”

“Still, seems like we would have run into it at some point?” Kai points out the very thing I was just thinking. “I was totally surprised when he texted me the address that day he asked me to bring you here.”

“I thought the same thing when we came here that day,” she agrees. “I mean, I’ve ridden all over the countryside and should have made it at least to his property line. It wasn’t until that first night I snuck out to see him that I did. Who knows... maybe there was some kind of protection spell around it.”

As if we’re all thinking the same thing we turn to look at one another. The idea may be crazy, but given everything, likely true.

Sitting there in the warmth of the sun, I can’t help but think the idea of secret properties makes a lot of sense, given all that’s happened, and all we’ve learned, the past few days.

“All I know,” she continues, “is my father saw our place while he was out here to ask for Declan’s dad’s help ending Luke, and when the penthouse was destroyed after the battle

between him and my mother, my father made the owners an offer they couldn't refuse."

"That's how you wound up out there," Kai smiles.

"Come," Nev pushes up from where she's sitting. "I want to show you the stables."

"Declan has horses?" he asks in surprise.

"No," she shakes her head with a smile. "Ares does."

Kai looks at her, eyes widening. "The Hoppoi Areioi... they're here?"

"They are," she nods excitedly.

"The hippo koi what are here?" I look from Kai to Nev. I may have studied but didn't see anything about any hippos in all I read.

Nev laughs and Kai shakes his head. "The Hoppoi Areioi... the horses that pulled Ares' chariot. They're legendary."

"And beautiful," Nev's eyes sparkle. "That first night I came to visit Deck after all that shit happened with my parents, I rode Beauty here, as you know. But Ares rode back with me on Kona, and I swear, that horse had a thing for my girl."

She smiles softly with the memory and I hope to fuck she's not about to start crying because when she cries, I want to burn the world to the ground.

"You okay?" Kai asks.

She gives him a clipped nod and when he reaches for her hand and kisses it, her tearful smile again turns joyful. She has a connection with each of us, and clearly, the one she shares with Kai included Beauty. To each his own. Whips were whips.

When they start to turn for what I presume is the direction of the stables, my phone rings. Hearing it, they both stop and look over their shoulders. "You two go on," I nod for them to continue. "I'll catch up."

“You sure?” Nev asks.

“He’s sure.” Kai squeezes her hand and tugs her forward. “Come on.”

I watch the two continue on and reach into my pocket for my phone. When I see who it is, I consider shoving it back in, and then surprise myself when I answer. “Well, if it isn’t my father, the liar.”

“And if it isn’t my son, the cocky little shit.”

Normally, I’d bristle at his use of my brother’s words against me. Funny enough, they only make me smirk. Maybe it’s because I’m two seconds away from replying with just how *not* little I am, exactly as I did last night when Declan hurled the quip. Or maybe it’s because of something my father said last night that I can’t stop thinking about—*Luca has one father...me.*

For the first time in, well, forever, he seemed ready to fight someone over the idea I could be anyone’s son but his. As if he weren’t obligated to be my father, but was proud to be, and he’d punch anyone in the mouth that said otherwise. I won’t lie, it did something to me.

“So, you four are off to figure things out on your own, huh?” he says, breaking the silence filling the line.

“Yup,” I look down, kicking at a pebble in the path. “Time to start getting answers the way we know how.”

“Right.” He exhales, filling the line with static. “How is everything with the four of you? Kai...he’s holding up okay?”

I look up, squinting under the glare of the sun and turn so my back is to it. “If you’re asking whether Luke has taken over his body again, the answer is no.”

The sigh of relief my father lets out is clear. “Keep an eye on him, will you?”

“Why, so I can rat him out and the legion can do whatever the hell they want to get the Devil out of him?” The muscle in my jaw ticks at the idea of anyone hurting Kai. “Hell no.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“No,” I bite back. “Then what did you mean?”

“I meant...keep an eye on him. Yes, for Luke, but also, to make sure he’s okay.”

“Is that right?” I scoff. “You suddenly care about Kai now?”

“I’ve always cared, Luca. About all of you.”

“You have a funny way of showing it.”

“Well, sometimes, we only see what we want to. But if you look back now, knowing what you know, I think you may see things a little differently.”

“Really.”

“Yes, really.”

“And what pray tell, will I see if I look back to say, my fourteenth birthday?” I ask mockingly. “When you dropped a suitcase on my bed and told me to pack up because it was time for me to head to Locksley? Or the time you made me practice the punching bag until the tape around my fists was shredded? Or hey,” I let out a short, dry laugh, “how about the time you had the balls to walk into my club, the business I built with my brothers, and look around, and say you’d seen better. What about that? What the fuck will I see if I look back on each of those times, huh *dad?*”

My father sucks in a sharp breath and when silence fills the line again, I brace myself for what’s coming.

I know that silence. It’s the one he gives me when I’ve said too much or pushed my luck, and usually results in one too many matches in the gym to show me who’s boss. If he were here, there wasn’t a doubt in my mind he’d be stripping out of his shirt, preparing to do that very thing, right here, right now, in the garden.

However, when he clears his throat and his voice remains even while speaking, I’m not prepared for his response. “You

will see a father that is trying to protect his son, his best friends, and the girl he loves, so that you don't lose them the way I lost the only thing that mattered to me."

His admission stuns me. On one hand, he would have never said anything like that in the past, which tells me things really have changed. And on the other hand, the irony of his words are too hard *not* to ignore.

"Newsflash, pops. You didn't lose everything. You had a son. And he worshiped you once, and when you couldn't be bothered, that worship turned to hate."

"There's still time to change that."

"Don't be so sure," I bite back. "From what I understand, time may be something we have very little of if the four of us don't succeed. And on the topic of the four of us, if you knew we were fated, why did you tell me to stay away from Nev?"

"Come again?" he questions.

"That day at the house...you grabbed me by the scruff of my neck like some kind of fucking dog and told me to stay away from her. Which side note, I hate it when you do that."

If I was so goddamn special, why did my father seem so hell-bent on making me feel so undecidedly so all this time? Why would he want to keep me from the one person who not only saw into my heart, but owned it?

"It's simple," he says plainly. I brace myself for his snarky response. Something to remind me he was a master asshole and had only been trying to throw me off my game this entire call by being all nice and shit. "I didn't want you to get your heart broken and live with it forever as I will have to, mine."

I hold my phone out and stare at it, not sure if this call is real, or if I'm dreaming. Shit, maybe I'm back in that chamber, dead as a doornail. The past few days nothing more than some kind of fucked up, existential game for the eternal.

When I bring the phone back to my ear, I'm still trying to figure out what to say when he speaks so I don't have to. "You

are exactly as she knew you would be,” he laughs.

My throat is suddenly dry, making it hard to speak. “And that is?” I manage.

“Wily, wicked, and the best damn player of any game. Just as your namesake. That is why I know you will take back what is yours and end this shit once and for all.”

I ignore the compliment, and zero in on two words that stick out more than any of the others. “What do you mean, *take back*?”

“Just as there are those on Olympus who believe Declan’s throne belongs to him, there are those in Valhalla who believe your mother’s belonged to them.”

The idea of anyone having the balls to take what belongs to me, pulls my back ramrod straight. “Who?”

“That I do not know,” he exhales. “But this I do. The gods are cruel, and their games wicked. Be careful.”

I nod and think about what he’s just said, wanting to compare notes with Declan as soon as he was done with his uncle.

“Hey,” I say when I feel like this call has run its course. “Ever since I was a kid, there was one thing besides working out that you’ve always harped on me about...the burn of The Fallen blood. You always said only the strongest can see through it. You’re one of the strongest. If you couldn’t do it, why did you think I would be able to?”

He laughs. “So you think your old man is strong?”

“Come on,” I roll my eyes. “You know you are. You don’t need me to stroke your ego.”

He laughs again as do I, and I can’t help but think it feels...nice. “Since you were part Fallen and part Norse, I thought you may be able to teach Nev that part of our power. You know, should you two ever...”

“Not find our way to one another,” I finish where he was going with that thought.

“Clearly, that isn’t the case because whatever you did to teach her it works because that part of her power...shit,” he whistles, “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

I look up and puff out my chest. I was proud of our girl, and honored to be a connection to the part of her power that lies in her Fallen blood.

“But Luca...” my father says, voice shifting to one of caution, “the four of you...I won’t lie and say I don’t know you are together. I can see it. Everyone can. But a word of caution?”

“What’s that?” I lift my chin.

“Keep what the four of you do between the four of you. Dante doesn’t need to know what or who his little girl is doing. Got it?”

I cringe when I remember what I said last night in the study. “Was he pissed?”

My father lets out another low whistle. “There isn’t a word for what he was. So just...don’t do it again, okay?”

“Noted,” I reply.

Before hanging up he tells me something that stays with me for the rest of the day. “She was amazing, Luca. Just like your girl.” It leaves me with the longing for a mother I would never know, and a burning desire to know who the fuck was on my throne because they were about to get a rude awakening. I’ll be damned if anyone took my mother’s last gift to me. I’d fight with all the fury of the gods if I had to. No one would ever take that which belonged to me.

Chapter 12

Kai

After dinner I decided to take a walk to clear my head. I wasn't used to my mind being plagued by tumultuous thoughts. I didn't do drama or histrionics. Easygoing was my nature. But in the last three days I'd had enough of both to last me for eternity, and it wasn't going to get better anytime soon. In fact, with the trip we were about to take, something told me it was about to get worse.

Under normal circumstances I would be all for a jaunt to Greece. But since we're headed there to climb Mount Olympus so Declan can take back his seat and officially command his mother's army, not to troll the blue waters of the Aegean on a yacht like every other millionaire, I'm thinking we may hit a hurdle or two. Especially given everything he shared with us at dinner, about the politics at play on Olympus.

Then, there was the trip to Sweden we'd be taking once we finished there that I was sure going to be filled with more fun and games.

After talking with his dad earlier, Luca confirmed that he too would have to claim his mother's seat in order to command her army. Apparently the message he had for Luca was similar to the one Ares had for Declan—someone commanded his mother's army, but whom Caro did not know, nor the politics at play. So yeah, it was going to be fun figuring *that* out, too.

I was surprised to hear Luca spoke with his father. Given how much his father had kept from him, I suspected things between the two would be tense for a while. Strangely, however, Luca was at ease after their call—his father's name

not even drawing a scowl—and I wondered if the truth coming out hadn't been a good thing.

I hoped so. If anything good were to come out of all the secrets and lies, it would be that. Luca was a good guy. Both he and Deck were. And to learn they were the sons of gods only strengthened what I already believed. I was lucky to call them my brothers.

There was something puzzling, however, about Luca's call with his dad. Neither Caro, nor anyone in the legion, knew how to get to Valhalla. Luca's dad had spent time in Sweden, but his mother hadn't say anything about where it was or how to access it. Even David's research had come up empty handed.

I expected the Bifröst, a bridge that connected mankind to Asgard, home of the infamous hall of the Norse gods, to be among the highest mountain tops in Scandinavia, where the Northern Lights touched the highest peaks. However, all we knew was the origin of the stone above the entrance to the tunnels for the Calamity seat of power that corresponded to the Norse god that signed the treaty—Neptuni Åkrar. Our search would begin there, on the banks of the Kalmar Strait, in Borgholm, Sweden, but where it led us, was anyone's guess.

“There you are,” Nev's melodic voice breaks into my thoughts.

I spin around and find her leaning against the trunk of an olive tree, watching me. “Are you stalking me, gorgeous?” I reply as lightly as I can manage given everything on my mind.

“No,” she laughs gently. “I was looking for you.”

“That's kind of the same thing, no?” I quirk a brow.

She pushes up from the tree and makes her way over. “As a fellow AP linguistics student, I'm fairly certain you know stalking and looking are antonyms, Kai.”

She comes to a stop in front of me and looks up, her closeness trapping a pocket of air in my throat. “Fine,” I can't

help but smile. “You got me. Now, how about you tell me why you’re out here and not inside getting packed for tomorrow.”

“Well...” She nibbles her lower lip. “I’m already packed since we just got here, and you said you’d be back. I didn’t think that meant tomorrow.”

I brush her hair back from one shoulder, noticing how the slight touch of my fingertips against her collarbone, makes her shiver. “We’ve got quite a trip ahead of us.”

“I know.” She looks up at me from under lowered lashes. “That’s why I was hoping you and I could turn in early. We haven’t really spent much time together.”

Normally, I would dive headfirst into the invitation because the meaning in her words is clear. She’s not the only one who’s craving time alone. I am, too.

Before Locksley, Nev wouldn’t have to ask me twice to go to bed early. Actually, she wouldn’t have to ask me at all. I’d have pulled her into the room Declan pointed out was mine as soon as we arrived and locked the door behind us. But the path we were on now was different, and the risks, too great.

Hyde, her protector, was gone, and as long as I existed, I was the biggest threat to Nev’s safety. No matter what happened back at Locksley, Luke could return at any moment, and I would do everything in my power to make sure he never lays a hand on her again. Even if that means keeping her at a safe distance from me, the one who’s hand he would use.

“As nice as that sounds,” I say as gently as I can, “isn’t this Deck’s place?”

“Yes.” She shakes her head and looks at me, slightly puzzled. “And?”

“And shouldn’t the queen be with the king while holding court in his castle?”

She smiles and laughs. It’s breathy and sweet and tugs at my heart. “I told you...he wants this to be a place for the four

of us. Besides, I've had the king, and my rook. Now I need my knight."

"And the rook would be Luca?" I laugh lightly.

"If the piece fits."

She's got me there. I'd rather be a knight than a rook. But as far as pecking orders go, the king and rook were getting more time with our queen than me, and I hated it.

It wasn't that I was jealous. It wasn't a chess match where the winner takes all. Nev loves all three of us and I would never begrudge her for wanting to be with them. It's just...I wanted that, too. I wanted to kiss and hold her and feel her against me. But I can't entertain the thought right now. Not when the last time Nev and I were in bed together Luke swooped in and took over my body and mind.

I didn't know when or where he may appear, but something told me he wouldn't hesitate to do it again when she and I were together—just as he did the first time since it worked out so well for him—and I couldn't let that happen. I won't.

It was ironic, really. Where I once tried to keep her safe from Hyde, the side of me that I thought would hurt her, it turns out, he was the more worthy side. He did the noblest thing a knight could do. He sacrificed himself to keep her safe, and because of his selflessness, he should be here now.

"You will sleep just fine." I drop my hand from her shoulder, knowing the longer I touch her, the harder it is not to.

It's better if we keep things on the mild side for now. Until we know more about Luke's whereabouts. But damn it's hard because I crave her in ways I have never craved anything.

"I wouldn't be much use, anyhow," I add with a shrug.

"Oh yeah? And why is that? If memory serves me correctly, you are quite useful," she says with a suggestive smile.

“I’m all honor and no armor, gorgeous.”

Her smile fades as her shoulders rise then fall with the deep breath that she takes. “You will always be my knight, Kai. No matter what happens.”

“Well, knights have one goal—protect their queen.”

“And you have.” She places a hand on my chest and leans in. “Admirably.”

“I haven’t,” I refute. “Hyde did. He made the sacrifice a knight would. I simply let him.”

“Now you listen to me.” She wraps her arms around my waist and pulls me close. “We both know you didn’t simply let him. You let a part of yourself go to protect me. If anything, that makes you the best knight in all my kingdom.”

“Gorgeous...” I shake my head.

“Kai,” she mimics, shaking hers right back.

We stare at one another, neither yielding, and when I feel my will weakening, I press my forehead to hers and close my eyes, breathing her in.

“Hey...” She cups my cheek. “Talk to me. What are you thinking?”

I grab her hand and kiss the inside of her palm, then open my eyes and lace my fingers through hers. “Come,” I step back. “Let’s sit.”

We make our way over to a wood bench on the walking path, and I wait for her to take a seat, before doing the same.

After sitting in silence for a moment, she places a hand on my thigh. “You’re struggling, Kai. I can tell. And I know better than anyone why. So please, don’t shut me out. Not when our hurt is the same.”

When I turn and find her beautiful blue eyes on mine, I’m struck by the overwhelming need to tell her everything.

She's right. We were both hurting. But our hurt is different. She lost one she loved. One who connected with a part of her power. And I lost a part of myself. A part that helped me deal with all the emotions I never had to deal with before, and it's hard to be who she deserves when I don't even know who I am now.

With Declan she knows exactly who she's getting. Our alpha. The one in charge. A mortal raised among The Fallen who always believed his life had an expiration date and because of this, was all in when it came to living and loving. When he and Nev were together, there were fireworks. Between them a dynamic blend of passion and power visible to all who laid eyes on them.

Luca on the other hand is her deviant, wicked charmer. The one who has needs that Nev is willing to satisfy because she too, has them. With Luca, our fiery girl submits willingly, so he can satisfy the burn of her Fallen blood, and in turn, she does the same for his. The best part about them together, is the calm she brings to his spirit, and there's nothing better than watching our confident brother turn to mush when the girl he's crazy about, kisses him like there's no tomorrow.

Then there's me. The good-natured brainiac. The one who preferred movies and make out sessions, and waited to cross the line with our girl to make sure no harm would come to her. I liked it sweet and tender, while my fucked up alter ego liked it dark, preferring to chase her through the woods, so he could have her face down, ass up, and screaming his name like a banshee.

She accepted each of us, without hesitation, and loved us, scars and all. That's why I'm struggling.

I am the son of Luke. Sire of the Devil. Flesh and blood of the one who wants to claim our girl's power to end all of us. Before I was protecting her from a part of me who could hurt her. Now I must protect her from the one who likely will.

Out of everything we'd learned, the most important was this—my very existence made it possible for Luke to return.

Whatever Nev did to his spirit back in that chamber didn't matter. Hyde's sacrifice had been in vain because the fact was, Luke could return as long as I breathed, and that, coupled with the idea he could and likely would return at any time, festered deep in my core, twisting my very being into knots.

Sadness, anger, disbelief, loathing...all had become a part of me, and I didn't know how to process, let alone manage them. Hyde had always carried their weight to unburden them from my spirit, but without him I didn't know how to do it.

"Kai?" Nev places her hand on my arm when I fall eerily quiet. "Talk to me."

I turn to look at her, and when I see the worry in her eyes, I know I can't shut her out. She won't let me. We've always shared a connection that made it possible to talk to one another about absolutely anything. If there is anyone who understands what I am going through right now, it's her because she too, lost Hyde.

I draw in a deep breath, wondering how and where to start. "I'm worried," I begin. "No, scratch that. I'm scared, gorgeous. What if Luke swoops back into me and hurts you, or worse, takes you away from us, this time for good?"

She slides her hand in mine and lifts her leg up on the bench, squaring her shoulders to face me. "That's not going to happen."

"How do you know?"

"Because you would never let him hurt me."

"But he did." I grip her hand tightly. "I failed to protect you, and he hurt you in the worst way possible. He took someone you loved. Someone you needed. And I know it hurts because he took him from me, too."

Hearing my confession, she scoots closer to me. "Back in that chamber, when Luke held that knife to my throat, who was the one who stopped him? You."

"Hyde and me," I correct.

“But that’s just it, Kai. Hyde *is* you. He is a part of you, born from your need to protect me.”

“You mean he *was* me.”

Nev lets go of my hand and looks down quickly. “That’s what I said.”

“No...” I shake my head. “You said he *is* me.”

“I meant...was,” she says briskly.

Shit, what the hell is wrong with me? Who cares about semantics when she’s hurting and I’m possibly losing my mind.

Reaching for her hand again, I hold it in mine, and rub my thumb across the top. “Damn it gorgeous, I’m sorry. I just... I’ve got all these emotions I’ve never had before and don’t know how to process them.”

“What do you mean?” she asks quietly.

“I’m saying I’m fucked up. There’s something wrong with me. Since Locksley—”

“You’re not fucked up,” she cuts me off, and looks up. “There’s nothing wrong with you.”

“Then why do I feel this way?”

“Like how?” Her eyes search mine. “How do you feel?”

“Off. I feel off,” I admit. “Like I’m going off the rails because no one is there to keep everything I’m feeling in check. And what I’m feeling...they don’t...” My voice trails off as I think about what I’m saying.

“They don’t what?” She cups my face like everything is riding on my answer. “What don’t they feel like, Kai?” Her hands are warm and yet, she’s trembling.

“They don’t feel like mine,” I admit. “It’s almost as if all these feelings I’ve had about what happened at Locksley, what happened to you, Luke being my father, losing Sam, Maren, and Hyde, all of it is there in my core, taking root, trying to

figure out what to do, as if they're waiting for someone to take ownership. Not, not someone," I shake my head. "Hyde. It's like they're searching for him, the one who knows them best."

There it is. The biggest truth I hadn't wanted to admit. My own emotions didn't know me. They knew and needed him.

Nev's eyes fill with tears as she draws in a shallow breath and pulls my face close to hers. "I'm so sorry. Had I known..."

A tear leaks from her eyes and I brush it aside with my thumb. "How could you know how this would affect me?" This isn't her fault. None of this was. She needs to know she did what needed to be done.

"But it is." Another tear rolls down her cheek as she draws in a staggering breath; words tumbling from her lips, tripping over one another, making little sense. "He asked me to...but I couldn't...I'm sorry...I never meant..."

"Shhh," I soothe, pulling her to me, placing a protective hand on the back of her head as she grabs my shirt with both hands. "You have nothing to be sorry for."

"No," she starts to cry. "It's my fault. What you're feeling right now is because of me."

"How can you say that?" I laugh slightly, the idea she is to blame for any of this ridiculous.

"Because I failed." She buries her face in my chest, shoulders shaking.

"Failed?" I kiss the top of her head. "Nev, you didn't fail. You're the strongest of us all. You made an impossible choice ___"

"I didn't." She shakes her head furiously. "That's what I'm trying to tell you. I didn't choose."

I pull back slowly and tip her chin up. "What do you mean?"

Twisting my shirt tighter in her delicate hands, her watery eyes meet mine as she works her lower lip nervously. “I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t just crush his spirit as if he never existed.”

I search her eyes trying to make sense of what she’s saying, and the longer I stare into them, the more I realize the emotion I see in them is not sadness. It’s fear...and regret.

Slowly, then all at once, it hits me, and everything stops. My breathing, my heartbeat, even the racing in my mind.

I know why she’s looking at me the way she is now. It’s the same reason she looked down every time the subject of Luke’s whereabouts or Hyde came up last night in the study. It wasn’t because it was painful. It was because she was hiding something...the truth. She didn’t end Hyde, which means she didn’t end Luke, either.

Suddenly the air around me feels thick; my lungs unable to draw breath. That’s why my emotions feel like they’re not my own. They’re not. They still belong to Hyde.

“What did you do?” I grip both of her shoulders.

“I did what I did to Sasha. Shoved both of their spirits into the darkest part of you and bound them to me until I figured out a way to save one and end the other.”

I drop my hands and pull back, blowing out a breath of disbelief. “Nev...no. Why?”

“Because he’s a part of you and ending him would be like ending a part of my heart and I couldn’t do that. I couldn’t end a part of you, Kai. Not ever.”

Shit. I run a hand through my hair. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I thought we could figure it out together. Then we got to the penthouse and learned about everything and I just...I didn’t know what to do. Especially when my mother more or less said it didn’t matter what I did because he would come back.”

“Does she know?”

She shakes her head no, fervently. “I think she suspected something was wrong when it was just her and I in the garden last night, but the minute she asked what happened in the chamber, I shut down. She assumed it was because I was upset about what Sebastian and Luke had done, but she doesn’t know what I did.”

I look out across the night, mind reeling.

“I’m so sorry,” she says for what feels like the dozenth time. “I hate what this is doing to you.”

Using both hands, I push her hair from her face and hold it firmly in my grasp. “Listen to me, you have nothing to be sorry for. I’m thankful every second of every day for you, even more so now.”

“How can you say that?” she asks sadly.

“Because everything I’ve been feeling the past few days... this storm of emotions I haven’t been able to understand, and thought were my new reality because a part of me was now gone...I was so confused, and worried. But knowing those emotions are still his...that this isn’t going to be my existence, is a weight off my shoulders.”

“So you’re not mad?” The hope in her question nearly cracks my heart.

“No baby.” I press my lips gently to her forehead then her cheek. “I’m not mad, not in the slightest. I could never be mad at you.”

When I say it, it takes a second and then she’s wrapping her arms around my neck, and drawing me to her, kissing me with that sweet perfect mouth I want to drown in.

When our lips finally part, she’s breathing heavily, and her cheeks are flushed. “What if all this could have been avoided had I just been strong enough to do as he told me to? What if by not ending Luke, I changed our fate?”

“Or what if this is exactly what was supposed to happen?”
I counter.

Whatever was or wasn't supposed to happen I didn't really care. I wasn't broken, a part of myself wasn't gone, and that's what mattered because it meant I wouldn't have to stay away from our girl. I could love and hold her all I wanted because if he did try to make a move, she would know.

This also meant that I wasn't responsible for breaking her heart and there wasn't a better gift in all the world because there was nothing I hated more than to see her turned inside out. She deserved sunshine and roses and all the happiness in the world, and there wasn't anything the three of us wouldn't do to make that happen.

“You know what?” I reach for Nev's hand. “Thank the stars you let your heart guide your mind that night because had you not, we'd be going through this without Hyde. And you need him. I need him. And we're going to get him back. But until we do, until we know what we're dealing with, let's keep this to ourselves. Okay?”

She nods in agreement. “We need to focus on Deck and Luca claiming their birth rights. When we're back from the trip and my mother is ready to transition Hell to you, we can tell them. Who knows, maybe Luke will make his grand entrance then. Certainly seems like the time he would swoop in...when there's something in it for him.”

“Good thinking. See gorgeous, what would we do without you?”

She leans in again, lips ghosting mine. “Hopefully we end this shit once and for all, and none of us has to find out.”

She presses her sweet lips to mine, and we end the night, exactly as we began weeks ago—kissing madly under the stars—and for a moment I can't help but think that I'm the luckiest son of the devil there ever was.

Chapter 13

Nev

“Now this is the only way to fly!” Luca exclaims while climbing the stairs to my parent’s jet, his bag in one hand, and mine in the other.

“Like a kid in a candy store,” Declan says from behind me.

I turn and look over my shoulder, finding him nearly pressed against my back. “If only we were headed to a candy store.” I shoot him a wry smile, then lean in, and whisper. “Maybe if you’re good I’ll give you something sweet.”

“Careful. Boyfriend number two and three may get jealous.”

“What’s the hold up?” Kai comes to a stop behind Declan, bag slung over one shoulder. He’s wearing the most beautiful smile and it makes my heart flutter.

What a difference a night makes. Kai has smiled more this morning than he has in days, and it’s a welcome sight. It makes it feel like things are getting back to normal. Well, at least, normal among the four of us, aside from the whole, stopping Luke so he doesn’t end the world thing. The air doesn’t feel brittle and our playful banter is back. I didn’t even dream about what happened at Locksley last night.

“We were just saying how good it is to see you smile.” I lean over Declan’s shoulder, and cup Kai’s cheek, giving him a kiss. “So good.”

He places a hand on the back of my head and pulls me closer, returning my kiss heartily while humming in delight as his tongue laps mine.

“Where’s mine?” Declan asks suggestively when I pull back, slightly dazed.

I place both hands on his shoulders and plant a quick kiss on his lips. “Satisfied?”

“For now.” He winks, then nods to the stairs in front of me. “Alright, up you go. We need to get going.”

“Yes sir,” I salute, and the little growl he lets out tells me just how much he likes the sound of it.

As I reach the passenger door, a breeze sweeps across the tarmac, sending the skirt of my dress flying up in front of my face. “I see Paris, I see France, I see Nevvie’s underpants,” Kai sings.

“Shut up,” I laugh, while holding it down. “What are you, ten?”

“Inches maybe,” he shoots back without missing a beat.

I look at Declan and he shakes his head and gives me a look that says, ‘what’s gotten into him?’ I simply smile and shrug.

As we step into the cabin, Saul, the pilot, and Jax, first attendant, greet us. “Miss Nev,” they say in unison. Both are wearing wide smiles and look happy to be here, despite the last minute request. “It’s good to see you.”

“Saul, hi!” I lean in to kiss him on both cheeks, then do the same to Jax. “Good to see you, both.”

Declan greets both with a handshake, and Jax reaches for the bags in his hands and stashes both in the closet to his left. When Kai steps through the door behind us, he reaches for his bag and does the same.

Jax had worked for my parents since I was a child and once stocked the bar with all our favorite candies and drinks. We may be adults, but something told me he would always see us as those kids he’d cover up with blankets on long trips and that the bar would be stocked with our favorites, even now.

“Thank you for getting everything ready on such short notice,” Declan says to Saul while pushing up the sleeves of his Henley.

Saul sticks both hands behind his back and nods. “It was no problem. I’ve had worse. Primordial business can often be last minute.”

When Declan filled me in that we would be using my parent’s jet, I was annoyed at first. I wanted to do this our way and something about using their plane felt like we wouldn’t be. But since he didn’t have his own plane yet—key word being yet, since I had no idea he was looking into buying one—booking commercial flights for all of us, I had to admit, would be a pain.

Once Saul fills us in on our flight time and arrival, he encourages us to get settled. “There’s a bit of a line ahead of us, so get comfortable and I’ll let you know when we’re ready for departure.”

“Thank you,” Declan and I say at the same time, as he places a hand on my lower back and steers me into the cabin, with Kai in tow.

Nothing’s changed since the last time I was on board. Underneath the TV is an entertainment center, stocked with movies and reading material and next to it a full service bar, with an ice bucket, and crystal glasses that sparkle under the overhead light.

Opposite that is a couch, which Luca is already stretched out on, clicking through the menu on the flat screen TV attached to the wall above the entertainment center.

“Hey dork,” he lifts his chin at Kai. “They’ve added an 80’s movies collection. Did you have something to do with that?”

“I haven’t been on this plane since we went to The Maldives for Spring Break our last year of Locksley.”

“That may have been me,” I admit sheepishly. “I asked my parents to update the menu last year when we went to Bali.”

“Ah.” Luca tosses the remote down onto the couch. “Well then, good choice.” He blows me a kiss while flipping Kai off,

which makes me laugh. Luca, too, had noticed Kai's change in mood and was back to giving him shit.

"Where do you want to sit?" Declan places both hands on my shoulders and kisses the top of my head. "Couch or chair?"

It's the same question we used to fight over when we were kids. He always wanted to take over the couch so he could play video games on the console that once sat under the TV and I wanted to lay down and watch movies.

Seeing Luca has given up on the TV and now laying down with an arm slung over his eyes, I turn my attention to the seating section of the cabin. "Chair."

Declan holds out his hand and I make my way toward the back of the cabin. On one side are four leather seats—two sets of two facing one another, with a table in between—and on the other side, two seats that swivel, with a small table jutting out from the cabin wall.

Sinking down into one of the swivel seats, I look to the very back of the cabin where Jax is busying himself in the kitchen. Next to the area where he works is a door to a bedroom with a private bath, and to the left of that a lavatory for passengers.

"So..." I tap my hand on the arm of the chair after getting comfortable. "How long do you think we'll be away?"

Declan sits down in the seat across from me and stretches his legs out. "Who knows," he yawns.

Through the oval window next to me, I watch as one jet touches down, while another takes off.

While I still wasn't thrilled at having been lied to for so long, I was glad the tension had lifted between my parents and I, and that we were working together. There could be no more secrets. From here on out it had to be full transparency.

When I realize the irony in that thought, I close my eyes and try to push it aside.

I hated keeping the truth about Hyde from Declan and Luca, but it was absolutely the right call not to tell them just yet. Kai was right—our focus needed to be on helping them claim their armies. We'd tell them once we were back from Europe.

“Well...” I clear my throat and turn back around. “Hopefully, when we do get back, we'll be up to our eyeballs in armies.”

“Right.” Declan grins.

Something about the way he says it while his eyes are focused on the sliver of skin exposed by the slit in the skirt of my dress, tells me when we get home is the last thing on his mind. In fact, the way his eyes flick to the bedroom door then back to me, tells me exactly what he's thinking. And now...I am too.

I'd never had sex in an airplane before. I once had sex with a rugby player in the VIP lounge on the train from Paris to St. Petersburg. Fueled by one too many cocktails and an impossibly confident full-back, I figured why not, YOLO and all. But in the sky, miles above the ground, I had to admit...I was intrigued by the idea.

As if he can hear my thoughts, Declan leans back and stretches, shirt riding up enough to flash me a peek of the carved lines of his Adonis belt. Crossing my legs to stifle the heat growing between them, I sit back, and place both hands in my lap.

“We're staying at Ares' place, you say?” I ask, tucking my hair behind one ear. I already know the answer, but I'm trying to think of something to talk about, so I won't climb into Declan's lap.

“Litochoro,” he confirms with a smile. “We'll get settled, rest a bit, maybe see the town and have dinner, then start for Olympus early in the morning.”

“Nev gets my vote for coffee duty,” Kai jumps in. “I love starting the day with her little jolts of energy. Don't you?”

I look up and find Kai standing next to my seat, Cheshire grin tugging at his lips.

Declan's lip hitches and I look down, fighting the heat creeping into my cheeks. "Did everyone hear us yesterday morning?"

Kai bends down and whispers in my ear. "Down to the doorman." Then kisses the side of my cheek and stands back up.

"It is the breakfast of champions," Declan says smugly, before laying his head back.

I drop my head into my hands and shake my head as Kai makes his way over to the couch and takes a seat.

"We're next up," Saul's voice comes over the intercom. "Everyone please take your seats and prepare for takeoff."

"About time," Luca mumbles before turning over. "Wake me when we get there."

Once we've reached our cruising altitude, Saul's voice comes over the intercom and tells us we are free to take off our seatbelts and move about the cabin.

After getting up from my seat I head to the ladies and when I'm done washing my hands, find myself staring in the mirror.

I didn't care if Luca and Kai heard Declan and I yesterday morning. I would never be embarrassed about any of them knowing how much I wanted or needed the other. I cared that I hadn't been with Kai since Locksley.

I needed him, just as I did Deck and Luca, and I hoped what happened wouldn't affect us. He knew I didn't see Luke when I looked at him, and yet, he seemed to be pulling away from me the last few days.

Part of me understood. We had learned a lot of shit that turned our worlds upside down, especially Kai. But after our talk in the garden, I thought for sure everything was good again, and he'd want to be with me. Only, he didn't make a move all night.

Thinking about my parents' bedroom next to me, I get an idea.

Sliding the door open, I stalk towards the couch and come to a stop in front of it. "What's up, gorgeous?" Kai shoots me a curious smile.

I reach for his hand and give it a little tug. "Come with me."

He grips my hand, long fingers grazing the inside of my wrist, sending a shiver through me. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see."

With his free hand, he moves Luca's feet from his lap to the couch, placing each down gingerly, careful not to wake him.

I can't help but admire the care he shows his best friend. Despite the shit they give one another, Kai, Declan, and Luca are each other's ride or die; among them a deep respect and admiration for what each brings to our foursome.

Declan is a leader, Luca a charmer, and Kai a lover. But he is also the glue. We were lucky to have him. *I* was lucky to have him, and I needed to remind him how special he is, because if there is one thing I know after our conversation last night, it's that Kai has been feeling lost and afraid and he needn't ever be. We were all here for him.

When Kai finally stands up from the couch, he looks down at me with those gorgeous gold eyes of his, sending butterflies fluttering in my stomach. "So, you want to tell me what's on your mind?"

"No." I place my free hand on his chest as our joined hands dangle at my side. "I want to show you."

I lead us to the back of the cabin, Declan looking up for a moment as we pass, and when I reach the door to my parents' bedroom he looks back down, the grin on his face hard to miss.

I wrap my hand around the doorknob and give it a turn, pushing it open, and once we're inside, close the door behind us and lock it.

"Wow," Kai whistles. "This is nice. Can't believe I've never been in here before."

It is nice. My parents room was plush for the space. There's a queen-sized bed with luxurious bedding, a couple of throw pillows, and a cashmere blanket draped across the foot of the bed, and small tables that jut out from the wall on both sides. There's also a sitting chair in the corner, with oval windows on both sides of the cabin, and a small desk on the opposite side.

As I let go of Kai's hand, I can't help but think about all the times my parents would come back here to 'lay down for a while' when we were on long trips. When Declan and I were smaller, we thought nothing of it. But as we got older, we both knew what they were doing, and used to bet how long they'd be back here.

My parents could never keep their hands off one another, and while the idea of them together was one I didn't want to think about, ever, knowing they were still so crazy about one another after all these years, filled me with warmth because I now understood that kind of crazy. It's what I felt for not one, but three.

Kai turns to me and when he sees me closing the space between us, his lips pull into a shit-eating grin. "What are you doing, gorgeous?"

I back him up toward the bed, and when his legs hit the mattress, he drops down and I climb onto his lap. "Hopefully you."

I lean in to kiss him and he grabs my hips and squeezes. “Is that why you’re wearing a dress in the middle of winter?”

“I’m wearing this because I wanted to be comfortable, but I’ll take the added benefit of easy access.”

He laughs and lays back, kissing me slowly, and languidly until he’s on his back and I am on top of him.

As our lips linger, I’m reminded of all those weeks we’d kept us a secret and made out like teenagers, every chance we had. He was scared of Hyde then and had been mourning him these past few days. But after our talk last night something changed. His easy-going confidence was back and I needed him to remember what it felt like to be us.

Sliding his hands down my thighs, he moves them under the skirt of my dress and when he grips my bare legs, I rub against him. “Keep that up, and we’re going to be making use of this bed,” he groans.

I run one hand through his hair, while moving my lips to his neck. “That’s the plan.”

He pulls back and presses his head into the bed, looking at me. “Are you serious?”

I sit up and when his jeans rub against my panty, I can’t help but moan at how good it feels. “I’m totally serious. I miss you Kai. I need you.”

“You had me a few days ago,” he winks.

“Correction.” I grab both of his hands and lace my fingers through them. “I had the four of you a few days ago, now I need just you.”

He laughs and sits up. “Are you asking me to join the mile high club with you?”

“No.” I grip his shoulders with both hands. “I’m not asking. I’m demanding.”

“But this is your parents room.” He looks around, skeptical. “Isn’t that a little...”

“Hot?” I suggest.

He shakes his head and laughs. “The word I was looking for is weird.”

“Well, for starters,” I start to untie the sash of my wrap dress, “I don’t care. And two,” I slip my dress from my shoulders and his eyes drink in my lace covered breasts, “still don’t care.”

“Okay...” He drawls while I slip my arm from one sleeve of my dress, and then the other. “Side note, you in lace and boots...damn.”

“Do you want me to leave them on?” I waggle my brows. “They are riding boots, after all.”

He grips my thighs and his fingers dig into my skin. “I’m thinking yes.”

Laughing gently. I wrap one arm around his neck, while brushing my thumb over his lower lip. “Won’t Jax think it’s weird if you and I are back here too long?”

“I am sure there are things he has seen and heard over the years that make the discretion part of his contract worth the money my father pays them. But honestly, I don’t give a shit who thinks what. You three are my heart, and my soul mates. I will not apologize for that. Who I am with is no one’s business but mine.”

I drop my hands from his face and reach around my back, unsnapping my bra. As I pull it down, my breasts spill free, nipples puckering.

“Shit,” he hisses. “You’re killing me, gorgeous.”

“La petite mort,” I smile deviously. “The best kind of death.”

He cups my breasts in both hands and slants his mouth over mine. “You’re making it hard to say no.”

“Then don’t. Let me have this first with you.”

“First,” he brushes his lips against mine. “How so?”

“Luca has my first kiss, and Declan my first time. You can have this...my first trip to the mile high club.”

“You’ve never done this with either of them?”

“When would we?” I tip my head back, relishing the way he’s plucking my beaded nipples. “That’s why it’s the first.”

He bends down and pulls one nipple into his mouth, sucking it slightly, then does the same with the other. When my sighs turn into a primal moan as he draws circles around the pebbled skin with his tongue, I look back up and find his eyes on mine. “Touch me, gorgeous.”

Reaching for the button of his jeans, I pop it free, and pull down his zipper, sliding my hand down his cut lower stomach, and under the elastic band of his briefs. There’s a bead of precum on the tip of his cock, and swiping my thumb over it, I bring my hand down his shaft.

He sucks in a breath as my nail grazes the vein that runs on the underside of his beautiful dick, and when his breath puffs out, tickling my lips, I slide my other hand down between my legs, and slip it under my panty.

“Oh no.” He grabs my hand and stops me. “You should never have to please yourself. Not when any one of us would gladly fill that need.”

He brings my hand to his shoulder and shoves a finger inside me, burying it knuckle deep, while rubbing circles around my clit with his thumb. And when he dips a second finger inside me, I dig my nails into his skin, and stroke him faster. “More,” I pant.

As I ride his hand, he thrusts his hips up and down, and when my clit starts to throb and warmth builds in my core, I push him down onto his back and wrap my lips around his throbbing dick.

“Shit gorgeous,” he punches out as I hollow both cheeks and suck, “if you keep that up, I’m going to be fucking your face in about two seconds.”

Surprised by the heat and candor in his words, I look up and find Kai's beautiful eyes backed by Hyde's heat. Knowing he's in there somewhere fuels me with the need for them both. I want it rough and soft, hot and tender.

Keeping my eyes on his, I inch my lips down his shaft, and when the tip of his cock hits the back of my throat, he shoves my head down until my lips suck the base. "Just like that. Suck me, gorgeous."

He gathers my hair in both hands, and moans as he fucks my face, and when I come up for air, releasing his cock with a wet pop, he reaches for me hungrily. I climb on top of him as he sits up, and instead of pulling my panty to the side, he grips the elastic sides, and rips them off.

I'm so hot for him right now, that I wrap my arms around his neck as he thrusts up and bottoms out in me instantly. "Ride me hard, now."

I rock my hips back and forth until I my tits are jiggling as I bounce up and down on his cock. "Shit," my head falls back in ecstasy as he grabs the back of my neck with one hand and tightens his grip on my hip with the other.

I don't know if it's the altitude or what, but the way he feels and the words coming out of his mouth, it's hot as fuck and I can't get enough. "Fuck Kai," I moan as he buries his face in my neck. "Don't stop."

"It's so hot," he murmurs into my skin while licking a bead of sweat that rolls down my throat.

"I know," I pant, his every thrust sending my climax racing for release. "So, fucking hot."

"No." He pulls back and looks at me as every inch of him fills me. "My hands. They're hot."

He moves both to my ass and when he grips my cheeks, I feel what he means. It's not the heat of sex and sweat. It's the heat of fire.

"Fuck me harder."

“Wh...what?” His eyes search mine.

“Just do it.”

Flipping me onto my back, he pushes one leg up, while pressing both hands down on the bed, and when he slams into me, a bolt of heat shoots up my spine.

“Oh...fuck!!!” I scream, and the plane jiggles. I don’t know if it’s me or turbulence, but when Kai does it again, and again, the movement intensifies.

He crashes his mouth down on mine and swallows my whimpers. “Don’t...bring down...the plane,” he mumbles through our locked lips.

I lay my head back and grip his forearms, focusing on my core as he thrusts in and out of me. It’s the best way to keep all the things I’m feeling in check and when I find my center the plane’s shaking stops.

Reaching for his neck as I open my eyes, I wrap my hands around his sinewy throat, and his pupils widen, nearly swallowing the gold of his eyes.

“You like that?” he asks hotly, the feel of his Adam’s moving under my hand stirring my dark arousal. “You want me to do that to you?”

I tighten my grip and stare into his eyes, watching as he fucks me with righteous intensity. He is still my Kai, but there’s something different about him right now. It’s as if he’s fucking me like Hyde and making love to me like Kai.

Then I realize...that’s who Kai is. He is both, and with Hyde not here right now, all the darkness and heat that drives his dark side is coursing through Kai, unchecked.

The day of the stable fire, it may have been Hyde that told Declan and Luca to back off, but it was Kai who’s hand was on my back as fire shot out of my fingertips. He was the one that connected me to Hellfire. All this time it has been him. Hyde just helped me understand how to release it.

Those emotions he's been feeling...they're the gateway to wielding the infernal power, and Kai has never felt them before because of Hyde. But now that he has, the gates are open. They are part of his power and he doesn't need to fear them. He needs to feel them because that's where Hellfire lives...in the darkest parts of ourselves.

I move my hands down his chest, leaving one directly over his heart. "Feel it, Kai. I'm here. I won't let you go."

Sweat beads his brow and his heart races, every muscle in his body pulling taut, and that's when I feel it in my own blood—the damning heat of fire, dancing along my skin.

"Fuck," he pants while burying himself in me, and when he grunts and his cock twitches, and he lets go, my own climax rips through me.

We come together, skin burning and our bodies sweating, and as we lay in silence after, with nothing but the sound of our ragged breaths filling the space between us, I feel the same connection with Kai, I felt that day when Declan unlocked my mortal power, and Luca my Fallen one.

Running my hand through Kai's hair, I wrap my legs around him and kiss his chest.

"Did I hurt you?" he whispers.

"No," I sigh in satisfaction.

He pulls back and when he sees me smiling, bends down and places the softest kiss on my lips. "Check out your ass."

"My what?" I laugh.

He pushes up on his knees and rolls me onto my side, and when I look down, I can't believe what I'm seeing. One of his handprints is burned into my cheek and it's both beautiful and sexy.

"Well, well, well," I give him a naughty smile. "Who would have thought you had that in you?"

His eyes flick from my ass to my face. "I...branded you."

“I know,” I bite my lip.

“You’re not horrified.”

“Not even in the slightest.” I reach for his hand and give it a squeeze. “Fire is not to be feared. It’s to be embraced. Hyde taught me that, and now I will teach you.”

He looks at our joined hands for a moment and when he looks up, the carnality in his eyes is undeniable. “How long until we land?”

“At least a couple of hours,” I smile.

“Well then...”

Reaching for one boot covered foot, he pushes it back and tells me to hold it up, while doing the same with the other. While holding both legs in a pike position, he buries his face in my pussy, and while devouring me from cunt to clit, bringing me to climax a second time, I can’t help but think... flying the friendly skies never felt so fucking good.

Chapter 14

Declan

When we arrive at Ares' place in Greece, the four of us stand there, mouths open. It's not a cabin at all, but a fortress, tucked into an alcove along a dramatic slope overlooking the village of Litochoro, which locals call the getaway to Mount Olympus.

The structure is massive, as if it were built for the gods themselves, with strong limestone walls that extend up at least four stories, and out into wings that curve along the side of the mountain.

"Well, shit," Kai says in wonder while taking it all in. "I feel like I'm in *The Odyssey*."

Towers mark the end of each wing, with red tiled roofs and a row of windows at the top, and covered walkways run down the side of each wing, with grape vines that weave effortlessly along the colonnades.

"It's incredible," I agree.

The hint of lavender and almond blossom that lingers in the air reminds me of my mother and connects me to her in a way no memory ever has. I feel her presence here so strongly. As if I am standing where she once did.

"She lived here," I say knowingly. "This was her home, once."

Nev turns to me and places a hand on my arm. "How do you know?"

"I can feel it." I turn to her and smile. "There's this pull... like a memory, only it's not in my mind, but in my blood."

I'd felt this kind of connection before. I felt a pull whenever the four of us were together. But a place? Never. Not

when I visited Ireland and not even in my family's estate back home. But ever since we landed, everything around me is familiar. The waters, the sky, even the winding road that took us from the airport to here. It's like I walked it in my dreams and know it in my heart.

Yet, it wasn't just a feeling, but a sense I belonged to something bigger than me. I couldn't help but feel a surge of pride as we drove through the city that honored my mother with its name and a part of me wondered if the city itself, weren't embracing me as her son.

Luca comes over and slings his arm over my shoulder as Kai and Nev check out one of the statues lining the driveway. "Shall we go check it out?"

"Yeah brother," I smile proudly. "Let's do it."

"Well shit." He pats my chest and shoots me a cheeky smile. "I was wondering how long it was going to take for you to make a move."

"First Kai, now you," I shake my head.

He pulls back and gives me a shit-eating grin. "Did Nev's boyfriend make a move on you?"

"That would be boyfriend number three," I correct with a smirk, "and no he didn't make a move on me. I'm talking about him and Nev being all sexed up. You didn't hear them in the bedroom on the plane?"

"Naw man. I was out. What did I miss?"

"Nothing much," I shrug. "Other than the two of them going at it like rabbits and almost bringing down the fucking plane."

"Oh," Luca laughs. "Nice. Like you and Nev in the closet yesterday morning?"

"And you and her in bed that first night."

Luca winks. "That was slow and smooth, brother. You two were anything but."

“How do you know?”

“Because...I jerked off to you two and was stroking my dick so fast that at one point, I thought I may finish before you.”

“Nice,” I roll my eyes.

“What?” He laughs harder. “You know that’s our thing. You fuck, while I watch and listen.”

“Then you missed out because shit, whatever was going on with Kai the past few days has disappeared and he was all about our girl earlier. I mean *all* about her.”

“Well, that’s a good thing, right?” Luca pats my back. “I mean out of the three of us, he definitely got the short end of the stick with Luke being his dad. I’m glad he’s not carrying around that shock anymore. Or the loss of Hyde. That’s got to be rough. Losing a part of yourself. Can you imagine?”

“Yeah. I hear you.” I agreed with everything Luca was saying. Still, the change was pretty abrupt and I wondered what happened.

He was beyond easy-going right now. He bordered on feisty and didn’t give two fucks about what we saw or heard him do with Nev. It was almost as if...

“Yo, dick!” Kai shouts interrupting that thought. “I mean, Deck. Grab your stuff, let’s head up.”

I swing my head in Luca’s direction and arch my brow as if to say, ‘see what I mean?’ He holds up both hands and backs away slowly, then turns and makes his way around to the tailgate of our rented Jeep.

Once we’ve unloaded our bags we make our way up the walk to the front door. It’s a long, winding path, and I’m thankful Ares had winter gear here for us because I couldn’t imagine lugging all of it.

“You okay?” Nev comes up alongside me as we walk.

I stop and turn to take a look. The view was breathtaking. Greece was beautiful, there was no doubt about it, and I couldn't help but wonder what the view was like from Olympus.

"I'm good. Just can't believe I've never been here before."

Nev holds a hand above her eyes to shield her eyes from the glare of the sun. "I'm sure your mother had her reasons for never bringing you. But..." She drops her hand and turns to me. "Hopefully everything goes well and we can come back as often as you want."

Sliding my free hand into hers, I bring it to my lips and place a gentle kiss on the back of it. "I'd like that."

We turn and continue along the walkway, hand and hand, following it around to the back side until we reach the front door. After punching in the code Ares gave me, it unlocks and I push it open.

Stepping into the main entry, the cathedral height ceiling pulls all of our eyes up to a massive wrought iron tiered chandelier. The candles lining each rung were new and a long pole resting against the side of the wall served as both a lighter on one end and snuffer on the other.

Bringing up the rear, Luca closes the door behind us, and when we make our way down the entry and reach the end of the hall, the four of us stop and stand there speechless, drinking in the room before us.

A polished marble floor, with intricate mosaic patterns extends from wall to wall, and the walls themselves are coated in a warm, earth-toned plaster. In the center of the room is a wood table, its surface smooth, and legs adorned with bone carvings of birds and foliage, and situated around it four wood chairs, with curved backrests and woven seats.

A smattering of odds and ends fills the rest of the space. On one side of the room, a large armoire and side table with an oversized vase overflowing with jasmine and hibiscus rested

against the wall. While, on the other three wooden couches with thick cushions covered in satin.

I take in every inch of the space, taking note of the wood and textiles used, native to the region, and when I look straight ahead, I realize the entire room opens up to a portico that offers a view of the village below.

As the four of us cross the room and step out onto the covered space, I realize where we're standing is not visible from below. In fact, the high walls, entrance tucked around the back of the structure, and unobstructed view in every direction, all but confirmed this was an actual fortress once.

"This must have been built in the time of ancient Greece," Kai says as if reading my mind. "This region was prone to invasion. Between the Roman, Persian and Turkish Empires, Greece was always defending itself."

I nod, knowing he's right, and knowing the people of Greece relied on the gods to keep things under control and blame them when they weren't.

Nev strolls over to the edge and places her hands on the half wall, looking out dreamily.

"Shit, guys come here you have to see this!" Luca calls out from somewhere inside.

"I'm going to go see what he's up to." Kai hikes a thumb over his shoulder. "Be good."

Seeing this is a great opportunity to spend a few minutes alone with my girl, I make my way over to where she stands.

"What do you think?" I whisper in her ear, placing both hands on either side of her, and pressing my chest against her back.

She tips her head up and looks at me with a beautiful smile. "I love it."

Drinking in her perfect mouth I bend down and kiss her as a gentle Mediterranean breeze sweeps over us. As it does, she

turns and wraps her arms around my neck, and jumps up, curling her legs around my waist.

Holding her like this is our thing. We've done it since we were teenagers; a habit that started one summer vacation and continued to this day. When she first came home and learned the truth behind why we turned our backs on her, I'd picked her up like this when we were alone, to remind her of us.

As she wraps her legs tighter around me, the kiss turns heated, just like the one that day did, and I back her up to the half wall and set her down on it, so I can cup her face, and command her mouth the way I want.

This kiss was headed in one direction—my pants down, and her nails in my back—and while there was nothing I wanted more, I was curious what happened between her and Kai on the plane. Not for kinks sake, but because my brother was confident beyond belief right now, and my gut was telling me she had something to do with it.

“Did my brother not satisfy you earlier, princess?” I ask, while her lips trail down my neck and find my pulse point.

“Oh he did,” she murmurs against my skin, flicking the delicate spot with her tongue. “But that doesn't mean I don't want you, too.”

I let out a little moan. She knows exactly what that spot does to me, and she's not playing around. She wants me right here, right now.

“How about,” I run my hands up and down her arms, “we finish taking a look around, find our rooms and freshen up, because I have a surprise for us.”

She pulls back and her brows shoot up. “A surprise?”

“Yes.” I grip her chin and place a gentle kiss on her lips.

“Does that surprise include something I've seen before?” she teases with a waggle of her brows and I can't help but smile.

“No,” I shake my head with a laugh. “I thought the four of us deserved a night out before...well, everything.”

“Oh yeah?” She drapes her arms over my shoulders, eyes dancing. “I like the sound of that. What do you have planned?”

“I told you, it’s a surprise. So pause this, because we will pick right back up where we left off when we get back.”

She twines her fingers in the hair at the nape of my neck and gives it a little pull. “Promise?”

“Oh, I promise.”

She brings one hand to my chest and rubs it gently. “Does that mean the four of us are no longer going to share a room?”

The disappointment in her question is clear. Nev loves having the three of us with her at night. I know this because I love it as well.

After everything that happened, making sure she and my brothers are safe has been a top priority. But I would be lying if I said I didn’t miss when it was just her and I curled up together.

Those weeks when it was just Nev and me, I savored that time with her because I knew the day would come when it would no longer be just the two of us. I don’t regret where the four of us are now. Not for a second. But sometimes a guy just wants to love on his girl without an audience.

I tuck her hair behind one ear, wanting her to have everything her heart desires, but also just wanting some time alone with her. “We can. But for tonight, can it just be us...just you and me?”

“Just us?” she repeats as I stroke her jaw with my thumb.

“The guys will understand,” I assure her.

She nibbles her lower lip as her eyes search mine. “Are you worried about what’s to come?”

“No...” I drop my hand. “I’m ready for whatever may happen. I just want to be with you tonight.”

“Okay,” she says simply. “Tonight, it’s just you and me. But remember, we’re all behind you, Deck. We are all ready to do whatever needs to be done. to get you that army.”

“I know.” I bring my hands to her hips and pull her forward. “And make no mistake about it, I want to be with you not because I’m worried, but so I can remind the universe who you belong to and that I’m not fucking around. I’m playing to win.”

“How hard are you going to play?” she asks, flashing me a wicked smile.

Nev loves it when I talk dirty. She loves it when I look her in the eye and tell her exactly what I’m going to do to her. So I’m going to give her what she wants.

If she wants to know what’s waiting for her when we get back tonight...hot words to tide her over... then I will tell her gladly give them to her, because I will never deny her anything.

“Princess,” I lean in, whispering so gently, the slight breath from my lips makes her shiver. “I am going to remind your body who it belongs to, and your pleasure who owns it. I am going to fuck you, and fill you, and devour your sweet cunt as you fall asleep, and in the morning when we wake up, do it all over again.”

She sucks in a sharp breath and when she arches her back, the hardness of her nipples presses against my chest.

“If you let me share your shower,” she whispers, “I will suck your dick so hard you won’t have anything left to fill me with tonight.”

Good god, I can’t help but groan at the thought of Nev on her knees in front of me, soapy water running down the slope of her back. “Fuck waiting. You’re on!”

She pushes me back and jumps down for the wall, grabbing my hand urgently and dragging me back inside.

Somewhere in the bowels of this fortress, Kai and Luca's voices drift along the walls, marveling at everything they see. But my eyes are on the girl in front of me. I am about to challenge the children of gods for her, and I hope they're ready because I'm not leaving without claiming my mother's seat. I will stop at nothing for the girl that owns me, body and soul.

Morning comes quicker than I thought possible and when I sit up in bed with a dull throbbing in my head, I start to regret going out last night.

The moment I see Nev sound asleep next to me however, sheet draped across the lower half of her body, hair splayed on the pillow, I can't help but grin and push the regret and pounding in my head aside.

Last night was just what we needed, Nev especially. She danced and laughed with the locals in the bar we found ourselves in, as if she had lived there her entire life, and when a group of elderly gentlemen asked for her hand to teach her sirtaki, Luca, Kai, and I all sat back with wide smiles on our faces as her hair swung wildly around her as she whooped and clapped.

I didn't think I could love her any more than I already did, but last night proved that thought wrong. Despite the amount we had to drink, I'd kept my promise, and with the memory of her epic blow job in the shower still hot in my mind, I fucked her with the kind of intensity that pulled the air right from our lungs. When our bodies finally reached the point of hedonistic ecstasy, I filled her so full, I wouldn't be surprised if I did finally knock her up.

The idea of getting Nev pregnant had once been both a kink and a dream. The thought that I could give her something that neither Kai nor Luca could cater to my primal instinct to dominate. But now it was a need. I needed to know if my

immortal birthright had taken away the one part of my mortality I didn't hate. The part that made it possible for me to be the only one to give Nev a baby.

Nev would never have agreed to the idea if she didn't want it, too. I know her better than anyone. When she doesn't want to do something, she won't. But when she does...look out. She digs her heels in and won't stop until she does it. And that's what made trying with her these past few weeks fun. Didn't matter how much she adored Luca and Kai. When it was just her and I, it was us trying together for that future we wanted, and it was everything.

Now, however, we were in the present, and with the intention of keeping the promise I made yesterday, I pull the sheet down, and run my hand up the inside of her thigh. She stirs but doesn't wake, and when I slide my hand to her beautiful ass and bend down to kiss it, I see a burn.

What the fuck?

It wasn't there yesterday morning and I didn't see it in the shower, because honestly, my focus was only on her lips wrapped around my dick. And last night I didn't feel it, because between the booze and sweat and total pleasure we were consumed by, I wouldn't have recognized my own name if anyone said it.

But now I can see and feel it and there is only one person who could have done it. Making a mental note to ask about that later, I pull back and push her legs open and find her pussy waiting for me.

Diving in headfirst, I swipe my tongue through her wet folds, and when I taste only me, a rush of primal satisfaction shoots through me.

She stirs again, this time with a moan, and when her hand finds my hair and she widens her legs, I know my girl is awake and waiting for me to give her what I promised.

As I suckle her clit, I shove two fingers into her likely aching cunt, and when she bows her back off the bed and

breathing picks up, I watch the effect I'm having on her. In this moment, it's just me bringing her to that warm, exquisite rush of climax, and when the walls of her pussy contract and start to spasm, I devour her through her release.

"That's it baby," I moan. "Come for me. Give me all of you."

She's pants and gasps and grips my head with both hands as her orgasm rocks her body and when she drops back down onto the bed, I push up between her legs and crash my mouth down onto hers.

Our tongues tangle, the taste of her release mixing with mine, and when she lines me up to her entrance, I thrust into her. Despite how wet she is, she grips my cock, and when I push up on my knees and pin her legs to the side, I command her to look at me.

"Did he fucking brand you?" I demand, watching her tits bounce up and down as pound into her.

"Yes," she rasps, eyes glazed over by sleep and sex.

"Did you like it?" I dig my fingers into the flesh of her thighs, while holding her legs down.

"Yes," she says again, both hypnotically, and unapologetically.

While still fucking her, I bring both of her legs together in front of me, and then push them up over her head so I can reach her tight little asshole. As I pound into her, I press my thumb into it, and then like a fucking acrobat, I bend down and spear it with my tongue.

Her body bucks and I know it wants me to breach the tight space. I know every response of her body and I know she likes anal now as much as I do. Surprising her, I forego my favorite hole and trail my lips down to her unmarked cheek and bite it.

"Oh, fuck!" she cries out as I suck the skin into my mouth, and using the tip of my tongue, run it along the indentation left by my teeth and lick it gently to ease the sting.

“There.” I pull back, looking at her marked ass in satisfaction. “In case anyone forgets who the fuck you belonged to first.”

She looks at me, crazed and dazed, and when I let her legs go, she wraps them around my waist as I place both hands down on either side of her and fuck her to the point I’m chasing my own climax.

Digging her nails into my back, I groan at the combination of pleasure and pain it brings, and when I feel her nails puncture my skin, the head of my cock swells and I feel the warmth of my release.

“Shit yes.” I press my forehead to hers as my cock twitches inside her.

As we lay there after, hearts pound wildly, I know without a doubt she is thinking the same thing I am—today, anything can happen, but there is no option but one, victory. I would accept nothing less.

Chapter 15

Declan

After showering, getting dressed, and having breakfast, the four of us load up in the Jeep and make our way to the head of the trail, ten minutes away. Litochoro is on the eastern side of Mount Olympus, and the Gortsia Trail, which begins at the edge of town, is the most commonly used to hike to the summit of Mytikas. We will start there as Ares instructed and continue until the path that is revealed to only those with the blood of the gods appears.

“Do you know how they’re going to test you once you reach the gates?” Luca asks when we pull into the parking lot.

“Probably a riddle,” Kai answers while hopping out of the back and sliding his sunglasses on. “Something like, ‘A house based on a foundation like the skies. A house one has covered with a veil like a secret box. A house set on a base like a goose. One enters it blind but leaves it seeing. What is it?’ Or something like that.”

Luca helps Nev climb out of the back, then reaches for the backpack on the floor of the passenger seat. We each have one for water, protein bars, and to carry our rolled up jackets. Luca agreed to add the First-Aid kit to his bag, and Kai and I both have extra water for the four of us.

“What the hell did you just say?” Luca asks while slinging his bag onto his back.

I drop the car keys into the outside pocket of my own backpack and zip it and do the same. “It’s a riddle,” I answer. “A famous one, actually.”

“Oh yeah?” Luca watches Nev who stands with her back to us, surveying the mountain in front of her. “And why is that?”

“It’s never been solved,” I reply matter of fact.

“Well...” Luca turns back to Kai and me. “Could that be because no one speaks gibberish?”

Kai laughs and shakes his head. “Riddles aren’t supposed to make sense. They’re supposed to trick you and make you think.”

“Well, that’s not exactly a fair test.” Luca pulls the straps on his bag, tightening his pack against his back. “To be lobbed some bullshit and expected to answer.”

“We don’t know if that’s what the test is,” Kai reaches for his own bag and slips it on. “I was merely suggesting it could be.”

“Well, merely suggest something else because we need it to be something that Deck can figure out.”

“Something tells me the gods don’t play that way,” Kai grins. “In fact, if you’d paid attention in Thompson’s class, you’d know the gods are anything but fair.”

“Yeah, well,” I smirk. “We all know why he didn’t pay attention in that class. It’s the same reason none of us did.”

The three of us all swing our heads in Nev’s direction, and a memory from our first day at Locksley slams into me.

Kai, Luca and I had done well those first three years. No one fucked with us. We ruled the school with cool indifference because the spoiled society brats that filled the halls weren’t on our level, and the girls...none held a candle to Nev. She was our best friend and we couldn’t wait for her to be with us.

But that day we stood at her dorm room door, watching as she unpacked, all three of our hearts stopped. I know they did because it was as if I could hear the collective breath we’d drawn in.

I’d seen her practically all summer. She and I vacationed with her parents in Bali at the beginning of the break, and the four of us spent countless nights at the lake house throughout the rest of it, as always. But there was something about her

that day that made all of us see her in clearer light. As if now that we were all here together, away from the eyes of her parents and our community, anything was possible.

None of us could keep our eyes off her. Luca, particularly. I had a feeling something happened between them months earlier when we were home for a long weekend over the winter and played drunk hide and seek, but he never said anything.

She was thirteen at the time, but standing at her door that day at Locksley, she was no longer a girl. She was fourteen and had developed curves grown women would kill for, and her coltish legs seemed endless under the cut off shorts she was wearing.

I had always cared about Nev. But it hit me one night that summer when we were in Bali, just how much I liked her, and that day at Locksley, when I realized Kai and Luca also had a thing for her, the hidden dance among the four of us began. I knew then I would do anything for her, just as I knew it didn't matter what riddle or test was hurled at me now, I'd do it. I'd do anything to save the girl we loved.

“But hey,” Kai clears his throat as Nev turns around and flashes us a bright smile when she sees us staring at her. “Come to think of it, maybe you should be the one trying to figure out that riddle Luca, because while some say it's Sumerian, there are many who believe its origins are Norse, and that Odin himself made it up.”

“Okay.” Luca slides his own sunglasses on. “And?”

“And...seeing as he was your stepfather, I suspect whoever is sitting in your mother's seat might use something like that to test you, considering she left him for your dad and it would be god-like to throw it in your face.”

The muscle in Luca's jaw ticks and I shoot Kai a look that says, ‘what the hell.’

This wasn't the first time one of his quips felt more like a barb than snark. Between his flippant attitude and the brand he

made on Nev's ass—which I still didn't know how *that* happened but was planning to find out—he was getting bolder by the hour and I couldn't help but wonder what was behind the surge of confidence.

Honestly, that kind of brazen arrogance was one of Luke's traits, and I was surprised Nev wasn't worried about it being a sign he was returning. He was as flippant as they came, and now that we know whatever she did to his and Hyde's spirit didn't affect Luke, I couldn't help but think parts of him may start to show themselves in Kai. Especially since he went from keeping his distance to now watching her like a hawk seemingly overnight.

This morning, for example, Kai couldn't keep his eyes off her. Especially when I placed my hand on her ass possessively, right over the bite mark I left. For a moment, his eyes flicked to mine and I thought I saw a hint of challenge in them. Of course, he didn't say or do anything, other than give me a slight scowl before turning his attention back to his breakfast. But still, something was up with him, and I planned to have a little talk with him when the moment was right.

“Well, I'll think about that,” Luca waves his hand at Kai, bringing me back to whatever it was that was happening with them, “if you can think about something that would be helpful in dealing with these whores.”

“Horai,” I correct. “And be careful. They are the daughters of Zeus and Aphrodite, so they are cousins and who knows what they can see or hear.”

“Well shit.” Luca runs a hand through his hair as Nev sidles up next to him and wraps her arm around his waist. “Is there anyone your grandpa didn't fuck?”

“Yeah,” Kai and I say at the same time. “My mother.”

The two of us look at one another and laugh, and it feels good to share this moment with him and makes me feel guilty for everything I was *just* thinking. He's my brother, always has

been and always will be, regardless of what's going on with him.

Luca laughs with a shake of his head. "I guess we're in for some kind of a family reunion, huh?"

"Oh don't worry," Kai grins. "You've got some interesting stories on your side too, brother."

"Well save 'em," Luca nods to the trail. "We have to get moving."

"He's right." Nev tips her head up and Luca places a kiss on her lips while wrapping her ponytail around his hand and giving it a tug. "Let's get this show on the road, shall we?"

I know Ares picked out our clothes for their durability and the weather, but the hiking pants and thermal shirt Nev's wearing are both skin-tight and I won't be able to put two feet in front of the other if I'm looking at her ass and tits the whole time.

"I'll lead the way." I shift my eyes from her to Luca and Kai. "Then Kai, you behind me, then Nev, and Luca, you bring up the rear."

"Oh, I'll bring it up alright." He pinches Nev's hip playfully and gives her a wink, to which she laughs.

Luca is just as smitten with our girl as we all are, but when it comes to physical activity, he's serious.

While there wasn't a doubt in my mind during those weeks we were each trying to help Nev with her power, their gym time together turned into play time. I also knew he had worked her out hard because I could always see sweat dripping from both of them when they returned from the gym.

It was a good thing he had worked with her those weeks, because today's hike was going to be arduous and we all needed to keep the pace.

"Alright," I clap. "Let's go!"

We start for the trail, following it straight, then down slopes and up again through terrain covered with elm, pine, hazel, and holly. On the way we see foxes, deer, and a couple of hawks perched on craggy rocks, as critters scatter under the brush as we pass. When we stop to take a water break and I look down at my watch, I'm surprised to learn we've already been hiking for an hour.

I look around, taking it all in, wondering what it was like once upon a time when the gods looked down from above, and can't help but feel a profound connection to the land. I wonder if Luca will feel the same when we get to Sweden, or Kai, when we get to Eden.

I wasn't sure how exactly Kai's claim to Hell's power would work. For Luca and me, it was clear—take back our mother's seats and we can then wield their armies. But for Kai, something told me it was more complex than simply drawing Luke out and ending him. That's why we needed the armies of Olympus and Valhalla because Luke wasn't going down without a fight. But neither were we.

As we each stash our water bottles into our backpacks, a whipping wind races up the slope we're standing on, sending a dust cyclone swirling in front of our eyes. We turn to shield our faces from the debris, and that's when I see off to the side, a path that wasn't there before.

"Hey guys." I point straight ahead as the cyclone moves up the hill and their eyes follow. "Do you see that?"

"What?" Luca asks, while lifting his glasses to wipe dirt from his eyes.

I turn around and look at him. "You can't see that?"

"See what?" Nev asks, while running the back of her hand across her forehead.

I turn back to the path, making sure I'm not seeing things, and when I see it there, turn back around. "You swear you don't see that path right there?"

“No,” Kai shakes his head. “But we don’t have to. Only you do. We just have to follow you.”

I can’t fight the rush of excitement that hits, when I realize that I can see it but they cannot.

It’s not that I didn’t think it would appear. But had it not, it certainly would have made me doubt all I’d been told. But seeing the path, lined with lush green flora and fauna, and buzzing with insects, confirms everything. I am a son of Olympus, and I have the blood of the gods in my veins.

“Well then.” I smile proudly and start down the path. “Follow me.”

I lead the way, pointing out where we are headed and what the path looks like. There are plants and flowers they can’t see, and an owl even swoops down from the sky and sits on a rock, watching as we walk by, before taking flight again. It’s almost as if the world I’m describing is in contrast to the one they are in, and it’s spine-tingling to think I’m walking a path created by the gods.

We make our way down a slight hill, then up again, and when we reach the crest, I see two columns up ahead. “Well, all be damn.”

“Do you see it?” Nev comes up next to me.

I sling an arm around her waist and pull her to my side. “Sure do, princess.”

She places her hand on my chest and tips her head up. “Son of a god,” she shakes her head. “Who would have ever thought?”

I wrap both hands around her waist and swing her around while planting a firm kiss on her lips. “God or not, I have and will, always love you,” she whispers.

I squeeze her tighter and set her back down on her feet, kissing her forehead and then looking over at Kai and Luca. “Ready?”

“Shit yes!” they reply excitedly.

I guide the four of us confidently toward the columns and stop just before reaching them. It's quiet, the air warm and sweet, and when I hear the crunching of rocks underfoot, I turn and see them—the Horai.

They make their way toward us, and I can practically hear Kai's mouth fall open as they come to a stop in front of me. If he can see them I can only assume Nev and Luca can too, and sure enough when I turn, see they are staring right at them.

“Son of Athena,” they say in harmony. “We have been expecting you.”

Each is wearing a white cloth that is knotted at the shoulders and drapes in folds at the waist, and a gold bracelet on their upper right arm. Their hair is piled on top of their heads, with a braid wrapped around the base and each is identical in appearance, except for hair and eye color.

The one to greet me, has brown hair and green eyes, and steps forward as she introduces herself. “I am Eunomia, goddess of good order and lawful conduct, and these are my sisters, Dike, goddess of Justice, and Eirene, goddess of Peace.”

“Hello,” I say formally. “It is an honor.”

The two sisters nod their heads in return, but Eunomia is the one who continues to speak. “You seek entrance to Olympus.”

“I do,” I straighten. “I am here to claim my mother's seat.”

“Goddess Athena.” They bow their heads in reverence. “Protector of Olympus, mother of Athens, and daughter of Zeus. We have missed her.”

The way they hold me in regard makes the hair on my arms stand-up.

I knew my mother was what they called a tutelary deity—one who was a guardian, patron, and protector of Greece. But never had I fully understood her importance, until now. She

was the pride of not only an entire region, but culture and people, and I couldn't help but feel the honor in my blood.

"These are your companions?" Eunomia asks when the three look back up.

"They are," I confirm.

She turns her attention first to Nev, then Kai, and finally Luca, assessing each as if taking in their very spirits. "You are welcome here, daughter of Heaven. Your heart is pure and your love, endless."

The smile that lights up Nev's face is brighter than the sun, and when Eunomia turns to Kai, I can't help but think he looks nervous while waiting for her approval. "And you, light of the morning star...you too, are welcome."

Nev places a hand on Kai's shoulder and he looks down at her and exhales visibly as Eunomia turns her attention to Luca. She's quiet for a moment as she studies him, and just when he's about to open his mouth to say something, she nods in acceptance. "We are honored to host you as well, heir of the Valkyrie."

The four of us let out a collective sigh of relief and when we finish hugging one another, Nev brings her hands to her mouth and gasps. Luca and Kai look at her, confused for a moment, and then they too, open their mouths in surprise.

It takes a moment to understand what's going on, but then I realize...they can now see what I have this whole time. The path we stand on is part of a world I have been in. One that exists alongside the one they were still in. But with the Horai's approval, they too, are now part of it. That of Olympus.

"Before the gate can reveal itself," Eunomia warns, "you must first pass a test, son of Olympus."

I pull my shoulders straight, ready for whatever they are going to throw at me. "Go on."

Eunomia nods, and steps back, as Eriene steps forward. She has dark hair and blue eyes and when she speaks, it carries

softly along the wind. “Son of Athena, grandson of Zeus, why do you come here today—in love or loyalty?”

When I hear the question, I realize Kai was right. It’s a riddle and it was meant to deceive, so I needed to look at the question from different angles.

I think about everything...my parents and my mother, her sacrifice, and my brothers. I think about Nev and her family who brought me into their world and raised me as their own. I could not choose love or loyalty for why I am here, because both are the reason.

Love begets loyalty and loyalty begets love. I loved Nev and my brothers and the family I was part of, and I would always fight for them because I was loyal to those I loved. And I was loyal toward Nev and my brothers and our family and community because I loved them. And *that’s* the answer.

There was no right or wrong answer to the riddle. Only one truth, and that is what Ares meant when he said the test was for me.

“Neither,” I reply, with my chin held high.

I feel Nev, Kai and Luca shift nervously next to me and I know my answer worries them because they don’t understand—and they’re not supposed to. My answer is mine and mine alone.

“I do not come here in either love or loyalty but *because of,*” I emphasize.

Eriene looks to Eunomia and then to Dike, who is the one to turn her blue eyes to me and bow her head. “You are free to pass, son of Athena. May the gods welcome you.”

Luca pats my back and Nev reaches for my hand giving it a squeeze. Even Kai gives me a nod, with pride in his eyes.

As the three of them stand next to me, a set of gates appear and beyond them, stairs that extend through the clouds, high into the sky. My skin prickles and goosebumps shoot down my arms and up to my scalp.

I take one step, and then stop, turning to look over my shoulder at the Horai, and when they all smile and encourage me to continue, I climb the stairs to Olympus, with our girl and my brothers by my side.

Chapter 16

Declan

We climb the stairs enthusiastically and I can't help but feel like Jack and the Beanstalk as I watch the ground below fade from view as we pass through the clouds. It's hard to believe a whole world exists above Greece's highest peak and at the same time not all, considering those who raised me, once watched over the Earth from the stars.

Everything I've ever known looks miles away, while at the same time, the connection I've been yearning for my entire life, feels within reach. Where we are is both between and beyond, and I can't help but laugh at the irony because I've been in that very spot, my entire life.

"You okay brother?" Luca asks when I stop for a moment and look back to see how far we've come.

I'm not sure how to respond. I've never felt at home among mortals, and while I'd always been welcomed among The Fallen, I sometimes felt as if I were on the outside, looking in. But I belonged here. I can feel it.

"I'm alright," I grip his shoulder.

He pats my back and takes off his glasses, tucking them into his shirt. Turns out we didn't need our jackets anymore or protection from the sun. We were part of this world's aura and the temperature is perfect and the sun's light muted.

"You know whatever happens up there, we got you brother. Even this asshole who can't stop making smart ass remarks," he says, giving Kai a clipped nod.

I can't help but laugh. "You know I got both of your backs too, right? No matter where it takes us."

“Even Hell?” Kai asks. The way he says it reminds me who he is. Kind and caring and the one who keeps us laughing even when it’s hard to smile.

I know the last few days have been hard and no matter what’s happening with him right now, it doesn’t change our bond. “Brother, I’d go to Hell and back for you.”

“Well then, demigod...” Nev nods to the stairs ahead of me. “Let’s get a move on so we can get your seat claimed and do that.”

I flash her a winning smile and continue on, and in no time we’ve reached the top. When we get there, the four of us stop and turn around, marveling at the sight before us. Earth is below, space above, and I’ve never seen anything like it in all my life.

With Nev to my left, Luca to my right, and Kai behind us, gripping both their shoulders, I feel invincible. It’s that unflinching confidence the four of us gives me, that has me turning around and marching toward the set of bronze doors that must be the entrance to Olympus.

When we reach them, Kai sticks out his hand, running it along the symbols etched into the surface. I never learned Greek, but I know what they mean because I hear it whispered in my mind. “On this hill and in this hall the surest preside.”

“I like your kind already.” Luca grins.

Seeing the doors cracked slightly, I take it as a sign they’re expecting us, and when I place my hands on one and push, it opens slowly, hinges creaking with the mighty weight.

When there’s enough space for us to pass through we enter and find ourselves in a receiving hall, with marble tables on either side and bowls of fruit, and above a fresco, similar to the one in my parent’s estate.

As we walk our steps echo along the stone walls, and when we come to the end of the hall, we pass through another set of doors, and enter a courtyard, with columns wrapped in red roses and snow white doves perched among the vines.

“Aphrodite,” Nev says in awe. “It was said she was so beautiful, and the power of love so strong in her steps, that roses appeared where she walked.”

“Then whoever sits in her seat can’t be that bad, right?” Kai asks.

“We’ll see,” I murmur, while taking in more of the grounds.

There are cloistered courtyards, golden walkways, and fountains spouting water so clear it’s practically translucent. As well as hallways with endless doors, stretching out on either side, and arched windows that look out into the light.

I’m about to ask Kai how much he knows about Olympus and where we may find the hall of the gods, when I see a set of gold doors up ahead, and I have my answer.

Once we reach them I stop and look up. They extend as far as the eye can see, and when I place my hand on one, it opens. “Blood of the gods,” I mutter as we make our way through, and find ourselves in a space so large it’s hard to make our where it ends.

“That must be the chamber for council,” Kai points to a room on one side, “and the feast hall with golden tables,” he points to the other. “And above....” His voice trails off as we all look up and find a translucent ceiling with the light of the cosmos shining down. “I’ve read about it, and sure, the stories paint a picture, but man,” he shakes his head, “it pales compared to this.”

I’d always prided myself on being able to maintain my composure in the most shocking of circumstances, but as I look around, I can’t help but think he’s right. Above me, the glowing light of a nebula pulsates, its center a radiant pink, and halo of light around it a blazing blue, and this may be the first time in my entire life I’m unable to fight back tears.

“That will change,” a voice calls out when I use my thumb and middle finger to press the outer corner of each eye.

Turning my attention away from the ceiling, I look toward the direction of the voice and see a raised dais on the other side of the hall.

“What will?” I call back, my voice echoing along the walls as I count twelve gold thrones, with figures sitting in each.

“The light...it stirs something in each of us the first time.”

The longer I look the closer the dais it appears, until I see a striking blonde looking right at me.

“You have your mother’s eyes,” she says plainly, while pushing up from where she’s sitting and I realize she is the one speaking.

When she stands, long hair the color of spun gold falls down to her waist, and after gathering her skirt in both hands, she makes her way across the dais, and down a set of marble stairs.

The hall is quiet as she approaches and when she finally reaches the four of us, I can’t help but think we’ve met before. “Do I know you?”

“You can say that.” She places a hand on my shoulder and circles me, and one would have to be deaf to not hear the growl it elicits from Nev.

”I am Thea, daughter of Erichthonius.”

“Well,” I smile, knowing now why she felt familiar. “Hello, niece.”

“Niece?” Luca barks out, clearly surprised.

After my conversation with Ares, I did a little research and learned more about the squatter that was sitting in my mother’s seat. While she did not have any other children but me, it turns out she did adopt a child that she looked after—Erichthonius.

According to the story, Hephaestus, god of fire, was in love with my mom and made several advances toward her, all of which she rejected. But once, after trying to force himself

on her, my mother fought him off and fled, but not before a drop of his semen hit the Earth, giving birth to Erichthonius.

After he was born, my mother delivered the baby to the three daughters of King Cecrops of Athens. The story is complicated, but net net—after the tragic death of two sisters, Erichthonius was raised by the third, and became a future king of Athens.

If you believe the story, Thea and I are related because Hephaestus was my mother's half-brother, making her my cousin. If you do not, she is the child of my mother's adopted son, making her my niece, which is what Ares believed—hence my own reference to her as such.

Regardless of how we are related, she is not the rightful heir of my mother's seat. But if London society has taught me anything, it's those who are raised as if they are royalty, will not let go of what they believe is theirs without a fight, and I need to be the best politician I can right now, if I hope to take back what's mine.

"It's complicated," I say finally, hoping this isn't the one time that Luca remembers something from Thompson's class. I could only imagine how he would tell the story of the birth of Thea's father.

"Isn't it always?" he says to my relief.

Thea presses her lips together and focuses her attention on me. "Your mother loved my father as if he were her own," she says pointedly. "That is why he sat in her seat and when he passed, gave it to me."

First, that's a lie. Her father wasn't given my mother's seat. Zeus left it open in hopes she would return, and Thea's father claimed it for himself. And second, who does this bitch think she is?

"Well, it's time to get out of it, because it belongs to my brother," Luca shoots back.

Normally, I am all for my brothers having my back. But if there was one thing I'd learned in the years we'd been running

Styx, sometimes you had to bite your tongue to get what you wanted.

“You must be the Viking.” Thea’s eyes narrow.

Luca crosses his arms and straightens. “I am,” he says proudly.

She looks him up and down, regarding him with indifference. “Makes sense.”

He curls the hand that is tucked under his arm into a fist and I silently plea for him to play it cool. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Thea drops her hand from my shoulder and steps back. “It means I expect nothing less than words with little meaning from your kind.”

“Hey...” Kai holds a hand up. “Come on now, we’re all friends here.”

Remembering all the times Kai had been the cool head between Luca and I over the years, I give him a nod of thanks.

Thea looks at Kai, tilting her head. “I take it by your diplomatic response that you are the son of Luke.”

Nev narrows her eyes and I can tell she is seconds away from slicing Thea to pieces for insulting the three of us in a matter of minutes. If there is one thing I love, nearly as much as our girl, it’s her willingness to go to bat for us.

“He sired me,” Kai says stoically, “but he is not my father.”

“Honey,” Thea laughs. “We all have daddy issues. Join the club. Maybe I could make that disappointment better, hmm?”

“Or...” Nev takes a step toward Thea, flames cropping up from her fingertips. “I could just burn this place to the ground.”

Thea laughs. “Fire and destruction. That’s all The Fallen thinks about. Maybe, had your kind tried a different approach,

the story of the angels wouldn't have gotten bastardized and you'd have lived on the way we have, in truth and effigy."

"Right," Luca snorts. "Because your dad was *really* born from semen that hit the Earth."

I close my eyes and shake my head.

"That you remember?" Kai shakes his head. "I mean really man, *that?*"

"So I paid attention on the day they covered sex and creation," he shrugs. "Sue me."

A tall guy with dark hair and gold eyes comes up behind Thea and places his chin on her shoulder, looking at Nev appreciatively. "There is no need to burn anything down, or mock anyone's birth. We are all friends here."

I step in front of Nev to cut off his view. I don't know if his eyes are on her or Luca, but either way, he needs to back off. "Then stop looking at what doesn't belong to you and we'll take it down a notch."

"Oh cousin," he laughs. "We're all family here. What's mine is yours. Isn't that right, Thea?"

He nuzzles her neck and she lifts a hand and grabs a fistful of his hair, closing her eyes for a moment, then yanking his head back. "Not now, Slider," she hisses while opening her eyes.

"Slider?" Kai arches a brow looking at them both with a wry smile. "Did you get that at the *Top Gun* estate sale?"

Slider looks from Kai to Luca and then Nev again. "I got it from my father because of my ability to slide into whatever and whomever I choose."

"And your father would be?" Luca asks as Nev's cheek's flush with his response.

"Eros," he turns to me. "God of love...and son of Ares. Which means, hello cousin."

Ares told me about his grandson. The sexy charmer with a penchant for family infidelity and a loyalty to Thea that was staunch.

Luca looks at the two in front of us and smiles. “Kissing cousins. Makes sense.”

“Why don’t you shut your mouth, Viking?” Thea snaps.

“Listen.” Nev steps forward, fire again cropping up in her hand. “I suggest you change your tone.”

“Or what?” Thea’s eyes widen in mock horror.

“I burn everything down, yourself included Rapunzel.”

Thea tosses her head back and laughs. “Hellfire does not work here, *princess*. Hades saw to it fire is for the underworld.”

Nev takes another step toward Thea and part of me wants to pull her back, because we can’t end shit, before we claim it. But the other part is so turned on by her willingness to go to war for what’s hers, that I want to watch our girl beat my niece’s ass for daring to look at what belongs to her.

“Hades?” Kai shakes his head. “Shit, that’s right.”

I turn to Kai, pulling my attention from Nev. “What’s right?”

Thea answers before Kai can. “He’s just realizing everything you knew to be true, is not.”

“Meaning?” Luca asks dryly with a roll of his eyes.

“Meaning,” Kai looks to Thea and slider, “Hellfire does not work here. Only Hades can control fire on Olympus.”

“Which also means,” Thea’s eyes flicker with excitement as she tosses her long hair over one shoulder and casts a condescending gaze upon Nev, “that your chosen one is nothing more than a pretty face and a couple of parlor tricks.”

Nev looks to her hand and the fire turns into a snake. She shakes it from her hand and jumps back, watching as it slithers

across the floor.

Thea bends down and sticks her hand out, and when the snake curls into her palm, and wraps around her arm, she speaks, while keeping her eyes trained on the serpent.

“Whatever you thought you were going to do, you need to think again.” Thea runs her finger along the snake’s flat head, as it’s forked tongue darts in and out. “This is Olympus. Built by and for the Gods. It has never fallen, and it isn’t about to.”

“Always time for a first,” Nev quips.

Thea looks from Nev to me. Her eyes cold. “The gods ruled for many millennia, uncle. You would be wise to remember that. And you would also be wise to remember the importance of blood and loyalty because we will not let Heaven take what is ours.”

“You mean what is mine,” I correct. “I am the son of Athena. It is my seat you sit in, niece.”

Thea grins. “Meaning?”

“Meaning do not fuck with my queen or me because you will regret it.”

Thea lets out a deep throaty laugh. “Is that so? Tell me, did your uncle tell you what needs to be done in order to claim your seat?”

I cross my arms, neither confirming nor denying that he did not tell me. Only that I needed to.

“Right,” Thea turns to Nev, flashing her a smile that lacks sincerity. “That’s what I thought.”

Nev straightens and lifts her chin. “You have something to say, I suggest you say it.”

“Athena’s son can have his seat back. Politics, I admit, bore me. I just need what was promised to me and it is his.”

“Is that right?” Nev crosses her arms, while popping out her hip.

“It is.” Thea gives her a once over as if sizing up the competition, which honestly is laughable, because there’s never been a contest, and never will be.

“And just what, pray tell, was promised to you?” Nev asks, appearing bored by their exchange.

“Ares really didn’t tell you?” Thea turns her attention back to me. The muscle in my jaw ticks and I wonder how long she’s going to keep us in suspense.

“Well dear heart.” She flicks her gaze from me to Nev. “The only thing that stands in the way of you and your seat... is an heir.”

“You mean me,” I correct. “Well surprise,” I hold out both hands, “I’m here.”

“No...” She kisses the top of the snake’s head, before bending down and letting it slither away. “I mean an heir,” she stands back up. “Ours.”

I jerk my head back; not sure I heard her correctly. “Come again?”

“The way to your power is through me. Literally,” she smiles wickedly.

“And I will say, cousin...” Slider looks at me while running the tip of his tongue along his top lip. “I don’t think either of you is getting the short end of the stick in that deal.”

“No way!” Nev jumps forward and Luca and Kai reach for each of her arms and pull her back.

The ridiculousness of what Thea just said makes me laugh. “Look, I don’t know what backwoods deal was made, but while you all may like to dip your wicks in the same wax, I don’t. Not to mention, I’m taken... forever. So try again.”

“You misunderstand me, uncle,” Thea’s eyes harden. “The only way you will get that seat is by producing an heir... with me. I don’t make the rules. I only repeat them.”

I look at Nev, her eyes wide, and burning with rage. “Over my dead body!” She shakes off Luca and Kai’s hold.

Thea’s smile is maniacal and then she narrows her eyes, directing her response to Nev. “And that is *exactly* what you will be if he does not comply.”

Her response is full of venom and makes my hands burn. “You are out of your fucking mind if you think I’m going to have a child with you! There is only one person who will ever be the mother of my children.”

“Do not mock what you don’t know,” Slider grins. “There is a certain eroticism in the taboo, no?”

I stare at the two of them in disbelief. “If you don’t do this,” Thea smiles ruefully, “you will never control your mother’s army.”

“But I already do,” I counter. “They already work for me.”

“Not fully. Yes, that little network of yours may listen to you, but they will not fight to the death. And what good are soldiers who are not willing to die?”

“You’re lying,” Luca says in disbelief.

“I am not,” she keeps her eyes trained in me, “I assure you. When your mother left, Zeus decreed only Athena’s son could sit in her seat and wield her army *if* they had an heir of Olympian blood to pass it to. Specifically, his blood. Meaning, a mother *and* father of his descendancy.”

“But you are not of Zeus’s bloodline,” Nev points out. “You’re the daughter of a tyrant. So whatever game you’re playing, it’s not gonna work.”

“And Zeus is gone,” Kai adds, “so what weight does any caveat he made hold?”

“The lightning that sends mortals running during a storm is that of Zeus,” Thea says with pride. “Denying his wishes is like denying that very power. And make no mistake, my father was the son of a god, stories be damned. I would not be here if he weren’t.”

The four of us grow quiet as Ares' words come to mind. 'The gods are cruel and their games are wicked.' And when I see the way that Thea is looking at me, I know he's right. She is using my heart and dreams against me and while she may be family in some twisted way, I've never wanted to destroy someone more than I do her at this very moment.

My heart starts to pound and blood whoosh in my ears, as the idea of what will happen if I do not have my mother's army hits me. We will fail. The prophecy will fail. And Nev and my brothers and everyone I love will be gone. The idea alone is paralyzing. I can't focus...can't think. A strange hum fills my chest, making it hard to breathe.

Then I remember what the seer told my mother. The prophecy she hedged all her bets on...the one that compelled her to leave the only world she knew for another, just for the chance at having me, was clear. Our heir, Nev's and mine, we will rule Olympus. Not some offspring between me and my deranged niece.

Or was it their? Shit. Did the prophecy say their? It could have meant just me, which could have meant any heir, but damn it. Words were important. Nev's father told me that once. One word can change everything. It did for he and Nev's mother and now it could for not only Nev and I but all The Fallen.

"Screw this." Luca waves a hand, pulling me out of my ensuing panic attack. "Deck, come on, let's go. We'll find another way."

I reach for Nev's hand and it's like ice. Holding it tightly in mine I look at her and shake my head. I could never, would never have a child with anyone but her, and she has to know that.

But we didn't come all this way to walk away with our tails between our legs. I may be the son of a god, but I was also the son of a man that was more feared by the Devil and raised among The Fallen. I do not give up on anything without a fight.

The army of Olympus is *my* birthright, not a spoiled child, and I will do everything to get it...even if it means making them believe I am playing their game. There is another way for me to take what's mine. There is always another way. But I just need to figure it out.

"I have an idea," Slider claps. "How about we throw a feast? The four of you can clean up and have a rest and we can get to know one another over more amenable conversation. I think that would be good, don't you, Thea?"

Luca opens his mouth to respond but I cut him off. "That would be great," I nod with a forced smile. "I would like to get to know the two of you more, as well as the others."

I squeeze Nev's hand twice. A signal we used as kids when we were trying to communicate. My heart beats once, then again, as I wait for her to return it. When she does, I exhale with relief.

"Come," Slider holds his hand out. "I will show you to your room. I would say rooms, but something tells me the four of you prefer less space between you."

A flash of heat shifts from Nev's hand to mine and I hold it close to my side, knowing exactly how she feels. "That would be good."

"Very well," he replies happily. "Thea, as you were," he winks at his cousin. "You four, come with me."

Chapter 17

Luca

Slider escorts us out of the hall, heading back the way we came. As we make our way down covered walkways and gilded halls, he points out items of interest—The Golden Fleece, The staff of Hermes, even Pandora’s Box, to which the four of us all stop and stare for a moment before continuing.

Kai geeks out of course, while Nev takes it all in guardedly, and Declan...he is silent, yet stoic. I can’t get an exact read, but if I know my brother, which I do, I know he’s furious, but putting on the best poker face anyone has ever seen.

He loves Nev and would do anything, absolutely anything for her. But he would never, not in a million millennia, sire a child with anyone. His mind is likely already running through alternatives and mapping out what exactly he’s going to say to Ares when he calls to ask him about this decree Zeus issued.

Finally, we reach the end of a long hall, and come to a stop in front of a set of double doors with gold hinges. “I think you will find these quarters satisfactory,” Slider says with a smile as he grabs hold of an oversize doorknob on each door and pushes them open.

Declan holds his hand out for Nev to enter first, and then nods for Kai and me to follow. Once the four of us have entered, Slider comes in behind us, watching for our reaction.

The room is massive, with a high domed ceiling with what appears to be blown glass spun so thin you can see the stars, and a wall of arches to the left, which open onto a balcony that overlooks Olympus. In the center of the room is a sunken sitting area, with a round couch of white tufted cushions and an ottoman in the center, with bowls of grapes and roses on

top, and a white marble fireplace with gold filigree etched into the mantle, directly across.

There are enough sitting chairs and side tables and vases overflowing with flowers in this room to rival a hotel and something tells me we haven't seen anything yet.

"There's more." Slider motions for us to follow him, as we take it all in.

He crosses the room and we follow, passing under an arched entryway, stopping for a moment to tie back a set of cotton panels, before revealing a large marble soaking pool. It's got to be at least forty feet long by ten feet wide—large enough for Kai to do laps if he wants, but also comfortable enough for the four of us to soak in, and not have to shout.

"Every bath in Olympus went through renovations a few years back. Some were cracked and others leaking; some crumbled to the point they no longer resembled the tubs they once were. You can use it for a hot soak, or a cold dip. Whatever your pleasure," he adds with a grin. "We thought a warm soak in a mineral bath infused with bay laurel leaves and lavender would soothe the body and mind from the hike here."

"We?" Declan asks, brow arched.

"The others and me. You did not get to meet them. My cousin can be...demanding. But, what she lacks in decorum, she makes up for in other ways," he says pointedly.

I cough, and look down, to which Slider swings his head in my direction. "Do not mock what you do not know," he says curtly. "You too, are in a relationship that is unconventional, no?"

I look up, spine stiffening. I know he wasn't comparing the four of us to fucking his cousin. I mean...how did one even begin to argue the wrong there? Thankfully, I don't have to because as if reading my mind, Declan jumps in.

"I would like to meet the others," he says with what I know is forced politeness.

Slider turns and when he looks at Declan, his smile returns. “They have been waiting a long time to meet the son of Athena so expect a long night, with plenty of conversation.”

“Is that so?” Declan shoves a hand in his pocket.

“Mm-hmm,” Slider nods. “First they waited for the stars to lead her to your father, and then they waited for them to deliver you.”

“Does that wait include watching?” Declan tilts his head, curious.

“The gods see all,” Slider says with a wink.

“Including those who signed Luke’s treaty?”

Slider presses his lips together, and it’s clear Declan has just brought up a subject of contention. “It is one thing to leave Olympus, it is another to side against it.”

“So those that did are no longer here?” Nev asks. It’s the first time she’s spoken since we left the hall and her voice is tight, her brows pinched.

Slider shakes his head once. “They were dealt with, and as I understand it, the last of the lines they sired in honor of their treacherous promise now gone.”

“They are,” Nev straightens. It’s the first time I’ve thought about the Augury in days, which is strange considering they once ruled every one of my thoughts because everything we did, everything we had become, was to protect Nev from them.

But the Augury was no more and we’d leaped right out of the frying pan, and into the fire—this divine world of glittering halls and lush splendor, the start of a battle that would continue until Luke too, was gone.

“Now come with me.” Slider claps, pulling me from the thought. “I have one more thing to show you.”

He starts to make his way out of the room, and when Nev looks at me as if to ask, ‘what else could there possibly be?’ I wink and nod for her to follow.

As we turn, and make our way back the way we came, and Slider leads us down a side hall until we come to a stop at the doorway that opens up to a bedroom, big enough for a titan.

In the center of the room is a bed, big enough for four, with a white tufted headboard, and a marble bed crown with a gauze canopy that flows down to the floor. Marble tables flank each side of the bed, and there's a bowl of fruit on one, and four cups and a water pitcher on the other.

While the floor in the rest of the rooms has been stone and tile from wall to wall, under the bed is a thick fluffy carpet, with two sets of slippers resting on it on either side, and four robes folded on the sitting bench at the end of the bed, made of the same fabric as the headboard.

“You will find items for tonight in the closet,” Slider points to a door on the opposite side of the room. “While we air on the side of tradition for meetings, parties are another story. Anything you do not like, leave it be, and if there are any alterations on the items you do choose, please ring your attendant using that,” he points to a cord that hangs down from the ceiling with a tassel on the end, “and they will help you with whatever you need.”

Slider turns and makes his way out of the bedroom and back to the front of the suite. When he reaches the door he stops and looks around. “I am sure you four will be comfortable here. Please try to rest a bit. Feasts can be a testament to your stamina,” he looks Nev up and down, which isn't lost on any one of us.

“Our stamina is just fine,” Declan shoots back.

“I'm sure it is, cousin.” He keeps his eyes on Declan for a moment then flicks them to Kai and then me. “Thea may have underestimated you. You may just fit in here among the gods, after all.”

“I don't really care about fitting in.” Declan crosses his arms and flexes. “I care about what's mine.”

Slider gives Deck a quick smile and then grabs each of the door handles and closes the door as he backs out of the room. When it's just the four of us, Nev grabs Declan's arm. "Please tell me—"

Before she can finish, Declan wraps one arm around her waist while cupping her neck with the other and draws her into a kiss. I know by just watching, he does not give a shit about what Thea said must be done to claim his mother's seat. Nev is Declan's one and only.

When they pull apart, slightly breathless, he tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. "I do not plan to, nor will I ever, have a child with anyone but you."

"But you heard her." Nev grabs his shirt, pulling him close. "It is what Zeus demanded."

"I don't care," his eyes search hers. "There is another way."

"How do you know?"

"Because...there is always more than one answer. And as owners of the hottest, most successful club in all of London, a club that uses one very important element as the core to its success, we are going to use said element and find out what it is."

"Yes," Kai points. "Secrets."

"That's right," Declan gives Kai a nod. "Someone knows how I can claim my mother's seat that doesn't involve producing an heir. In fact, someone knows if that is even true, and we're going to find out. We are going to that feast tonight, and we are going to talk with every god's spawn and make them feel as if they are the most important one in the room. And when the night is over, I will know how to take what's mine and we can get the hell out of here."

"Well alright." I clap my hands and rub them together. "Finally a game I can play."

“Play?” Declan smirks. “Shit, brother. You’re not going to play. This is your specialty. You’re going to win.”

Deck is right. I could move in any crowd and have anyone eating out of my hand in minutes. I would find out how he could claim his seat. I would not let my brother or our girl down.

“And me?” Kai asks.

“You and Nev will keep all eyes in the room on you, while I look around and do a little digging of my own.”

“Good,” Nev leans into him, “a plan I agree on.”

“Did you think we would leave you out?” He looks down at her and grins. “You’re our Trojan Horse, baby.”

“Hell yeah she is,” I wink. “No one will be interested in what you and I are up to. Not when their eyes are on you and the son of the Devil.”

For a moment I question if my word choice was too soon, but Kai’s lip hitches at the sides and the fucker grins. He actually grins. “You know, I thought having Luke as a father was bad, but it looks like Deck won the worst relatives contest.”

As soon as he says it, we all laugh. It’s a tense, tired, anxious laugh.

“I assume Ares didn’t mention anything about his father’s decree about the heir thing?”

“No,” I shake my head. “He alluded to the fact it would be difficult, but he certainly didn’t tell me about this. And it’s not like I can call and ask. We’re a little out of range.”

“Well, there’s nothing that we can do for now, except take Slider’s advice and clean up, rest and get our game faces on. And I don’t know about you, but that tub is calling me. What do you say?”

“I say you’re on.” Nev drops her bag at her feet, peels off her clothes, and makes her way to the tub, naked ass taunting

the three of us. “You boys coming?”

“Hey Deck,” Kai asks when we’ve been soaking in the tub for a while. “Did your Yaya ever tell you any stories that might be helpful?”

“No.” He stretches his arms out, pulling the muscles in his chest tight. “I may have called my father’s mother Yaya, but she knew as much about Greek heritage as Luca does.”

Kai smirks, and I do, too. He’s not wrong. The Greeks were confusing, and I was having a hard enough time with Norse mythology as it was.

“My mother was really close with her,” Declan continues, “but I don’t think she knew who my mother was. Why?”

“Just thinking,” Kai muses. “Wondering if your mom ever shared stories that *weren’t* in the textbooks.”

As the two talk, my eyes drift over to the balcony where Nev stands gazing out upon Olympus, one hand on the top of the low wall, the other holding a glass of wine. Turns out, the balcony we saw when we first entered the room extended the length of the suite, making it accessible from every room.

“Hey, Dick,” Declan splashes me with water. “Eyes over here.”

I splash him back and keep my eyes on her. She looks right at home, and why wouldn’t she? In a kingdom of gods, she was the divine, and no one can, or ever will, compare.

I’ve seen her naked and under me, on top of me, bound in chains, and on her knees. Shit I’ve seen her take not one, but both of my brothers, and yet, somehow, right now, she is more beautiful than I have ever seen. And the way she loves each of us, faults and all, it’s nothing short of inspiring.

Just thinking about the way she was ready to throw down with Deck's niece earlier makes my dick hard. Nev is sweet and spirited and every bit our dream girl. But she will walk through fire for us, and we're damn lucky to have her, and we all know it.

"Leave me alone." I rub my hand over my chin, daydreaming about letting her ride me in this tub while the water ripples around us. "I'm thinking."

"Right." Declan follows my gaze. "I know what you're thinking about. And my mind is happy to join you. But later. We need to be thinking about tonight."

I sit back and stretch my arms overhead and then extend them out on each side of me, mirroring the way he's sitting. "I can think about two things at once, just so you know."

"Oh yeah?" Declan runs a wet hand over his hair. "And what was the *other* thing you were thinking about?"

"What your cousin said earlier. About the gods and how they like to play games. I was wondering what's waiting for me when we get to Valhalla."

"Well, whatever it is," Kai laughs, "I hope to god, no pun intended, it's not fucking your cousin. I mean, it's going to take a miracle to find a way out of that one, as it is."

"She's not technically his cousin," I correct.

Declan rolls his eyes and then looks over at Nev. "I'm not fucking anyone but that goddess out there on that balcony. Hopefully, when I get out of this tub."

"Fuck you," I splash him again. "You had her this morning. And you yesterday," I splash water at Kai for good measure.

Declan shakes his head. "You know, we will have to figure out some kind of schedule or something when all this is over."

"No way," I shake my head. "We aren't slotting out who gets to do what with Nev, when. We take her lead. She wants all of us. She gets all of us. She wants one, she gets one."

“That simple?” Kai asks.

“Yup.” I run my hands through the water, letting it glide through my fingertips. “That’s how it’s always been with us. We figure it out, just like we did at school.”

“Like we did what at school?” Declan asks.

“Come on.” I sit back again and look up at the glass ceiling. Every room has one and I’m growing used to it. Thinking I may want to do it to my room at home. It’s kind of cool. “That day she arrived her first year we were all thinking it. I don’t have ESP and shit, but I could literally hear you two thinking about her. And I was, too. Shit, I couldn’t stop thinking about her after kissing her the year before. But it’s like we all knew it wasn’t time to tell her how we felt. And it wasn’t. We wouldn’t have been able to deal with it then. Sharing her...no way. It would have probably ruined our friendship. But now, after all we’ve been through...” He shrugs and flicks his fingers in the water. “She loves us and we love her. There is nothing to figure out.”

When I stop talking, both Declan and Kai are staring at me. “How is it, you can understand the most complicated shit and yet, not remember any of the easy stuff?” Kasi asks with a smile.

“Easy,” I shrug. “We aren’t complicated. But movie titles and songs and Greek mythology...that’s for you, brainiac.”

“Fair enough.” Declan laughs. “You’re right. We take her lead. Whatever she wants, I’m all in.”

“Me too,” Kai adds.

There is no need for me to say anything. I have been all in, the day I swore off kissing any other girl but Nev. And the day she knelt in front of me, she bound my heart to hers for eternity.

As the three of us look at her, it’s like Heaven itself is shining down through Olympus. Light halos her face and butterflies swirl around her and when she holds out her hand,

one lands on her finger. It has one black wing and one white, and she holds it close to study it, before it flies off.

She hasn't used her powers since Locksley, and while it didn't take a genius to know why, I wondered if she was using them now.

"Didn't Thea say her powers wouldn't work here?" I ask quietly when Nev holds her hand out and the vines along the wall snake towards her.

Declan nods hypnotically, watching her with the same fascination that I am. "She did."

"Nev is the daughter of Heaven," Kai says knowingly. "Her powers transcend all universal laws."

Kai's response, as usual, was worthy of a riddle. "Meaning?"

"Olympus and Valhalla are both kingdoms under Heaven. She can use her powers; they just manifest as they are in those worlds."

"And what she did to Sasha...and Hyde?" Declan asks carefully, knowing the latter is a sensitive subject for both Kai and Nev.

"If she can crush the Devil, she could probably do the same to your kissing cousins," Kai says matter of fact.

"Okay then. How about what Thea did earlier?" I counter. "Turning Nev's fire into a snake? Do the power of the gods supersede hers?"

Kai shrugs. "Erichthonius was mortal, even though legend likes to paint him as one who was autochthonous. Of the soil," he adds when I raise my brow in question. "Perhaps her mother was a mage. Parlor tricks are one thing, power like Nev's is another."

As if she can feel our eyes on her, Nev looks over her shoulder and blows us a kiss. "Shit, that girl is everything," I whisper. "Literally, everything. Why do we need to go through

all the hoops if she can end the kingdoms that challenge Heaven with a snap?”

“I don’t know,” Kai admits. “I’m just glad she gave a piece of her heart to me.”

“Well, well, well.” I give him a smug smirk. “It’s nice you’re so sure of your feelings now.”

Kai stretches his long arms out and leans back. “I’ve always been sure of my feelings. I just didn’t need to mark my territory like you two.”

“Is that so?” Declan huffs.

“It is,” Kai grins.

“So what do you call what happened on the plane, then?”

“Sex,” he shrugs. “Sex that connected me to my power, as a matter of fact.”

I look at Declan and he looks back at me, apparently not fazed by that revelation. I, however, am. “Come again?” I look at Kai.

“Hellfire,” he says proudly. “I channeled it.”

“Yeah,” Declan scowls. “I know.”

“Wait.” I look from Kai to Declan and back again. “Wasn’t that Hyde’s thing?”

“It was,” Kai confirms. “But I am the son of Luke and Hyde is a part of me. The power is mine, not his. He just happened to be the one who helped draw Hellfire from Nev because he was my darkness.”

“And that’s where Hellfire lives,” I nod knowingly. Something I actually remembered.

“Well look who suddenly knows shit,” Declan rolls his eyes.

I flip him off and turn back to Kai. “And are you feeling that darkness now?”

“I have been feeling a lot of things since Locksley,” he says casually. “Emotions I didn’t understand because I never had to because they were Hyde’s. But since he’s been gone, I’ve had no choice but to feel them and well, when I did, they connected me to my power.”

“How do you know?” I ask, curious if he set something on fire or what.

“Well,” he swings his head in Nev’s direction. “I burned her.”

“You...what?” I stand up, splashing water over the side of the tub.

Kai turns back around and flashes me a sly smile. “What... Deck can bite her, you can chain her up, and Hyde can hunt and fuck her, but I can’t burn her?”

I don’t know what surprises me more, the candor in his words, or the fact he fucking burned her. “Did you know?” I ask Declan accusingly.

“I did,” he says slowly.

“And you didn’t jump out of your skin?”

“I did,” he says a second time.

“What the fuck!” I splash Kai, this time using both hands, sending water crashing outside the tub.

“What’s he going to do?” Kai laughs. “What are you going to do for that matter, beat me up?”

Something’s changed in Kai the past few days. It’s like he’s grown the biggest set of balls I’ve ever seen and while normally I’d be proud of my brother, I’m too surprised to be anything but confused.

Deck hated Hyde for choking Nev. But he accepted it because she loved that part of Kai, just as she did the part of me that needed to bind her. But deep down, I know Deck hated anything that hurt her, even his own needs. So a burn...he had

to be absolutely hating this, which tells me he's holding back. But why?

I turn to Deck and when I see him studying Kai who is too busy looking at Nev to notice, it hits me. He thinks this newfound confidence of Kai's is Luke. Or at least, a sign he's returning.

I clear my throat to say something, and he holds up a hand and shakes his head. When he does, Kai swings his head around, and he drops his hand back in the water.

"Look," Kai slicks his wet hair back. "I didn't do it on purpose, but she wasn't in pain and she actually liked it. Just as she liked when you two do what you do to her. And if there is anyone here that is a risk to her here, it's you," he says to Declan pointedly.

"Excuse me?" Declan growls.

Kai hops out of the tub and sits on the ledge, pulling one knee up while leaving the other leg dangling in the water. "You and I both know you will do anything to secure control of your mother's army because without it, you can't save The Fallen, which means, you also can't save the girl we love. So if siring a child with your niece is the only way to do it, you will. You will hate it but you will because—"

Declan hops out of the tub, cutting Kai off as he storms over. Jumping up to meet him, Kai stands with his hands curled into fists. "Now you listen to me," he stares down Kai. Declan's got fewer inches on Kai than he does me, but he's still bigger than the two of us and if he threw a punch, he'd knock Kai on his ass. "I will not, under any circumstance, sire a child with my niece. And I won't do it, not because I wouldn't give my left nut to save Nev and everyone else I care about, but because there is another way. There always is."

I watch them, waiting to see if either speaks, and when neither does, I have to ask the question I know Declan doesn't want to consider. "What if there's not?"

He flicks his eyes to me. They're hard, cold, and angry, not because I asked the question, but because he has to consider it, and I'm glad I'm still in the water, because I don't feel like being knocked on my ass and that question surely would have landed me on it.

"There is." He clenches his fists, knuckles popping.

I know Deck well enough to know he's really fighting the urge to punch Kai right in the fucking teeth because the fact he has to even think about that possibility scares the shit out of him and Kai knows it. We both do. So for him to say it, well, it's just fucked up.

I heard what Declan whispered to Nev the night that he called me and asked if I wanted to watch the two of them. It wasn't just your average breeding kink. He was making love to her and trying to give her a piece of himself that would live on when he didn't. But he was immortal now, which meant that possibility might be off the table, just as it was for Kai and me.

I loved my brother. He was loyal as fuck and one of my ride or dies. But Deck was the alpha, and they like to have just a little more of everything, even our girl, and the idea he may have to give what he wanted to give Nev to someone else to save her scared the shit out of him.

"All right." I jump out of the tub and make my way over to where the two stand ready to throw punches. This shit had to stop. It wasn't good for anyone. "Come on guys, stop. Nev is a big girl. She can make her own decisions about how she expresses her love for each of us, as well as how she wants us to. Alright?" I place a hand on Deck's chest.

He blows out a heated breath. "Yeah, alright."

"Good," I pat his chest and look at Kai. "Alright man?"

He clenches his jaw and looks from me to Deck and then relaxes. "Alright."

"Good, now shake or fuck or something because all this tension isn't good for anyone. We have other things to worry

about.”

It takes a moment, but slowly Kai holds his arms open and Declan steps into them. The two hug and pat each other on the back and before stepping back, Declan cups his neck and kisses his cheek. “I love you brother.”

“I know man,” Kai pats his cheek. “Same. I’m sorry.”

“Well, what do we have here?” Nev asks cheekily, with her hands on her hips. “Are you two finally going to give me a show?”

“What are you talking about?” Declan grins.

She shrugs and looks at me, giving me a wink. “You three are going to shrivel up if you don’t get out of there soon.”

“No chance of that happening,” I laugh. “Nothing on me shrinks, baby girl.”

“Alright, big man on campus,” she smiles. “How about we figure out what we are going to wear tonight, starting with you. Toga with a codpiece?”

“Sure.” I shoot her a playful smile. “If it’s a fruit bowl.”

She laughs as do Declan and Kai and the tension in my shoulder eases. We needed to be united, not fighting as we headed into tonight. The gods were tricky, and this wasn’t the time to get tripped up by either love or possession. If anything, it was time to lean into it.

Chapter 18

Nev

“Who does it better?” Kai asks while twirling me around on the dance floor. “Olympus or *Styx*?”

I laugh as the skirt of my dress—if I can call it that—flies up and smacks me in the ass. Funny he should ask, since I feel like I should be there right now given what I’m wearing.

When Slider said the party clothes on Olympus were different from those worn for meetings, he wasn’t lying. The black bandage corset bustier top dress I’m wearing, is a far cry from the clothing worn in honor of ancient Greece. It’s more like what I would expect to see members at *Styx* wear, and that’s partly why I chose it.

We’d only been gone for a few days, but I missed home, and yearned for those first weeks when it was just the four of us and the club.

Then, Declan, Kai, and Luca were keeping me safe from a group that wanted to end my existence. Now, the four of us are fighting to save not just my existence, but all The Fallen. We’ve moved so far past our fight with the Augury it’s hard to believe it’s only been a few months since all this began. Well, for me at least.

It was a lot for anyone to carry and for just one night, I wanted to have fun and let loose, and enjoy my devastatingly beautiful boyfriends—and that’s the other reason I chose this dress. I not only felt sexy, but in control, and it screamed dominatrix. And later tonight, that is exactly what I planned to be.

It was a capped sleeve, with a dramatic open v-cut that dipped to my belly button, revealing the bustier top with double straps that ran from the cups to the neck in a halter. The

belt around the dress was the same fabric as the v detailing on the bustier, and the skirt had two slits that ran clear to the waist, revealing boy shorts connected to halter straps that ran mid-thigh.

When I walked out in it, the guys' mouths hit the floor, and my own was too busy wiping the drool from it, to see that which was dripping from theirs.

They looked hot. Each had on a pair of black dress pants that sat low on their hips, and a black patterned, button up shirt, with the sleeves rolled up. Each of their shirts had been buttoned to mid-chest, which on Declan revealed tats, Luca abs, and Kai, a sculpted physique, and leather straps wrapped around their wrists. They were mouth-watering in their singular beauty and I didn't know who I wanted first because I wanted them all.

While I wanted to have fun, I also wanted the night to be over so I could bring them back here and go for round two of what we'd started in the dining room that night before Luke kidnapped me and took me to Locksley.

Tonight, I planned to push their limits in a way I know they were game—I just needed to make them see what I could. The four of us together, no boundaries, and no rules.

Until then, the night was young and I was glad to spend time on Kai's arm as Declan and Luca mingled and met the others, listening and learning all that they could. The two together were sex personified and I was secure in the fact they were mine, to encourage them to use whatever they could to get what they needed—except for touching. There was no touching allowed by anyone in this room and if they did, I wouldn't hesitate to protect what was mine.

I was seconds away from bringing down the hall earlier when Thea dared to put her hand on Declan and size him up like he was dessert. I may not have used the full strength of my power since that night at Locksley, but I wouldn't hesitate to use them on anyone that dared touch them.

Looking over at Thea holding court, I can't deny she is beautiful. Wearing an olive green tube dress, and gold bracelets that wrapped up her arm, and gold heels with straps that wound around her leg all the way to her knee, she was every bit the child of a god. But Declan's eyes, as well as those of Luca and Kai, were on me and only me, from the moment I walked out of the bedroom in this dress, to now.

I'd felt both Declan and Luca watching me while Kai and I were dancing, and I couldn't help but relish the feel of their eyes roaming over my body. Even across a crowded room the very thought of both made me shiver, and I was lucky to have Kai in my arms, to satisfy the ache in my body. He was a great dancer, and his hold was intoxicating, and I loved being able to drift in and out of sweet kisses with him, as we swayed on the dance floor.

Slider's eyes, however, were locked on Thea. Despite his earlier flirting, he clearly only had eyes for her, and I wondered what their relationship was, other than the obvious. How old were they, and how long had they been working together to take control of Olympus? And make no mistake about it, that's exactly what they were both about.

I could smell power hungry whores a mile away. I had been friends with Sasha for a spell, but I knew she was all about control. When I was friends with her, I didn't mind. But once she was out of the picture, I was reminded just why I hated girls like her, and didn't know Thea yet, but already decided I loathed her. She wanted to have a baby with one of my men. That made her an enemy. And Slider...he may think he's fooling us, but I've got my eye on him.

When the song ends, Kai and I make our way over to a table with a tower of chalices that trickle a waterfall of what Slider called, Luna's Punch. It's sweet, and slides down your throat smoothly, filling the senses with warmth and igniting little explosions on your tongue. After two cups I feel properly buzzed and start to relax.

As Kai and I stand together and assess the room, a petite girl with bright green eyes and auburn colored hair comes over. She introduces herself as Persephone's granddaughter, Liv, and after telling us how glad she is to meet us, leans in and whispers, "remember the blood of the gods can be in all of us."

When she pulls back, she winks at me, in time for a handsome gentleman of the same height to come up behind her, grab her by the hips and kiss her on the cheek. I hope to hell they're not related because they make a great looking couple and there is only so much family fucking I can take. Unfortunately, as I came to learn only minutes later, they are.

His name is Ronan and he is the son of Hermes, a half-sibling of Declan's mom. They shared the same father—Zeus—but different mothers, and unlike Thea, it sounded like Ronan did not have one bitter bone in his body about his aunt.

Persephone was the daughter of Zeus as well, which made Liv and Ronan relatives, but since she was Persephone's great-granddaughter, I decided instantly they're likable.

The four of us spend the next thirty minutes drinking and eating and sharing stories from below, as they say. Turns out, the children of the gods do not return to Earth as often as they like. Something about the staying power of nectar, to which Liv reaches for the chalice in my hand and says, "to have your wits, your mind must remain clear."

It's then I realize these powerful, hungry, sexy thoughts I've been having must be driven by the punch. "Son of a bitch," Kai sets his chalice down and pinches the skin at the bridge of his nose. "I thought I was feeling overly virile."

"It's okay," Ronan pats him on the back. "Stick to the wine and you'll be fine."

"Master of words," Kai points. "You get that from your dad."

"I do," he smiles proudly. "Language and writing was his thing. I like you, son of Luke. You know the gods. I am proud

to call you a friend.”

“Ugh,” Kai drops his head back. “Just Kai is fine.”

“Daddy issues?” Liv asks me.

“The worst,” I nod with a smile.

This feels good. It’s almost like Kai and I are a couple at a party. Not a feast welcoming my second boyfriend into the fold, while my third mingles and works his magic.

Ronan and Liv excuse themselves and once they are gone, Kai and I decide they are relatives we *want* to see on holidays. We both fall into a fit of laughter at the idea of what a holiday dinner could look like given well, all of our bloodlines, and just as I inhale to draw in breath to ease the burn of laughter, a firm hand grabs my arm and spins me around, pulling it right out of my lungs.

I look up and find Declan’s eyes blazing as he reaches for the chalice in my hand. “Do not drink that.”

“We know,” Kai rolls his eyes. “Stick with wine, you’re fine.”

I hiccup and Luca comes up behind Declan, hand on his shoulder. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah.” Deck looks over at him. “If you call drugging us, so that we spill our secrets and let them in.”

Luca looks down at the cup in his own hand and sets it down on the table next to us. Easing his grip on my arm, Declan looks at me in apology. “I’m sorry, princess.”

I’m about to tell him not to worry about it when Kai reaches for Declan’s hand and throws it back. “You know what, Deck. Fuck off.”

His eyes narrow and he closes the space between us. “Come again, brother?”

“You heard me. Fuck you, and you,” he lifts his chin at Luca.

“Yo!” Luca holds his hands open and leans in. “What the hell did we do?”

“Ignore him,” Declan turns. “It’s the punch talking.”

“Maybe,” Kai grips Declan and turns him back around. “Or maybe, I’m just tired of you being alpha all...the...time. I was patient. I shared her with you *and* Hyde. And now we finally get to have a night where it’s just us. Not you,” he pokes Declan’s chest with his finger, “or you,” he does the same to Luca.

Luca’s brows raise to his hairline. “Brother, you better remove that finger right now before I break it and shove part of it up your ass.”

“I’d like to see you try,” Kai laughs.

I should be scared that the three I love more than anything are at each other’s throats, ready to rip each other to pieces. But I’m not. I’m so turned on right now, I want to take all of them back to our room and fuck the night away. And that’s what we need. The four of us raw and unfiltered, to obliterate the tension that had been building for days.

The guys would never admit it...well, maybe Luca, but they needed to fuck it out, too. I was never surer of this fact than on this trip where innuendos and heated glances have made my cheeks blush, on more than one occasion. I not only wanted them to devour me, but I want to watch them consume each other. And it’s a need that is so carnal, and wicked, I can’t deny it any longer.

Declan and Luca have shared me before, and of course, there was that moment between the four of us before everything happened at Locksley, so I knew the chemistry that exists between us. My boys were hot and when they loved me, even hotter. But seeing them explore and love each other as I knew they did...that would probably be the hottest thing ever. Just thinking about it makes my nipples hard and pussy wet, and we need to get out of here, right...fucking...now.

“Come with me,” I command, and don’t wait for an answer. I don’t have to. The three are on my heels faster than jack rabbits coming out of hibernation.

When we get to the bedroom, I turn and find them standing shoulder to shoulder. The look on their face is priceless. They think I’m going to berate them for fighting. If only they knew what was about to happen.

Swallowing down my need for them, I tell my greedy body to be patient, and channel the most commanding voice that I can. “Get undressed.”

“What?” Luca’s lip hitches.

“You heard me,” I place both hands on my hips. “Get undressed. Now.”

They look at one another, brows lifted, and when they turn back around and see me waiting, fingers tapping, they do as I asked.

As if being controlled by the same puppeteer, they kick off their shoes first, followed by their shirts, then their pants until they’re standing there in nothing more than matching black briefs, clinging to their uniquely exquisite bodies.

“What’s going on princess?” Declan asks with a confident smirk. “Are you going to punish us for what happened downstairs?”

Luca’s eyes flash and I know he would like nothing more than for me to spank him and call him a bad boy. He’s already proven to be a fan of submission, but what I want goes beyond that little kink. What I want strikes right at the heart of us.

“Briefs too, boys,” I reply, answering Declan’s question with another demand.

Shrugging as if it's the easiest order they've ever followed, they peel their briefs off and toss them aside, laying bare their obvious need for me. Each stands at attention, and I feel like Goldilocks. Only no cock is too big or too small, each is just right...and all mine.

But this isn't about me. This is about them. I want to give them what they have given me—freedom, love, and acceptance to express their feelings openly and without judgment or rules. They've done so for me, but now it's time they did so for one another.

There is love that runs deep between the three. A bond that has kept them together in the darkest of days. I need them to see they aren't only bonded in their love for me, but by that which they have for one another.

I make my way over to Kai first, stopping just shy of our bodies touching. Placing my hand on his chest, I tip my head up and stare into those marvelous gold eyes. “You're so beautiful,” I smile adoringly. “So full of light. Never doubt how much you are loved or needed.”

Wrapping my hand around the back of his neck, I pull his head down and draw him into a kiss. It's sweet and soft and everything we are. But just before pulling back, I nibble his lower lip—a nod to whom he has also become. My spark of fire and connection to the bloodline we share.

When I step back, he brushes his thumb across my lower lip and winks, as I shift to the left and find myself face to face with Luca.

My wicked boy. My cunning charmer with the sassy mouth and hypnotic kisses. When he binds me I feel safe and in turn, remind him who he was, and still is. Without Luca, the power of my Fallen blood would have swallowed me whole, and the burn in his would have eaten him alive. I need him, but the two standing next to him do just as much.

I wrap my arms around his waist and lean my cheek flat against his sculpted chest. There are no safe words with us

because I do not need them. We have no limits, and I need him to show Declan and Kai this. “Show them how it can be,” I whisper. “To love, without boundaries.”

He lowers his head to my hair and breathes me in. “I got you, baby girl. And them.”

When I step back, the smile he gives me is brighter than the Cheshire cat. I knew he would understand. Without having to say a word, he knows what the four of us need, and he will be the one who pushes us not only into the dark abyss but brings us back out.

Moving on from Luca, I take one last step to my left and find myself face to face with Declan. My first love, and lover. The first boy I dreamed about, and the first I allowed to see my soul bare. Sometimes the weight he carries is so heavy, it suffocates his needs to the point he can't even see them. But I do. I have from the moment I came back to them. He just needs to see them, too.

He's owned me in every way imaginable and he will always be the first to claim me, but he needs to let go of the idea that he has to always be the one in charge. He needs to let go, and feel, and love...not just me, but them.

Placing a hand on his heart, I look up and when his gray eyes find mine, I can't stop the tears that prick the corners. The way I feel about him is so intense, it's sometimes hard to remember to breathe.

“Why do you allow them to love me?” I ask.

His eyes search mine, troubled. “Princess?”

“Why did their needs matter, Deck? Why do you care what they want when what they want is me?”

He looks over at Luca and Kai, and the surprise in his eyes when he sees they aren't looking at him in confusion, but curiosity, is clear. “I...don't know,” he stammers as he turns his attention back to me.

“You know.” I press my hand down harder on his chest. “In here, you know.”

He looks down, as if his eyes will somehow betray him, but when I tip his chin up, I see the answer clear as day. “Because I can’t bear the thought of you or them with anyone else,” he says quietly.

Moving my hand to the back of his head, I twine my fingers through his hair, knowing how hard that was for him to say. I know he’s never wanted me with anyone but him, but that obsession...that possession that comes with love, it also includes Kai and Luca, and Declan needs to accept that he loves them, too.

“It is the four of us now and forever.” I close the inches between our bodies; the length of his erection pressing into me. “We are bound to you, just as you are to them.”

He wraps an arm around my waist, and lowers his forehead to mine, exhaling as if he’s been holding his breath for an eternity.

“Clearly, I have your heart, but so do they,” I whisper. “Let go and show them you love them and let them show you, too.”

The four of us never felt wrong, even though a part of the world in which we existed would have us thinking otherwise. Among The Fallen, no one batted an eye on who loved whom. But the world of man, for every two steps forward, took ten back. They would not see four hearts bound to one another as love. They would see it as strange. No matter how far mankind believed love is love, that love had limits to those who could not understand. They wanted you to keep it to yourself if they did not see it as anything but beautiful. But I didn’t want us to keep anything to ourselves. Not now, not ever. Fuck the haters. Love wins, always.

“Look at them,” I encourage and when I do, his eyes flit to his two best friends. “They’re gorgeous, and brilliant, and kind, and they are yours, just as I am. Doesn’t matter where

we are...even in a room full of gods, they only have eyes for you and me. So give in, Deck. Let them love you, back.”

The air in the room thickens; a strange pulsing in my body starts to hammer away at my nerves, begging to be fed. A hunger that does give two fucks about boundaries or rules. I want to see them love each other and then I want to see them love me.

“You’ve been ignoring the inevitable for months. Aren’t you tired of being the one in control all the time? Don’t you just want to let go?”

A look of lust and need fills his eyes and when he reaches out for Luca and grips his neck, my heart stops. And then with me between them there’s teeth clanking and tongues tangling and fuck, I’ve never been more turned-on in my entire life. I thought it would be hot. But seeing it... “Fuck me,” I say on my exhale.

When Declan and Luca pull apart, the smile on both of their faces is undeniable. Looking like a lost puppy, Kai opens his mouth to say something, and without missing a beat, Luca swings his head in his direction. “Oh shut up, fucker,” he reaches for him and brings his mouth to his.

Declan and I laugh and I can’t help but feel the shift. It has always been about their love and need for me. But now it was about the need we had for one another, and I couldn’t wait to finally scratch that itch that had been gnawing at us.

“To be clear,” Deck says while watching the two, “I’m not into dick. Her ass is the only one I plan to tap.”

Luca pulls back from locking lips with Kai and punches him lightly on the arm. “Oh, for sure, brother,” he turns and gives Declan a shit-eating grin. “My mother’s symbol was a cat. I was born to like pussy. One, in particular.”

“Well, we are in total agreement there,” the two bump fists. “But hey, if there’s one in my way...” Declan adds with a shrug, and when his voice trails off something tells me we’ve just crossed into anything goes territory...and I am here for it.

“Same,” Luca replies wickedly. “Game on.”

As the three look at me, gazes turning heated, my need reaches a tipping-point. “Well then,” I unsnap my belt, followed by the zip on the back of my dress. Easing it from my shoulders, it glides down my body and pools at my feet, leaving me standing there in my bustier, boy shorts with the garters attached, and heels. “Shall we?”

Chapter 19

Nev

No sooner does my dress hit the floor, than the three are stalking towards me, and peeling off my clothes.

Declan stands behind me, unsnapping the button on the halter strap around my neck, followed by those on my bustier, then removing it and dropping it to the floor, as Luca kneels in front of me and pulls my boy shorts and garters down. But Kai, my little hellion in training, removes one heel and then the other, before kissing the instep of my foot, and running his hand up the back of my leg and grabbing the ass cheek he branded.

I lean my head back against Declan's chest as he sucks my neck and cups my breasts, while Luca slides a hand between my legs and groans with approval when he feels how wet I am. Their touch sends pleasure shooting through every nerve ending and the fire in my core flashes.

"You like that?" Declan growls, as Luca pushes my legs apart and leans in, and laps at my pussy.

"Mm-hmm," I sigh, and bite my lip.

I am putty in their hands as they kiss and touch me, and I am so ready to fall into the exquisite bliss of us, my body aches. But I can't lose my head yet. I need to make sure they shatter those boundaries between them first.

"Where do you want us?" Luca looks up at me, mouth glistening with my arousal.

I draw in a breath, channeling control. "In the bedroom."

"Alright princess." Declan gives my neck one last nibble, gripping my tits with ownership, before letting go and stepping back. "Lead the way."

Kai and Luca stand up and I place a hand on each of their cheeks wanting them to know this was an hors-d'oeuvres, and what comes next the appetizer to a full-course meal I want us all to consume until we're full.

I make my way to the bedroom, the heat coming off the three as they walk behind me making my fingers twitch in anticipation, and when we pass through the archway and find ourselves at the foot of the bed, I turn to them.

“Kai,” I look at my golden boy, “get on the bed and lay back against the headboard. You two,” I shift my attention to Deck and Luca, “stay here, but get ready.”

They look at one another with a mix of surprise and hunger, and start stroking their cocks, enthralled by my command. As they move their strong hands up and down their rock hard shafts, eyes on me, I can't help but marvel at how perfect they are. How perfect, obedient, and mine.

“Good.” I wink and turn back to Kai who is now on the bed. He has positioned himself exactly as I instructed and that pleases me.

Truthfully, I thought Kai may be the hardest to unravel. When it was the four of us, he claimed me, just as his brothers, but he was holding back a bit. I could feel it in the tension in his muscles and the way he used moans to tell me what he wanted and what felt good.

Tonight, I wanted the Kai he was becoming. The one on the plane who fucked me and marked me as his. The boy who was my knight, and the man who opened himself up to me and let me love both his darkness and light.

I crawl over to him on my hands and knees and position myself between his legs placing a hand on his chest. “To be loved, and needed,” I move my hand down over his chiseled physique. “There is nothing like it in the world. And they do,” I look over my shoulder. “They love you and need you to be happy. So let yourself go, Kai. Feel every emotion, every sensation of us.”

He flicks his eyes to Declan and Luca, who stand stoically stroking their dicks. They can't hear what I'm saying, and they're not supposed to. They will get their turn, but his moment right now is for Kai.

Placing a kiss on his lips, I trail my mouth down his neck, pecs, stomach and then abs; the muscles between his Adonis belt contracting as near his long, strong dick. It stands at attention, ready for me, and when I lower my head and swirl my tongue around the tip, Luca and Declan suck in a sharp breath.

Taking my time, I taste the bead of precum that leaks out, salty on my tongue, and lick him like a lollipop. His skin is sweet, his breaths easy, but when I work my way down his shaft, licking the vein that runs under the shaft, while grazing the skin with my teeth, his breathing grows more ragged.

As his cock hits the back of my throat, I hollow my cheeks and suck and he grabs my head with one hand while throwing his head back.

"Fu...fuck," he pants as the fabric of the headboard absorbs the impact, and he thrusts his hips up, stuffing my mouth full. "Shit, gorgeous, just like that."

I know what I'm doing is sending the most intense pleasure through him because one, Kai rarely swears, and two, I can feel his cock swelling in my mouth. Preening with satisfaction, I slide a hand between my legs, and knowing full well my pussy is on display for Deck and Luca, start to rub my clit, while swaying my ass back and forth.

Seeing me touch myself, while blowing Kai, the two let out a little groan, and when I flick my eyes over at them and see their strokes have grown faster, I turn my attention back to Kai.

"Gorgeous," he grabs my head with both hands. "I'm going to come."

Releasing his dick with a wet pop, I swipe my finger along my lower lip and look up. His eyes are glazed, his heart racing,

and I know his body aches for release. I can tell by the way he's clenching his thighs.

"I know." I rub my hand up and down his dick slowly while he focuses on me. "And I want you to."

"Not before you," he shakes his head. "Your needs come first."

There he is. My sweet guy with patience and manners. The one who wanted to make out in a movie theater and take me on dates before we even had sex. He is a gentle, and kind lover, but the last few days I have seen a side of him that is selfish. One that wants what his brothers have and isn't shy about telling them. And what happened downstairs, is part of what brought this to a head, no pun intended.

Kai has been struggling with his loss of Hyde, and the way his emotions have wreaked havoc on his heart has been painful to watch. But when he found out that Hyde wasn't gone, it flipped a switch in him. I could see he was no longer trying to run away from the parts of him that had always been hidden. He was embracing them and it was manifesting itself in a confidence and need for me that was delicious.

When we had sex on the plane and it drew out his Hellfire, it told me he too, needed to be connected to that part of himself. It was his birthright. And right now, I wanted him to know not only did I embrace that side of him and those needs, but Declan and Luca, too. In watching him have me the way he wants, they are showing Kai just how much they love him and will do anything for him to be at peace.

"You want to come, Kai, you come. Show your brothers that you are part of this foursome. Show them. Own me and command them."

He rakes his top teeth over his lower lip and nods slowly, and when I push up onto my knees and look over my shoulder, he calls out for Luca. "Get over here," he demands as I wiggle my finger for Luca to join us.

He climbs onto the bed, dick so hard it touches his stomach, and looks at me, wickedly. “Where do you want me, baby girl?”

I turn to Kai. “Well?” I ask. “It’s your call.”

Gripping my chin, he studies my face, and then he crashes his mouth down on mine, kissing me hard, before shoving my head down. “You, suck,” he lets out a little moan as my lips wrap around his dick. “And you,” he says to Luca. “Take what you’ve always wanted.”

Luca’s brows lift and when Kai nods for him to do as he says, I can feel the excitement in his touch as he grabs my hip with one hand and scoots closer behind me. He’s about to get something I know he wants and Declan has never let him have—and that is what this is all about. Breaking their rules and chains and bringing them someplace entirely new.

Grabbing my ass with both hands, Luca spreads my cheeks as I bob up and down on Kai’s dick, and when he swipes his tongue up my crack, I let out a little moan. I know his tongue well, but it feels different than Deck’s there, and I want more.

Pushing back, he spears the tight hole with his tongue, swirling around and around, before pulling massaging it with his thumb. “Shit your ass is tight.”

“Be careful,” Declan calls out angrily; his need to own that part of me, making it hard for him to keep quiet. “It’s not a toy.”

“She’s fine,” Kai rasps, and encourages Luca to continue.

Sliding my hand back between my legs, Luca changes from using his thumb on my puckered hole, to his finger. It pinches as it always does as first, and I rub my clit harder to distract me from the sting.

Once he’s knuckle deep, he eases his finger in and out of me slowly, and I feel my body opening up to him. “Good girl,” he grips my hip tighter as the burn subsides. “Let me in.”

Spreading my cheeks open, he spits, and using his free hand, plays with my pussy for a moment, before bringing it to my ass, and massaging my hole again. The combination of his spit and my arousal makes it nice and slippery, and when he nudges the tip of his cock against the tight space, it breaches easily and without pain.

“Shit,” he puffs out, holding me tight with one hand, while rubbing my back with the other as he eases into me further. “Are you, okay?”

“Mm-hmm,” I murmur around Kai’s cock, which sends a vibration through him that makes him groan in ecstasy.

Once Luca is in me all the way, he slaps my ass, and clicks his tongue against the roof of his mouth. “Fucking hell,” he grips both hips, “I’m going to bust a nut seeing your ass take my dick like this. Now I know why you kept it to yourself, Deck.”

“Shut up man, and fuck her,” he replies anxiously. “You can’t just leave your dick in there.”

I look over at him, wanting him to know that I am okay, and when Luca starts to thrust in and out of me harder, and Kai pushes up on his knees, and grabs my head with both hands, the look on Declan’s face changes. The sound of skin slapping and heavy breathing fills the room and hearing our shared moans of pleasure shifts the look in his eyes from one of concern to hunger.

My climax builds as the three of us move together, and when I’m ready for Declan, I motion for him to join us.

He storms over to the bed and kneels at the edge, then crawls toward me, and positions his head underneath me and starts with my tits, licking one nipple, circling the hard bead with his tongue, before sucking it into his mouth and biting, then doing the same with the other.

When my breasts become heavy and nipples hard to the point of pain, he works his mouth down my body. Feeling him

worship me, while yielding to Kai and Luca's command of my body, I am so proud of my sexy, possessive alpha.

"That's it, baby," I purr, while running a hand through his hair. "Let them show you how good they love me. Then you can show them how much you love them."

His dick twitches with my words and he kicks a knee up and pushes back so his head is directly under my pussy. Spreading my lips open he finds my clit and rubs gentle circles around the sensitive knot, then starts to suck.

My back arches, and tiny shocks jolt my body. "Shit, yes," I grab his head and hold his mouth to my wet, throbbing pussy, "right there."

Declan devours me as if it's his last meal, and when his mouth finds its way to Luca's shaft, he starts his assault there, too. Luca jerks with the flick of Declan's tongue, and thinking of him working both me and Luca, shoots my climax skyrocketing close to release.

Letting go of his head, I move my back up and down, and as the four of us consume one another, my orgasm hits, rocking my body. Declan moans as I whimper and writhe as when he slips two fingers in me and milks my orgasm with his hand and tongue, he groans with satisfaction. "That's right, princess. Come for me. Soak my face."

Feeling me grip his cock, Luca starts kneading my ass the way he does when he's close to coming, and when Declan grabs his balls with his free hand, and massages them, Luca blows out a charged breath.

"Your turn, brother," Declan commands. "I gave you that part of our girl. Now fill her up and make me proud."

"Oh fuck," Luca pants as Declan's tongue swipes the base of his dick again, and I know his mouth is doing to Luca, what it does to me.

We probably look like a carnival sideshow—the four of us wrapped around one another, limbs and bodies, bent and bound—but it feels so good for our hearts to be so open, and

vulnerable, that I don't give a shit what it looks like. I only care what it feels like and that ecstasy we are drawing out in each other is the feeling of us, and there is nothing else like it in the world.

Kai is the next to hit his climax, shooting warm ropes of cum down my throat while gripping my head tight, and with Declan under me groaning and Luca and Kai moaning, the most obscene, yet beautiful sounds fill the room.

As Kai slumps back against the headboard, easing his dick from my mouth, my own unintelligible words join the symphony. "Ngh...sh....shit...fu..."

Declan chuckles as Luca pulls back, pressing his forehead to my lower back, before kissing it. "Shit, baby girl. That was..."

"Fucking amazing," Declan finishes his thought, massaging my hips as Kai reaches for my face and holding it delicately in his hands, pulls me into a deep kiss.

"Do you like the way you taste?" I whisper against his lips.

"Fucking love it," he whispers back, kissing me for another moment, before letting go and sliding off the bed.

When it's just Declan, Luca and I, the two look at one another, shit-eating grins on their faces. Something tells me the two have been dancing around their sexual connection for quite some time, and I'd just helped them satisfy the need that both had been itching to scratch.

"How'd I taste, brother?" Luca asks.

"Almost as good as our girl," Declan shoots back, not missing a beat. "Now if you don't mind, I need to come."

Reaching for me, Declan pulls me onto his lap and thrusts into me easily, and despite my wet, satisfied pussy, manages to stretch and fill me in a way that brings my nerves to life once more.

Pressing both hands down on either side of his head, I move my hips back and forth, riding him hard and fast, and

when he sits up, I wrap my legs around him as he bottoms out.

While holding me tight he bites my neck, shoulder, and collarbone—any space his hungry mouth can find—and I throw my head back reveling in the exquisite feeling. For a moment it's just he and I as our sweat-covered bodies slide against one another, and when he opens his mouth, I press my finger to it. "I know, my love. I know."

Luca makes his way over, wrapping my long hair around his hand, and when he pulls my head back, he claims my mouth and pulls me into one of his sensual kisses.

While he holds my chin and pulls us into that sweet abyss that only his kisses can, Kai surprises all three of us, and pushes me down gently. Easing down on his back, Deck wraps his arms around my back loosely as Kai stands behind me, and slides his cock, right into my ass.

Luca watches, licking his lips, as I spread my ass cheeks while Kai and Declan DP me, and before I know what's happening, Declan sits up, reaches for Kai's neck and pulls him forward for a kiss.

The two have been at odds the last few days, but no more. With the simple act, Declan is telling Kai he loves and accepts him, just as we all do, and the love I feel for both soars. I grab their heads, the intimacy between the two so beautiful it brings tears to my eyes, and with an arm wrapped around both, my orgasm hits hard and fast.

As my climax rocks my body, they shift their mouths from one another to me, each sucking a breast, and when I'm done coming, Kai pulls out and I lay down on Declan's chest, panting and sweaty.

While catching my breath, he covers my forehead in feather light kisses. "You're fucking amazing, princess. So perfect. So ours."

Claiming my mouth again, he rolls me onto my back and pushes up onto his knees, wrapping his arm around my thigh and holding my leg up, against his chest.

As he flicks his hips, Luca bends down and laps at my clit, and this time, it's his skilled tongue that strokes my pussy and the base of Declan's dick.

I swear to fuck, these boys are going to kill me, because watching Luca bring pleasure to Declan's determined face is the hottest thing I've ever seen and my greedy body wants all three of them again.

As if hearing my thoughts, Luca swings his leg over me, plants his knees on either side of my body, and gives me access to his beautifully hard cock. I take him deep in my throat, as Declan fucks me harder, and when I see Kai cup Luca's balls while stroking my head, I think I've died and gone to Heaven.

The pace they set is feverish, but when Kai climbs on the bed behind me and stretches his long legs out on either side of my head, Declan and Luca stop for a moment so he can pull me up onto him so my back is flush with his chest. Once I am comfortable, he enters me again, anally, and after grabbing my legs and holding them open, Declan eases his massive cock into my throbbing cunt again.

As they ease in and out of me in alternating rhythm, I reach out for Luca who is kneeling next to me watching them raptly. Wrapping my hand around the base of his cock, I stroke him slowly, and when I wrap my lips around the tip, and suck, he reaches between my legs and rubs my clit.

"Fuck, baby girl," he pants and when my pussy starts to clench, I close my eyes as Declan goes balls deep.

"Open your eyes," he rasps, and when my eyes whip open and find him, he grunts and fills me, followed by Kai, and Luca, and my own orgasm, which races through me like wildfire.

Declan collapses on me first, followed by Luca who falls down on the bed beside us, and Kai eases out of me, but stays put, wrapping his arms around me and planting a kiss on my head.

As I close my eyes and listen to our erratic breathing, I can't help but notice how our hearts have fallen into rhythm.

We pass out, a tangled, satisfied, albeit sticky mess, and when we wake up a short while later, do it all over again. There isn't one hole they don't fill, one inch of my body they don't claim, and one line we don't cross, and it is everything I wanted.

They were my boys once, and now they're my men. Men who love me and each other, in every way possible. It doesn't matter what anyone says or what challenges come our way, our future is limitless because the four of us are now bound in every way possible, and together we are unstoppable.

Chapter 20

Kai

“Look at her,” I whisper to Deck. We’re laying side by side, one arm behind our head, as Nev sleeps peacefully on Luca’s chest. “Are we the luckiest bastards in the universe, or what?”

“Well you got one thing right. We are lucky, that’s for sure. But bastards...naw man, that’s all you and Luca. My parents were married.”

I look over at him and when he grins I can’t help but laugh. “Touche.” I turn my attention to the ceiling and take a deep breath. “How about sons of bitches then?” I suggest on my exhale.

Declan scrubs a hand down his face and I know he read between the lines of my comment. “You want to talk about it?” He drops his hand and side-eyes me.

Both his and Luca’s moms were goddesses. Mine was a messed up headcase that slept with the Devil. I wasn’t sure I’d ever be ready to discuss her, considering I was still trying to unpack what was in the folder Nev’s mother gave me.

“Not yet,” I shake my head. “Let’s leave tonight be what it was.”

“And that was?” Deck raises a brow.

“Perfect. Tomorrow we can dive into the suck.”

“Fitting choice of words,” he laughs and nudges me with his leg.

It was fitting. I’d never kissed or fucked so much in my short existence. Not even when I was Hyde because my body never felt so satisfied, or at peace, which was strange because in all our years together, I’d not one thought about my brothers sexually or considered crossing the line.

Even though Declan and Luca were hot as hell, and the most beautiful beings in any room, I didn't feel the urge to tap it so to speak, no matter how satisfying tonight had been. While sure, I saw beauty in the masculine and feminine, my connection with others had more to do with energy, and that's what it had always been with Nev.

She was my friend first, and as a kid, the only one who appreciated my intellect. But as she got older, it was her very nature that drew me in. Sure, she was beautiful, and those blue eyes breathtaking, but her very spirit beguiled me. It was always her heart that lit up the room. At least it was until she got to Locksley. Then, her body elicited an all new craving that was hard to deny.

Whether it was those cut-off shorts she liked to wear, her long shiny hair that always smelled like strawberries, or the tight polo shirts of her uniform, everything about her drove me wild. Each time I saw her I fell harder, and by the time we graduated, I was so far in over my head, I didn't know where the line was between friend and more.

But I knew the guys wanted her, too. Declan's eyes had betrayed him for years, and Luca's flirtatious nature made it impossible to even think about pursuing anything. Not to mention the fact I didn't want to ruin the best thing in my life. And that's exactly what would have happened had any one of us made a move on her. I'd possibly lose her and them, and that idea alone was paralyzing.

Yet, there was always something more between the four of us. Always a connection that went beyond friendship. While sure, now I knew the fate we were all tied to was part of it, the simple truth was, we all loved one another, and the idea of one of them not being a part of my life hurt in a way nothing else did. While I'd always thought I was the only one that felt that way, I now know better.

Tonight, it was clear—I would do anything to anyone that tried to hurt any one of them, and they would do the same for

me. It was love, pure and simple, and Nev, knowing us as she did, knew we needed to not only say it, but express it.

It's why Declan and Luca need to know about Hyde. You didn't keep secrets from those you loved, and they needed to know he was not gone. I hate even bringing it up, but if we couldn't talk about it while naked in bed, covered in each other's cum, when could we?

It wasn't my truth to tell, and at the same time it was, and when Nev woke up, I was planning to talk to her about filling them in now, instead of when we got back. This trip had turned into something we didn't expect, and I wasn't sure what was waiting for us in Valhalla. The sooner they knew, the better.

"You okay?" Declan asks, while turning on his side when I grow eerily quiet.

I blow out a pensive breath. "Yeah, just thinking."

"You're not worried this is going to change things, are you?"

I can't help but roll my eyes. "No."

"Good," he looks over at Nev. "Because as Luca said earlier, I still like pussy. But dick is fair game if it gets in my way." I shoot him a curious look and he shrugs. "Just saying."

The two of us laugh again. I know well how much Declan loves Nev's pussy and I know he's ribbing me. If there was a choice between her ass or Luca's I know he'd be sidled up behind Nev in no time. But removing those barriers sure did make it easier to do whatever in the pursuit of pleasure.

"You two want to quit it with the pillow talk?" Luca whispers. "Our girl is exhausted. We worked the fuck out of her."

"I know what my girl needs," Declan flips him off. Yup, no matter who's dick he licked, Deck was still the alpha.

"Can you believe with all of that sweat our girl still smells like Heaven?" Luca buries his head in her hair and takes a

deep breath. “God, I want to feel those ripe tits press against me all day, every day.”

“Luca.” I drop my hand. “Come on, man.”

“What?” He looks at me eyes wide. “*Now* you’re modest?”

“It has nothing to do with modesty. It has to do with time and place.”

“And?” He looks from me to Declan.

“Not the time, or the place brother,” he says.

“How is this not the time or place? You two can pillow talk but want to crucify me when I do?”

“Because we’re exhausted, she’s exhausted. Just...ease up.”

“Shit,” Luca laughs and lays his head back on the pillow. “Ease up? You ease up. My morning wood hurts like fuck. I could go another round.”

Declan groans as do I. “Ok,” Luca smirks. “Maybe not another round like the last couple but some slow, soft, morning sex.” He stretches his arms overhead, careful not to wake Nev. “I could go for that.”

I flick my eyes to the archways that lead out to the balcony, and seeing it’s still dark out, look back at him. “Well tell your dick to go to sleep. It’s not morning yet and we should let our girl rest as long as she wants. It’s been a long, what, twenty-four hours?”

Luca yawns and closes his eyes. “What day is it even?”

“I don’t know,” I admit. “But we need to find an answer to grandpa’s decree, and fast.”

Declan sits up and rests his back against the headboard. “Speaking of, did you two learn anything useful at the feast?”

“Yeah,” Luca looks at Declan and grins. “That basically, the gods are more or less all related.”

I can't help but shake my head. "And had you paid attention in Thompson's class, you would have learned that."

"Look," he holds up a hand. "Enough about Thompson's class."

"All right." I hold up my own hand in return. "Fair enough."

"You know," Deck rubs his chin. "I was talking to one of the siren's daughters, Cleo or Clarey, or something. I don't know, can't remember. It was after a couple of cups of fucking Luna's Punch and got the distinct impression Thea isn't liked. In fact, she's a bit of a tyrant. Something tells me we could get a few members of my twisted family tree on our side should I try to claim my mother's seat."

"That could be a plan." Luca shifts and Nev whimpers slightly.

"I like it," I lower my voice so I don't wake her, "but it seems like that would take time, which we have little of."

"True," Luca agrees. "What about you and Nev? Make any headway?"

I fill them in on the time we spent with Liv and Ronan and admit that they seem like good ones to get on our side if it comes to that, and Declan makes a note to get to know them better.

Luca runs through a list of names and information, some of it useful, other bits not so much, and when Nev stirs again and twitches like she's having a dream, I put my hand on her back to steady her.

"Hyde," she says sleepily.

I freeze, wondering if she's dreaming and about to start talking in her sleep, but then her eyes open slowly and find mine.

"Hey gorgeous," I smile softly. "Having a dream?"

Her eyes fill with tears and she pushes up from Luca's chest sluggishly and looks from him to Declan. "No."

He sits forward, clearly alarmed by her response. "You okay?"

"I didn't crush him," she says quietly.

Declan looks at me, and then Luca, who sits up straighter. "What do you mean?" he asks. "Were you dreaming about what happened at Locksley?"

"I love you," she says numbly. "I love all of you, so much. And what we just shared...I don't want to lie to you. Not when you have been so open with me, and each other."

She pulls the sheet to her chest and looks down, and Declan looks at me, one brow raised. I know he's trying to make sense of what she's trying to say—if perhaps she's rambling in that haze between sleep and awake. But I say nothing and wait for her to continue.

"He kept pleading with me but I couldn't do it." She draws in a shaky breath and looks back up. "I couldn't crush him as if he didn't matter."

When Declan hears what she's just said and realizes that she is awake and not rambling, he draws in a deep breath and blows it out.

"Hyde's still exists," he says matter of fact and she nods her head slowly in acknowledgement. "I knew something was going on. That morning in the closet...and the last few days..."

Nev reaches over me and grabs his hand. "I wanted to tell you. I did...I just..."

He grabs her hand and rubs the top of it with his thumb. "You don't have to explain, princess. I get it."

She works her lower lip with her teeth and her watery eyes glisten. "Really?"

“Of course.” He brings her hand to his lips and places a soft kiss on the back of it. “I’m just glad you’ve been weird because of this and not because Luke returned.”

“Is that why you have been so short with me?” I ask.

“Partly,” he nods. “And to be honest, I’m glad it’s this and not that.”

“So, you’re not mad?”

“Fuck no.” He shakes his head, then looks from me to Nev. “Wait,” he stops. “You knew?”

“Well of course,” she answers before I can. “Hyde is part of him so he was feeling...off.”

“Is that where your surge in confidence these past few days came from?” Luca asks.

“I think so,” I reply, and turn to him. “Although it feels like me, too. The Hellfire I can summon now comes from a dark place and it emboldens me, I guess you can say.”

The four of us are quiet for a minute. “Does this change anything?” Nev asks tentatively, breaking the silence.

“What?” Luca laughs. “Shit, no.”

“Really?” She looks from him and then me and finally Declan.

“Princess,” he smiles softly. “I am all in. I thought the fact I licked each of their dicks made that clear.”

“Oh, so you can say it, but I can’t?” Luca asks, wide eyed.

“Like he said earlier,” I shrug. “Time and place, brother.”

Declan sticks his fist out and I bump mine to it. When my hand falls to my lap, Nev lurches across the bed and the sheet falls away. The two hold each other tight, and while they’re both naked, there is so much tenderness in the way they are holding onto one another, it makes my throat tight with emotion.

“I love you,” he says softly while rubbing her back. “You and those fuckers,” he adds with a grin. “No matter what.”

“Do you think this is why Luke can come back?” Luca sits up. “Because you didn’t crush his spirit?”

“No.” She pulls back, and wipes under her eyes. “My mother was adamant he would have returned, regardless, because of how he was able to integrate into Kai the first time.”

“So, your mom knows then?” Declan asks.

“No.” Nev shakes her head. “And I don’t want her to yet.”

The four of us are quiet and then Luca pulls his legs up and leans forward, wrapping an arm around them. “What did you do with them?”

“I bound them to me the way I did Sasha. That’s how I know Luke hasn’t come back because I will know.”

“Even though you didn’t know about Sasha that morning of the stable fire?” he questions carefully, knowing the loss of Beauty still haunts Nev.

Nev twists her fingers together nervously. “With Hyde and Luke, I didn’t strip away all they were. Just pushed them away.”

“Pushed them...where?” Declan asks, curious by her explanation.

“Into Kai,” she admits and drops her hands into her lap. “The deepest part of him. But I bound them to me.”

“You what!” they reply in unison.

The two are quiet as Nev looks at me clearly needing help with explaining how her power works. But I can’t because I barely understand it myself.

“So can you feel or hear them?” Luca asks, which is clearly a relief to Nev because it’s a question she can answer.

“No,” she looks at me. “But Kai can feel Hyde.”

“You can?” Declan asks.

“He hasn’t been in my mind like before. Rather, my emotions...they know they’re not mine. It’s weird, but the reason they feel so off and make me feel off is because they know they belong to Hyde.”

“Fuck,” Luca whistles. “Man, I do not envy what you are going through.”

I shoot him a dry look. “Gee, thanks brother.”

“You know what I mean. I got you. You know that. But that’s some confusing shit right there.”

Declan pulls his knees up and when he drapes his forearms over them, my eyes widen. There’s a rope of light around his right wrist.

“Um, Deck,” I point, “what’s that?”

“What’s what?” he asks.

“Your wrist.” Nev’s eyes zero in on his hand, clearly seeing what I do. “There’s a rope of light around it.”

Luca, Nev and I all stare at Declan as he holds his arm up in front of his face and examines it. “What the...”

“Everyone can have the blood of the gods in them,” Nev mumbles.

“What’s that?” I turn to her, wondering what she just said. Our chat about Hyde just took a dramatic turn and I’m wondering if tonight was too much for her.

“Something Liv said...when we were talking. She said anyone can have the blood of gods in them.”

She looks at the nail marks she carved last night in Declan’s chest, then holds up her hand, and sees blood under her nails. I hadn’t even noticed the marks on Declan’s chest until just now.

“Omigod!” She jumps out of bed and starts pacing. “Of course!”

I reach for the throw on the end of the bed and hold it out to her. Frankly, I'm surprised it's even there given the absolute mayhem we made of the bedding. "Hey, gorgeous, put this around you."

She's naked and doesn't realize or even care because her eyes are darting back and forth and her lips are moving a mile a minute. "Why didn't I think of it sooner? The answer is so easy. Have a baby...no. This is the answer."

"Nev," I shake the throw, "put this around you, please."

Reaching for it, she wraps it around her shoulders, and holds it tightly. "Deck," she stops and stares at him. "Our thing, it's blood, right?" He nods. "Well, when I scratch you or you bite me, there must be some kind of transfer of blood because that," she points to his wrist, "is lightning. I know it anywhere because I have always feared it. But here, the elements...my power, it's different than it is on Earth. I feel them on Olympus, but they're different. Yesterday, out on the balcony, I felt the sun and the soil and the creatures that call this place home. They came to me, just on thought, and their energy...it was this little hum that buzzed like the flutter of their wings, and that...is lightning. I feel it in my veins. It makes my scalp tingle, but not in fear as it did when we were kids. It feels good. I'm pulled toward it like a moth to a flame because it's your power. It's a part of you."

Declan pushes out of bed and grabs her by the shoulders. When he does, another rope coils around his left wrist.

"Are you saying you have my blood in you right now? Blood that if you were to get pregnant, would create a child with Zeus's bloodlines from both you and me?"

"I think so," she nods emphatically. "I don't know how long it lasts in my system or why now and not before, given we've done the whole blood games for a while. Maybe you had his power when you arrived and it just took some time to connect with this place and maybe this is a sign that Olympus has acknowledged you as Athena's heir. But Deck, that also

means the prophecy is true. It may not be now, but one day, our heirs will rule each of your kingdoms.”

“But how?” Luca pushes out of bed. “We can’t sire children. I mean, clearly, you’d be knocked up by now between the three of us.”

“I don’t know,” she shrugs. “Maybe something happens to make it possible?”

Declan’s eyes search hers frantically, and when she smiles so wide it’s like the light of the sun, he scoops her up and spins her around.

“How do we test it?” Luca looks from Declan to me. “Don’t you know something, brainiac?”

I rack my brain for something, anything and then I snap and jump out of bed. “Call them. It was said the army of Olympus answered only two—Athena and Zeus. They would come from wherever they were, and stand at attention, waiting for their order. So call them,” I say again, excitedly.

Declan looks from me to Luca and when Nev grabs his arm above the rope of lightning curling around it, he does as suggested. In a matter of seconds, we hear footsteps in the courtyard below, of what sounds like a thousand soldiers.

I run over to the balcony and look down, and sure enough, a legion stands there; gold shields with an owl etched onto them, shining under the light of the stars.

Running back into the room, I run a hand through my hair and then point at the closet. “We need to go...now. Declan secured control of his mother’s army. We need to get out of here and get to Valhalla so Luca can do the same.”

The four of us run to the closet where our clothes are washed and hanging neatly, and once we are dressed, reach for our bags stashed on the floor next to it, and throw them over our shoulders.

“Wait!” Nev calls out as I search the room, making sure we didn’t forget anything.

“What?” Luca asks impatiently, standing by the door.

“I want to write a letter...for Liv.”

“Why?” He holds out his hand and motions to the door.
“We’ve got to go, baby girl.”

“I know,” she holds a hand up. “Just, give me a second.”

Nev hurries over to a sitting desk on the other side of the room and pulls a piece of parchment from a wicker basket, then reaches for the quill pen standing upright next to it, and a small jar of ink.

“Huh.” She holds it up, examines it for a moment, then dips the nib into the ink. “Guess Locksley wasn’t totally useless,” she looks at me and grins.

Nev and I took calligraphy as an elective and while Declan and Luca thought it was pointless, guess Nev and I get the last laugh right about now.

Once she’s done writing her letter, she blows on the paper, and seeing it’s dry enough, folds it in half, writes Liv’s name on the outside and then reaches for another piece of parchment.

“Now what are you doing?” Luca asks, growing more impatient by the second.

She presses her lips together, scribbling away furiously.
“This one is for Thea.”

Declan looks at me and this time he’s the one grinning. Our girl no doubt has a few choice words for his niece, and not one of us will hurry her through *that* letter.

When she’s done, and the letter is folded with Thea’s name written on it, we take one last look around and hurry out the door.

Making our way out, the way in which we came, we walk quietly, but quickly. Athena’s army would no doubt wake all those sleeping, and we needed to be out of here before Thea found out. It wasn’t that we were prisoners. But we didn’t

need a showdown. We'd already spent enough time here and needed to get to Valhalla.

When we push through the main doors undetected the four of us look back one last time and then hurry down the stairs, leaving Olympus behind.

Chapter 21

Luca

We breeze through check-in at the airport thanks to the VIP terminal for private jets, and when we make it up the air stairs, Jax is waiting for us at the passenger door, arms outstretched.

Grabbing each of our bags as we enter, he stores them in the closet next to him at record speed, and when I hear the engines fire up, I know we'll be taking off any minute.

Deck wasn't kidding when he texted Saul once we hit the main hiking trail and our cell service returned and told him to be ready to leave in two hours. After running around Ares' place, gathering our bags, and packing the winter gear in the suitcases he left for us, we piled into the Jeep and raced to the airport, pulling into the parking lot nearly two hours on the dot.

"Trip was good?" Jax asks as we fall onto the couch for a moment to take a breather.

Declan rests his head on the back of the couch, draws in a deep breath, then exhales. "It was...productive."

"Well good," Jax nods, then heads to the back, returning a moment later, with a stack of blankets. "Shower in your parents room is stocked with towels and supplies," he says to Nev while Kai reaches out for the blankets. "You should have time to rest a bit before getting cleaned up. Flight time is around three hours and fifteen minutes."

As he flicks his eyes over us, I can only imagine what we must look like. Our clothes are clean, but between our hair, remnants of make-up on Nev's face, and circles under our eyes, it probably looks like we were in an all-night orgy. I can't help but laugh to myself because well, we were, and how

we don't smell like sex is beyond me. Or maybe we do and he is being discreet.

"Tell Saul thank you for being on stand-by," Nev offers Jax a sleepy smile. "We didn't expect to be out of touch overnight."

"Overnight?" Jax laughs. "Well, that must have been some party young lady. You four have been gone for five days."

"Five days!" Declan sits up and reaches for his phone, as we all do. Sure enough, five days have passed. We didn't even bother to look at the day before. Only the time. "Son of a bitch."

Nev looks from him to me and then Kai, eyes wide, and once Jax leaves, leans in. "Was it the punch?" she whispers.

"Must have been." Kai tosses his phone down and rubs both hands down his face. "Or it's a time continuum thing."

"A what?" I swing my head in his direction.

"There was this movie..."

"Interstellar," Nev cuts in.

"Right," he snaps. "And one of the astronauts is swept away by this massive tidal wave while they're on this ginormous planet in some far away solar system."

"Time, man." I move my finger around in circles and motion for him to speed it up. "What does that have to do with time?"

"Right," he says tiredly. "Sorry. Well, due to that planet's gravitational pull, every hour on that planet is seven years on Earth. And after their departure is delayed by that wave, they lose time, and it wound up costing them decades. By the time they returned to their ship, twenty three years had passed."

"Shit." I blow out an anxious breath.

"Maybe Olympus is on its own time continuum," he suggests. "Which would make sense since it's a world that is

separate from this one. Regardless, our bodies must have caught up because...”

As his voice trails off, Kai’s eyes drift to Nev, and when she sees him staring at her arms, she looks down. “I don’t believe it.” She examines her wrists, then holds them up for us to see. They’re nearly healed.

“Well shit,” Declan shakes his head. “Let me see your neck.”

She holds her chin up and I don’t believe it, but the bruising around her neck is gone, and when Declan and I lift our shirts, the bruises on our bodies have also vanished.

“Deck, you’ll have to remember the whole time thing when you return because you will,” I note, while pulling my shirt back down. “Something tells me Olympus is not done with you yet.”

“Right,” he grimaces. “Time...and don’t drink the fucking punch.”

He pinches the skin at the bridge of his nose and I can’t help but wonder why he is so pissed about that punch. When he found me last night at the feast, he tossed the cup I was holding out of my hand, before storming over to Nev and Kai and doing the same. It must have fucked with his head, and he hates losing control.

Making a note to ask about it later, I continue. “I am going to shower. Anyone else want to go first or join me?”

Declan shakes his head back and forth slowly. “Go on,” he waves. “I’ll take one when you’re done.”

“Baby girl?” I ask.

“I’m tired,” she says sleepily. “Between last night and that hike back, I’m worn out. I’m going to crash right here.”

Declan turns to her with a soft grin. “Not the best word choice given we’re on a plane, princess.”

“Sorry.” She curls up on his shoulder. “Sleep. I am going to sleep.”

I reach for one of the blankets on Kai’s lap and hold it to Deck, who drapes it over her. By the time we are ready for takeoff, she is fast asleep and Declan and Kai as well.

After I latch the seat belt stuffed into the cushions of the couch around each of their waists, I wait for us to hit our cruising altitude, and when Saul’s voice comes over the intercom and says it is safe to move around the cabin, I head to the front, grab some fresh clothes out of my bag in the closet, then make my way to her parents’ bedroom to take a shower.

As I stand under the stream of hot water and lather up, I can’t help but think about what waits for me in Sweden, and if we will lose more time once we reach Valhalla. It felt like the last few months we were in our own time continuum so losing five days honestly, felt normal.

The years Nev was in Paris had been painfully long. We may have been running the hottest club in London, but without her, those days were meaningless. But then she returned, and every hour of every day seemed to matter again.

That first week she was with us flew by, and then as the weeks went on, it began to feel normal again. So much had happened the past few months, and we had come so far, and I couldn’t wait for things to slow down so we could just be—life filled with more moments of just the four of us. Like last night.

Last night, was fucking epic, and it wasn’t just the sex. The connection between the four of us all these years has always been there, and I’ve teased it, sure, but to cross those lines and love my brothers and our girl openly, and without giving two-fucks what it meant, I wanted to live that way, every day, for all eternity. But I meant what I said last night—I still preferred pussy but didn’t mind a little dick now and then. Or big dick, rather, if we’re talking about my brothers.

I get out of the shower, dry off and change, and when I head back to the cabin Declan is awake. He's looking out the window behind the couch and looks deep in thought as Nev lies sound asleep with her head in his lap.

"Hey man, I'm all done." I move Kai's feet aside gently, before taking a seat. He's spread out taking over my spot and his. "You want to go next?"

"I'll take one in a minute," he murmurs.

"You okay?" I sit back.

"Mm-hmm," he nods, finger on his chin. "Just thinking."

"About?"

He turns away from the window and his gray eyes look tired. "Everything that happened on Olympus."

"Having second thoughts?" I sit back, draping one arm along the back of the couch.

"About us? Not at all. It was just...strange. I had the weirdest dream earlier. At least, I thought it was a dream, but I don't know, it held the weight of a memory."

"Oh yeah?" I look at our perfect girl. "Did it have anything to do with that one commanding you to get on your knees?"

He places a hand on Nev's head and looks down, lip hitching at the corner. "No," he shakes his head softly. "But now I know why Ares said to have your wits about you. That place is a trip."

"They should make a note of it in *Fodor's*," I agree.

"Anyway," he rests his hand on Nev's back and looks up. "Are you ready for what comes next?"

"If it's anything like last night and the four of us, hell yes. If it has anything to do with running into family members like Thea, nope."

The muscle in Declan's jaw ticks. "Yeah, she's a real peach, isn't she?"

I can't help but notice the furrow of his brows at the mention of her name. "Did you two get into it last night?"

"That's one way to put it," he says simply.

"Want to talk about it?" I ask carefully.

He draws in a deep breath and I can't help but notice the way his broad chest constricts with tension. "Not really," he says while exhaling. "We're done there for now. It's your turn to be the focus."

I nod and think about all that happened, looking down at his wrists. "How does it feel?" I ask, wondering if something similar will happen to me.

He looks at his hand, the one that bears the same tattoo we all have and now, a rope of lightning as well. "Strange," he admits. "Like my blood is humming." He pauses for a moment and I know there is more he wants to say. So I say nothing and wait. "You know, for as long as I can remember, it's been the four of us. Our connection pulled us together so tightly it was almost as if I couldn't breathe."

"And now?" I can't help but ask.

"Now, I feel that pull, as well as another. That of duty and obligation to my birthright. I am loyal to the four of us, above all, but I don't know man...I can't help but think it won't be as simple as we think. Once we control our mother's armies, I don't think they will leave us alone. And I don't think we will want to leave them alone, either."

We look at one another, a silent conversation passing between us, and when he lifts Nev's head gently to slip out from under her to take a shower, I take his place.

I run my fingers through her hair gently, thinking about duty and obligation. Declan's mother didn't sign Luke's treaty, and mine did. Would that make the birthright I inherited—or obligation to the world in which she existed—different from Deck's?

I was also curious about the gods that *did* sign the treaty. While my mother and Deck's had betrayed Luke by having a child in which they passed their army to, I couldn't help but wonder what happened to the others. Aside from their mortal offspring that became a founding member of the Calamity did they have other children? Children who maybe still existed or were part of a larger extended family?

By the time we're ready to start our descent the four of us are showered, awake, and ready to go thanks to the coffee and breakfast Jax prepared for us. He didn't say a word about the days we were gone or our confusion about it, but he did tell us to bundle up because a storm hit the area earlier in the week and snow had been falling for the past three days.

Thanks to the suitcases Ares left in each of our rooms back at his place, we were able to pack the winter gear he provided and bring it with us. Good thing, too. We needed all of it.

After putting on snow boots, we slipped on our jackets, promised to stay in better touch with Jax and Saul on our plans, and deboarded.

When we make it to the small terminal for private planes, a package is waiting with keys to a car and a cabin in the fishing village of Byxelkrok. From there Neptuni åkrar is a mile up the road and we would begin our search for Valhalla there.

My father wound up being the one to arrange where we would be staying in Sweden. Having been to the area many times over the years, he arranged for our car, and the cabin where we'd be staying, as well as driving directions and a map of Neptuni åkrar, with spots marked that could be a potential starting point in our search. As a nature reserve, there are forty-nine acres of land to cover and while Mount Olympus is enormous by comparison, at least we had guidance on where to go, and what to look for.

After driving an hour north, we make it to the village, and after passing through, arrive at the pull off for the cabin just past the outskirts of town. As we pull up, I'm pleasantly surprised to see it is in fact an actual cabin and not a fortress,

and once we park, get out and stretch, and then grab our bags from the back and make our way up the front walk.

Before opening the door we kick the snow from our boots and once we're inside, set our bags down in the entry, take off our boots, and pad down the hall. The space that greets us is in contrast to the red clapboard structure and black high-pitched roof, but it's hard to deny the beauty and charm of modern meets rustic.

The sparkling gourmet kitchen with white marble countertops and stainless steel appliances flows into a comfortable living room with a leather couch, two side chairs covered in woven fabric, and a huge stone fireplace, with floor to ceiling windows flanking the sides, looking out over the Kalmar Strait.

Also on the first floor, are three bedrooms, each with their own bathroom, matching birch furniture, and a sitting chair with a swooping leather seat and a fur slung over the back. As well as a spacious dining room with a long birch table that looks out over a side yard with enough flower beds that look like the backyard will be covered in color in the spring. There's also Scandinavian artwork on every wall, and a reading nook with an impressive library nestled under the stairs which leads to the second floor.

Making our way up the floating stairs, one look around confirms the floor is a loft that has been turned into a master bedroom, with a full bath, sitting area, and massive deck off a set of sliding glass doors, with a hot tub.

"I called dibs on this one." Nev drops down on the bed and claps both hands behind her head. "You three can stay downstairs."

"If giving you this room means we get to see you in a bikini in that hot tub later, then by all means, it's yours, baby girl."

She laughs as Kai drops down next to her and puts one arm behind his head and rests his other hand on his chest. The two

look like they're buried under a mountain of fabric given the size of their coats, and I shake my head and turn to where Declan is looking out the window, with one arm on the glass.

“What do you say we head into town, look around a bit, and then make our way to the fields and get started?”

“Yeah,” he drops his hand and turns to me holding an envelope in his hand.

“What's that?” I point.

“It was in the packet waiting for us at the airport. Your father left it for you. Asked me to give it to you when we got here.”

“What is it?” I reach for it.

“I don't know man, it's not for me. Do you want us to leave you alone for a few so you can see?”

“Well shit,” I quip, turning it over in my hand. “When you say it like that, maybe.”

I open the envelope and remove the contents, and when I see the word DEED on the first piece of paper that I unfold, and my father's pinched handwriting on the outside of a second folded up piece of paper.

“What is it?” Nev pushes up from the bed and comes over to where I'm standing.

“It's the deed to this cabin.” I hand it to her, while keeping hold of my father's letter. “And something from my dad.”

“What?” Kai jumps up from the bed and comes over. “A deed to this cabin?”

Nev scans the paper and looks up. “Yes,” she answers him. “This is Luca's place.”

I look at Declan and he shoves both hands in his pockets. “Congrats,” he smiles. “This place is pretty damn cool.”

I sink down on the bed holding the letter in each hand, not sure what to do. When Nev sits down next to me and sets the

deed down on the bed next to her, and places a hand on my thigh, I turn to find her warm eyes on mine. “Do you want us to stay here while you read it?”

“I don’t know,” I admit.

I’d spent so much of my existence loathing my father, that I still hadn’t gotten used to the fact that what I felt for him now wasn’t hate. There was so much I needed and wanted to know, and he was the only one that could tell me. But I still had my walls up, rightfully so.

“How about you three go and see if there is anything to drink and I’ll be down in a few minutes?”

Nev grips my thigh and leans in, kissing me gently on the cheek. “You got it.”

I place my hand on hers and squeeze it tight, leaning in to kiss her properly. “I’m not kidding about the hot tub,” I whisper against her lips.

“I know,” she whispers in return, then pulls back and winks.

Once the three make their way out of the room, I take a deep breath and turn my attention to the letter and start to read, heart thrumming hard against my ribs.

Luca,

In all of the years I have watched over you, my one regret is that you have come to believe that I do not care about your wellbeing. Nothing is further from the truth. I do, son. More than anything.

When I first met your mother, she was my everything. Then you came along, and you were our everything. But love can be complicated, and a broken heart is difficult to manage, and I hope, with all of my heart’s broken pieces, that we can find our

way back to the relationship we once had when I was simply your dad.

I know you want to know more about your mother, and one day, we will sit down and we will have that talk, man to man. I will tell you everything you want to know. But for now, for this journey you are on, the one thing you need to know is this—she loved and wanted you, more than anything.

That's what made it hard to look at you sometimes. Not because you reminded me of her, but because you reminded me of all the dreams she had that went unfulfilled. She wanted to see your first step, and hear your first word, and she wanted to be there when you fell in love and watch you become a man. That is why it pained me to be around you because in you I saw her heart, and it saddened me to know you would never know it.

If you were to look up star-crossed lovers in the dictionary, there would be a picture of your mother and I because we met at the absolute worst time. But man...when we did, there were sparks and light and a love unlike anything I have ever known. She was every bit the warrior goddess the legends have portrayed her to be, and I will tell you this...she was proud to sign Luke's treaty. Not because she hated Heaven, or because she sought vengeance, but because she was standing up for herself...for her right to a destiny that was not connected to a ruler that wanted her at his side. And for that, I will never begrudge her for signing because she did it for the same reason me and the others divided Heaven.

You see son, it was never about good or bad, or right or wrong. The gods that signed Luke's treaty wanted what all of The Fallen wanted, the freedom to pursue their own destiny. Yeah, I was hurt and angry. But not because she left me. And not because she was part of Luke's revenge against Heaven. I was angry because fate took her from you and me, and I will always begrudge the stars for that.

In the years your mother has been absent from my life, you have been all that matters to me. I know I have not shown it

but I am hoping that this place can help you see this truth because it is not only where your mother and I spent some of the best moments I have ever had in all my existence, but it is also where you were conceived and where you were born.

This cabin is more special than any material possession will ever be because it is here she still lives. Here, I see her in the morning sun, the colors of the Northern Lights, and in the whisper of the snow. That is why I kept it. For you. So that you may come here as often as you wish and feel her, too. In these walls her memory lives on, and it is my hope as you search for your birthright, you find her too, because she is everywhere you look, and she is who you are...,and you are our everything.

Be safe and come home soon.

Dad

When I finish the letter I can barely see. My eyes are so full of tears I feel like a damn baby. At the same time, it feels like something has been unlocked inside me. A box I kept everything that I didn't want to deal with, the biggest being the mother I longed to know and felt cheated that I never had the chance.

I fold the letter back up and hold it tight. My father and I had a lot of baggage and there was so much to unpack. Yet, his words were clear. He loved her, and me, and this place was where we could come and rebuild our relationship, hopefully into something new, and better.

I push up from the bed and look around, thinking about what he said—*In the walls her memory lives on.* As the words echo in my mind, I look up and see carvings in the moldings along the ceiling. Viking runes. And like Deck and the Greek carvings in the doors to Olympus, I can read it: “For you, my tears were real, my joy strong, and love infinite.”

I make my way over, push up on my toes, and place my hand on one of the runes. I may be crazy, but I can feel something there. Energy maybe? Or perhaps just love...the love of a mother, who let go of her son to protect him.

“I’m here mom, and I’m coming to find you.”

Chapter 22

Luca

When I get downstairs, Declan, Kai, and Nev are sitting around the fireplace, mugs in hand. There isn't a fire built, and yet their cheeks are flushed and laughter buoyant.

"There he is." Nev sets her mug down on the hearth when she sees me and pushes the sleeves of her sweater up. "Everything okay?"

"Mm-hmm." I nod to the cup. "What are you drinking?"

I'm surprised they were able to find anything in the kitchen. I didn't know when my father was last here, but I knew whenever it was, he wouldn't have left behind anything to eat or drink that would still be good. I figured we'd pick up a few things in town for us to have while here.

"Glögg." Kai lifts his mug. "Skol!"

"Want me to make it for you?" Nev starts to get up and I stop her.

"Sit baby girl, I got it."

"You sure?" She eyes me skeptically.

"I think I can manage."

"Are you sure?" Declan laughs. "We know how you are in the kitchen."

"Yes, mom, I got it."

The minute I say it, I can't help but laugh and the three look at one another and then me. "Babe, everything okay?" Nev asks.

Babe...the way she says it, so casually and with endearment makes my heart lurch. "Yes, baby girl, everything

is good. You just sit, look enticing as fuck, and I'll be right over."

I reach for the open bottle on the counter, find a cup next to it, and then place it in the microwave to warm it up. When the timer goes off, I make my way over to the fireplace and they each scoot over to make room for me.

"So," Nev says expectedly when I sit down next to her. "Are you going to tell us what that deed was all about?"

"Sure," I take a sip. The drink is a spiced wine and despite its likely age, is actually pretty good. I take another sip, then continue. "This place is mine."

"We got that part," Kai leans in. "But how?"

"Well..." I hold the cup in my hand and look around, taking it all in with a new lens. "It was where my mother and father spent most of their time when they were together. And...I was born here."

"Shut up!" Nev slaps my thigh, which jiggles my hand, splashing drops of my drink onto my leg. "Oh, shit, sorry."

"It's fine." I brush them away. "Apparently, my father kept it for me so I could come here and connect with her. Which, by the way, I can read Viking runes now because there are some etched into the moldings upstairs and I understood them."

"Like Deck and the doors on Olympus?" Kai questions.

"Yup," I confirm, popping the p at the end. "So, I don't know about time continuances, but there's definitely something about being in the place of our birthright that ignites a connection. Who knows, maybe tonight the Northern Lights will dance around my head and the stairs to Valhalla will appear."

"Incredible," Kai shakes his head. "But it almost makes me afraid of what waits for me in Eden."

Deck, Nev and I look at him, not knowing what to say. Our brother has come a long way these past few days. I'm proud of

him. But he's right...who the hell, pun intended, knows what waits for him there.

"Maybe you can learn from whatever happens here and what happened back in Greece to guide you," Declan suggests. "Use what we've gone through to get something out of it for you that is for the better."

"Good point," I agree, holding up my cup. "You know, after reading my father's letter, I'm wondering if maybe we're looking at this wrong. Maybe learning who our moms were and what they wanted is part of the journey. The Fallen divided Heaven for a reason. Those who signed Luke's treaty did as well. They didn't know he would turn the Augury into some worship group that would pursue the girl we were destined for. They just wanted their freedom."

Declan sets his drink down and leans back, placing both hands on the hearth. "You got all of that from a letter?"

"That and more," I grin. "But think about it. Your mother considered signing because she was tired of Olympus, and that was more or less why mine did. Only, yours didn't sign because of what a seer told her and who knows, maybe mine signed because of what one did."

"Well, that may be fine and well for you two," Kai stares into his cup, "but we all know Luke was a relentless narcissist who believed he was unmatched in strength and intellect. There's nothing more I need to know there."

"True," Nev says gently. "But what about your mom? Luke is only part of your story. What about the other? There was a lot of information in your folder. Have you looked at it yet?"

I can't help but notice how Kai falls eerily quiet with Nev's question. "You're right," he says finally. "There is information about her in there, but I can't bring myself to look into it deeper just yet."

Nev reaches out and puts her hand on his knee. "When you're ready, you'll know."

“Speaking of ready...” I finish the rest of my drink and push up from the hearth. “What do you say we head into town, check things out, and then make our way to Neptuni ákrar?”

“Yes!” Nev jumps up excitedly and looks at the guys. “Ready?”

They look at one another, down their drinks, then get up from the hearth. “Lead the way, Loki,” Kai says with a grin.

We spend the first part of the day in the village talking with the locals and learning more about the area. My father was right. Stories of my mother are everywhere. She is not only heralded, but loved, and I feel a connection to this place that I haven’t felt anywhere else before.

When we finally make it to Neptune’s fields, which is what visitors and locals alike call it, I’m surprised by how beautiful it is. Even covered in snow, the terrain is mystical, and when the sun breaks through the clouds, melting the snow that dusts the cobble-stone beach, the Viking-era stone circles and cairns are a haunting reminder this is a place of heritage—*my* heritage—and I know now how Deck felt in Greece.

For all of our existence, Kai and I have been called children of The Fallen. But this trip has connected me to a part of myself I never knew existed. A part in my blood just as prominent, and I no longer feel just part of one world, but two.

The wind whips along the strait, tossing the hood of my jacket up around my head, and as I watch Declan, Kai, and Nev taking it all in, I can’t help but feel I was right earlier when I said this journey we are on is more than just about claiming our mother’s armies. It’s connecting us to something bigger—worlds beyond those to which we have always been confined—and I feel an energy in my blood that I’ve never felt before.

“Find anything that looks like it could be a stairway?” Kai calls out.

“Nothing yet!” I call back. “How about we check out over there?” I nod up ahead.

“Alright.” He waves me over. “Come on!”

I jog over to where he is standing and once we reach Declan and Nev, the four of us make our way across the fields a Viking burial ground.

When we make it there, we stop at the stones lining the perimeter, and I bend down and place my hand on one. As I do, warm energy passes through me. I close my eyes, blocking out the wind and water lapping the shore, and when my being is silent and still, I hear something. A whisper...perhaps a memory of a memory, in the recess of my mind.

I lean my forearm on my knee and bring two fingers to my lips, kiss them, then press both to the stone. “I’m coming, mom. Just show me the way.”

I stay there for a while, taking in the horizon—birds land on the water and fly away, a dance that continues for well over an hour—and when the sun starts its descent, I stand and start to make my way over to Declan, Nev and Kai.

As I walk, I look out across the horizon, and just before I reach the three, I see a white moose traipse across the field. I freeze, wondering if I’m seeing things. Then as if sensing me, it stops and turns, looking right at me for a moment, then continues before disappearing from sight.

“Any luck?” Nev asks when I finally make it over to them. She’s twisting her long hair in front of her to keep it out of her eyes.

“No.” I look around admiring the view for the dozenth time. “And at the same time, yes. Does that make sense?” I ask while turning back around.

“It does brother,” Declan claps me on the back. “It does.”

As we make our way back to the car, I can't help but feel Valhalla is within reach. But I don't need to look for it. It will find me.

On the drive back to the cabin, Kai and Declan stop at a local market and pick up dinner, and later that night, after the dishes are done, and a fire roars in the stone hearth, I excuse myself to go take a dip in the hot tub, while they crack open a game from the library, and Nev curls up next to the fire with a book.

I'm soaking in the hot tub, jets going as I look up at the stars, when I hear the door to the deck slide open. "Can I join you?"

Turning my attention down from the night sky, I find Nev standing there in a white string bikini, with a towel draped over her shoulder. It's freezing out, her nipples so hard they're pressed against the two triangles of fabric covering her breasts. Yet, seeing her standing there brings my blood to a boil.

I've seen her naked and under me, riding me, and kneeling at my feet. Shit, I've seen her with my brothers separately, and with all of us together. But there's nothing like seeing the way I am now—in a bikini as white as the Arctic snow all around us, and a blanket of stars overhead.

"Never a question you have to ask." I jerk my head for her to join me and she hurries over. "Get in. It's cold."

She hurries over and I stand up and reach for her hand as she tiptoes up the stairs and then eases into the water. "Oh, this feels good." She moans slightly as she sinks down next to me and rests her back against one of the jets.

Her little sigh of satisfaction and hot body has me thinking all kinds of things; thoughts I haven't been able to get out of my head since Olympus.

"Are the others coming?" I ask casually, running my hand through the water, and then up and down my face. She's right. The water does feel good. The contrast of heat from the water, and the cold air, soothes me.

“Nope,” she says simply. “It’s just you and me.”

I arch a brow. “Oh yeah?”

She lays her head back and looks up at the stars. “Yup.”

My eyes drift over her face and down to the curve of her neck to the swell of her breasts. The bubbles from the jets push her tits to the surface, and all of those thoughts I’ve been having shoot straight to my dick.

Nev and I haven’t been alone since that first night after shit went down at Locksley. Sure, we were together plenty last night, but I ache for it to be just us so we can play the way we like to.

“I hear what you’re thinking,” she says in a sultry voice.

“Oh yeah?” I push away from the wall and position myself in front of her. “How about now?”

The minute she feels my erection pressed against her leg she turns her head down from the sky and locks her eyes on mine. “You’re not wearing any shorts.”

“Nope,” I grin.

“And why not?” she asks huskily.

“Well, one, unlike you, I don’t bring swim trunks everywhere I go.”

She splashes water at me and laughs. “Just so you know, when I was younger and my parents were traveling a lot, it didn’t matter where we were, there was always a pool or a hot tub. So, shoving a suit in my bag while traveling became a habit.”

“Uh huh.” I roll my lower lip between my teeth. “And string bikinis became a part of said habit?”

“As a matter of fact...” Her eyes flash. “Yes, they did.”

“And why, pray tell, did they baby girl?”

“To make Declan want me.”

To anyone else her answer may incite jealousy, but the way she says it, brazen and without apology, only makes me want her more.

Being raised together, she and Declan spent more time alone than either Kai or I had with her, and there is something excitedly wicked about thirteen year old Nev, wanting to tempt sixteen year old Declan while away on family holiday.

“And now?” I place both hands on either side of her and lean in.

“Now...” She sits up a little straighter. “I am wearing it so you will.”

“Oh love,” my eyes search hers, “you don’t need a bikini to do that. Every fiber of my being wants you every hour of every day.”

Wrapping an arm around her waist, I pull her to me and when she places both hands on my chest, I draw her into a kiss. Letting my lips linger on hers for a moment, I enjoy the first seconds of connection, before slipping my tongue into her mouth. Hers greets mine eagerly and tangles with it, lapping at it with smooth, slow strokes.

Fuck, this girl... It’s no secret I want her, but I tend to keep how much I care about her close to my vest. But the fact is I have been head over heels in love with Nev since that first kiss, and nothing will ever change that. Not her love for my brothers, or any obligation of birthright.

The moments the four of us share will always satisfy that need for carnal connection I crave. But this right here...these moments when it’s just she and I, satisfy my heart in a way nothing else does.

“Luca,” she whispers. “You are every bit your mother’s legacy.”

“Oh yeah?” I trail kisses down her neck and pull her closer. “And what is that?”

She grabs my neck with one hand and holds my hip with the other. “A lover and a fighter.”

“Well then.” I bring my mouth to her ear and suck on her earlobe. “Since we didn’t get to fight today, how about we fuck with the stars as our audience.”

“Mmm,” she hums, and presses into me; that body of hers, driving me wild, igniting heat in my core. “Hot and cold,” she murmurs while running her hand through my hair.

“What’s that?” I moan, ready to strip her naked and have her right here, right now.

“Your blood...” She pulls back and looks at me. “That’s why you are never in a shirt. Not because of the burn in your blood, but because the Arctic is in your veins.”

The moment she says it, I realize she’s right. My mother was the fierce, strong cool of the Arctic, and my father was the passionate burn of The Fallen. I am not only her son...I am theirs, and when they were together, there must have been fireworks.

Speaking of...nudging Nev’s knees apart with my own, her eyes widen as I reach for the knots in the strings to her top—pulling first, the one at her back, followed by the one at her neck.

Slipping it off, I place it on the side of the tub, and then cup her breasts with both hands. She tilts her head back and moans as I lower my mouth to one, suck it slowly, and gently, before moving my mouth to the other. I never tire of her tits. They’re so full and round and fill my hands and mouth perfectly. Declan may be an ass man, but I am a breasts guy, through and through.

Moving my hands down to her hips, I pull the knots on both sides of her bottoms and pull those free as well, setting them down next to her top. Sliding my hand to her pussy, she sucks in a breath as I drag my finger through her entrance. There’s no point in trying to make her wet while we’re in a

one hundred degree hot tub, but I have to touch her for a moment to give my aching balls a break.

“Stand up,” I rasp when her widening legs and little pants drive me wild to the point of impatience.

She pushes up from where she’s sitting, water rolling down her body, and I have to swallow the urge to tell her to hop up on the edge of the tub so I can suck her pussy until she comes.

“Turn around and lean over the side and put your hands behind your back,” I order.

Like a good girl, she does as I ask, and when I grab her wrists, I take a moment to inspect them. Damn, that time continuance thing was a miracle. Her wrists look even better than they did on the plane, which means we’re good to play.

Reaching for the top of her bikini, I wrap it around her wrists, using the triangles of fabric to give padding between the string and her skin, just in case there is any lingering sensitivity, and when it’s tied, I caress, then spank her ass. She moans gently and it ignites my need for her even more. Knowing only I can give this to her....that she will allow only *me* this pleasure, is an honor.

I tug on her wrists, which makes her arch her back and stick her chest out. “How does that feel?”

“Good,” she puffs.

I press my chest against her back and rub both hands up her body, giving her breasts a little squeeze, while rubbing my dick against her ass. “Mmm, yes it does.”

“More,” she lays her head back on my shoulder. “I want more.”

Shit, our girl has been railed in the closet, branded on an airplane, and fucked senseless by the three of us in one night. The fact she wants more tells me she has been needing this time alone with me, just as much as I have her. My name on her lips is like a prayer only I can answer, and I am about to.

“Your shoulders okay?” I rub one and then the other.

“They’re fine,” she nods.

“Good.” Reaching for her bottoms, I squeeze them to get as much water out of the fabric as I can, and when done, hold them up in front of her face. “Tonight, I stuff your pretty mouth with this.”

She looks at me and licks her lips, and I can’t help myself. I run my thumb along her lower lip and kiss her passionately, before shoving the bottoms into her mouth. “Okay,” I grip her hips tightly and lean in, “bend over.”

She does as I ask, and when I see her bent over the edge of the tub naked, gagged and bound, my dick twitches. It’s a site I don’t think I’ll ever forget.

“Shit,” I shake my head. “The things I want to do to you, baby girl.”

Kneeling behind her using the seat in the tub, my face is directly in front of her ass, and when I grab both cheeks and spread them apart, her perfect pussy greets me. “Well hello,” I lick my lips. “Come to daddy.”

I dive in, swiping my tongue from cunt to clit, and when she moans, it comes out as a sexy muffle. Now that she is out of the hot water, I can feel her wet heat on my tongue, and it makes me so fucking hard, my cock points straight up, parallel to my stomach. I need to be inside her. My dick surrounded by her warmth. But she wants to come. I can tell by the way she pushes back for more.

Spearing her pussy with my tongue, I bring my hand between her legs, and spreading her lips with my hand to reveal her pulsing clit, I suck on the bundle of nerves, while easing two fingers inside her.

I work my fingers and tongue the way I know she likes and when her moans get louder and the walls of her pussy clench around my fingers, I know she’s about to come. Pulling back, I continue to stroke her and watch as her cunt clenches my fingers, and warmth floods my hand.

“Good girl,” I praise, while, rubbing my palm up and down her pussy in slow, smooth strokes. “Come for me.”

She moans and jolts as the gentle strokes draw out her orgasm, and when her muscles stop contracting, I stand and grab her bound wrists. Nudging my cock against her entrance, the slickness of her arousal sucks me right in, and when I’m balls deep, I yank her up and wrap one arm around her chest, fusing her body to mine.

I move slowly at first, wanting to ride the edge of her climax, and when I hear her breaths coming out in shallow puffs, I know a second climax is building.

“Do you think they’re watching?” I whisper hotly in her ear, hoping to fuck they are. I know Deck likes to watch, and Kai is catching onto the satisfaction of seeing our girl getting railed by one of us. But right now she looks so fucking perfect, I wish I had filmed it so we could all watch it later.

“Don’t...know,” she rasps.

“Well that’s a shame, because watching you get fucked is my favorite pastime. Well, aside from being the one doing the fucking.”

Nev loves a dirty mouth. During sex, anything goes. The dirtier, the better. It’s such a contrast to her modesty outside the bedroom and that alone, is a grade A turn-on. But I know she needs this as much as I do—submission and control. It satisfies the burn in the blood we share, so it doesn’t consume us whole.

“Can you come again for me?” I grab her breast with one hand and move the other between her legs. “Can you show me how much you need this, baby girl?”

She widens her legs as I press down on her clit and while taking me deep, her breathing grows more ragged.

“You’re such a good girl,” I praise. “Taking me the way you are...bent over and bound. Good girls get to come. You want to come, my love?”

Yanking the bottoms out of her mouth, I grab her chin and pull her face to me, kissing her with intensity to give her the air in my very lungs.

“Yes,” she moans in my mouth. “Make me come, Luca.”

When we pull apart her eyes lock on mine and when she bites her lip, I’m a goner. I thrust into her while holding her tight, and once she hits her climax, my dick pulses and throbs as I hit my own.

“Yes,” I groan as my cock gets the release it needs, as the burn in my veins subsides and all I feel is the heat of our girl and the steady cool of the Arctic.

Chapter 23

Luca

After showering Nev slips into a warm pair of pajamas and curls up in the oversized bed of the loft. When I'm done, I do the same, and after turning off the lights and crawling into bed, find her fast asleep.

Laying my head down on the pillow next to her, I can make out her face with the light of the stars and moon, and my chest tightens. She's so peaceful and I hope her dreams tonight are sweet.

I'm just about to drift off when a light knock at the door has me whipping my eyes open. Rolling over, I look to the door and find it cracked open, and Kai standing there.

"We're going to turn in." He hikes a thumb over his shoulder and I notice Declan behind him. "Just wanted to say goodnight."

"You're not sleeping in here?" I look from them to the bed. "There's plenty of room."

"Well..." Declan grips the door frame with one hand. "We thought you two may want to be alone."

I wave for them to come in. "Not needed. Crawl in."

Declan drops his hand and the two saunter into the room. "It's not like I'm keeping track or anything, but you two haven't been alone since—"

"It's fine," I cut him off, patting the bed on the other side of Nev. "She'll be pissed if you don't sleep here. I think that's why she left all that room."

"Are you sure?" They stop at the end of the bed and it's then I notice they're wearing matching pajamas with moose

antlers on them, and brown thermal shirts that cling to their sculpted chests.

“Yes, I’m sure. Now shut up so you don’t wake her. Although maybe we should so she can check you two out in those pajamas.”

“Fuck you.” Declan runs a hand through his hair. “We bought them in town earlier because we knew it would be cold tonight.”

“We bought you a pair too, if you want to put them on,” Kai adds with a grin.

“Thanks. I’m comfortable in my birthday suit next to our girl. Arctic blood, remember.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Kai reaches for the comforter and pulls it back gently and gets in behind Nev. “But one favor? Can you two just sleep tonight? Between last night, traveling, and being out in the cold all day, I’m exhausted.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this,” Declan crawls in behind him, “but same, brother. We could all use the rest.”

“Well, if you must know, that itch has been scratched.”

“Oh yeah?” They ask in unison. “When?”

“Why the fuck do you care?”

“I don’t want to find your dick against my ass in the middle of the night,” Kai fires back. “Like I said, I’m tired.”

“Nice.” I roll my eyes and adjust my pillow. “Well, a gentleman doesn’t kiss and tell.” The two laugh and I push up on one elbow. “Okay, one, shut up,” I practically hiss, “and two, that hot tub got a workout alright?”

They flick their eyes to the doors that lead to the patio and when they turn back to me and see my smug smirk, they know exactly how.

“Well, alright.” Declan lays his head back. “Then we can count him out for a few hours at least.”

“Perfect.” Kai reaches under his head and buries his head into the pillow. “So go the fuck to sleep already.”

“I’m trying to,” I grumble, and close my eyes.

“Sweet dreams,” Declan and Kai whisper.

“Same,” I murmur, knowing I will, with our girl beside me.

Later that night I’m awakened by a howling wind. It whips along the roof and sends snow flurries covering the windows. When I look over to see if it’s woken any of them up, I’m shocked to find all three sound asleep. Nev has turned over and curled up next to Kai, and Declan is laying with his back to him.

I get out of bed and slip on a pair of sweats, then go downstairs. As I stand at the window by the fireplace, I see a storm barreling across the strait. It makes me wonder if my mother and father ever sat here in the dark, watching a storm. Maybe that’s when I was conceived or born for that matter—in the middle of a storm, with the Arctic wind, blowing all around.

No one wants to think about their parents having sex, ever, but there is something comforting in knowing there is more to their story and that I was conceived out of love. I have a strange curiosity to know everything about them, and yet my heart tells me I already know everything that I need to.

With my fascination getting the better of me, I open the sliding glass door and step out onto the deck. There’s a kinetic buzz in the air, and when I look up and see the wind has stopped blowing, I listen and realize I can hear the snow falling. It’s like rain, only crystalline, and when I hold my hands out, tiny snowflakes fall into my palms.

I have the overwhelming urge to run out onto the stretch of land between the deck and water and lay down in the snow and make snow angels. But just when I’m about to, the snow stops and the clouds part, and when I look up, I see the vibrant glow of the Northern Lights.

Hues of green, purple, and blue dance in the sky as if they are the light of another world, and with the breathtaking icy landscape surrounding me, I can't help but wonder if that is what they are. If I'm standing under the bridge to my mother's world.

A sense of hope and wonder fills me, and I get the distinct feeling not only is this land and these lights welcoming me, but my mother. It fills me with peace and hope and when I close my eyes, I know in my gut it's the sign I have been looking for.

Opening my eyes I look at the dancing lights again and smile. "Hi mom."

To my surprise, someone answers. "Hello, Loki."

A chill shoots up my spine, and I turn slowly, and when I see a figure approaching, I freeze. Either I'm dreaming or sleepwalking, either way, it's time to wake up.

I close my eyes, clenching them tight, and when I open them again and find not only am I awake, but the figure is standing right in front of me, I stumble backward.

"Watch your step, son. The ice can be tricky."

"Mom?" I choke out, and when she opens her arms to greet me, I find I'm already there. Her embrace is warm, her arms soothing, and when she speaks, it curls around me like protective armor.

"Son," she whispers, and places a tender kiss on the top of my head. "How long I have waited to hold you again."

I don't want to let go, afraid when I do she will be gone, and yet, I have to see her. I have to know the face I have pictured in my mind all these years.

I pull back slowly and when I find her eyes on mine, I'm speechless. She is every bit as beautiful as my father said and possesses a noble strength I can't help but feel in my core. She has long golden hair, green eyes like mine, and wears a dark

cloak, and her smile, which is lit up by the glowing necklace she wears, mirrors my own.

“My boy.” She places both hands on either side of my face. “You are every bit the marvel I knew you would be.”

I grab both of her hands and hold them tight. “How are you here?”

“Come,” she holds out her arm. “Walk with me and I will tell you everything.”

When the drape of her cloak brushes mine, I look down and see it is made up of feathers. It reminds me of a story one of the folks in town told me earlier today. *A maiden was being hunted by a wolf and Freya, protector of all virgins, swooped down and saved her. Shifting from goddess to protector, the feathers of her cloak were those of a thousand falcons, and her long gold hair, that of their eyes.*

Looking up again, I turn to the cabin. “They will be okay,” she says as if reading my mind. “They are being looked over.”

I turn my attention to her, and when she nods to the edge of the deck, I see a golden boar, and on top of it a black cat, and a raven.

“Where’s the partridge in the pear tree?” I ask wryly.

She smiles and lets out a melodic laugh. “They are warriors, I can assure you.”

“Am I dreaming?” I can’t help but ask when I find myself staring at her. The fact I’m standing outside, in the middle of an Arctic night, with no shirt on, next to a woman wearing feathers, has got to be nothing less.

“What is our existence but a walk between day and night,” she winks.

Her response makes me smile. “Sounds like something Kai would say.”

“Your friend is a wise, old soul.”

I let out a flat dry laugh. “You’re telling me.”

She looks at me, smile fading. “You’re worried about him.”

“I am,” I admit. “He’s been through a lot and lost a lot. The past few days have been good for him but I can’t help but wonder when all this is over, what toll it will have taken.”

“Some advice?” she asks. Years ago I would have given anything to have a conversation like this with my mother, and now, I find I am that same little boy, all over again.

“Please,” I nod.

“Let him go through it and be there for him. He is strong and has always seen the positive in things. He will be okay.”

I tilt my head, intrigued by her words. “You say that as if you know him.”

“I do. I know all of your friends, including your beloved. That is why I am here.”

“Your army,” I say simply. “You know I need it to save her and The Fallen?”

The wind stirs and the feathers on her cloak flutter. “You mean your army. And yes, I know.”

I think about the conversation I had with my father and all Declan went through on Olympus. “Don’t I have to claim it or something?”

“Oh my beautiful boy, the Valkyries have always been yours. But to wield them, I ask that you first know my story.”

I shake my head; not sure I want to. “I already know how it ends. Luke took you from me...and dad. Isn’t that enough?”

“Did he?” She grabs my arm and I swear, I feel her touch as if she is right next to me. “Come, let’s walk.”

“Where?” I look around, nothing around us but snow and the strait.

She slides her hand in mine and it is the touch I have longed for all my existence. It is that of my mother and I have

never felt anything like it. “You have much to learn and time is short.”

She leads me away from the cabin, talking as she walks, and before I know it, we are on a snowy road high in the mountains, close enough to touch the stars. As we walk she tells me about Asgard, home of the Norse gods, and the struggle that once existed between its people, the Aesir and Vanir.

“The two had been at war for untold millennia, and when a truce was called each side exchanged hostages. My father, Njorth, god of wind and sea, and my brother and I, were taken by the Aesir, and I, betrothed to Odin.”

“So you did not marry him for love,” I say matter of fact.

“It was a political arrangement,” she confirms. “Done for the sake of peace for my people. And to maintain that peace, I was a dutiful wife, and ruled by his side. In appreciation for my obedience, Odin gave me the job of overseeing sacrifices, which included presiding over Fólkvangr, as well as determining the gift of virility and fertility.”

I look down, trying to hide the smile on my face. Nev was right. I am my mother’s son, from her beloved symbols to the blood in my veins to my desires and uninhibited interest in sex.

“Clearly, that harmony was short-lived.” I clear my throat and look back up. “Something happened for you to align yourself with the one who divided Heaven.”

“Yes,” she confirms. “Something did happen. Unlike the Vanir, the Aesir were violent, and Odin grew more cruel and violent over time. He imprisoned my brother, and eventually killed him, and manipulated our son, Baldur.”

“Son?” I swallow at the mention of her other child. “Is that the one who sat on the Calamity?”

“Oh stars no. Baldur lived and died, long before the mortal world. He was the only good thing to come from our union, truth be told. I think you would have liked him, Loki. He was

beautiful and strong and possessed the same kind of light as you.”

I nod, accepting her answer, but not wanting to know more. Whether I would have liked him did not matter. I had three brothers I would do anything for, and that’s all I needed.

“As part of my duties in ruling over Fólkvangar,” she continues, “I was responsible for choosing half of the heroes slain in battle to live there in the afterlife, while Odin took the other half to Valhalla, where they would train and prepare for Ragnarök, the end of the gods.”

“So what happened?” I swallow.

She draws in a breath, and her eyes turn dark; the color of mine when my Fallen blood burns. “He grew crueler and more foolhardy over time, as gods tend to do, and I did not take kindly to his iron fist. I may have been a goddess of love and beauty, but the Vanir were gifted. So, when I could not take his cruelty any longer, I called a seidr, and when I saw his future was one of eternal glory, I changed it.”

“Wait.” I hold out my hand, not sure I heard what I just heard. “Did you just say you could not only see, but change the future?”

“I did,” she acknowledges.

I stumble backward a second time—the wall that hits me so powerful, I find I’m actually knocked on my ass. She laughs and sticks out her hand and when I reach for it, she has the strength of a thousand horses as she helps me up.

“You are of the Vanir.” She brushes the snow from my shoulders. “We are of the stars, and our kind have practiced divination from our first existence. That is how I knew what I saw was true.”

I think back to something my father said years ago about my Fallen blood. He kept telling me to see through it. Even though the strongest of The Fallen could not, he insisted that I could if I tried.

I never forgot this belief and used the same encouragement when Nev first experienced the burn in her blood. I can't help but wonder now, knowing the gifts my mother possessed, if I tried harder, could I, too, see past the burn.

I put a pin in that for now and make a note to come back to it. "How then did you wind up with his army?"

"When Odin gifted me Fólkvangar, he also gave me command of the Valkyries, female soldiers who flew over battlefields on horseback to collect and escort those he had chosen for Valhalla. And when Luke came to Valhalla offering the gods a deal of freedom, I saw it as my only way out of my marriage to Odin. I signed and took that army and that is what changed his future. Without the Valkyries, no more soldiers came to Valhalla, and when Ragnarok came, he was outnumbered. His rule was over, and the time of his gods came to an end."

My eyes widen with the revelation. "You are responsible for the downfall of Odin?"

"I am," she says proudly.

I can't wait to tell Kai. He's going to burst a blood vessel when he hears. "So, Odin isn't my stepdad."

"No," her eyes darken further. "You have one father. The only one to ever own my heart because to him I was his equal—in love and war."

We stop walking and the wind whips around me. I have no idea where we are, or even when we are. Shit, when this is over, will Declan, Nev, and Kai even still be in the cabin?

"So you really did love him." I shake my head in disbelief. "He wasn't lying."

"I did," she smiles. "He was the destiny that I saw the night I left Odin."

"Wait." I hold up my hand, my mother's story sounding eerily similar to Deck's. "You saw my father?"

“I did,” she smiles. “The night I left Odin, I had doubts. Did I do the right thing? Would my people pay the price? So I again held a seidr and that is when I saw you—the son I would have, once the time of the gods came to an end. That is why your father has done all he has. For me. To keep you safe. Because I may have defied one god for my freedom, but I made sure the end came for all of them for you.”

I can’t believe it. My mother was a badass, and everything she did was for me. I wonder if she knew how my dad had treated me all these years. “Well, you should have given my father a manual because he was a shit father.”

“Luca!” She closes the space between us and I can’t help but notice how she used the name Nev gave me. “Do not begrudge your father for all he has done. He has suffered more than you know.”

For a moment I feel like I’m a kid. That same little boy being called out by Kai for swiping my finger in Nev’s birthday cake. “But I needed him. I needed *you* and you weren’t there.”

Her eyes fill with tears and I instantly feel horrible. “Mom,” I close my eyes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—”

Her hand wraps around my wrist, cutting me off. “Say that again.”

“What? That he didn’t mean...”

“Not that.” She smiles and shakes her head. “The other.”

“Mom?” I say hesitantly, and when I do, she closes her eyes and a tear rolls down her cheek.

We stand there under the stars, quiet, and when a wind whips across the night, I take a step toward her.

“Mom,” I say it a second time. “Why are we here? Couldn’t you have told me all this back at the cabin?”

She opens her eyes and nods over my shoulder, and when I turn, I see lights of every color, and among them a city. “I was right. The Northern Lights are Valhalla.”

“That is Vanaheimr,” she corrects. “The last of the Norse realms. The Valkyries have protected it all this time for you because through your heirs it will live on.”

“Heirs?” I look back at my mother. “But I cannot sire children.”

“Says whom?”

Says any of us that were sired by The Fallen and never knocked a girl up, I want to say, but don’t. Instead, I just look at her, skeptical.

“Luca,” she laughs. “You are the grandson of Njörd, sire of the Vanir. I was the goddess of fertility, for stars sake. You can procreate, I assure you, and like all things in the universe, it will happen when it is meant to because your heir is destined to rule Vanaheimr. But for it to happen, Luke must be stopped, as well as Heaven. I could not stop him as I signed my loyalty, and a god does not revoke an oath, no matter how dark it may be. But your beloved can.”

“Wait.” I hold up my hand. “What do you mean stop Heaven?”

“Heaven wants to rule every kingdom in the hierarchy and with your beloved sitting with the throne, they will have the power to ensure total rule. No one would challenge Heaven with the armies of Olympus and Valhalla backing them. The same reason Luke wants your beloved, is the same reason Heaven does, too.”

Shit. I need to tell Nev and the others all of this. The idea of my mother’s legacy, my legacy, being erased, and our girl being the conduit for the throne’s total rule, fuels a sense of duty and obligation I’ve never felt before. “When you saw the future and you saw me, did you see this?”

“I did not. But fate weaves its own tapestry and those who are blessed to be among its cloak, are destined to ensure it succeeds.”

As I stand there in the dead of the Arctic night, my mind reels with all I’ve learned.

No one commands my mother's army. It's been mine all along. There are no politics at play because Valhalla is gone and another kingdom, that of my mother, awaits its new leader...me.

I don't believe it, but for the first time in all my existence, I actually feel sorry for my father. Losing my mother broke his heart and turned him cold. But if he knew she existed here, among the Northern Lights, between day and night, it could maybe heal him and I could have a chance...a real chance, at having a father.

"Son." My mother reaches for my hands and holds them in hers, clasping them tight. "I cried a thousand years of tears for your father, and when they ran cold, they turned to snow and ice. But there are no more tears to shed. No more love to mourn. I have been given this gift of time with you, my Loki, and it has been everything."

"Mom..." I search her eyes frantically, not sure what to say or do.

"You, my son are everything I dreamed." She places a hand on my chest and it fills me with warmth. "You love with such passion, and it is beautiful. That you get from me. But do not let the burn of your father's blood drive you any longer. See through it and let the part of your spirit that is light, guide you."

I pull back, wanting more time with her, wanting to know all about her world and time she spent with my dad. But as a gust of wind blows across the night, sending snow flurries swirling all around me, she is gone, and when they clear, I am back at the cabin, and a gentle snow falls down around me.

I'm in the kitchen cooking breakfast when the others come down the stairs the next morning. "Food will be right up.

Coffee is ready.” There’s a bounce in my step and I can’t believe it but I’m whistling.

“Brother, are you feeling okay?” Kai asks, pulling out one of the stools at the counter.

“I’m great.” I turn off the stove and take the remaining pancakes off the griddle. “Got this recipe from a book in the cabinet. They’re Swedish pancakes and they are incredible. Dad said he used to make them all the time.”

“Dad?” Declan repeats.

“Yeah, we talked earlier and he showed me where a few things were. Also gave me a list of places to check out in town. And Gretel. He told me we have to see a woman named Gretel. Works a boat at the harbor and has the best catch of herring around. He gave me a recipe we should try and I am going to make it tonight if her catch is good today.”

Nev comes around the counter, wrapping her arms around my waist and gives me a squeeze. “You okay, love?”

I hug her back and kiss the top of her head. “I’m fantastic. Grab some coffee. Breakfast is ready.”

She looks at me, a curious smile pulling at her lips, and I bend down and kiss her gently. “I’m good, baby girl. Eat up. I sure plan to...after breakfast,” I add with a wink.

Her cheeks turn a delicious shade of pink and she clears her throat, and heads over to the coffee pot and pours three cups, seeing that I have one already.

When she is done handing one to Declan and one to Kai she takes a seat in between the two and I feel the three watching me as I set a plate of pancakes in front of each. I’ve sliced berries, and made my own syrup, another recipe in the book my dad pointed out when we talked earlier.

I didn’t sleep the rest of the night. As I sat on the couch, staring out the windows, watching the snow, I knew my mom was watching me, and while I sat there among their memories,

waiting for the sun to rise, I found a strange kind of peace I've never felt before.

When the sun finally did appear, I called my father to let him know I'd connected with my mother's legacy and while I didn't say how, the change in both of our voices was noticeable when he said before hanging up, 'be careful, son' and I replied with, 'I will, dad.'

I couldn't wait to tell Nev and the guys what happened, and I would. But I wanted to watch them eat and enjoy this moment with the girl I loved and the brothers I would do anything for—my family.

"So, where should we start the search today?" Kai asks after taking a sip of coffee. "Do we want to go back to Neptune's fields?"

When I hear the name I can't help but laugh. My grandfather was the god of the sea, and Neptune was the name the Romans gave their god of the water. Yet, my army was that of the skies, and I couldn't wait to introduce my family to them.

"Oh, I don't know brother." I lift my own coffee cup and take a sip. "I thought maybe we'd start here."

"What?" Declan asks after taking a bite. "Oh shit, these are good, man."

"I know," I smile.

"They are," Nev nods enthusiastically. "I mean, *really* good."

"How come you can't cook at home?" Kai says while shoveling in a forkful of pancakes.

"I don't know," I shrug. "When in Rome, maybe?"

The three nod and continue eating. "So why do you think we should search around here? Did you find something?"

"You can say that." I set my coffee cup down and lean against the counter, crossing my legs at the ankles.

“Well?” Nev asks eagerly when I don’t say anything more.

I turn to the window and their gazes follow. Just past the deck, waiting among the snowy field, are dozens of winged horses, and on their backs, their riders, The Valkyries.

The three turn back to me, mouths open, and I just smile and sip my coffee, thanking my mom silently.

Once they’re done with breakfast and the dishes are done, I sit down next to the fire and tell them everything—what happened last night, the story of my parents and that of my mother and her people, and my destiny to rule not Valhalla, but the kingdom of her people, Vanaheimr. But when I tell them what she said about both Luke and Heaven wanting to control all the kingdoms in the cosmic hierarchy, Nev stands up, fists clenched.

“Well that’s not happening,” she says with defiance. “And once we remove Luke, Heaven will have no choice but to fall in line.”

The way she says it, I want to believe her. But as Declan, Kai and I all exchange a look when she heads upstairs to shower, I know the three of us are all thinking the same thing—it would be nice if that were the case, but something tells me it won’t be that easy.

Chapter 24

Declan

When we finally make it home, it feels like we've been away for years. With our stay in Sweden extended a week and the time difference on Olympus, it was hard to believe all the shit that went down with the Augury was two weeks ago, because it feels like a lifetime.

When Luca filled us in that morning on everything he experienced during the night with his mother, we were blown away. Seeing the Valkyries outside waiting for his command was wild but seeing the way the time with her had changed him, was even more so. His energy was as wily as ever, but there was a new kind of confidence in his step. One of conviction and duty, and it was contagious. Particularly with Kai.

While the trips to Greece and Sweden weren't part of his birthright, the time away seemed to do his spirit some good. He smiled more and his quirky attitude returned, while his bitterness subsided.

When Nev told Luca and I the shift in Kai's attitude originally had been on account of the darker emotions he was experiencing without Hyde to safeguard them, it made sense. I could only imagine the way anger would feel to one who never had to feel it fully, and decided to give him a break, even if a snarky remark or two did come out. But they didn't.

He also seemed to be breathing easier and I knew this was because Luke hadn't made himself known. His spirit and Hyde's seemed to be trapped deep inside Kai, and while I know she was eager to search in his spirit and find Hyde, she also knew we needed time to get all our ducks in a row should Luke be there waiting.

And our girl...what could I say about Nev. Her injuries had healed, and her focus was clear, and when Luca and I practiced commanding our armies, she worked on her power.

Every time I held up my wrist and called for the army of Olympus, it didn't matter where I was, or what I was doing, a rope of lightning wrapped around my arm, followed by the thundering sound of a thousand steps, and in seconds, they were there.

The Valkyries on the other hand...they were always in sight, ready to swoop into battle. Between the speed of their horses and the strength of their battle cry, they were formidable in their own right. There was not a doubt in my mind together, the two armies were a power beyond measure.

Nev's powers were another story. While she surprised us by confessing she hadn't really been using them since Locksley—the crack she created in the chamber, filling her spirit with a taste of destruction that was appealing, which scared her—Luca, Kai, and I saw the way the world around her responded to her presence, and we knew she didn't have to use them because they were her very thoughts and feelings.

When we were on Olympus the sun, and foliage, even the butterflies that day we watched her on the balcony, appeared to follow her. And in Sweden, the snow seemed to create a path wherever she walked—the flurries around her head ceasing, creating a halo. But once we were home, whether it was the fire in the hearth or the wind in the trees, every part of the world around her seemed to wait for her command, and the power of all her bloodlines fell into harmony.

When her Fallen blood burned, she and Luca didn't have to go at it to squash it. She'd find her center and see through it with little drain on her spirit. And when she channeled her mortal power, it no longer showed her where everything around her could break, but instead, where it could mend.

One night while lying in bed, a gentle rain tapping on the windowpane, she told us it was the harmony of us that had brought the power in her bloodlines in balance, and I couldn't

have agreed more. The four of us felt in sync in a way we never had before and I couldn't help but think it was that night in Greece, when Nev pushed us to let go and allow love to guide the way.

With our armies under control and Nev's powers growing stronger, we decided to reopen the club. New membership requests had come in every day while we were away and with the staff ready to get back to work, it was nice to have something to focus on while we waited for her parents to give us the order on when we would head to Eden to transfer the power of Hell over to Kai.

None of us knew exactly what it would mean, but we were all pretty certain that once that happened, Luke would make an appearance. Power was his calling card, and Hell had been his, and he wanted both. He'd worked too hard to put the pieces into place and wouldn't lay low much longer.

With Nev and Kai working on the reopening party, and Luca running point on entertainment, it was easy for me to tend to the business side of things, as well as my network which turns out, did function as a business still.

"Well, hello my love," Nev says as she pads into the kitchen one morning a week after we'd been back. "What has you so deep in thought this morning?"

I turn from where I'm standing at the counter, staring out the back window, and smile when I see her a few feet away, in one of my old T-shirts, pajama bottoms, and slippers.

"Just thinking," I say casually, while taking a sip of coffee.

"Oh yeah." She saunters over and wraps her arms around my waist and tips her head up. "About?"

I set my coffee down on the counter and rub my hands up and down her arms. "Do you really want to know?"

"I'll tell you what's on my mind, if you tell me what's on yours," she teases.

I bend down and give her a kiss, humming in pleasure at the way my coffee tastes on her lips. “Alright, you first.”

“Well...” she drawls, as a playful smile tugs at her lips. “I was thinking, it seems we christened your kingdom, and Luca’s, and now all that’s left is Kai’s.”

The moment she says it every muscle in my body tightens. While we didn’t have another moment like that night the four of us shared in Greece, the nights in Sweden were full of love and laughter. The four of us shared the same bed at night, but Nev always managed to find ways to spend time with each of us, alone.

When Luca let it slip casually one day, that hot tubs were the only way to have sex in the Arctic, I couldn’t wait to test the theory. He was right, of course. There was something erotic about letting her ride me with the jets bubbling all around us, and something equally satisfying about feeling her hot body wrapped around mine, as I carried her to the bed and devoured her from head to toe.

Whether Kai took Luca up on his advice for a late night soak with our girl, I didn’t know. But I do know they were doing perfectly fine in that department. Knowing the Hellfire the two drew from one another, I wouldn’t be surprised if they went at in the snow and melted it, fucking in a puddle.

“Only one more to go.” I lean in and kiss her neck, unable to help myself. “Do you think you can stand the heat of Hell on that cute little ass of yours?”

“Kai and I will be fine. We have fire in our veins. It’s you and my Arctic boy I’m worried about.”

I growl and nip on her neck, and she tilts her head back and laughs that sexy, throaty laugh of hers and I swear, I’m about two seconds away from throwing her over my shoulder and carrying her to the pool house so we can start up the sauna, lock us in there until we are hot, sweaty, and drenched from sex.

“Now you tell me what you were thinking.” She runs a hand through my hair, and I bury my face in her neck.

Fuck, I love everything about her. Holding her, kissing her, laughing with her. She is my dream girl, and I can’t believe I get to be with her forever. That’s why it’s easy to tell her what I was thinking. “I was thinking about making you my wife.”

The moment I say it she freezes. “What?”

“I mean it, Nev.” I pull back and find her wide eyes on mine. “I love you and I want you to be my wife. I want to marry you, and have babies with you, and live out this incredible existence we are destined to have, with you, and those two clowns by our side.”

“Is this about what happened in Greece?” She grips my forearms. “About needing to prove I’m yours because I am. I ___”

“No, it’s not about what happened in Greece,” I cut her off. “I love you and them. Nothing’s changed.”

“So you are still okay with what happened?”

Warmth ignites in my core when I think about that night. “Hell, yes, I’m okay with it. I wouldn’t have done it if I weren’t.”

“So is there a chance I may see you three together someday? Because baby, what lines you did cross were hot. I mean, I thought about it in my mind, but seeing it was an entirely different thing.”

I laugh, unable to help myself. “You thought about it?”

She bites her lower lip and nods sheepishly. “Maybe a time or two. I mean, you and Luca have this electric chemistry, and I don’t know, it seemed like something you would be down for...or maybe had done before.”

I run my thumb across her chin, noting the question in her comment. Luca and I did have that energy, it was true, but I didn’t want him or Kai the way I did Nev. What we shared was more about wanting them to feel the depth of my love for the

four of us and crossing that line intimately about bringing us closer together.

“For the record, Luca and I have never kissed or fucked. Any touching that’s happened has been—”

She holds up her hand, cutting me off. “I don’t need to hear about anyone the two of you shared or who either of you were with before me.”

“That’s fair,” I nod. “Just as I don’t need to hear about anyone you were with before us. Deal?”

“Deal.” Her eyes soften and she chews the inside of her cheek. “Then what’s this all about? Marriage, that is.”

“It’s not about anything other than the fact I love you and want to give you my name.”

“Your name?” She looks at me again with confusion in her eyes.

“Come.” I step back and lace my fingers through hers. “Have a seat and I’ll explain.”

I lead her over to the stool, pull it out and wait for her to sit, then do the same. “We may be part of The Fallen community, and now I belong to another as well, but for the most part we exist in this world. A world where Primordial is an empire that will someday be yours, and *Styx* already is.”

“Declan.” She holds out one hand and I see the wheels in her mind already turning. “In Paris, I had a colleague... Juliette. She had a boyfriend, and a girlfriend, and no one batted an eye.”

“Sure,” I nod. “Polyamorous relationships are everywhere. But one girl with three guys...it’s one thing if you were just dating different guys all the time, but it’s another if you keep showing up on the same arms, over time.”

“It’s also a whole other thing if we show up over time, period,” she counters.

“This too, is true,” I agree.

Nev's father had kept a low profile over the centuries by moving around like the rest of the legion. But when he built Primordial, he and Vinny set up shop in London and used the hair and clothing styles of each decade, to disguise who they were by saying they were sons, grandsons, and even great grandsons, of the men that built the company. In the hall of the executive floor at Primordial's offices, there were pictures of Nev's father over time, to further cement this "lineage."

But for the past twenty years he, Nev's mother, the rest of the legion and their attendants, had called London home, and the fact that no one had commented on their non-aging appearance always perplexed me—especially when they had children that did age physically until eighteen, and then stopped. Which shit, come to think of it, that was now me, too.

"Honestly, we have decades before we have to worry about that," I continue. "And really, we could always hole up in the country for a few generations, until we can return."

"The four of us, in the country," Nev purrs. "I like the sound of that."

"Me too," I smile. "But back to what I was saying...those businesses, and worlds, especially if we have a child, they will be much easier to navigate if you had my last name."

"My parents aren't married," she straightens. "And those who play at *Styx* have no room to comment on anything given their tastes."

"You're right about *Styx*, and to the point of your parents, your mother uses your father's last name."

"Ah," Nev holds up a finger. "You got me there. But he made it up. For the business."

"But he has it," I counter.

"True, but my mother doesn't use it for appearances."

I pull back and look at her, wondering if I had gone about this all wrong. "Do you not want to marry me?"

“Oh Deck...” She places a hand on either side of my face and leans in. “Once upon a time that is all I ever dreamed about.”

I swallow, my pulse kicking up a notch. “And now?”

“Now, I still dream of you in my future, but Luca and Kai are there, too.”

I smile gently and my racing heart slows back down. “Is that what you’re worried about?”

“Well yeah.” She drops her hands. “I mean, I don’t want them to think I am choosing one over the other.”

“Oh princess.” I wrap my hand around the back of her neck and pull her face to mine, kissing her so hard it steals the air right from my lungs and knocks her off balance.

When she falls into my lap, I pick her up and cradle her in my arms. It’s the kind of kiss you never want to end. But I need to so she will know the reason this is on my mind.

“It’s not about taking you from them.” I press my forehead to hers and she places a hand on my chest. “It’s about wanting you to be protected from the wolves of this world so that you *can* be with them. So you can love all three of us the way you want without the ridicule that mortals are so good about dishing out. If we are married and you have my child, no one will ever question you.”

The moment I say it, recognition flashes in her eyes. I am the only one who will be able to give her children. The mortal blood in our veins is not cursed like Luca and Kai’s. If she is pregnant with my baby, and shows up with them on her arm, no one will question it because in their eyes, she is mine.

“It would only be for this world,” I lean in. “In Luca’s and mine, you can use whatever name or label you want. There is no judgment on either Olympus or Vanaheimr, and we all know what happens in Hell.”

She laughs and I do, too. Tales of what happened in Eden during its day were infamous.

The soulless were not for decorum. Eden may be gone, but the soulless still existed according to their own rules—with Nev’s mother watching over them, of course.

But when the power of Hell was transitioned to Kai and he was in charge of Eden, he could rebuild it and create a place where you could exist as you wished. Free, like it never was.

“Marriage is for this world,” I continue when I see her giving the idea more thought. “To satisfy this world’s archaic structures. But elsewhere, you are each of our queens, and you will have the title and role and responsibility of being on each of our arms, exactly as you choose.”

Her eyes turn a beautiful shade of blue. One I’ve never seen before. Almost like they’re backlit by fire. “You’re forgetting one thing,” she says huskily.

“And that is?” My chest tightens.

“I am destined to rule three kingdoms, too.”

“Oh yeah?” I rake my top teeth over my lower lip. “Do if you are our queen, does that make us your kings?”

“You are each a part of my heart, and by my side, you will sit. My equals, and my lovers.”

We kiss again, and this time, it doesn’t end. I carry her up the stairs, to my room, and we spend the rest of the morning in bed. But before drifting off she whispers, “I love you to the stars and beyond, Declan Draven, and I would be proud to be your wife, and honored to have your name.”

Holding her close, she just made me the luckiest man in the universe. And it’s exactly what I dream about when we drift off to sleep for the quietest nap I’ve ever taken.

Chapter 25

Nev

The next night, Luca knocks on my door after I've just gotten out of the shower. "Well hello," he greets me with a sly smile when he finds me standing there in a towel.

"Well, hello to you, too." I return his smile with my own. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Oh baby girl, if it's pleasure you seek...." He steps into the room, grabs me by the hips, and kicks the door closed with his foot.

I let out a small laugh and tilt my head as he trails kisses down my neck. His lips are warm and help ease the tension in my muscles.

Today was beyond busy. Luca, Kai, and I spent most of it at *Styx* getting ready for the reopening, while Declan left early to meet up with Ares, promising to be home by dinner.

It was nice to focus on something other than war. I loved working at Primordial and hoped I would someday be able to do the job which brought me back home to begin with. But I knew it may be awhile before I worked there again and decided to put all my energy into the reopening at the club.

It wasn't that I didn't think we would beat Luke. There wasn't a doubt in my mind we'd win. With Declan and Luke's armies, my power, and Hell under Kai's command, when he finally wielded it, I believed with everything in me we'd be successful. I just didn't know what our lives would look like when all was said and done, and if working at my father's company would even be possible.

It was clear Luca's kingdom needed him, and Olympus, full of players and politics that Declan would need to navigate. And Hell...Kai would likely manage it differently than my

mother because each leader had their own style. But I was curious how each of their roles in those worlds would work alongside the life they had here. It would no doubt be about balance, and that would take time, for all of us.

As Luca kisses my neck, his hands find the end of my towel, and when he pulls it off while kissing my freshly scrubbed skin with greater intensity, a moan rumbles his chest.

“Fuck, baby girl...” He rubs against me while one hand finds my lower back and the other my neck. “You taste like sin and strawberries.”

“Sounds like a cocktail. Actually,” I pull back, “it should be on the menu for the reopening. Something with strawberry liquor.”

“Love it. Let’s taste it on you.”

He backs me into the room and when my legs hit the couch in the sitting area, I pull him down with me and open my legs so he can settle between them.

I wasn’t planning on getting sweaty right now, but I won’t deny where this is headed. I never grow tired of my guys, and the harmony in which we now exist is incredible. It’s like our bodies know who needs what, and when, and right now, Luca is the cure to my long, tiring day.

I moan as his hands massage my breasts. Still warm from the shower, they’re pliable and nipples, soft, and his touch makes my nerves dance. “Why are you so fucking delicious?”

I grab a fistful of his hair and tug in approval. “I don’t know, but don’t stop.”

“So demanding.” He chuckles.

“That’s right,” I arch my back. “I am. So shut up and make me come.”

He stops and pushes up on his knees. “I have a better idea. Why don’t you make yourself come and I’ll watch?”

I push up on my elbows and arch a brow. “Is that a dare?”

He shrugs. "If you're up for it."

"Baby." I roll my bottom lip under my teeth. "You should know I am always down for a dare."

Running my hand down the flat of my stomach, I slide it between my legs, and when I run a finger through my wet folds, and dip it inside me, he sucks in a breath.

"Shit.... I think I like watching you touch yourself, more than I do my brothers."

Curling my finger, I go knuckle deep, and when I hit the knot of nerves that makes my skin tingle, I sigh in pleasure. "Damn, you know just how to hit it, too."

"Mm-hmm." I bite my lower lip and flash him a smile. "Practice makes perfect."

"How much have you practiced?" he asks hotly.

"When I was younger...a lot."

"And now?" he rasps.

"Never," I confess. I no longer ache to be touched the way I once did because the three of them satisfy all of my wants and needs.

He swallows and rubs his hand across his chin. "What did you think about while practicing?"

While one hand works my pussy, I use my other to rub my clit. Knowing my arms have pushed my tits together, I probably look like a porn star, and judging by the expression on his face, and the way his dick is straining against his pants, that's not a bad thing.

"You," I confess.

"All three of us," he swallows, "or me?"

"Sometimes the three of you. Sometimes just you... sometimes them."

My heart starts to race as my breathing picks up, and my climax builds. "Fuck, that's hot. When did you start?"

I circle my clit harder, legs clenching. “What?” I punch out.

“How old were you when you started touching yourself?”

My cheeks flush with heat as my pussy gets wetter. “What kind of question is that?”

“Answer it,” he demands, eyes dark with hunger.

“Thirteen.” I lay my head back. “The night we kissed.”

He groans with my answer and blows out a charged breath. “Well, guess what?”

“What?” I puff out.

“I thought of you that night, too. In fact...” He leans over me and grips my chin. “That night, I came thinking about your sweet lips.”

My nipples harden, and the way he looks at me when he says it, I can’t stop my orgasm from tearing through me. “Oh fuck, Luca.”

“That’s right, baby girl. Say my name when you come, just like I did yours that night.”

As my pussy clenches and my body jolts, I can’t stop the flood of emotions that surge through me.

“You, me, them...” He licks his lips, watching me draw out my climax, “this is forever, baby girl. Can you take it?”

I run my thumb, slick with my arousal, across his chin. “I can take it. All night, every night, forever.”

He licks my thumb, then crashes his mouth down on mine, swallowing every breath of my climax as we kiss like the world is ending.

When our lips finally part, and we’re staring at one another panting, and breathless, he waggles his brows. “Tomorrow night, I want you in my room, naked, bound, and in my bed.”

“And tonight?” I ask, curious why he’s not throwing me over his shoulder and heading there right now.

“Tonight,” he pushes up and looks at me with a devilish smile, “we have company.”

“We what?” I push up on my elbows and bring my legs together.

“That’s what I came up here to tell you. Get dressed. Family dinner night starts tonight.”

“Family, what?” I sit up straighter. “Who’s coming?”

“Well...” He looks at my naked body and smiles cheekily. “We know who already did. But your parents, Vinny and Lila, my dad, and Viper.”

“They’re coming here...for dinner?”

“No,” he laughs. “They’re already here.”

I slap both hands over my face. “I can’t believe I just came with my parents downstairs.”

“Technically, you came when they were right down the hall that first night at the penthouse. But who cares about semantics,” he shrugs.

“You shit.” I sit all the way up. “You knew.”

“I did.” He laughs. “But you loved it.”

“Oh, I don’t deny it.” I run my hand over the top knot I threw my hair into for showering, realizing it’s probably frayed now, and my hair likely in need of washing. “But one question, my wicked boy.”

He crosses his arms and flashes me a beautiful smile. “Shoot.”

“How are you going to explain what’s going on there?” I zero in on the bulge in his pants, really wanting to help him take care of it.

“It’s not like I haven’t rubbed one out in seconds before, baby girl. I’ll have this taken care of by the time I grab the roasting pan out of the cabinet.”

“Or...” I nibble on my lower lip. “I probably need to rinse off now. Maybe you can join me.”

I don't get the chance to say another word. He picks me up from the couch, carries me to the bathroom, and makes a mess of me for a second time—this time against the wall of the shower, as the hot water sprays down, and washes us clean.

Once we're dried off, Luca goes back downstairs to start dinner with his father, while I get dressed. Apparently his dad loves to cook and the two are dazzling us with a recipe Caro came up with. I wasn't sure what surprised me more—the fact Caro could cook, or the fact he and Luca would be cooking together?

I loved the fact Luca and his dad were working on building their relationship. Caro was loyal, and my parents adored him, but it always bothered me he and Luca never got along. I knew the way he treated Luca over the years had pained him. However, now that I knew more of his parents' story, I understood the distance Caro had kept.

We all deal with grief and love in the ways in which we think is best. When Declan, Kai, and Luca wanted to protect me, they pushed me away, and when I was gone, dove headfirst into dark vices to help them deal with what they'd done. Neither choice was best, but it's what they decided at the time, and who knows, maybe it was for the better.

Where we were now was someplace I wasn't sure we would be had our friendship continued as normal after Locksley. There always seemed to be a guard up between us. A line we didn't want to cross, no matter how thick the tension got. But when circumstance pushed us apart, then pulled us back together, the need was there, only stronger than ever.

Time had proven what we'd always felt but were afraid to entertain—we belonged to one another, in every way possible,

and everything we'd gone through had made who we were individually, and together, indestructible. We'd been forged through fire and ice, and nothing could break us.

When I finally make it to the dining room, I'm greeted by the sound of laughter. "There she is," Declan says from the other side of the room.

I smile watching as he crosses the room and comes to greet me with a kiss. "You're back."

"I am." He holds a bottle of wine in his hand. "Will you open this? Caro needs to know where the emulsifier is. Luca may be learning to cook, but he still needs a map of the kitchen."

"You went all the way to the country for a bottle of wine?" I laugh gently.

"Hey," he shrugs, "it was a good bottle."

Clearly, he went there for more, but I would ask about his meeting with Ares later. For now, I hold my hand out and he hands me the bottle, then gives me a kiss, before heading into the kitchen.

While opening the wine, I look at Kai and he winks. I know what's behind his playful smile. The last time we were in the dining room, the three fucked me right where he's sitting, and Kai, my sweet love, wants me to know exactly why he chose the spot.

I wink back and set the open bottle down on the table so it can breathe, then make my way over to my parents.

"Hi mom," I greet her with a smile. "Dad."

"There's my girl." She places both hands on my shoulders as I kiss her once on each cheek, then reaches for my hands, and steps back, holding them out. "You look beautiful, honey. Tres chic, mon ami."

"Oh..." I finger my ear nervously. "Thank you."

I'm wearing a green silk, off the shoulder shirt, with black ankle pants, flats, and a gold Gucci horsebit belt. My hair, which did wind up getting washed, has been slicked back into a wet chignon, and I have on a pair of simple gold hoop earrings, and my medallion.

I hadn't worn it since the morning after Crane Manor. I'd been too afraid it would get broken with Hyde's penchant for choking. But since we've been home I've worn it every day and when Hyde returns, because I'm confident he will, I'm planning to make it a permanent part of me, so it never gets lost or broken again.

After giving my dad a quick hug, I go over and say hi to Vinny, Lila, and Viper, and then make my way over to Kai, and talk with him and Declan as we wait for dinner.

When it's ready, I'm not surprised that it turns out to taste delicious. The breakfast Luca made us that morning in Sweden was from his dad's recipes, and we spend the first half of dinner trying to convince Caro he should open a restaurant, or at least, write a cookbook. When my mother tells him she knows a publisher that is looking for new culinary talents, he nudges her shoulder with a laugh, and says he'll think about it.

Throughout the rest of dinner the conversation is unending, the energy infectious, and at one point, when I see who is gathered around the table, I'm struck by just how surreal it all is.

Kai is at ease with Viper, as they have always been, and Luca and his dad are sitting next to each other, shit talking in a way that isn't in anger, but good fun, and my parents are sitting across from Vinny and Lila, laughing and drinking as if this is the most normal night in existence. Seeing all of them moves me to tears, and when I place a hand on Declan's thigh and excuse myself for a moment, I head to the living room to catch my breath.

I'm standing there for a few minutes, pressing my fingers to the corners of my eyes to stop the tears that threaten, when my father comes in. "Princess, you okay?"

When I turn and see him, I can't help but run to him like I'm six years old and he's just returned from a work trip.

He's always hung the moon to me—the strongest of The Fallen, who loved my mother so much he defied the Devil just to free her from a contract that had kept them apart. And I always envied my mother for owning his heart so completely because I too wanted to be loved that way someday.

However, now that I am, I realize... I'm no longer envious of her because I *am* loved just as much as she is, by not one but three, and those incredible men, possessed everything I admired about my father.

Declan's fierce nature to protect what he loved, Luca's wicked sense of humor, and Kai's intellect and appreciation for higher thinking were all things I had always admired about my father. There's just one thing missing...Hyde. The dark part of us that was a little unhinged, just as I knew my dad could be from the stories I'd heard. Hyde too, was a part of us, and should be here tonight.

"I guess maybe it's time to stop calling you that." My father tightens his hold when I grow quiet.

I look up and find his eyes—a mirror of my own, warm and watery. "Why?"

"Because..." He kisses my forehead and steps back. "I've heard Declan use it for years and now I know just how much it means to you when he does."

I nod, unable to fight the smile that pulls at my lips. "You should probably strike baby girl and gorgeous from the list, too."

"Right," he replies with a short laugh.

Shit, I close my eyes. Was that awkward, confessing the pet names my other two boyfriends have for me?

Seeing me question myself, he smiles. "I know you care for each of them, Nev. I've had many years to get used to the idea that one day, you would be dating all three."

“I don’t know if the term is dating,” I can’t help but laugh again, because I don’t think any of us has gone on an official date. Kai wanted to, but I guess we reached a place of togetherness where dates were no longer needed.

He holds up his hand. “Not another word. How about I call you Nev, darling daughter that I can’t imagine this existence without, and we leave it at that.”

“That works,” I nod with approval, and fold back into his arms.

I don’t know how long we’ve been standing there hugging, when my mom walks in, clearing her throat. “Love, they’re about to serve dessert.”

We turn and realizing she has the same pet name for both of us, break into wide smiles. Looking at us with a curious one of her own, my father reaches out and she grabs his hand, folding her into us.

“This right here,” he kisses each of us on our heads, then closes his eyes, “this is everything.”

“Mm-hmm,” my mother murmurs. “Can you believe Luca and Caro cooked us dinner...together?”

“No,” my father and I reply in unison.

My mother places a hand on my cheek and looks at me, wistfully. “It’s nice to see you happy, honey.”

“I am,” I place my hand on hers, liking the way the word feels. “All we need to do now is stop Luke so that happiness can be infinite.”

We stand that way for a few minutes, and when we hear Caro and Luca bring out dessert, the three of us make our way back to the dining room.

After dessert we head outside to the patio. As we sit around the firepit, with blankets draped over our legs, drinks in hand, the subject of what’s next comes up, and the conversation turns more serious.

“I guess we should talk about when we head to Eden,” my father says while standing behind my mother, hands on her shoulders.

The four of us look at one another, and each knows what the other is thinking. It’s time to tell my parents about Hyde because wherever he is, Luke is likely there, too, and only I can reach him. Doesn’t matter what my mother needs to do to transition Hell to Kai, only I can summon the Devil when it’s time.

Declan places a hand on my back as Luca pushes up from where he’s sitting and crouches down in front of me. “You ready?” he asks.

I look from him to Kai and then Deck. “You got this,” he says with encouragement. “You’re stronger than all of us combined.”

I flick my eyes back to Kai and when he gives me an extra nod of support, I take a deep breath and look to my parents.

“When we get to Eden,” I clear my throat, “I will be the one to summon Luke.”

“Nev,” my father starts to respond but my mother holds up her hand and he stops.

“I will do it,” I continue, “because I know where he is. He is with Hyde, in the darkest part of Kai’s spirit. And I know he is there because I put him there.”

“You didn’t remove his spirit that night at Locksley,” my mother says with little surprise. Almost as if she’s known all along.

I shake my head. “It would have been like removing Kai, and I couldn’t do that.”

“So you saved him and Luke?” my father asks, incredulously.

“Yes,” I straighten. “And I’m glad I did. You said it yourself Luke would return, no matter what we did. Can you

imagine if I *had* sacrificed Hyde? I would have never forgiven myself.”

My father looks at my mother and a silent exchange passes between the two.

“She’s right,” Vinny says when it grows quiet. “Nev knows what she’s doing. If anyone can summon that son of a bitch, it’s my niece.”

I smile at my uncle, grateful for his encouragement. “Thank you.”

“I mean it, buddy. From what I hear, you can control the elements while holding the power of creation and destruction in the palm of your hand. If anyone can do this, it’s the one who has been fated to end him all along.”

“He’s right,” Luca and Caro say at the same time.

“Nev,” Caro continues, when Luca defers to his father. “You’ve kept these three in check,” he hikes a thumb toward Declan, Kai, and Luca. “The way I see it, you lead, and we’ll follow.”

A rush of pride swirls in my chest and when I turn to Kai his smile is bright and wide. “We got you, gorgeous.”

“Alright,” my mother says when Viper offers her vote of support. “I know how hard you four have been working on the club’s reopening, so we’ll head to Eden after that. We start with the transition of Hell to Kai, and then summon Luke.”

“Finally.” Vinny rubs his hands together, gleefully. “I’ve been itching for a little payback. Didn’t get enough shots in that son of a bitch the last time.”

My father and Vinny bump fists, but my mother’s eyes remain on mine for a moment, before shifting her attention to Vinny and Lila.

After we finish our drinks, we call it a night, and when it’s just my mother and I at the door saying goodnight, I find her looking at me in a way she never has before—the way I’ve always looked at her. In pride, and admiration.

It was hard not to be in awe of her but standing there, just the two of us, I can't help but feel as if I understand her now, in a way I never have.

She went up against the most powerful being in existence to protect me and my father, because that is what she was willing to do for those she loved. Now, for those I loved, I was prepared to challenge Heaven itself.

She cups my cheek and smiles fondly. "Do you know, when you were in my stomach, you would keep me awake for hours on end, tumbling around?"

"Maybe it was because you and dad couldn't keep your hands off each other," I shoot back, wryly.

She barks out a laugh. "Nev!"

"Mom," I sigh. "Don't deny what we all know. When the two of you are together, no one else exists."

"Well..." She drops her hand, considering the comment. "For thousands of years I could not see him the way I wanted to, and then one day, suddenly I could. But then you came along and you were all *we* saw."

My chest warms at the comment. I can't help it. In some ways, I was still a little girl, wanting her parent's approval.

"What are you trying to tell me?" I smile softly, knowing this isn't a conversation about how I used to keep her awake when she was pregnant with me.

"The reason I tell you," she gives me a soft smile, "is because one night when you were keeping me awake, I found myself up on the roof talking to you. You always seemed to calm down when your dad read you stories, so I wondered if maybe you'd give your old mom a break, if I told you one, too. You loved it, of course because it was the story of how the stars fell for the moon, and when I rubbed my stomach, and told you when you found your moon, that love would be worth any fight, you kicked gently, and I knew you heard me."

I draw in a breath, not sure what to say. The moment is so precious, so full of emotion, I can barely speak.

“Even if your moon is three, do not ever question what you are willing to do to protect those you love,” she continues as my eyes fill with tears. “What you did to protect Hyde is admirable, and it is who you are. One who loves fiercely and does not apologize for that love. That, you get from your father.”

“But what if my actions led to this?” There it is. The question I’d been asking myself since that night the four of us learned the truth about our destiny. “What if I created this path we’re on because I was too weak to do what needed to be done?”

She considers the question, then responds. “When your father and I were bound by Luke’s contract, I loathed him. At least, I thought I did. But my heart knew I loved him and had convinced myself otherwise. But I let him in at the right moment and when I did, it changed everything.”

“Meaning?” I blink back my tears before they can fall.

“Meaning, do not ask what if. It is a fool’s game. What happens is meant to happen at the time that it does.”

She cups my face and studies me and when she sees my lower lip trembling she kisses my forehead and locks her green eyes on mine.

“Oh sweet girl...love is messy, but it is always worth it. In whatever form it comes to you, and no matter how hard the fight. And when the time comes, you will know what to do because love will be the answer. It always is. It was when you saved Hyde, and it will be when you fulfill your destiny.”

My throat is thick with tears, and I can barely talk. “How do you know?”

“Because that you get from me. And you are my daughter in every way, right down to your very spirit.”

Chapter 26

Kai

“If you’re going into the kitchen, would you grab me a Vitamin Water and maybe a shovel?” I grumble as Luca gets up from where he’s sitting across from me and heads to the kitchen.

“Aw, what’s the matter, lightweight?” He flashes me a shit eating grin, as Nev tips her head back to steal a kiss from him as he walks by. “Did someone have too much to drink last night?”

I’m on the couch in the living room where I’ve been since morning, while Nev is curled up in the oversize chair across from me, and Deck sprawled out on the other couch. The two of them are faring better than me, but the only one who appears unaffected by how much we had to drink last night is Luca.

I flip him off and he runs a hand over his abs and laughs. “Yeah brother, I’ll grab it. Anybody else need anything while I’m up?”

“Water. Aspirin. A knife.” A multitude of responses ring out at the same time, and I’m not sure who says what, but I agree with every one of them.

Last night’s reopening was one of the biggest parties we’d ever thrown at the club, and it went off without a hitch. There were so many new members anxious to put their wildest dreams to the test, that the four of us found ourselves meeting, greeting, and taking care of guests for the first two hours straight.

When things did finally calm down, we made sure to enjoy ourselves, making up for the first couple of hours by dancing and slamming back drink after drink. Nev’s tolerance was

impressive, and her energy infectious, as she had all three of us on the dance floor, bumping and grinding, song after song.

I never would've believed she would be the mixologist among the four of us, but the cocktail Nev came up with a few days earlier turned out to be something that not only tasted incredible but packed a punch.

At one point during the night, Luca had the brilliant idea of doing body shots, and when he poured a bit of the new concoction on her wrist and proceeded to work his mouth up her arm stopping to steal a kiss before saying with a laugh, 'yup, just like sin,' I figured he had something to do with its creation.

Aside from that little moment between the two, Nev managed to spend time with each of us separately, as well as together, and by the time we spilled through the door at home sometime around three in the morning, we didn't even bother showering. We were too tired to do anything but strip out of our clothes, and fall into bed—mine, because it was quickest to get to—and slept well into this afternoon.

It was nice to let loose for one night and just forget about everything. But I know one of the reasons we all had more to drink than normal was because of what was in the back of our minds. The day after tomorrow we leave for Eden, and despite how confident we feel, we're also a little anxious because we don't know what to expect.

While we're confident that we will save The Fallen and put an end to Luke once and for all, when all is said and done, I will still be the heir to Hell, and my kingdom that of fire and fear, not gods and heroes. I'm apprehensive what that will mean to me, not to mention Deck and Luca curious what the kingdoms they now commanded will ask of them.

I'm not sure if it's the sharpest bent of irony to ever exist or the smartest idea fate ever had, giving me, one whose very being was the antithesis to all Hell was, the dark kingdom to rule. I couldn't help but think the universe was high when it

wove its web in such a way to make me Luke's child, because I was the worst one for the job.

There wasn't one part of me that wanted Hell or the responsibility of keeping the scales of good and evil in balance. Nev's mother was an archangel and she found it difficult at times, so how could I possibly hope to do so with ease?

Maybe it was an age thing. After all, The Fallen had thousands of years to understand the way things worked, and Nev's parents had existed for untold millennia before they were even angels. Perhaps with time, I could understand and accept it? I don't know, and honestly, right now I can't be bothered because thinking hurts.

"Here you go." Luca hands me a bottle and rumples my hair. "Better get yourself together, brother. We've got shit to do and can't do it while nursing a hangover."

"I'm aware." I twist off the cap, drink half the bottle, then set it on the table next to me. "The shit we have to do was my idea, remember?"

"Yeah, yeah." Luca slumps back down in his chair and kicks his feet up on the coffee table.

Nev looks from Luca to me, curious. "What shit do we have to do? I thought we were laying low until we leave for Eden."

"We are," Declan gives Nev a sleepy smile. "It's just a day trip, princess."

"Oh," she settles back in the chair. "Where are we going?"

Deck looks at Luca who looks at me. "To run an errand," I answer cryptically.

"What errand?" She arches a curious brow.

"You'll see," Luca winks, and surprisingly, that was it. Nev didn't ask about it again the rest of the day.

Maybe it was the hangover we were all nursing, or maybe it was the utter exhaustion in our bones, but the next morning, when we all feel like ourselves again, Nev finds me alone in the kitchen and wraps her arms around me from behind, her curiosity returning.

“Morning.” She presses her chest against my back and snuggles against me, while running her hands under my shirt, and up my chest. “Do you want to fill me in now on where we’re going?”

Knowing *exactly* what her touch does to me, I turn around and when I see her standing there in a pair of lace underwear and one of my vintage Thrasher T-shirts, I let out a little groan. “Now that’s just playing dirty.”

I love Nev in my shirts, and even more if it’s one that’s aged to perfection, with fabric so thin I can see the outline to her breasts.

“No...” She drawls, grabbing the sides of her panty, and wiggling it down. “This is playing dirty.”

Keeping my eyes locked on hers, I maintain my resolve as she slips it off, then holds it out in front of me.

I cross my arms and steel my resolve. “I know what you’re doing.

“Oh yeah?” she taunts. “And what is it I’m doing, Kai?”

“Distracting me.”

“Is it working?”

Grabbing her sides, she drops her panty to the floor as I hoist her up onto the counter and giggles as I lean in to kiss her neck, while running my hand along the inside of her thigh. “I’d say so.”

“See.” She tips her head back while running a hand through my hair. “Dirty always works.”

“Not really.” I nibble her neck.

“Then why is your hand between my legs,” she says flirtatiously.

While the answer is obvious, the reason I’m letting her distract me is a little more complicated.

When I woke up this morning with my hangover gone, I was reminded just how quiet my mind was. With how much time I’ve spent with Nev these past few weeks, I thought for sure Hyde would come crashing into my consciousness by now. His need for her a tether, pulling him from wherever he was. But nothing has roused his spirit and I don’t like what it could mean.

The thought that’s been going through my mind, even while I trail the pads of my fingertips along the sensitive skin on the inside of her thigh, is one I don’t want to entertain because it will affect us both—what if he’s gone, and not because of what Nev did that night at Locksley, but because Luke did something to him?

Luke is one of the most powerful beings to ever exist. Nev’s mother vanquished him, but his spirit *still* returned. What if he snuffed out Hyde’s spirit and was lying in wait, biding his time? What if everything we are doing is part of his grand plan to take out The Fallen, once and for all?

That’s why I asked the guys to help me with the surprise we have planned for today. I want to see that beautiful smile on Nev’s face as much as possible because what if we find out Hyde is gone, or in summoning Luke and claiming my birthright, I become swallowed by the dark without Hyde to balance me?

Not wanting to think about any of it today, I grab her thighs and press my forehead to hers, taking a deep breath.

“Hey.” She places one hand on my chest, and the other on the back of my neck and I look up, finding her eyes on mine. “I love you,” she says with conviction. “No matter what, remember that.”

My chest tightens as she places her lips gently to mine, and I realize then, that she too needs a distraction, and something tells me for a similar reason.

The truth is, none of us really knows what's about to happen, and until all those we care about are safe, every moment counts—even those when we can't help but think about those we believe are lost, and hope like hell that we are going to find.

After showering and getting dressed, we pile into Luca's car, and an hour and a half drive later, arrive at the village of Brockenhurst. A mile past the edge of town, we turn onto a private drive, with an ornate gate, flanked by two stone pillars.

As we make our way down the rocked road, Nev turns from where she's looking out the window next to me in the backseat. "What are we doing out here?"

We're in the country, but nowhere near either her parent's house or Declan's, and when we pull up to a two story brick estate with varying roof pitches and a carriage house with bright green topiaries at the entrance, her brows furrow. "Did you three buy another property?"

"Oh, we bought something," Luca says with a laugh, as he puts the car into park. "But not a house."

After turning off the engine, he climbs out of the driver's seat while Declan gets out on the passenger side, and Nev and I slide out of the back seat.

As our feet hit the driveway, the sound of horses whinnying in the distance greets us. It stirs memory in me, so I know it does in her, and sure enough, when I glance at her, her eyes are wide, and jaw tight.

"Come on gorgeous." I hold out my hand and encourage her to take it. It's time to remind our girl what else she loves.

“There’s someone waiting for you.”

Declan and Luca hold their hands above their eyes, as Nev slides her hand in mine. There are large, fluffy storm clouds in the sky and the sun’s light bounces off them every time it peeks through.

“He said to meet him out back,” I say to the guys while pointing with my free hand to a cobblestone path that winds around the house. “Shall we?”

Both drop their hands. “Lead the way,” Declan lifts his chin in acknowledgement.

I make my way to the path with Nev close to my side and Declan and Luca behind me, weaving through a lush side garden, until we reach the back of the house. Nev tugs my hand and stops abruptly, and the three of us halt as well, taking in the acreage before us.

“What are we doing here?” Nev’s voice falters slightly as she flicks her eyes across the green hills with white fences and horses dotting the horizon.

Feeling her hand tremble in mine, I hold it tight for reassurance. I hate that Beauty’s death still haunts her and I’m even more convinced the reason we are here was the right call.

I open my mouth to answer, when the high pitched whine of a horse, followed by the excited clomping of hooves catches all of our attention. Swinging our heads around, we find a spirited foal, being led toward us by a man in a green barn coat and brown newsboy cap.

I nudge Declan, who in turn does the same to Luca, and the three of us watch Nev as she stares at the beautiful young horse headed our way. Its coat is light gray, and its mane and tail a dark charcoal, and I can’t help but think the pictures the breeder shared with us didn’t do it justice. Beauty was every bit her name, but this horse is spirited, magnetic, and practically otherworldly.

“Hello.” The gentleman looks at our clasped hands and then greets me with the tip of his hat. “I’m Brody. You must be

Kai.”

“Hi, yes.” I reach for his hand with my free one and give it a shake. “It’s nice to meet you. Thank you for making the time.”

I’d maintained all communication with Brody and said the horse was for my girlfriend, so it was easy to assume the one holding Nev’s hand was me.

“I hope the weather agrees with us.” He slides his cap back, rubs his forehead, and then replaces it. “Rain is in the air and the horses can feel it.”

Declan shoves a hand in his pocket and looks up with a grin. “It’s almost as if you can feel the electricity. Like lightning.”

Luca snickers and I roll my eyes as Nev ignores the comment, and addresses Brody. “She’s beautiful. Is she weaned yet?”

“Not yet,” Brody admits. “We’ve got a couple more months to go. But don’t worry. The day you can bring her home will be here in no time.”

The minute he says it, my heart falls in my stomach, and I know Deck and Luca’s as well because we all stiffen as Nev shakes her head in confusion. “The day I...what?”

Brody runs a hand down the horse’s hindquarters and smiles as it tosses its head, just like Beauty used to. “This little firecracker. I’m sure you can’t wait to get her home.”

Nev turns to us, question in her eyes. “Surprise,” I squeeze her hand.

I went out on a limb when I reached out to her father to find out the name of Beauty’s breeder, and went even further out on one, when I called him and learned he had a foal born this winter that would be ready for a new owner in the spring. But when I learned the foal was sired from the same line as Beauty’s, I couldn’t ignore it was the universe sending me a sign and bought her sight unseen.

I would never try to replace Beauty. I adored that horse because she helped connect me to Nev in the years she was away, and when she perished in the stable fire, my anger was there, right alongside Nev's, igniting my Hellfire and connecting it to that in her.

But that day had taken something from our girl. Something she once loved that brought a smile to her face had become painful. I saw the trepidation that crept into her eyes that afternoon when we went to the stables at Declan's estate. She had put on a brave face at first but being around Ares' horses had been hard for her, I could see it, and she deserved not to feel that pain anymore.

Watching as she makes her way over to the foal, I can see this is what she needs. She's tentative at first, studying the horse carefully, and when it lowers its head and nickers, she freezes.

But she's not the only one. Everything around us seems to stop and I know Nev is doing what she did that night at Crane Manor. She's paused the world around her so it's only the four of us and that magnificent creature in this moment, and it's breathtaking.

Then, as if she's pressed play, everything resumes. The clouds in the sky continue their billowing, and the horses in the field, running.

"All of Baldemar's offspring are born in the winter and do well come spring," Brody says with confidence.

"Did you say Baldemar?" Nev straightens.

"Sure did," he says with pride.

"That's Beauty's sire," she turns to us.

I shove a hand in my pocket and look at her knowingly, then shift my attention to Brody. "Based on the chart you provided, this horse and Baldemar are cousins, right?"

"Actually," he laughs. "I made a mistake." My heart sinks for a moment, but what he says next, lifts it right back up.

“This is Baldemar’s last sired foal before retirement.”

Nev’s hands fly to her mouth as she gasps and I can’t help but draw in a surprised breath, as well.

“Beauty’s sister?” She turns to me. “This is my girl’s sister?”

“Sure is,” Brody confirms. “And if memory serves me correctly, you two had quite an impressive run together.”

Nev turns her attention back to the foal, and when she throws her arms around its neck and her eyes fill with tears, my chest tightens.

Deck, Luca and I watch in stunned silence as Nev and the foal seem lost in their own world. But when the horse nudges her back, just like Beauty used to, you’d have to be a cold bastard to not feel it in your heart.

“Would you like some time together?” Brody holds the rope in his hand out to Nev. “Take her for a walk and get acquainted?”

Nev wipes under her eyes with the back of her hand and steps back, nodding excitedly. After taking hold of the rope, she turns to look at us, flashing that smile that will forever melt me. “Are you coming?”

“All you brother.” Deck claps me on the back. “You put that smile on her face. Go and enjoy it.”

I shoot them both a look of thanks and make my way over to Nev. “Shall we have some tea?” Brody suggests to the guys.

“That would be good.” Luca runs a hand through his hair. “Got any biscuits?”

The three turn and make their way toward the house and Nev watches as they disappear inside before turning back to me.

“I can’t believe you did this.” Her eyes search mine. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Don’t say anything.” I cup her neck and drown in her smile. “Just look at me the way you are right now. That’s all I need.”

She slides her free hand in mine and gives me a kiss, before clicking her tongue, and leading me and the horse down the path.

We’ve been walking and talking for the past half hour, when the skies open, releasing a torrential downpour. There are barns and stables all over the property, so we trot the horse over to the closest one to take cover.

After putting the foal in an abandoned stall, Nev unfastens the rope from the halter, closes the gate and comes over to where I’m standing in the open door.

“Foals can be unpredictable,” she explains while coming over to where I am, watching the rain pour down. “Better to keep her in there until we can head back.”

I look up at the sky. “We may be stuck here for a while. It’s coming down pretty hard.”

“Well...” She shoves both hands into her back pockets and turns to me. “It could be worse.”

I turn to look over her shoulder and it appears as if this is one of the lesser used stables. The stalls are clean and there are no other horses in here right now. The tack room across the way is even sparse. It appears we’re completely alone.

“You’re right.” I turn back around and find her staring at me with a look in her eyes I know all too well. It’s the one she was giving me that night after Crane Manor and that morning on the airplane.

She leans back against the frame, hands pinned behind her back, and when I lower my mouth down on hers, a clap of thunder clashes over head.

“Kai,” she sighs, and the way my name rolls breathlessly from her lips, makes every nerve come alive.

She grabs my shirt and pulls me close, as I grip the backs of her thighs, and pick her up, fueling the kiss deeper.

Pressing her back against the frame, we grip at one another feverishly, and I don't think this is going to be a hot and heavy make out session. I want her right now in a carnal, primal way, and the way she's touching me, tells me she wants that, too.

Before I know what's happening, I'm letting go of her legs, and she's placing her feet on the ground and turning around.

"Pull your pants down," I whisper hotly in her ear. "I want to fuck you right here in the rain."

My words are like Hyde's, but the desire flooding through me is all mine, and when she yanks her pants down and I unbuckle my own and push them down, I push her legs apart with my knees, and slide my palm down the flat of her stomach, and cup her pussy. She's warm and wet as I slide my finger through her slick slit, and while rubbing her clit with one hand, I use my other to guide my cock into her.

"Yes," she sighs, and her airy pant makes my dick harder as she pushes back to take more of me.

The rain comes down harder as I bring both hands to her hips, and when I start pulling her toward me, she grips the frame with both hands and pushes back with equal force.

The wind picks up, blowing the rain sideways, soaking us both, and it's then I know she did this. She heralded the storm to give us this time together and I am so full of my need for her, I can't think straight.

The slap of our skin is swallowed by the sound of the pelting rain, and while we fuck bone to cheek in this abandoned stable in the middle of a storm, I can't help but think this may be the last perfect moment we have together.

Wrapping one arm around her waist, I brace my forearm on the wood frame above her head, burying my face in her neck. "Gorgeous," I pant. "If things don't go our way, if claiming my father's kingdom somehow changes me, I need

you to remember I love you. And when you ride that beautiful horse, think of me. Please, just think of me.”

She reaches up and grabs a fistful of my hair, scraping her nails along my scalp. “We’re going to win. I won’t let anything happen to you, Kai. I will sacrifice anything, I promise.”

She arches her back as her climax hits, and when her pussy grips my cock, I can’t stop my own from powering through me with fiery intent.

As her legs slacken, our racing hearts and rapid breathing fall in sync, and when I wrap my arms around her and hold her close, I hope that the rain never ends. Because when it does, we will have to leave, which means we will be one step closer to today being over and possibly my end, and the thought alone, is enough to want me to take root here, and never leave.

Chapter 27

Kai

The next morning we're out the door and on our way to the airport with the sunrise. The plan is for the four of us to head to Eden with Nev's parents and meet up with the legion who are already there. Apparently, the secret island off the coast of Spain is still home to the soulless, and the legion spends time there regularly to keep them in line.

I'd heard stories about the mysterious city where Luke once banished the undecided for failing to swear their loyalty after The Fall. In addition to being their home, it was also that of the soulless, and a playground for the legion when they arrived each century in pursuit of their undecided's loyalty. Because of this it had an enigmatic vibe and cool aesthetic, with a mercurial energy that was a mix of good meets bad.

I was under the impression nothing had remained when Declan's father burned it to the ground to lure Luke out of hiding twenty-one years ago. Apparently, that wasn't the case.

"So you rebuilt it?" Nev asks as we climb into the SUV waiting for us on the tarmac.

We arrived at the private airstrip in the south of Spain a few minutes ago, and while loading bags in the car, Nev's mother surprised us when she revealed Eden was no longer a place of ruin, but once again, a thriving metropolis hidden from the mortal world, in the middle of the Mediterranean.

"Yes, we rebuilt it." Her mother flips down the visor from where she sits in the front passenger seat, checks her reflection, then flips it back up.

"Why?" Luca throws an arm along the seat, thumping the back of my headrest with his fingers while looking out the window next to him to check out the Andalusian mountains.

“They’re soulless, who cares if they have a place to get coffee or not.”

“My thoughts, exactly,” Nev’s father says with a smirk as he climbs into the driver’s seat. “Everyone buckled up?”

Declan and Nev mumble yes from their seats in the far back, while Luca and I confirm that we’re good.

It’s weird to be looked after like a child, when the four of us have just spent weeks claiming birthrights, and preparing for a war that could end existences. But I guess that’s what being a parent was like—no matter how old your children are, they’re still kids in your eyes.

“Alright, then, let’s get this show on the road.”

He closes the door and checks his phone for a moment, then slides it into a cup holder in the console and starts the car. From here it’s an hour drive down the coast and then one long trip through the tunnel that connects the mainland to the island, and then we’re there.

“I learned a long time ago that no being is either dark or light,” Nev’s mother answers Luca’s question as her father pulls away from the tarmac “And that which others find themselves running away from, or to, is not for anyone to judge. While I am not naive and know some of the soulless are beyond redemption, I do believe there are those who were lost once but wish to no longer be.”

Nev’s father reaches out and places a hand on the back of her head. “And that is why you are still my angel because I say let them rot. They gave up their soul for Luke. What is there left?”

“Exactly.” Luca sticks his fist out and surprisingly, Nev’s father pulls his hand from Nev’s mother’s head to bump it.

I turn to the window, wondering if Nev’s mother was right? Were all of us in our core neither dark nor light but merely shades of gray? A color that was reflective of not our nature, but the ebb and flow of our spirit. What I’d learned about my mother’s life certainly supported that thinking. She

didn't give up her soul for self-pursuits. She gave it up for peace. If that wasn't redemptive, then I didn't know what was.

"I don't know," Nev says from where she's sitting with her head on Declan's shoulder once we've pulled onto the main road and begun our journey down the coast. "Dad, you're a daemon. You sided with Luke for thousands of years. Can you imagine if mom would've shared that thinking the last time you were here?"

"Honestly..." He smiles at Nev's mother. "No, I can't. But I will forever be grateful for her grace and wisdom because it changed my existence."

As Nev's parents look at one another, I can't help but see parallels between them and the four of us, including the biggest—their battle with Luke for freedom, and the one we were about to have for existence.

"So if it's been rebuilt, have you been here since you left?" Declan asks.

"We have," Nev's mother nods in confirmation. "It's funny. The day I left, I never thought I would return. There was no reason to. My home was with Dante and I was ready to see the world."

"And your house?" Nev asks. "That home you loved and built over thousands of years. Did you regret leaving it?"

"No, because your father packed it up and shipped it to London so I would have it."

"Wait..." Nev leans forward, head poking between Luca and me. "You packed up her entire house?"

Nev's father steers with one hand, while resting the other on the center console. "I did."

"Everything," she asks skeptically.

"Everything," he confirms. "Now sit back, the road gets windy up ahead."

Declan grabs Nev by the hips and she squeals as she holds onto the seat to kiss me then Luca before falling into her seat.

“I hadn’t planned to ever return,” her mother confesses while looking out the window, watching the scenery pass by. “But when Eden became my responsibility, it no longer felt like a punishment, and that is how I choose to see it.”

“And the soulless?” Luca asks with a curious lilt. “Do they see it that way, or can we expect a city of the dead to rise when they see their master has returned like some kind of movie?”

The car falls silent. As usual, he said what I knew we were all thinking and I’m glad he did. I can’t help but notice, however, the way his question sits there like an anchor, slowly sinking to the bottom of the ocean, seeking a place to land.

What if Luca’s right? What if there is an army of soulless waiting for Luke’s return? Soldiers that have played nice and made Nev’s mother think they were compliant, when all the while, they’ve been in communication with Luke. It won’t just be like a movie. It will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. Corporeal hoards fighting otherworldly armies, and Heaven’s own daughter in the middle of it all, with the ability to burn the world around her, with a simple flick of her wrist.

I sit up, the idea making my skin prick. I had yet to wrap my mind around what was going to be expected of me once I claimed Hell. Add to that the idea of an infernal army lying in wait, and well, it shook me up a bit.

As if sensing my anxiety, Nev leans forward and wraps her arm around me. “Just remember what I told you. Listen to your heart. It will never lead you astray.”

I wanted to believe her. I wanted to believe anything was possible, by simply listening to that mortal instrument in our chest. But what if that instrument could be used against everyone I loved, because it shared flesh with the one who wanted to destroy them?

One hour and a million thoughts later, Nev's father slows the car as we approach a nondescript turn off, and after turning onto it, follows a narrow road around a bend and down a hill. At the bottom, the mouth of a tunnel appears, and when we enter, the car is swallowed by darkness.

He drives slowly at first, lights overhead passing by every couple hundred feet. But as we descend further into the tunnel and the entrance disappears from behind us, he picks up the speed. Overhead, the lights whiz by, blending into one long white streak as we race along the darkened corridor, and when the other end of the tunnel finally comes into view, we pass through.

As we return to the light, we all stare out the window to check out the island. The terrain is a stark contrast to the arid, rocky coastline we had been driving along. It's lush and tropical, and strangely, bright and alive. A sharp cliff drops down on one side of the car, on the other fields as far as the eye can see, and the sky overhead is so blue, there is not a color in existence to compare it to.

Each of us rolls our windows down, the air crisp and clear, and when we weave around a sweeping bend, the roar of a waterfall thundering down the side of a mountain sounds healthy and strong.

When we come around the other side, and hit a straightaway, Nev, Declan, Luca and I draw in a collective breath when we see a glittering city in the distance.

"It looks like Oz," Nev says with a nervous laugh, and she's not wrong. Except, the glass of the buildings is blue, reflecting the beautiful sky, not emerald like Baum's faraway land.

"I may have nudged the contractors in that direction," Nev's mother grins. "Why have all these incredible worlds only in books when we can have them in reality?"

"Contractors," Luca repeats. "Does that mean this place is open to the public now?"

“It’s not a carnival,” Nev grips his neck with a laugh.

He reaches behind the seat and grabs her wrist, pulling it over the seat and biting it playfully. “You know what I mean.”

“The island can still only be seen by those of our world and those of the cosmic hierarchy. So Luca, Delcan, your armies are welcome here.”

“So, who rebuilt it?” I find myself asking.

“You’d be surprised by the talents of the soulless.”

Luca leans over and waggles his brows. “From what I heard about this place, I can only imagine.”

Eden had been built for debauchery. The lost souls who called it home, there to serve the legion whenever they were in town. And when they were, the legion did anything, and everything, to coerce their undecided to join them.

But it had also been home to the undecided, and while they may have refused to swear their loyalty to Luke, they were still part of the rebellion that made it possible for The Fallen to be free, and because of this had an existence here that differed from mortals who gave up their souls to serve Luke.

Nev’s father slows down as we reach the city limits, and I’m amazed by what I see. From far away, it looks like a glittering metropolis, but up close, it is a mix of old and new, with cobblestone streets and Dickensian looking storefronts mashed up alongside modern glass buildings that were architectural feats.

“The old city had been erected throughout history, creating an eclectic look you would be hard pressed to find anywhere else,” Nev’s mother says with pride. “I once had a bookshop in a part of town we called Dickens, because the streets looked like something out of *A Christmas Carol*. But Lila’s favorite part of town was always Wall Street. It was a unique city, truly, so when rebuilding we decided, why not do the same again.”

“So I have a question?” Declan asks as we drive down a street with gas lamps and oak trees lining the sidewalks. “Why did Luke choose to create Eden here?”

Nev’s mother looks to her father, then turns around to face us. “Because it is here the angels fell.”

“What?” the four of us ask in unison.

“That is why Hell is here,” her mother nods in confirmation. “Where the angels fell is damned, and the ground beneath, temporal. It is where Luke was condemned to live out his punishment, which is why he began creating the soulless. They were his loophole. Their souls connected him to their worlds. Every soul that was signed over to him, gave him their foothold in the mortal world.”

The car starts to slow as we approach an aging brick building with faded windows in what I can only assume is the warehouse district. After pulling down a sloping driveway, we come to a stop at a large iron garage door.

After rolling down his window and punching a code into a metal box, the door jerks open slowly, and once the door has pulled back far enough, we drive through and come to a stop in an underground garage.

“Is this your new kingdom?” Luca asks jokingly as Nev’s father puts the car in park and turns off the engine.

“This is our place,” he replies, while pushing open the driver side door, getting out, and stretching. “We’ll stay here while helping Kai prepare.”

“Our place?” Nev climbs out of the far back, with Declan behind her. They come over to where Luca and I stand taking in the plethora of cars and bikes parked all around.

“This building is a replica of the one that stood here before,” Nev’s mother says fondly as Declan, Luca and I help Nev’s father get all the bags out of the back.

“Aw...” Nev gives her mother a sarcastic smile as her father closes the back of the car once we’ve grabbed

everything and leads us to a double door entrance. “Was it where you and dad had your first kiss?”

“No,” her mother deadpans as she holds the door open for all of us. “That would be the study at home.”

“Actually,” her father sets the bags in his hands down when we reach an elevator and presses the UP button. “That would be *Saints*.”

“Oh joy,” Nev rolls her eyes. “A mental walking tour of all the places you two made out. What’s next, where I was conceived?” The minute she says it she holds up her hand. “Don’t answer that.”

“First floor is the garage,” her father says with a laugh as the elevator arrives and Nev’s mother holds it open as he picks up the bags he’d set down and we file in. Once we’re situated, Nev’s mother presses the button marked for 4 and the doors close and the elevator jerks up.

“Gym and pool are on the second floor,” her father continues. “Third floor is Vinny and Lila’s flat, and the fourth is ours. Same layout as the original building. Oh no, wait. This one has something the other didn’t.”

“Let me guess,” Nev looks around. “A coffee shop. Or wait...a spa?”

“No.” He adjusts the bags he’s holding and fishes around in his pocket and pulls out a set of keys and tosses them to her.

She catches them easily and examines them before looking up. “What are these for?”

“The fifth floor,” he says with a smile. “Your floor.”

She looks from her parents to me and then Deck and Luca. “What?”

“Kai will probably be spending some time here until he figures out what he wants to do, and while he is, you three can come with and keep him company. There’s great hiking trails on the island, and the beaches are pretty incredible. And the nightlife...it’s nonstop.”

“But the soulless,” she says with hesitation. “Isn’t this their home? How will they feel with us being here?”

“Things have changed since Luke was around,” her mother explains. “The soulless have more freedom now, and I don’t ask them for anything, other than compliance and making sure they don’t knock the scales out of balance. That is why, when the time comes, I know they will be on our side.”

The elevator arrives at the fourth floor, and when it stops and the doors open, Nev’s mother holds them open while we make our way inside and find ourselves in a spacious flat.

Setting the bags down, the four of us look around, taking it all in. It’s not the same size as the penthouse, that’s for sure. That place is sprawling and overlooks the river, with museum-worthy artwork hanging all throughout. But this flat, while rustic, is just as polished, and appears to run the length of the building.

On one side of the flat is a bar and pool table, and a flat-screen TV covering nearly one wall, and on the other, a large table made from a slab of oak and twelve high-backed antique chairs with black leather cushions around it.

Behind us is a gourmet size kitchen, with a gray marble waterfall countertop, and a series of counter height stools tucked underneath, and to the side, multifold patio doors that opened up to a balcony with an unobstructed view of what appeared to be undeveloped land.

“Through there are the bedrooms,” Nev’s father points to a hall next to the kitchen, “and a bathroom is there,” he points to a door just off the dining room. “Come,” he nods over his shoulder. “I’ll give you a tour.”

I make my way over to the patio doors while the others are looking around, and when I hear someone come up behind me, I turn and find Nev’s mother looking out the glass wistfully.

“When Vinny and Dante bought the original building, they would remodel it each time they came to Eden.” She

laughs, and I can hear the memory in her voice. “They couldn’t come here themselves, of course, outside the ten days they were allowed to each century, so they would have the soulless they trusted manage the place and make the necessary improvements. You know, running water and electricity last century, and high-end electronics in this one,” she says with a laugh and I can’t help but smile. “But the one thing he never did was change this view. No matter the century, no matter his mindset.”

“Why?” I wonder.

“Because from here, you could see my house. And he bought all the land in its line of sight to make sure it would always stay that way.”

I turn to her, wondering what it must have been like to be here all those millennia while he was out in the world, watching time go by. “Was it hard...being separated from him for one hundred years at a time?”

“Sometimes, yes, other times no,” she says candidly. I raise my brows, surprised by her answer. “Don’t get me wrong, I love Dante. There has never been another. But there were some centuries where his determination was painful and being near him hurt and that’s why I rebuilt this place. It may have been my punishment, but it was also my home. And while he is my home now, I didn’t want to see all that we went through just...erased.”

Nev was so much like her mother it was scary. Optimistic and thoughtful, as well as strong and determined.

“She’s just like you,” I smile incredulously. “Her heart is so big and her hope, limitless. She deserves to be happy.”

“And you?” Nev’s mother folds her arms over her chest. “What do you deserve, Kai?”

“I don’t know what I deserve, but I know what I want. I want Nev, my brothers, and all of you to be safe. No matter what it takes.”

She nods and looks down for a moment. “And your sister and Sam...do you want peace for their spirits?”

I shake my head and look out for a moment. How could I want peace for my sister? She betrayed all of us, including the girl I would do anything for. “She doesn’t deserve peace.”

“Oh Kai...” Her mother looks at me the way one would their child. The way I had seen her do with Nev more times than I can count. “Everyone deserves peace.”

“Everyone?” My eyes search hers. “Even Luke?”

“Peace means we have let go,” she says simply. “It means we have given our spirit the freedom to move on from that which has haunted and hurt us. There is power in letting go. When we let go of what holds us back, we can become who we were meant to be.”

She smiles at me warmly for a moment, before turning and heading over to Nev’s father who is laughing with Luca and Declan by the pool table, racking up a game.

“Hey.” Nev comes over and grabs my hand. “Are you, okay?”

I pull her to me and wrap my arm around her waist, nodding as I breathe her in. She places a hand on my chest and looks out the window. “Who would have thought below all this beauty is hell?”

I can’t help but let out an ironic laugh as I kiss the top of her head. Deep down there had always been a darkness in me. A side that kept that which haunted or hurt me away so that I did not feel anything but the light. Perhaps I was a reflection of Eden.

Maybe this place, this birthright, was exactly who I was meant to be—beautiful on the outside, while inside was a raging infernal power that would burn anyone, *anything* to the ground that dared try to take what I wanted.

Only, what I wanted wasn’t what Luke did. I wanted those I love to be safe. The brothers I found when I was six,

the girl I vowed to protect when I was fourteen, and the family that embraced me when I was a boy. They are what I wanted. And if Hell was the way in which I was going to do this, then I accepted this destiny with open arms.

Chapter 28

Nev

I never would've imagined this flat in the middle of a city I'd heard about in stories and believed no longer existed, would feel like home, and yet, strangely, it does.

It couldn't be more different from the penthouse, or the guys' house in London, or even my parent's or Delcan's place in the country, and yet, I feel a connection to Eden. I'm not sure if it's my parent's history here or knowing this city now belongs to Kai, but the more time I spend in Eden, the more I like it.

We've been here for two days and I see the hint of nostalgia in the eyes of the legion. Even my parents, Vinny and Lila can't stop reminiscing about their time here together, and why wouldn't they? For five thousand years my mother and Lila called the island home, and my father and Vinny longed to be here, in the years they were away.

While knowing the most notorious daemons of Luke's legion were pining for the headstrong undecideds who refused to swear their loyalty was admittedly romantic in its own way, I can't imagine what that must have been like only being together for ten days, every one hundred years.

The three years I'd spent away from Declan, Kai and Luca had felt like eternity, and yet my father waited for my mother for five thousand years. While my mother had been forced to exist for five millennia, not being able to confess her true feelings for him.

They really were the definition of star crossed lovers, and considering they were once the moon and stars, I wasn't exaggerating. Yet, given all they'd gone through, the two

seemed to be at peace here, despite the fact their freedom hung in the balance.

I knew I wasn't the only one who wondered what would happen when Luke was ended, once and for all, and The Fallen were granted their freedom. Was it going to be a matter of simply no longer feeling the burn in their blood, or could it mean more...like their wings?

"Penny for your thoughts?" Kai comes up behind me as I stand on the balcony of our flat, and take in the view, coffee in hand.

The place my parents had built for us was similar in layout to theirs and had been a welcome retreat for the four of us the past couple of days.

"Just thinking." I turn and find Kai standing in the morning sun, light bouncing off his golden hair, making him look every bit the son of an angel, not the sire of the Devil.

"About?" He reaches for my cup and sets it down on the outdoor table next to a set of lounge chairs, then pushes my hair off one shoulder and kisses the exposed skin.

"The weather," I say with a laugh, a clear lie given the sigh his kiss draws from me.

The weather here was a far cry from a London winter. It was always sunny, with a breeze that was the perfect temperature. It flowed through the open windows all day, filling the space with the sweetest mix of Spanish sweet peas, orange, and sea salt.

"And what, pray tell, is so interesting about the weather?" he murmurs while trailing kisses across my collarbone.

"It's...um..." I swallow, trying to find words to fit the lie but give up. "Oh, fuck it." I run both hands up his chest and drape my arms over his shoulders. "I was thinking about you."

"Me?" He laughs and pulls back, running both hands up my sides. "What about me?"

“What not about you?” I tip up my head. “I love you and I’m worried.”

He wraps his long arms around my waist and lowers his forehead to mine. “It’s going to be fine. Trust me.”

I close my eyes and brush the pads of my fingers along the back of his neck. “I trust you with my existence. It’s Luke I don’t trust.”

Today is the day we finally head to Luke’s domain and my mother transitions the power of Hell to Kai, and admittedly, I’m on edge. Any number of things can happen, the first being Luke’s immediate return.

The first night we were in Eden, my mother explained more about the connection between Hell and Luke. While the power of Hell can be used by whomever commands it, in whatever way they wish, it is stronger when wielded by Luke because it is through him it was born, and to his flesh it was bound.

That’s why she believes Luke will return as soon as Kai draws the power into him. No matter where Luke is in his spirit, he will feel it, and that pull will draw him out, like a moth to the flame. Or as Vinny said, like a vulture to a corpse, which naturally, made Kai laugh, but made me cringe.

The other thing that could happen...Luke could feel the power of Hell in Kai and lay low, siphoning it from him slowly, while wrapping his spirit around his son’s mortal coil until he is in control of his entire being, and takes over Kai entirely. While that possibility is horrifying, Kai appeared to take it in stride. In fact, he’s taken everything we’ve learned here in stride.

While we’ve been here Kai’s confidence is soaring. In a way, it reminded me of Hyde and made me wonder if he had begun to integrate into Kai’s being, which honestly, I didn’t know how to feel about that.

While Kai was my true connection to Hellfire, Hyde owned the darkness in me that channeled it, and I both needed

and wanted him. My heart wasn't divided into three, but four, and since that night at Locksley, had been missing a piece.

"How are the Valkyries?" I ask, deciding to change the subject. We only had a couple of hours before we left, and the last thing I wanted to dwell on was what was to come.

He blows out an exasperated breath. "They hate the weather, and their horses hate the soulless. I mean, I don't blame them...on the soulless that is, not the weather. The weather is perfect. The soulless however, they are kind of creepy. I mean, they're basically zombies. Mindless shells, without the whole craving brains thing."

I place a hand on his chest and laugh. "Remember, not all of them are bad. Like my mom said, there are those that want to be free from Luke and plan to fight with us."

While the soulless will never get their souls back, they could be granted forgiveness, which would set them free, and that's what they really wanted to begin with. Except Luke's version of freedom had come with servitude, and my mother's with exoneration.

I wondered what could have been so bad to make Kai's mother consider giving up her soul to become one. What did she want to be freed from? Kai hasn't really said much about her even though I know he finished reading through the folder my mother gave him.

"Tell you what..." Kai kisses my nose. "We let Luca deal with the flying horses and Deck his golden army."

I lift a curious brow, detecting the sarcasm in his response. "What's the matter, Norse and Greek not playing nice in the sandbox?"

Kai runs a hand over his head, smoothing down the longer strands on top. "Like our alpha, the Olympians are overly confident. But now I know where he gets it from. He can't help it. It's in his blood."

We both laugh, because yeah, Deck was every bit the alpha, and I loved this about him. His confidence had always

drawn me to him and that authority made him an incredible lover.

“But hey, there are also similarities between the Valkyries and Luca,” Kai adds. “They are beautiful, and strong, but their confidence is less in your face. They know their purpose and they have this kind of swagger to them that is just...”

“Like Luca,” I nod.

That night with Luca in Sweden, when it was just he and I in the hot tub, I meant what I said about him being like his mother.

From what I’d read, Freya had been a beautiful mix of strength and charm and her connection to sexuality and love had very much been passed to her son.

Luca was sensual and loved to connect on that intimate level. It’s why kissing meant so much to him. Despite his preference for certain kinks, he wanted to explore things that made him feel good, and I didn’t blame him one bit.

“Hey,” Kai jumps back a little as if he’s just remembered something. “Speaking of the Norse and Greek, I’ve been wondering...did your mother ever tell you who the other gods were that signed Luke’s treaty?”

I cross my arms and tap a finger against my cheek. “You know, she never did. Why?”

“Well...” he drawls. “I’m curious who they were and if their descendants will ever be a threat to Deck or Luca on Olympus or Valhalla. Or is it Vanaheimr? Or shit, is it Asgard? Luca’s mom was Vanir, were the other gods that signed Vanir or one of Odin’s kind? Shit, you know, now I have even more questions.”

As Kai continues to ruminate about Luca’s Norse roots, I can’t help but think about the politics at play in both of those worlds.

While on one hand, I was curious to know which gods had defied their kingdoms, I wasn’t sure it mattered anymore.

The Augury was gone, and from the sound of it, none of the descendants of those founding Calamity members had been a part of it for centuries. Each seat of power had changed hands multiple times since its inception making those bloodlines obsolete.

Then again, Thea clearly had an ax to grind, and she wasn't even part of Luke's treaty. She was just a pissed off family member with a thirst for power. Were the four of us naive to think our destiny was only about what was happening in this world and there was more to come in those kingdoms they were now a part of as well?

I make a mental note to talk to David about it when we get back. He likely has thoughts on the document he found in Declan's mother's things and what we may need to consider about our prophecy. Right now, however, I want to focus on the here and now, and what was about to happen to Kai.

Before he embraces his father's destiny, I can't help but think he needs to come to terms with his mother's. He may not have known her, but I've learned a few things these past few months, and inner peace has its own kind of power.

I close the space between us and wrap my arm around his waist and pull him close. "Instead of worrying about Declan and Kai's moms, why don't you tell me about your own?"

When I say it, he doesn't flinch, but he doesn't say anything either. He just stares at me, which is a little alarming because of all the things we've learned the past few days, the mention of his mom should cause little reaction. Yet, it seems to affect Kai more than learning Luke could lie in wait in his being, while absorbing all his power.

Lacing my fingers through one of his hands, I lead him over to one of the lounge chairs and take a seat. He sinks down slowly, doing the same.

"Kai," I rub my hands up and down my thighs, trying to figure out what to say now that I've ripped off the Band-Aid. "With all we've been through, you've not once mentioned her.

It's just you and me now. No one else. So tell me something about her.”

He swallows and looks down, and a lance of pain slices my chest. He looks like he did as a kid whenever he sought Sam's attention, and he was too busy with Maren to grant it. It makes me wonder if his mother had been around, would Kai have turned out differently?

It was pretty hard to imagine a better version of Kai. He was already light personified, and I couldn't help but wonder who she was, and how part of her created this incredible being I loved so much. She helped create this being that had been unchanged by all this world had thrown at him, and I wanted to know more about her. Her memory deserved attention.

“Kai...” I reach for his hand and he looks up. “I love you. I cannot imagine this existence without you. You are one of the most beautiful beings I know, and I want to know more about the woman who created you. Her memory is worth sharing.”

His eyes glisten slightly and it tells me he needs this. Painful or not, he needs to make peace with his mother before he accepts the birthright of his father.

“The folders your mother gave us,” he says then pauses to clear his throat, “they were full of information on our moms because they were key to who we are. For Declan and Luca this meant their birthrights, and for me...”

I shift closer so our knees are touching. “For you, what?”

“She is why I am the way I am. Me, and Hyde.” I draw in a sharp breath, but don't say a word, waiting instead for him to continue. “She had hopes and dreams like anyone else but saw the world in absolutes. There were only two versions—black and white. When it was good, it was bright. And when it was bad, it was dark. And she was smart. Really smart, and it's what made the world overwhelming for her at times. That's why she came to Eden.”

I hold his hand close as he pauses to take a breath. Whatever he's about to say, it's a weight he's been carrying.

“She was only six the first time her parents sent her away for treatment,” he says sadly. “And those treatments continued into her teen years. The facilities they sent her to, Nev,” he closes his eyes and shakes his head, “they should never have been opened to begin with. None of them wanted to help. They only wanted to hide those that didn’t see the world the way they did.”

I reach out with my free hand and place my hand on his shoulder, as a tear rolls down my cheek. The world could be cruel to those it deemed different. I hated this about it.

He looks up and wipes it away, smiling slightly. “It’s no wonder she fell for Sam. He was kind and as close to an angel as you could get on Earth. And he loved her. He did.”

“So what happened?” I sniff.

“My mother first came to Eden because she was troubled and Luke made her a promise, as he did to all mortals who sought him out. But the first being she met when she arrived was Sam and well, she fell for him, and he, her. That’s when Maren was conceived. She was ecstatic when she found out she was pregnant,” Kai smiles. “You could practically hear the excitement in the letters she wrote.”

“Wait,” I pull back. “She wrote letters?”

“To her unborn child,” he nods. “When Sam found out she was pregnant, he encouraged her to leave Eden. He said it was not a place to raise a child and he was right. It wasn’t then. She hated leaving him, but she did because she would have done anything he asked. When she arrived home, she began seeing a therapist, who recommended she write letters to her unborn child, and I have all of them in that folder, and gorgeous,” he rubs his thumb gently across my hand, “the hope and love that poured from her words...it was inspiring.”

“So what happened?” My eyes search his. “Why did she come back?”

“Her parents were horrible. They wanted her to give up the baby. Said a headcase couldn’t be a mother. They are why she

came back here. She just wanted to be with the one person in this world who ever saw her. But when she returned, Luke was there and this time, he used her for his plan. He courted, then bed her, and after siring me, you know the rest.”

I shake my head and look down. Kai’s mother had suffered so much, and all she wanted was to be loved. But just when she found it, Luke took it from her. How could he have ever been an angel? He was too selfish. Too cruel.

Kai looks up, as a light breeze stirs his hair. “I judged her for falling for Luke, but I shouldn’t have. He manipulated her, just as he does everyone.”

He turns to look at me and my heart feels full and at the same time, broken. For his mother and everyone that had been a casualty in Luke’s never ending thirst for revenge.

I lean my head on Kai’s shoulder and as the morning breeze sweeps over us, he tells me more about her. “She looked a lot like Maren and she loved movies and Doc Martens. She was a real 90’s baby. Loved grunge and did the whole black nails and flannels thing for a while.”

To this I can’t help but laugh. Kai loved the bright, sugary feel of the 1980s but the dark, angry, self-expression of the 1990’s was more of a Hyde genre. Funny...he was just like her in every way.

“She wasn’t a headcase.” I grip his chin and turn his face toward mine. “She was perfect and you are perfect. Who you are, dark and light...Kai and Hyde...you are magnificent.”

I kiss his lips gently, wanting him to know just how perfect he is. “We will get him back,” he whispers against my lips. “I promise, I will bring Hyde back to you.”

He wraps his arm around my shoulder and we sit there together, looking out into the morning. Hell may be below Eden but it was there Kai was born and his birthright. Knowing now it was his destiny, I would help him take what was his. No place that gave birth to one of light could be beyond redemption.

Chapter 29

Kai

Hell is a vast and curious place and not at all what I expected. While I had a vision in my mind of gates made of bones, and rivers of lava that spit balls of fire in the air, I was surprised to find neither were true.

For starters, to reach Luke's domain, you had to take a spiral staircase located behind a door in the storage room at a bar called *Saints*. Apparently it was the legion's place, and when they were in town, no one but they were allowed inside. Everything catered to their needs, from the booze to the music, and no matter the century, it reflected the aesthetic of the time.

At least, that's what it *had* been. This was a replica, built in the same spot, and when we arrived at the bar and stared up at the blue neon sign with a halo under the S, I recalled what Nev's father said in the car about this being the place where he and her mother first kissed. It was a shame the original had burned down, because the stories it could tell for a history geek like me would have been amazing.

Still, apparently it looked so much like the original, the legion couldn't help but share with us stories about how the original had changed over the centuries.

The last time the legion was in Eden under Luke's contract, it was a bar with a club-like vibe, throbbing bassline, and a game room in the back. The century before, it had a speakeasy vibe, with thick velvet curtains, wood tables and chairs, and a smoky haze that was so thick it clung to the walls.

As we make our way inside and head to the storage room in the back, Nev's parents look around and confirm it feels so close to the original, it even smells the same. One thing is

different, however, and when I ask what, they look at one another, grin, and then turn to me and say in unison, “the staff.”

Vinny, who walks with us alongside Lila, Caro and Viper, can't help but laugh, and when he claps Nev's father on the back and winks at her mother, I know there is a story there, as I'm sure there are everywhere on this island.

As they walk ahead, I can't help but think about the family they found among one another, and the love I feel for this community. To think we were one step closer to freeing them from the thousands of years of punishment they had endured is a little hard to believe.

The last few weeks had been a rollercoaster but after overcoming my insecurities, and learning both of my parents' stories, I not only knew my purpose but felt it. Sam was right to save me and bring me into their community.

The Fallen had been through enough. It was time for me to own up to my destiny. No matter what happens, I am going to make everyone who believes in me proud. It was time to usher in not only a new era of Eden, but a better future for all of us.

After opening the door in the storage room and shining the light on our cell phones down the spiral staircase, we make our way down the stairs in single file.

As we descend, Declan asks why the entrance to Hell is through the back of a bar, and Nev's mother explains, during her first battle with Luke, the force of her wings not only cracked his throne in half, but sent a ripple effect through his domain, collapsing the entrance behind she and the legion as they left.

When reconstruction efforts began, she ordered Hell to remain untouched, while this entrance used mainly by Luke and his inner circle, after being found under ten feet of rubble, be cleared and then sealed.

While her parents may have been back to Eden over the years, Nev's mother had not set foot in Hell since that day. This will be the first time they'd returned to this place in twenty-one years, and I hear the weight of memory in both of their voices.

When we reach the bottom of the stairs and find ourselves standing at the end of a darkened stone corridor, Caro reaches for a torch on the wall and lights it with a Zippo he fished out of his pocket.

"Man, it seems like so long ago," Vinny looks around, and waves his hand to clear the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. "Which after existing as long as we have, is saying something."

The six of them laugh, and Declan, Nev, Luca and I do the same, but it's anything but light and buoyant.

"Are you ready?" Nev asks.

"Yup," I nod with confidence. "Let's roll."

We make our way down the corridor, and the further we go, the warmer it gets. When we finally reach what looks like the end of the corridor, we find ourselves in a subterranean chamber.

I look around, marveling at the size, and when I turn around, I see a gothic structure in the distance. It has arched doorways and spires that extend so high they nearly fade from sight, and glassless windows with red light that emanates from beyond. It's both beautiful and haunting and I wonder what it looks like inside.

"Luke's domain," Nev's father grits out.

"A real pleasure palace," Vinny sneers. "Ass and pain. That was his game."

It's positively stifling where we are, and I can't imagine how much warmer it may get, but strangely, the heat doesn't bother me. I wonder if it's a blood thing because I see a bead of sweat rolling down Declan's temple, as Nev blows an errant

strand of hair from her face. Luca has already ripped his shirt off and honestly, who knows if it's a heat or confidence thing.

Nev's mother, however, shivers, and when her father wraps an arm around her, and tucks her into his side, she stops.

"You ready?" he asks and when she nods, we all make our way toward the structure.

"I thought you said the entrance was crushed?" I ask, while looking around as we walk. This certainly looks like a front way in.

"The entrance *we* used was," he says over his shoulder. "This, however, was Luke's. He loved the grandeur of it all, and it gave him easy access to *Saints* where he would meet and debrief with his spies."

"Do you think we can get in after all this time?" I wonder.

"Only one of his flesh can open the doors," he replies with a grin. "You're our key."

Nev looks at me, beautiful blue eyes determined. "I guess membership has its privileges," I wink.

When we reach the door, I'm relieved to find it's not made of bones but wrought iron and when I stand in front of it, the doors open. It may be Hell, and it may be the least welcoming place in existence, but it's kind of cool to feel a connection like Declan felt on Olympus, and Luca, in Sweden.

Once the doors have opened wide enough for us to pass through, her father leads the way and we enter the domain, passing under an entryway with a high glass ceiling that mimics the night sky. I look at Deck and Luca, brows raised. This must be where Nev's father got the idea for that secret room of his. Apparently, the night the angels fell didn't just haunt the legion. It haunted their leader, too.

As we walk down hallway after hallway, Caro, Viper, and Vinny follow easily. They were all Luke's most trusted once and have probably been here more times than they can count.

The vastness of this place is impressive and I can't help but take in everything as we walk—wall sconces with candles so covered in dust, you can barely see the wax. Black glass bowls on long hall tables and ornate high back chairs with black leather cushions. Room after room filled with furniture, all covered in dust, frozen in time.

The more I see, the more I start to find beauty in this place. It's warm, sure, and dark, but there can be beauty in darkness, and it wouldn't be as dreary if Nev and my brothers were with me. Maybe I could come to appreciate it. Let in a little light.

When her parents come to a stop and I nearly run into their backs, I'm about to ask what's wrong, and then I see what they do, and my mouth falls open. Before us is a vast hall with a domed ceiling and large stone columns. At one end is a black marble throne, with fire pits on each side, and on the other, a vast pit with chains hanging down over it and smoke billowing up from below.

As Nev's parents stand together, silent and stoic, I know this is where it happened. This is where my father shot Nev's, and her mother begged Heaven for his existence as he lay dying in front of her, and where Heaven restored her wings. It is a place I have only heard about, and now that I'm here, I feel the weight of this place.

I place a hand on her mother's shoulder, not knowing what to say, but knowing I want to comfort the one who has always shown me what my own mother never had the opportunity to—unconditional love and support.

She reaches for my hand and holds it tight, and one by one, we all put a hand on one another's shoulders. As we stand there, surrounded by the weight of the past, I feel their loyalty, and more importantly, love.

I have questioned this place since I first learned Luke was my father, but this moment has just confirmed the one thing I have always known to be true—I would do whatever it took to

keep those I loved safe. And that would never change, heirdom be damned.

Nev's mother turns around, flicking her watery gaze to each of us, and when she lands on me last, she lifts her chin in strength and resolve. "Are you ready?"

"I am," I confirm.

"Well alright." She squeezes my hand and when I pull it from her shoulder, the rest do the same. "Let's give you that birthright."

We make our way into the hall, and when we reach the center, Nev's mother stops, and reaches into the saddle bag slung around her shoulder and pulls out a box.

I've been wondering what this moment might look like. Played out a dozen different scenarios in my head. I'm not sure what to expect, and Nev's mother and I have never talked about it. So seeing her standing there with a box in hand is admittedly perplexing.

"What's that?" Nev asks the question I was about to.

She makes her way over to us and comes to a stop in front of me. "When I broke the contract that bound The Fallen, the power of Hell transferred to me because it was their light Luke used to create Hell and this domain. When they rescinded that loyalty, ownership of that light transferred to me. But it was the night I vanquished him, when I drew Hellfire into me, and passed it to Nev, that the infernal power he had crafted over the millennia, also became mine."

She pauses for a moment and looks to Nev, the love between mother and daughter never clearer than it was at this very moment. "My wings protected me, because it was counter to all that I am and not natural to my spirit. But since you had yet to be born, it bonded with you and became a part of yours. That is how you and Kai are connected and why you can draw Hellfire. A part of your spirit is dark, and another light. Just as Kai's."

As if reading one another's minds, Nev reaches for my hand at the same time I do hers. While this is a truth we have both known, hearing it out loud is a confirmation we both need—to know the part of me which is dark is not a defect, and her love for that part of me is not wrong, but as natural as that which she feels for the part of me that is light.

“Over time her body adapted like mine,” her mother continues, shifting her attention back to me. “But I was not born with darkness in me, like you and my daughter. The power of this place takes a toll on me. Every time I use it, my light diminishes and that is why the power of Hell will never truly belong to me. I cannot fully control it but you can Kai, because only one of Luke's flesh can command it to its full potential.”

The sound of shuffling behind us shifts my attention and I don't believe it, but the entire legion has entered the hall and taken a knee. Nev's mother watches them proudly as they focus their attention on us and wait for her command.

“I don't need to transfer the power of Hell to you Kai, because the day you were born, it became yours. You are the rightful heir to this place, and you can make it anything you want it to be.”

I tighten the grip on Nev's hand and turn back to her mother. “If we're doing all this to free The Fallen, then why are they taking a knee? When we remove Luke won't they be free?”

“When we get rid of Luke, Hell will still need to exist. Just like when I vanquished him before. This world cannot survive without a balance between good and evil. You will be responsible for keeping that balance, and the legion will be your soldiers. But they will not support you out of obligation. When Luke is vanquished for good and The Fallen are freed, it will remove the burn from their blood and the shame from their spirits, and they will serve you in honor of that freedom.”

There may be hundreds in this hall, but the silence that falls after her response is that of a thousand nights.

“So, why the ashes?” Nev asks.

Her mother looks at the box in her outstretched hand. “When you open this, the part of Luke’s spirit that is in you—that which you were born with—will be drawn to the ashes. You will be free of him for a window of time as he uses all of his power to fuse with those ashes and become whole again. When he is free from you and we see his form starting to shape, that is when we must end him.”

He’s never been my father. Never done anything but hurt all those I love. And yet, the idea of ending the one who ended my mother’s pain, no matter how malevolent his reasoning, makes me feel something. Not love or empathy but regret that sometimes it’s the children that have to sever the ties that bind.

Then I remember what Nev’s mother just said. A part of his spirit has been in me since I was born. And the idea he had been privy to my heart and thoughts and most intimate moments, makes me feel something else. And not just me. Deep down I feel it stirring in the depths of my spirit. My anger and vengeance. The part of me that was dark...Hyde.

As if feeling what I am, Nev turns to me, eyes wide, and I nod. I don’t need to say anything. The acknowledgement is one she’s been waiting for.

I pull her hand to my lips and kiss it with confidence, then let go and reach for the box. “When do we do it?”

“Anytime you are ready,” Nev’s mother confirms as her father comes up behind her and places both hands on her shoulders.

“Declan, your army will protect the four of you and the legion, and Luca, the Valkyries will need to grab Luke,” he instructs. “That is their specialty. Their greatest skill is choosing the slain from the battlefield and when they have him, Nev, you will use your power to keep that hold of him you have had since Locksley and go into his spirit and end him.”

Under her they will align—one from the stars, another from the sky, and one with the power of fire. That was in the prophecy David found in Declan's mother's things. Together we end him. Each playing a part. Stronger together than apart.

I look to my brothers, and then to Nev. "Now or never?" I ask.

She looks at Declan and Luca who both nod, and when she turns back to me, does the same.

"No matter what happens, no matter what this power may do to me once he's gone and all of it is in me, stay with me?"

She holds my hand tighter. "Even if I have to turn my heart black, I won't let you go. It is a promise bound in blood, which means it's forever."

As the words of our childhood bond fill me with strength, I look to her parents ready to get this show on the road. "Alright," I let go of her hand. "Let's do this."

She looks to Declan and Luca, and the two command their armies. In seconds, the gold clad armor of the Olympians flanks the legion, and the hooves of the winged horses of the Valkyries come to a stop next to Luca. Declan holds up his arms, the lightning of Zeus coiled around both forearms, and when Nev straightens and pushes her sleeves up, readying her power, I draw in a deep breath.

Standing there with my hand on the lid, I look at her and my brothers one last time. This is it. This is the moment we've not only been waiting for, but destiny itself. And it's time to do what needs to be done.

"Rock n' roll," I grin, and lift the lid.

Chapter 30

Nev

The hinges creak as Kai lifts the lid, and an oppressive heat fills the space between us, followed by a gust of wind. It scatters the ashes fluttering all around, and a putrid smell of rot and decay poisons the very breath that I take.

“Step back!” My father shouts as the army of Olympus takes their battle stance, armor clanking in unison with their unified steps. “Get ready!”

The horses of the Valkyrie whine as the ashes start to come together and take shape, and watching the legion stand ready to protect the four of us, my power starts to churn in my core.

Holding his arm out as Declan and Luca take up positions on either side of us, I feel energy flash between us, as a strange hum fills the hall.

I stare at the form taking shape, wondering what Luke will look like and what he will do when he sees us, and when a body starts to appear, my father steps in front of my mother protectively. She is the fiercest of us all, and has endured more than any of the angels, and yet, my father is still ready to lay down his existence for her.

Vinny and Lila stand shoulder to shoulder as Caro and Viper both stand in front of my mother, and when the wind stops, and the air thins, I hear Kai gasp and clutch at his throat.

“Kai!” I scream as his head yanks violently upward, and when his back bends at an unreasonable angle, I watch in horror as his jaw looks like it’s being pried open, and a black light shoots out of his mouth.

It pools at the ceiling and pulsates in the heat as if looking for its target, and when it does, it races toward us and encircles

the ashes, spinning round and round until it absorbs all the light.

When the wind stops and the heat wanes, and the form is fully shaped, it turns around and faces us, and what I see leaves me speechless.

He is tall and muscular, with hair dark and ebony eyes, and the longer I stare at him, the easier it is to understand how the soulless trusted him and The Fallen fell for his lies.

He once possessed the light of the morning star, the greatest of all the angels, and that celestial energy still surrounds him, despite the dark being he became. He still has the beauty of an angel and fierce determination of a dark god, and he is undeniably magnificent, despite everything.

“Hello, love.” He flashes me a smile that is both hypnotic and chilling. “I’ve missed you.”

“Don’t fucking talk to her!” Declan shouts, the lightning around his arm, flickering.

He tosses his head back and laughs, turning his attention to my mother. “Diablo,” he eyes her lasciviously. “I see you have not changed. Still as delicious, and deceitful as ever.”

My father growls and holds both hands out to shield his view. “And you, Dante, just as nauseating as you were the last time we met.”

“Luke!” Vinny calls out. “Still a piece of shit, or has vanquishing tamed it?”

Luke’s eyes flick to my uncle and he holds a hand in front of Lila. “Vincenzo. Still all brawn and no brains?”

Vinny scoffs. “Still strong enough to pump your ass full of bullets and smart enough to keep shooting until you’re done, motherfucker. Although, something tells me we won’t need that this time.”

Luke opens his mouth to speak but then his eyes flick to Declan and the army that flanks the legion, and scowls.

“So...” He regards Declan with contempt. “You figured out your mother’s secret, I see?”

“He did,” Luca responds, and Luke’s eyes flick to him. “And I did, too.”

“Tell me, beta,” Luca grins. “Have you grown tired yet of alpha fucking your girl?”

My mother draws in a sharp breath, and a look of horror fills her face.

“Oh come on, Diablo.” Luke turns to her and clicks his tongue. “You made your daughter what she is. What kind of mother allows her only daughter to be surrounded by three boys her entire life? You know the needs of these earthly bodies. You knew how that was going to play out. Then again, you probably wanted that. She is, after all, just like her mother. A whore, and nothing more.”

“Hey!” I spit out angrily, to which Luke whips his eyes in my direction. “Don’t talk to her like that. In fact, don’t talk at all!”

“Now, princess,” he tisks. “Or wait, is it, baby girl? No, wait.” He holds up a hand, and his lips pull into a sardonic smile. “I got it...gorgeous. That’s it. That’s the name I’ve grown fond of as it comes, no pun intended, from my son’s lips. I’m not sure which one I like more, however. That, or pet. Certainly appreciate the carnality of the latter.”

He waggles his brows and while I should be disgusted, a part of me has come to accept the fact that Luke has always been a part of Kai. I knew it the night he appeared before Locksley and called me baby girl. But I’m not ashamed of whom I love or how I show it. In fact, I plan to use Luke’s penchant for spiritual voyeurism to get close enough to crush him.

The *Art of War* teaches you that the key to winning the battle is to know your enemy. When you know them, you can anticipate their actions. Luke has been using this strategy for thousands of years. He has layered backup plan upon backup

plan, anticipating the fallout of each to ensure his success, no matter the twists and turns. He has played a long game that is impressive, I'll give him that. But everyone knows the queen is the most powerful piece in chess because she can move straight to her enemy's throat before they even know she has done so.

"Tell me," I straighten. "Do you prefer to be called a villain or an asshole?"

Luke looks at me, and I don't believe it but he looks stunned. The Devil actually looks like he is surprised at the taste he just got of his own medicine.

"Touché, sweet girl. Touché. You have your mother's spirit and your father's fight. I'll give you that. If I appreciated either, I'd ask for more. But alas, I have things to do. So, I'll give you a choice. Hand over your power, or I take it myself—by any means necessary."

"Over my dead body," Kai steps forward. "And something tells me *dad*, I am more valuable to you alive, than dead."

Seeing Kai is okay gives me the confidence I need to remain calm and focused.

Luke looks at Kai, and while he considers the being he sired, I see parts of him in his son. Kai possesses the morning light, while the darkness is in his eyes when he's Hyde. They each existed because of what Luke was, and what he became.

"Tell me, *son*," Luke shoots back, voice nearly identical to Kai's. "Did you know just how deep a connection I have with you and your little alter ego?"

"We know," I jump in, not wanting Kai to be in harm's way. "Not exactly a surprise, *pops*."

I know Kai is weak from what just happened. I can feel the slowing of his heart with my mortal power and feel the cooling of his Hellfire with the blood we share. I don't know if Hyde is with him or not, but I want to keep the focus on me. If something happens to Kai, I will never forgive myself.

“Oh, Nevaeh,” Luke snickers. “You have no idea how I would love for you to call me daddy. Maybe when all this is over and you rule by my side, you can.”

“When Hell freezes over,” Kai laughs. “You’ll never touch her. In fact, the way I see it, your days are numbered.”

“Oh son,” he laughs. “Don’t you know, I already have touched her. My boys are of my flesh. Every time you fucked her, I did, too. Sweet and slow, or in the dirt like a slut. I was there, every time, and it was delicious.”

Kai’s eyes narrow as Luke claps his hands. “Man, this is fun. Let’s keep going. Anyone else have anything they want to say?”

I once hated knowing everything we had and were about to go through, had all been mapped out long before we were born. The armies that were foretold, and the pain, anger, and hurt we’d experienced along the way, waiting for us. But there was something cathartic knowing if it had been planned, that meant all of it. From beginning to end. And Heaven knew who the winner would be, and there wasn’t a doubt in my mind it was looking down right now at both the victor and the loser.

The air crackles with tension, and I know we’re on the brink of war. The army of Olympus moves closer, forming a tight formation around Declan and the legion, archers bows ready, and the gleaming gold swords of its soldiers, sheathed. While the hooves of the great winged horses of the Valkyries pounded into the stone, ready to charge.

Behind me the legion stands tall. Everyone I love united by purpose and an unbreakable spirit, and I straighten with pride, knowing their strength and determination not only runs in my blood, but the spirit of Heaven, who created me for this very moment. One way or another, the crown I was born wearing would crack or fit tonight.

A thunderous roar erupts from both sides, as the floor beneath our feet shakes, and when a hoard of soulless—those who had obviously aligned themselves with Luke—snarl and

hiss, slamming their hands against their chests, I realize Kai was right. They did look like zombies. But there weren't many, and I was confident we could take them.

“Under the stars and moon you will end.” Luke points at my parents. “Just as you began. And your daughter, forever by my side.”

“Sticks and stones, shithead!” Vinny shouts. “Stick and stones.”

Luke turns and waves for the mindless idiots to charge, but the arrows of Olympus whistle through the air, defying gravity as they seek out their targets with deadly precision. Flames erupt when they hit their targets, falling to the ground in a pile of ash.

“Let's go!” Declan roars as lightning breaks through the ceiling and strikes the stone floor, sending cracks out in every direction. His power is truly awesome to witness, and I stand there awestruck, until a clash of thunder booms overhead, and the army of Olympus charges forward.

Upon Luca's whistle, the Valkyries take off, and I thrust my hands out and pull chunks of the wall out behind Luke, hoping to confine him, only to fail by soulless that are willing to push him out of the way, and sacrifice themselves.

My determination to save those I love, matched only by Luke's relentless hunger for power, fuels an insatiable lust for destruction and control. What he did to Kai's mother. My parents. The legion. I hate him. I've never felt such loathing in all my existence.

Like the queen on a chess board, I cut a path through the soulless hordes; bolts of lightning raining down, striking soulless after soulless as I pass. A trail of blood follows me as I walk, and when I realize this is the vision I had that day in the kitchen with Luca the first time he bound me, I don't feel dread but power. Chaos and carnage and flames in my steps. I am destruction and my power is unyielding.

“Nev! Get back” Kai calls out but I stay focused. I need to get closer. Need for him to let me in. He talks a good game, but he respects courage, and he wanted my mother. I am her daughter, in every way and I know what he sees when he looks at me. Her. The angel he wanted. And the angel he damned them all for.

I continue my approach, Valkyries circling as the legion and army of Olympus fight the soulless, but as I reach for Luke, he grabs me by the neck and lifts me off the ground.

A blood curdling scream vibrates along the walls as a deadly silence falls over the hall while Luke lifts me higher. My mother and father and all those I love, fear the worst, but they don't know this is part of my plan. To end Luke, I have to be close. I cannot look into his spirit and find the most vulnerable part of him from afar.

Closing my eyes, I channel the part of my power that stops everything around me, and when I open them, and see everyone I love is frozen and safe, I peer into his inky black eyes.

His need for revenge is legendary, stories of his malevolence told to mortals as children so they will be good. Yet, as he stands here with my very existence in his hands, I do not fear him. Instead, strangely, I pity him because the longer our eyes remain locked, the deeper I see into his spirit, and the clearer the truth becomes. The look in his eyes isn't one of ruin. It is something else entirely.

“What is your secret?” I reach for his strong hand, trying to pry it free. “This can't just be about power.”

Luke smiles and licks his lips. “Are you really this brave, my precious kitten, or is your bravado all a show?”

I lift my leg and land a kick between his legs. He grunts but does not ease his hold. “You may not want to damage the goods, sweet girl. Once you learn just what I can do, you will never want another.”

I narrow my eyes. His words do not dignify a response, but I give him one so I can continue diving into his spirit unbeknownst to him.

“You won’t win.” I pull my head back, trying to expand the breath in throat. “Your son has your empire, and I have him, and the great Greek and Norse armies you bartered for. Once I let my hold on this world go, and time resumes, those armies bound to me now will end you. Heaven will never be yours.”

Luke tilts his head to the side as if he’s fighting not just my words, but something deeper. “You think I care about empires?” he sneers. “You think this is about power?”

“No.” I dig into my lungs, searching for breath. “But I do think it is about something.”

His eyes flash and it is then I see a part of his spirit that is behind a wall and bound by chains. I wrap my mind around them and tug and pull and when one falls to the depths of his spirits, rattling, I do the same to another.

As my breath starts to thin in my lungs, I remove his chains, layer after layer, stripping them free, and once they’re gone, and it’s just me standing before a wall, I kick through it and that’s when I see it. A part of his spirit that is still light.

As if feeling me in him, he grips my throat harder and pulls my face to his. “You’re right,” he says with rueful indifference. “This isn’t about power. It is about pain.”

I grab the shining part of his spirit and wrap my hand around it and the light makes my skin tingle and chest warm. I swallow, and a tear leaks from my eyes, but it’s not from the pressure of his hold. It’s from the buoying sensation I feel all through me as I hold this luminous part of his spirit in my hand.

Behind his calculated schemes for power and control, before he was even the light of the morning star, he was the sun, and he was effervescent. His very presence kept everything together and made life possible. Nothing could

exist without his light, not even my father, the moon. But my mother, the stars, was as old as the universe itself, and neither could exist without her. Together, the three worked in harmony. For millions of years it was the three. And then the moon fell for the stars and left the sun without their light.

The weight of their story is greater than time itself, and yet, this piece Luke has kept hidden, this part of his spirit that he's locked away, he has done so to remind himself of the greatest power in the universe. That which can bring together, and that which can destroy.

My mother said it herself that night after Locksley—there was only one thing that could make anyone, mortal and immortal alike, do the unthinkable, and that was one thing that was greater than anything in the universe. Luke wants what he once had with my parents, and then what they together, found with one another. What Declan, Luca, Kai and I had fought for, and still fighting for—love.

When I awakened in that chamber that night at Locksley, I thought my worst nightmare had come true—the Augury succeeded and had taken me from everyone I loved—and thinking that was the end, sent a surge of emotion through me unlike any I'd ever felt. It was love, and it could move mountains, change the course of the sea, and even...summon the devil.

Love had been the catalyst behind everything. Maren's love for her mother and Sebastian's love for his sister drove the nonsense with the Augury. My love for Declan, Kai and Luca, and their love for me, had driven us all these years. My parents for me, Declan and Luca's mothers for them, and Kai's for the part of himself that kept him at peace. What was happening now was about what it was in the beginning...love.

They had been friends once—Luke and my parents—and I knew better than anyone the kind of love at the core of friendship. I felt it for Declan, Kai and Luca as kids, and even now that we were lovers, and would do anything for any one of them because they were my heart, and my heart could not

exist without them, and Luke's love for my parents had been the same. He would have done anything for them. But their betrayal cut deep, turning his love into rage, giving birth to this endless cycle of revenge.

Luke brings me closer to his face, and when I place my hand on his chest, I'm surprised when instead of disgust, I feel something else instead.

The opposite of hate was love. No two emotions had ever been more opposite, and yet intrinsically connected, and I can see now all this time, Luke wanted what we all did—to love and feel loved—and I can't bring myself to hate him. Instead, I feel empathy, understanding, and most of all, compassion as my mother's words slam into me. *It is love, Nev. That is the key. It was in the beginning and so will it be in the end.*

My mother said when the time came I would know what to do, and now I know what that meant. Love is what brought my mother's wings back when she thought she no longer had them, and what saved my father after The Fall, and love is what was going to end this war, once and for all.

I reach for the hand that's wrapped around my neck and hold it tight. "I'm sorry my parents hurt you, but you can fix this. You can choose a different ending."

"It's too late," he says stubbornly.

"It's not." Tears fill my eyes and I kick my legs and pull back to expand my lungs and give myself a bit of breath. "Love is not to be feared. It is beautiful."

He laughs. "Love is the bane of my existence. It is nothing more than an emotion that makes the strong foolish, and the weak, pitiful."

"You're wrong."

"Am I?" He studies me, eyes searching mine.

I remember what Kai said...that Luke knew things about us. If it was possible he knew those things because he had been a part of him the whole time, then maybe somewhere in

Luke, he could feel Kai and Hyde's love for me, and felt it, too.

He squeezes my neck and a series of flashbacks come to mind. As they do, I grip his hand, passing my memories to him through our shared Hellfire.

I am six, and I have skinned my knee, and Kai is there to put the bandage on.

I am eleven, and Kai and I are running down the hall to avoid being seen after he caught me listening at the doors of the legion meeting.

I am eighteen, and he looks at me as I turn my back on them.

And I am twenty-one, and he is asleep in bed next to me, and he is so beautiful, my love for him so infinite, I can barely breathe.

Luke's eyes remain dark, and my mind races for another way to reach him. And then I see a faint flicker of light in his eyes.

"That night at Locksley," I gasp, seeing the window and using it, knowing it is the only one I will get. "Hyde wanted me to sacrifice him but I didn't do it. Do you know why? Because that darkness in Kai...that part of him that owns my Hellfire, *your* power...I love it. I can't exist without it. Kai is your light, but Hyde is your dark, and I love them, Luke. I love them so fucking much, which means a part of me too, loves you. So please..." I sputter, as the last of my breath starts to thin, "let this end."

"I...cannot," he says, looking confused and lost.

"I promise you. Through your son, you will know love. Both the dark and light will know so much love it erases the hurt you have carried, all these millennia. But you have to end this, now."

He closes his eyes and shakes his head, and when he opens them again, and the light grows bigger and the black, smaller, I

can feel it as his hold eases. I was right. Love was the key, and it is the answer.

“I was wrong,” he says finally. “When I said that night you were your mother. You are not. You are neither your mother nor father because you are a rarity all your own, Nevaeh. A star worthy of her own name.”

He brushes the back of his free hand against my cheek and when he presses his lips to my forehead, I feel Kai and Hyde in his kiss. It is kind, warm, and full of love.

He eases hold of my neck, wraps an arm around my waist, and places my feet back down on the ground.

“Your sons will know what you did for them,” I say shakily, holding that sliver of light in my hand.

“Oh, sweet girl.” He drops hold of my waist and steps back. “I didn’t do it for them. I did it for you.”

The moment he says it a bright light flashes in front of my eyes and everything fades away. I am in a field with apple and cherry trees, delicate white and pink blossoms, blowing all around me, and in the distance a gate, with vines woven throughout the curves of the iron.

I look around, searching for Declan, Kai, and Luca, my parents and the legion, the armies of both Olympus and the Valkyries, but they’re gone. It is just me and Hell nowhere in sight. In fact this looks like....

“Hello daughter,” a resounding voice calls from beyond. “We’ve been expecting you.”

The voice is strong, yet comforting, vibrating my chest and curling around my heart.

“What happened?” I ask, as I start walking toward the gate. “Where are we?”

“You won, and you are home.”

I look around and up, the sky above and the fields on either side of me, endless. Something about this place feels so

familiar, and yet, it is not home because my family is missing.

“Is this Heaven?” I look back to the gate, the light beyond it growing brighter with each step that I take.

“It is the space before, where neither judge nor jury exists. Only those things we have lost and wish to see again.”

I shake my head, not understanding, and when I hear a whinny in the distance, I turn. I know that sound anywhere. Longed to hear it in my dreams. But not until this moment had my hopes materialized.

My girl perished in the fire, her last seconds filled with smoke and fire. Yet, sure as I stand here now, there she is running toward me, alive and free, just as beautiful as the last time I saw her.

When she reaches me, she stops a few feet away, tossing her head as the wind blows her mane. But as I close the space between us, cool blades of grass, bending under my feet, she walks toward me.

I place my hand on her forehead and her eyes close and between us passes memories of our time together. They are what surrounded her when she crossed over and what she fills her days with now.

“She has been waiting,” the voice says, as I wrap my arms around her neck. I breathe in deeply, filling my lungs with her scent. It is the smell of hay, leather, and sunshine and it brings tears to my eyes.

“When you pass through the gate, she will be yours again.”

When I hear it, I close my eyes and my chest feels a weight. “I cannot stay here. This is not where I belong.”

“This is your destiny, Nevaeh. Your place is with us.”

“I don’t belong here.” I step back from my girl and she regards me longingly. “Heaven is for angels. I am anything but.”

A tingle shoots down my spine and my body imbues with warmth and when I turn around and see what's extending behind me, I can't breathe. Wings, the color of snow, with gold dusting the plumes.

"You are a child of Heaven, Nevaeh. And sitting alongside the throne was always your destiny."

I reach out to touch one of the plumes by my shoulder, and energy shoots through me. They're so beautiful. Unlike anything I have ever seen. *You are my daughter in every way, right down to your very spirit.* My mother was right. I am her in every way. Love was her spirit, and so too, is it mine.

"But how is this possible?" I look around realizing this is Heaven, and the voice is the Throne.

"Too long the kingdoms have been left to their own devices, Nevaeh. Luke's treaty was the last straw. We didn't give you power to rule. We gave it to you to enforce Heaven's authority. You have always been our greatest hope, and now that you are bound to the armies of the two remaining kingdoms with the ability to challenge our authority, you will wield that power to ensure peace over our dominion.

"But that's not what I wanted. That's not why I did this."

"This has never been about what you wanted," the Throne chides. "It is about our will. And peace is the only way. Luke proved this time and again with his selfishness."

"No," I shake my head fervently and step back "Not this time. This time he chose love. That is why I am here."

"You are here because it is your destiny. You read it yourself."

"No..." I shake my head, defiant. "My destiny was to bring peace and set The Fallen free. I have done that. They are why I did this. For their freedom. Not to reign."

"It is the reason you were born, Nevaeh. We cannot change the destiny which created you. The Fallen will be freed, but this is your place now."

“There is another option,” a voice says from behind me. I spin around and when I see Luke, I can’t believe it. Gone is his darkness, and now he is only light.

“Morning star,” the Throne says somberly. “You have no say here.”

Luke comes up alongside me and stares at the gates. “I do, otherwise I would not be here. It’s time to let her go.”

“Why?” the voice laughs. “So *you* can rule? You would like nothing more.”

“This is not about me. It is about her. And she does not belong here. She belongs with those who love her.”

The throne scoffs. “You do not know what love is.”

He turns to me. “You’re wrong. I did, and I guess in a way, I always have.”

“What are you saying?” the Throne questions.

“I’m saying the shell you confined me in, the ash that was my spirit, give it to my son.”

“Your son!” If I could see the Throne, I bet it’s shocked because I am right now, too.

“The dark part. The part that was born from anger. Give it to him. He can ensure Hell stays in order. He can carry your punishment on Earth.”

“No!” I scream as the Throne cuts me off.

“And of you?” The throne rumbles. “What of you?”

“The light of the morning star will come home, as it was in the beginning.”

“And the other part of your son...where will his light go?”

“Let him be your work on Earth. Let him be the promise of the morning light.”

The Throne is quiet and then speaks. “You do not know what you are asking.”

“I do.” Luke stands firm.

“You betrayed us,” it says simply. “We cannot risk you doing this again, Luke. The part of you that is dark, if we confine it to Hell, it may rise again. Maybe not this millennium, but surely, in another. Your track record if anything, is consistent.”

“Bind it to my domain.” He steps in front of me and when he does I cannot speak. I want to tell the Thone not to make any deals with him, but I can’t. My lips are sealed. Literally. “Let the light in my son be your will on Earth and let this body serve a new purpose.”

I try to scream. Try to shout. But when that fails, I cock my hand back and punch Luke in the back of the head.

“Ow!” He turns around and when our eyes meet, he releases whatever hold he had on me and I gasp for air.

“What the hell are you doing! You can’t bind Kai to Hell!”

“If you want Hyde to live and Kai to be free, this is the only way, Nevaeh.”

“What?” I shake my head, not understanding. “You were right. Kai is the light that I was and the world still needs, and Hyde is the darkness that Hell needs. They think they are getting me, but really, you are getting this win.”

“How?” My eyes search his.

“Heaven’s rule cannot be total if Hell exists. If Hell exists, so do the other kingdoms.”

Now that the war was over and the dust had settled, and Hyde was not here, I finally had a chance to process what Hyde’s absence meant to not just my heart, but the part of my spirit that needed him, and it hurt.

I longed to hear his voice and feel the heat of his touch. To know he was there when the darkest depths of my spirit needed him.

“Is it the only way Hyde can return and Kai can be set free?” Luke nods. “Then do it.”

“She’ll do it!” Luke spins around.

“And your wings?” the Throne asks.

“What of them?” I look around Luke.

“Angels do not walk on earth. You are either an angel here, or you are simply, a child of The Fallen.”

“But they’re forgiven,” I counter.

“The burn in their blood will be lifted and their punishment, absolved. But they will remain forever and always, The Fallen.

I knew the pain the clipped wings of The Fallen had left. But I never had them to begin with. What was mourning something I never had to begin with? I was born a child of The Fallen, and I would forever be one. Seemed a fair deal.

“Take them,” I say without a second thought.

“This cannot be undone,” the throne says gravely.

“I understand.”

“Do you truly? You will no longer be an angel.”

I think of Declan and Luca, Kai and Hyde. My boys and their kingdoms, and me destined to rule by their side. It is then I know the truth of our destiny. That which has bound and driven us, all these years. *Who wants infinite power when you can have a lifetime of love?*

I want to free The Fallen, and fulfill my destiny, and make sure Declan and Luca’s legacies are secure by giving them heirs. And Kai...I want to free him from this birthright that I know is an anchor around his neck and give life to Hyde.

“I was never meant to be your angel.” I smile, knowing now, the meaning of my mother’s words. “I was meant to be their queen.”

Luke lets out a breath of what looks like relief and turns to the throne. “It is done. Open the gates.”

The throne is quiet for what feels like forever, and I hope they accept. Given the need for control that has driven *them* all these years, there’s a possibility they won’t.

Then something peculiar happens. The gates open, and the light streams through, and when it hits Luke he is a ball of light that is so bright and blinding it’s hard to see.

“Welcome home, Lucifer Morning Star. We have been waiting for you.”

I turn to the Throne, eyes wide with surprise. “We were right, Nevaeh.” Its voice is soothing and makes my hair stand up on my arms and stir warmth in my chest. “You were the one all along.”

“The one for what?” I watch in disbelief as Luke’s light makes its way toward the gate.

“The one who brought our son home and granted him peace. You may not have your wings, but you are every bit your mother’s daughter. Our greatest hope.”

“Luke,” I can’t help but laugh. “This was about him?”

“And that little piece of our greatest creation that never died. That which can outlive anything—love.”

Then I hear a snap and there is darkness...followed by light.

Chapter 31

Nev

I blink and look around, and when I turn, and see Declan, Kai and Luca, and the armies behind them and everyone else I love, my heart soars. But I don't see Hyde. "Where is he?" I ask.

Declan cups my face, eyes scanning my face for a moment, and when relief floods his eyes, he pulls me to him and holds me tight. I grip his arms and murmur into his chest as Luca kisses the side of my head and Kai the top. "Where is he? Where's Hyde?"

"He's not here," Kai says sadly. "I thought I felt him, but..."

"No." I pull back. "Luke gave his body, and I, my wings. He's here."

"You...what?" Luca looks from me to Declan. "Baby girl, what happened when he grabbed you? Are you okay?"

I look around again and when I don't see him anywhere, start searching frantically. "Princess?" Declan reaches for my hand. "Shit, what did he do to you? What happened when time stopped?"

"This wasn't what was supposed to happen." I shake my head, confused.

"Of course it is." Luca flashes his easy, confident smile. "We won."

"No," I close my eyes. "It wasn't. My sacrifice...his sacrifice...for Kai, and Hyde."

My mother runs up to me, followed by my father. "What's wrong?" they ask Declan, Kai, and Luca in unison.

“I think he hurt her,” Declan says angrily.

“He didn’t hurt me,” I say angrily. “He saved me. He saved his son, and he should be here.”

“But I am?” Kai looks at me confused.

“Hyde,” I shake my head.. “Luke gave that part of you life so that you could be the light, Kai, and Hyde the dark. And Heaven agreed. They—”

“Heaven?” my mother cuts me off. “Nev, you spoke with the Throne?”

“I was there,” I nod. “And I saw Beauty and it was so beautiful.” I look at my mom and then dad, and their eyes are wide with shock. “But it would not let me past the gate because I did not want to go. I wanted to stay here. And we had a deal.”

I turn and clench my fists, surveying the hall. “We had a fucking deal!” I shout and look up. “Is this your great promise!”

My father starts to speak and my mother holds up a hand. “Answer me, damn it! You took my wings, now you owe me. Give. Me. Hyde!”

The hall falls quiet, as a light breeze sweeps through, bringing with it clouds and smoke. I cover my eyes and when it stops, and I look toward the end of the hall, I see Luke’s throne. It’s no longer cracked and a figure sits in it. I know everyone sees it because I hear the collective growl of hundreds.

Knowing who it is, I take off running but Declan, Luca and Kai stop me. “Let me go!”

“It’s a trick.” Declan shakes his head, but I know it’s not. It’s Hyde. I can feel it.

Declan and Luca’s armies are bound to me, and the legion was Kai’s. But with Hyde now being bound to Hell and me the one who just secured their freedom, they also answer to me.

When they see Declan, Luca, and Kai trying to apprehend me, they look to me, awaiting my command. I give them a look to stand down, while I try to get the three pieces of my heart, to understand why I know that which sits in Luke's throne, is the fourth.

"It's him," I whisper.

"It's...who?" Luca asks.

"It's Hyde," I answer, while looking at Kai.

They look over their shoulder, straining to see what is sitting in the throne, but I don't have to see it. I can feel him.

I was connected to Declan, Luca, and Kai by fate and when I gave up my wings for Hyde they became his spirit and it connected me to him. Just as I could feel the invisible tether to the three that stood in front of me, I felt it to the one waiting at the other end of the hall.

Kai places a hand on my shoulder and squeezes. "What if it's not him?"

"I'm an angel," I say softly. "Or I was until I gave up my wings. And Luke...he didn't hurt me. He saved me. He saved you. That's how I know it's him."

"Saved you?" Luca asks, incredulously. "How?"

"My destiny...it was you, but it was also to serve Heaven. Luca, you said it yourself. Your mom told you to tell me that Heaven must not rule. That was why. She was right. They wanted your armies and for me to rule by their side. But I chose to love instead. I chose to be here with you and I sacrificed my wings so that Hyde could be here, and Kai, so you could be freed from your birthright. You three are pieces of my heart and I would do anything for you. And I know in my very spirit that is Hyde, because he too, is a piece of my heart. I feel my connection to him, just as I do to the three of you. Do not let my sacrifice be in vain. Let me go to him."

They look at one another, and when my mother makes her way over and grabs my shoulders, I feel her conviction just as

sure as I do my own. I wait for her words of wisdom or protest, but she simply pulls me to her and embraces me.

“Do you believe me?” I whisper.

“I have always believed in you.” She places a hand on the back of my head. “You are, and always will be, my angel.”

We stand there, holding onto one another tight for a moment, then she pulls back and cups my face, green eyes bright like the grass I stood on not moments earlier. “Go,” she encourages.

I look from her to my father, and then Declan, Kai, and Luca. “I love you. You are my forever.”

Declan grips my hand and then kisses me on the forehead, and Luca and Kai do the same. “We will be here waiting,” Declan nods in confirmation then the three watch as I turn and make my way across the hall.

When I am halfway across, I turn and see Declan, Kai and Luca, not as they are, but as they have always been—three I have been bound to from the moment I drew my first breath. But there was another who was also there, not in the same way, but just as present, and it’s time he too knew the place he held in my heart.

I smile and turn back around, continuing my approach, the throne getting closer with every step that I take. When I am only a few feet away, I stop. The silence that surrounds me is deafening because it is then I see him.

“Hello, pet.” The smoky tenor of his voice greets me, rousing my senses, and igniting every nerve in my body.

My stomach plummets as I take him in, sitting there in a broken throne, with his elbow pressed into the arm, legs spread apart. His appearance is not Luke’s nor Kai’s but his own entirely, and he is so beautiful it hurts.

His face is chiseled perfection, his countenance a combination of confidence and strength that makes me weak in the knees. But it’s the way he’s looking at me that makes me

want to kneel at his feet. It speaks volumes of love and desire and unspoken hunger, and when he pushes up from where he sits, I freeze.

As he makes his way down the stone stairs, the pounding of my heart falls in line with each step that he takes, and as I remain rooted in place by a duality of longing and surprise, I can barely breathe, pockets of air trapping in my throat, lodged like a weight.

But when he is no more than a foot away, he stops and flashes me his trademark grin, and air rushes back into my lungs as a cry curls from my lips.

“You’re here.” I throw myself into his arms and bury my face in his chest, tears streaming down my face. “You’re really here.”

“Shhh,” he soothes, wrapping a strong arm around my waist, while placing his hand on the back of my head, holding me close.

“I don’t believe it.” I grip his shirt tight, afraid to let go. “It’s been so long.”

He kisses the side of my head, and draws in a deep breath, fusing our bodies. I want to know where he’s been and if he knows what we’ve been through.

“I missed you, Hyde,” I mutter into his chest as sobs of joy and relief rock my body. “I missed you so fucking much.”

He lets out a deep laugh and it rumbles his chest. “I’m glad to hear because I, too, missed you.”

We stand that way for a moment, holding onto one another, and when my racing heart slows, and tears stop falling, I pull back, so I can look at him. He is every bit the dark lord he was destined to be, with eyes the color of night and a ring of gold in the center, and lush ebony hair that parts down the center and falls to his chin.

I reach up and touch his cheek with the pads of my fingers, bringing it down along a jawline that can cut glass, but

when I reach his lips, I brush them tenderly just before he grabs my chin and pulls my mouth to his.

As our lips meet, I let out a little moan, and he scoops me up, and holds me close in his strong arms as his mouth moves deftly over mine. The kiss is soft at first, and then turns passionate, and his mouth tastes of oak and smoke, with a hint of cherry. And it's hot. So fucking hot it makes my lips burn.

His fingers dig into my side as I grip the back of his neck with one hand and use the one gripping his shirt to pull him closer. The wall of his chest is one of muscle and strength, yet below the rigid outline of pectoral perfection, I can feel his need for me, burning deep in his core. It is heat and Hellfire, and when I grab his hand and place it on my own chest, I know he can feel that it matches mine.

“If we keep this up,” he rasps, “it’s only a matter of time before I bend you over the arm of that throne so I can break it into four.”

I can't help but grin at the way his carnality speaks to the primal part of me that needs to be claimed by him, and when I kiss him again with bruising force, it speaks volumes of love and desire, and unspoken hunger that silently wills him to bend and shape me, anyway he wants.

When we finally break apart, our breaths mingling in heated pants, we stare at one another in want and awe. “You did it,” he shakes his head. “You won.”

“No,” I marvel at the incredulity of his being, “we did it. Your brothers and I and Luke.”

“Yes,” he nods, eyes searching mine. “But this,” he looks down, “this was all you and this body yearns for you.”

We both turn and look at the crowd gathered on the other end of the hall, and when he lifts his hand and waves, Declan, Kai, and Luca wave back. Seeing I'm okay, they turn with my parents and make their way out of the hall. Their job is done. Their destiny is fulfilled...for now.

Hyde carries me out of the throne room and down a candlelit corridor, stopping once we reach a set of double doors at the end. Swinging me around I kick them open and he tosses his head back and laughs.

“Good,” he growls with approval. “Your legs are still strong. You’ll need them when I chase you all over this place and christen it by claiming you on every surface.”

He strides into the room, like a king in his castle, and after kicking the door closed, makes his way over to a chaise lounge in the center of the room, and lays me down. As I drape my arms over his shoulders and tangle my fingers in his hair, he braces his hands on either side of me and leans in, running his nose along the column of my throat.

“Do you know why I didn’t peel every stitch of clothing from you just now, and fuck you on that throne?”

He runs the tip of his tongue along the plump skin of my lower lip and when he sucks it between his teeth and gives it a little tug, I arch my back with a mewl. “Because there were too many watching?” I pant.

“Because I want to take my time and show your body how this one can command it.”

Grabbing a fistful of hair I yank his head back so his eyes are looking up at mine. “Show me now,” I beg. “And when you’re done, hunt me, then fuck me in the flames.”

He pulls my shirt down on my shoulders, and anticipation fills the air as the growing intensity of our locked gaze fuels the heat between us.

“How did you know this room was here?” I whisper, my breathing picking up as he trails his lips down my neck and across my shoulders.

“In the recesses of my mind,” he murmurs against my skin, “I can see the outline of memories. Whispers of an existence spanning countless millennia.”

I wonder how much of Luke's spirit inhabits the body I now hold in my arms. If he knows what just happened and what I...what Luke sacrificed for him.

"And you were right," he pulls back, eyes skimming my face as he answers that very question. "Luke did love your parents, and in his own way, Kai too. That is why he freed them. For you. And you, my pet, wings or not, are still every bit the angel I want to corrupt for eternity."

"And you." I reach up and push a strand of hair from his face. "That is why he gave you his body. Because of him, you now exist wholly, and I will forever be thankful."

He kisses me again, and my body warms; muscles melding to create a fit that is not that of Kai's body with mine, but ours, Hyde's and mine.

His hands find my hips and grip them with possession; strong fingers I can't wait to feel wrapped around my throat. "I do have a question."

"Yes?" He pulls back and arches a brow.

"In those whispers of memories, do you by any chance see a bathroom and change of clothes because I must look like I've been through a war."

Reaching for my hand, he brings my wrist to his mouth and nibbles the soft skin. "You taste divine, pet. But yes, there is a bathroom through those doors," he points to the other side of the room with his free hand, "as well as a closet full of clothes."

"Really?" I look to the doors and then back at him. "Who do they belong to?"

He lets go of my arm and brushes my hair back, the gold in his eyes flickering. "Would you believe me if I said your mother?"

I shake my head, not understanding, then I remember... Luke held my mother hostage here and planned to keep her for eternity. The very heat of this place must have been stifling for

her. For me, however, it soothed the part of me that gravitated toward the warmth.

It's then I know without a doubt, the greatest gift I could have ever given Kai was to free him from this part of his birthright. His spirit could never have existed here. Now he could exist in the light, and together, he and Hyde could carry out their birthright.

Hyde leans in again, and I prepare my lips for his mesmerizing kiss, but when he tucks his head into my neck, and draws in a deep breath, I close my eyes and do the same. We've never laid together before. There was always a barrier between his being and me. And realizing this is a first, I don't rush it. I savor it.

“You feel like Heaven,” he whispers.

“And you feel like peace,” I whisper back.

“Will you stay with me?” he asks finally.

I pull back and brush his hair from his face, falling in love with him all over again, and yet, for the first time. “Always,” I bring my forehead to his, and I mean it.

Our forever will look a bit different than that which I have with Decan, Luca, and Kai, but the fact we will have one at all is a miracle in itself. It is that I decide to focus on as he pulls me into his arms and carries me to the bathroom, where he bathes and cares for me as he likes to do, before claiming the fuck out of me, all over this forsaken place.

After bathing, I text the guys to let them know I'm okay. How cell phones work in Hell, but not on Olympus, is a curious thing, but as Kai says when I ask Declan to put him on so I can hear his voice, “Hell is below the ground, just like power lines. Makes sense, gorgeous.”

After confirming I will be back in the morning, I get ready for my night with Hyde. I'm thankful the guys understand how important it is that he and I spend this time together. There are a few things we need to discuss, including how he and Kai will both serve Luke's birthright, Kai above ground, and Hyde below.

With the heat of this place my hair is nearly dry and falls in waves down my back. Since I don't have to fix it, I make my way over to the closet and pull the doors open to see if I can find something to wear.

Now I know where Kai got his fashion sense. There are clothes for every occasion and they are exquisite; price tags dangling as if just purchased.

After settling on a black see-through nightgown with a long, flowing robe, I get dressed, thinking about how far we've come since that night at Locksley. It's been a long road but along the way, we've shared a lot of love, and some incredible truths, and now it was time to do the same with Hyde.

I enter the room, black sheer nightgown flowing behind me, as the stone beneath my feet offers respite from the warmth of this place. But the moment I see him, heat flashes in my core and every inch of my skin pricks with need.

He lays on the bed, back against the headboard, with one arm behind his head and the other resting just above the carved v that dips below the black silk sheet draped lazily over his waist. The power he exudes is exhilarating and he is every bit the darkness that first chased me in the woods. Bold and unyielding, eyes hungry and focused, and I ache for him the way I did that first night he revealed himself to me.

Watching as I make my way over to the bed, he pushes up from the headboard, and drags his eyes up my body. "Oh pet, I can't wait to tear that from your body and fuck you on the shreds."

The gravel of his voice is thick in want, and it makes my nipples harden and my clit pulse. “I take it, you approve.”

“Oh, I approve.” He swings his legs over the side of the bed and when he stands, the sheet falls. “Wouldn’t you say?”

Every part of Hyde’s body is now his own, including a thick, strong cock that stands at attention, eager for me. I am anxious to know the way he commands and fills me, and my body hums with anticipation wanting to do anything, and everything tonight.

“Come to me” he demands, and compelled by his very presence, my feet carry me toward him until we are standing only inches apart.

He walks around me slowly, the tip of his cock brushing the sheer fabric of my robe, and when he peels it from my shoulders, and slides it down my arms, I draw in a charged breath.

Next is my nightgown, which clings to my skin in the heat, and when he slides his fingers under the spaghetti straps, and I drop my arms, it falls to the floor, and pools at my feet.

Running his knuckles down my bare back, my nipples harden to the point of pain, and when he wraps his hand around my waist, and pulls my back flush against his chest, I drop my head back on his shoulder and sigh.

I’d always felt a little guilty at the way I longed for his touch, in a way that was different from Kai’s, but now I don’t. Now I get both of them, dark and light, and it feels as if I am the luckiest being in existence.

Fire ignites in my core as he trails his other hand down my side and across my stomach, and when he slides it between my legs, I arch my back. “Are you ready for me to fuck you like only I can, pet?”

My pussy throbs as his palm slides over my slick folds, and when he drags his middle finger through my wet heat, the ache of separation makes my thighs hurt. It has been too long to be teased like this, and when he bites my ear and grinds

against me, I reach up and grab the hair at the nape of his neck. “I want you, Hyde. Now.”

His body tightens and when I turn slowly, and place both hands on his chest, his cock twitches. Tomorrow I will tell him what I sacrificed to have him here with me. That this kingdom of heat and flame is his. But tonight I only want this—to know he is real, and never leave me again.

“Do to me what you wish, my lord. I love you, and I am yours. And when I am here, I serve you and only you.”

When he hears those three words I have been longing to say, the gold in his eyes flickers. He may be one of the dark, but there is no denying the power of love’s light. “Does your darkness still belong to me?”

My lips pull into a dark smile. “My darkness will always belong to you, and only you.”

We stand there, staring at one another—energy crackling in the air between us—and then a smile tugs at his lips. “Then be a good girl and lay down for your lord.”

I draw in a shuddering breath and take a step back, and when I feel the bed behind me, I lay down. Resting on my elbows, I part my legs, wanting him to see how much I need him.

He drags his eyes down my body, eyes smoldering when they find my glistening pussy, and when he grabs both ankles with his massive hands, and pulls me toward him, I can’t fight the moan it draws. “I am going to fuck you like an animal, pet. Just as you like. But first, I need to taste you.”

Dropping to his knees he drapes my legs over his shoulders, and while my ass hangs off the bed, he grips it with both hands, and buries his head between my legs. Devouring me like he did that first night, he consumes me from cunt to clit, and when every part of my body burns, he spears me with his tongue and draws out a powerful orgasm that makes my entire body shake.

“Yes!” I grab his head with both hands and clamp my legs down on his shoulders. “Fuck, don’t stop.”

Encouraged by my need for more, he suckles my clit, slurping and sucking, and when he lays me down, limp and satisfied, he pushes my legs apart, and stands back up.

“While I’ve been gone, have my brothers been giving you what you need?” he rasps while stroking his massive cock.

Seeing him wearing nothing but his need for me makes my mouth water. “They have,” I pant, gripping the sheets in anticipation. “But only you can sate my darkness.”

“Mmm,” he growls. “Good answer.”

Prowling toward me, he plants one hand on either side of me, dragging his thick dick along my leg. “Do you want this?” he taunts.

“Yes,” I pant.

“How much?” he asks, before sucking, then biting my nipple.

“Shit,” I hiss, while arching my back. “Badly.”

He laughs that sexy, low rumble that makes my pussy throb, and when he pushes my legs apart with his knees and drags his dick across my leg and up my entrance, goosebumps dance along my skin. “I can’t wait to own you again.”

As he eases into me, his substantial girth stretches and fills me in a way that is different from the way he did in Kai’s body. I widen my legs and press down on his lower back, wanting more...wanting all of him.

“Oh pet,” he looks down and licks his lips. “Look at your greedy pussy stretching and swallowing every inch of me. I can’t wait to make it mine again.”

I writhe and moan as his words and touch fuel my need, and once he’s filling me fully, he grips my hips, and pulls me toward him. My eyes roll back in my head as he does this over and over, slamming the tip of his cock right into the knot of

nerves deep inside that sends shocks of electricity shooting through me.

A fine sheen of sweat starts to bead along his brow as he brings me up and down on his cock, and when he feels my body opening to him, arousal slicking the base of his cock, he lifts me up and holds me flush against his chest.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I hold on tight as he fucks me while standing, and when my breathing grows ragged, my climax imminent, he twists one hand in my hair and tugs my head back.

“Come for me, pet. Soak this cock and make it yours.”

“Fuck Hyde,” I pant as my second orgasm rips through me. “That mouth.” I grip his chin with both hands, nails digging into his cheek. “I fucking love it.”

Laying me back down on the bed, he runs his tongue through my sopping cunt, and when he works his way up my body, and stops to give me a kiss, I taste myself on his lips. “You are so sweet,” he moans as my arousal tickles my tongue. “So hot.”

Wrapping my hands around dark inked vines that run up his muscular forearms, I am desperate for more. I want him to consume me until I can't walk or think. “Don't stop,” I dig my nails into his flesh. “Give me more.”

“Oh my beautiful, carnal beauty,” he grins. “I plan to. But first, I need to remind you who we are.”

Preparing for him to fuck me at a punishing pace, I widen my legs, eager and ready. But when he pushes up and turns, I watch first in curiosity, wondering what he's doing, then in appreciation as the sculpted muscles of his back flex as he makes his way over to the wall and removes one of the tapered candlesticks from the sconce.

“What are you going to do with that?” I arch my brow as he turns and flicks his heated gaze back to me.

Making his way over to the bed, he stands at the edge, studying the flickering flame and wax dripping down the side, before dragging his smoldering gaze up my naked body.

“Do you trust me?” he asks, with the kind of heated promise that teases pleasure.

The idea of him dripping wax on me is alarming, and yet, I trust him to do anything, and everything he wants. “With love comes trust. You never have to ask for it. Both are yours, unconditionally.”

A beautiful smile lights up his face and when he tips the candle, a rush of excitement shoots through me as I wait for the wax to hit my skin. When the first drop hits my stomach, I hiss with the burn, and he sinks two fingers deep inside me.

My body bucks at the combination of pleasure and pain that rips through me as he curls his fingers and hits the knot of nerves deep inside, while the wax hardens on my skin. “Fuck, my lord, FUCK!”

He grins and tips the candle again, trailing hot wax up my body while fucking me with his hand, and when the last drop hits my breast, he blows out the flame, and tosses it to the floor and sinks his cock back into me.

His massive body covers mine as he pounds into me, thrust after thrust, and when he rolls onto his back, and pulls me on top so I’m riding him, I take him deep and slow, riding him like a prized thoroughbred.

His hands find my breasts, then my neck, and when he wraps both around my throat, I lean back and flick my hips faster, chasing my climax.

Grabbing his thighs, I move my hips back and forth, keeping him seated in me fully, and when I feel the head of his cock swell inside me, and his hold on my neck ease, I lay down on his chest, and fuck him harder.

Sliding one hand down my ass, he rubs the tight bud with his thumb, and breaching the space with two fingers that are still slick from my arousal, the sheer ecstasy shooting through

my body, heightens every sensation, and in seconds we're both coming.

"Yes," he groans. "Own it, pet. Own. Me."

Pressing my forehead to his, I grip his shoulders and ride him through my climax, and when I fall into his arms, he whispers in my ear. "Good girl. Now lay down."

Pulling back in a daze, he brushes my hair off my sweaty forehead, and lays me down on the bed. Rolling me over slowly, he trails kisses from my foot to my lower back and when he is stretched out on top of me, buries himself in me once again.

This time, he fucks me slowly, and passionately, gripping my breasts while licking my neck and flicking his hips. It's not punishing or bruising or even feverish. It tells me exactly what it is supposed to. This is how Hyde shows his love. By owning me and my darkness. That is his love language, and he is speaking it...in a perfect, rhythmic, orgasmic cadence that makes me never want to let go.

He is my lord, and I am his queen, and together, we will rule this world. Just as his brothers and I will rule theirs. Everything will continue the way it began, with all of us. Only now instead of four, we are five, and we are fucking everything.

Epilogue

Nev

Three years later....

“Ready to go Mrs. Draven?” I look up from my desk and find Declan standing in the doorway.

With his shoulder pressed against the frame, brooding good looks, and hypnotic eyes the color of lightning, he looks every bit the demigod that he is. His very presence sends butterflies flitting in my stomach, just as he has done since we were kids.

I push back and when I come around to the other side of the desk, Declan’s eyes drift down my body. The way he looks at me makes my toes curl and ignites a fire in my core.

“How’s my boy today?” He flashes me a smile and places a loving hand on my stomach.

“Not even close to kicking. *She’s* the size of a lima bean right now.”

His eyes dance, and the fact we are having this conversation at all, I know brings him joy. “Still convinced it’s going to be a girl, huh?”

“Yes.” I give him a kiss, letting my lips linger, enjoying this moment together. The truth is, neither of us cares if it’s a girl or a boy. We’re just thrilled to be having a child at all.

After a couple of years of being more than careless, I was convinced I wouldn’t be able to get pregnant. But as my mother said the night we told her and my father I was expecting, ‘Heaven works in mysterious ways,’ and she was right.

Whether we're having a girl or a boy, however, isn't the biggest question on everyone's minds. That would be, who is the father?

Turns out, those sired by The Fallen *were* able to sire children themselves. They were just smarter about it and made sure they didn't. It took a couple of tests from James to confirm after the battle in Eden, but when he did, the four of us were stunned.

Luca called Heaven the ultimate birth control, 'because they don't seem like the kind that wants a pregnant hero saving the world,' and there was some truth in that. Being pregnant wouldn't have been the best given all the shit we went through.

Still, it took a couple of years for it to happen, and in the long run, I was thankful that it did because it gave us time together that we needed.

Now, each of the guys are convinced the baby is theirs, and honestly, it could be. Our hunger for one another hasn't waned—if anything, it's grown—and making love with them, whether it's one or all, is still my favorite pastime.

"Girl or boy, the odds could go either way. But..." Declan's mouth pulls into a rueful smile. "You and I both know I'm the one that fucks and fills you more than the two of them combined, princess."

My cheeks flush with heat as my need for him rears its head.

Something I didn't know about pregnancy is that your libido goes through the roof, and mine is no exception. It was high before and now it's off the charts. If we weren't expected downstairs in five minutes for family dinner night at my parents', I'd lay down on my desk and tell Declan to get to it, and he'd gladly oblige.

The guys have become my very own submissives during this very interesting phase of pregnancy, and while each proved to have their own little breeding kink when they

learned they could in fact sire children, they're now glad to give into my new craving because they know that it won't last.

Like all those to sire children with The Fallen, the gestation time of a fetus is half that of a mortal. So regardless who the father may be, because I have Fallen blood, that's the pregnancy timeline we're on.

Since we learned I was pregnant a couple of weeks ago, the baby's size has doubled, which is why I am enjoying every perk of this stage. I will be out of my first semester before we know it making side effects like fatigue more common than an increased sex drive.

"Ready to go Mrs. Luca?" A knock pulls my attention from the growing heat between Declan and I, and when I look around his broad frame and see Luca standing there, he flashes me a wicked grin and makes his way over. "Is alpha crowding my baby?"

He steps in between Declan and I, who laughs and steps back as Luca wraps his arms around me and pulls me into a kiss. "How is the sexiest baby mamma this side of the Atlantic?"

"Hungry," I admit. "And ready for a break. It's been a long day."

I began heading up the due diligence department at Primordial—the job my father lured me back home with three years ago—and do that job, alongside running the club with the guys. Business was doing well, especially since we caved into Kai's desire to turn it into a chain.

With Declan and Luca spending more time on Olympus and Vanaheimr, opening a location in Greece and Sweden made sense. But Paris was my idea. I loved it there, regardless of why I had moved there years ago, and I loved being there with the guys to remind them why it was the city of love.

Between my work at Primordial and the four clubs, my plate is full, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I love being

a part of my parent's legacy and creating one with the guys for our family.

Giving me a gentle kiss, I place my hand on Luca's cheek and marvel at the sexy confidence of my second husband.

While Declan's intentions to marry me were noble, I couldn't help but think this society's mindset was archaic. After everything we went through to be together, I didn't want to choose one as my husband for appearance sake. I was proud to be with each and would never deny whom I loved. Fuck the haters, love always wins. And when I married each of my guys last year in our backyard, with all of our friends and family watching, those were the very words I used in my vows.

The long-standing joke, however, was I got to use Declan's name in public more because like all of the children sired by The Fallen, neither Luca nor Kai had last names. The only reason I had one was because my father had adopted it centuries ago for Primordial—Angeleaux.

“Skip dinner and head to our place for dessert?” Luca says suggestively with a waggle of his brows. “You can lay back, relax, and let us do all the work.”

Luca is still my wicked love. He may no longer need to be bound since Heaven forgave The Fallen and their blood no longer burned, but we both loved it too much to give it up. I still crave being cuffed to his bed posts while he feasts on me, and it's too much fun to ride him like a prized jumping horse, while his mouth is gagged and his hands bound.

“How about a compromise?” I suggest. “We have dinner with my parents, and then sweets at home.”

“Deal.” He grips my hips with approval and leans in. “But I get to pick what, how, and where we have dessert.”

“Let me guess,” I pretend to think. “Luca, with a rope, in the library?”

“Sexual Clue,” he winks. “My favorite.”

“Are we gonna shake, or are you two going to monopolize all of my wife’s time?” Kai says as he pops in the doorway and looks at the three of us with an easy smile.

“Yes,” I grin. “To both.” Declan and Luca would gladly take all my time if given the chance. It’s why I split my time between this office and the one at the club so I can get work done.

Kai strides over, cups my neck gently, and kisses me with a softness that sends goosebumps down my arms. “I’ve got a surprise for you, wifey?”

“What now?” I ask with pretend exasperation.

Kai is still my forever sweetheart. He rubs my feet and wakes me with soft feathery kisses and has informed Declan and Luca that he is on craving patrol as soon as I start demanding ice cream at midnight. He spoils me and I love it, and his penchant for surprises secretly makes me swoon.

It wasn’t enough he insisted they buy the house behind us and turn the added acreage into a stable for Nyx. The beautiful foal he gifted me with before we went to Eden had secured a place in my heart, right next her sister’s memory, and I loved her insanely. He was constantly surprising me with gifts but I wasn’t complaining. It’s nice to be loved.

“Wait here.” Kai kisses me again, then leaves.

I look around the corner, wondering what he’s up to, when Hyde appears.

“Husband!” I scream and make my way over excitedly, throwing myself into his waiting arms.

“Pet,” he says in his lush, sexy tenor, which alone could get me pregnant. “How is my delicious wife feeling today?”

I place both hands on the sides of his face and stare into his dark eyes with the gold irises. “Better now that all of my husbands are here. “Speaking of, how *are* you here?”

Hyde. My wild card. A piece of Kai that is now his own being. Where we were once four, we are now five, and my

guys are more than okay with it. They love Hyde too, because he was born from their brother, and balances out their energy in the way he always has. He is dark and broody and up for a good fight and goodness, can he fuck. I thought when the four of us were together it sucked the air out of the room, but when the five of us are...shit, it sucked the air from the very universe. But our time together was limited, and while I was used to it now, I wasn't at first.

When I made the deal with Heaven—my wings for Hyde's existence—I knew his confinement to Hell would be part of it. But at the time my mindset was one that believed a world with him was better than one without.

Once we went back to our lives in London, however, and Hyde remained in Eden, the reality of our situation hit me hard. There were many nights I cried myself to sleep, wondering if I had made the right decision, but every time I talked with Hyde; he assured me that I did. Plus, he reminded me, phone sex could be hot, and the guys and I were free to come to Eden, as often as we liked.

While it had once been cut off from the world and the legion, with Hyde in charge, he changed the rules and we could now travel there freely, which made honoring the deal I made with Heaven easier. Plus, he also got time away for good behavior, as he liked to call it, and while I didn't know what the specifics of that arrangement with Heaven were, I didn't care. I loved it when he was here.

The first time he came to London was when we had the wedding, making him my fourth and final husband, and the last time was two months ago, which is why I didn't think we'd see him here again for a bit. That's why Declan, Kai, Luca and I were planning a trip to Eden to see him in the coming weeks to celebrate the news we were expecting.

Hyde runs a thumb over my lip and leans in, kissing me again like a starved lover. "It's a funny story," he murmurs. "Tell you over dinner? I'm starving. Been a busy month."

As guardian of Hell, Hyde works with the legion to keep good and evil in check. My mother loves it. She no longer has to worry about it and can instead focus on her passion—her little division at Primordial, as I like to call it, which focuses on all things books. I say little because it's not. She runs an agency, publishing house, and a bookstore chain, and even started a new division last month that looks to inspire a love of literature in kids by offering free creative writing classes at schools around the world.

"I can't wait to hear it." I grab Hyde's hand, lacing my fingers through his. "Tell me about it on the way up to the penthouse. Deck, will you grab my bag?" I ask in my sweetest 'do for me now and I'll do for your later' voice.

He smiles and reaches into the bottom drawer of my desk where I keep it as Hyde, Luca, Kai and I turn for the door.

"Princess," Declan calls out after shutting the drawer. "What's this?"

I turn and see the envelope with the gold wax seal of Olympus. "It came today."

He picks it up and turns it over in his hand. "What is it?"

"I don't know. As you can see, the wax is still sealed," I reply playfully.

While Declan had settled into his role as one of the twelve ruling demigods of Olympus, it was a lot to manage between that, the clubs, and his father's network. They may have been Athena's army, but his father had turned it into a thriving global business, and Declan had been working hard to make sure the legacy his father built lived on. As such, he let me handle the correspondence with Olympus as I did for Luca with Vanaheimr. As queen, it was the least I could do.

I liked most of those I had gotten to know in both their kingdoms, especially Liv. She and I had become good friends. I'm always glad to see her when we go to Olympus for meetings and she has visited me here in London many times.

"What do you think it is?" he asks.

“Only one way to find out.” I pick up the letter opener on my desk and hand it to him. He runs it under the seal and when it cracks, opens it.

“What is it?” Luca asks.

Declan looks up, his eyes wide with surprise. “A birthday party.”

“For whom?” Kai laughs. “Slider? Please tell me his old ass is celebrating a millennia. Or wait, if it’s for Ronan, I’m there. You know that’s my boy.”

Kai and Ronan struck up quite a friendship over the past few years. When Liv comes to London she always brings him with her and he and Kai have been known to disappear for hours at a time, watching movies in our home theater.

Declan makes his way over and hands it to me. “It’s not for Slider, or Ronan.”

I reach for it and read the invite. Well, all be damn...Thea had a baby. But wait, the baby is three?

“So she had a kid in the months after we left.” I hand the invite back to Deck. “Or she was pregnant while we were there.”

“I don’t know.” He grips the back of his neck, worry filling his eyes. “I haven’t talked to her since that night, as you know.”

Neither he nor I had talked with Thea since the night of the feast. Declan didn’t trust her, and Slider was mercurial at best. For her to have a baby and no one said anything...

“Well,” I shrug, watching as Declan tosses the invite down on my desk. “I hope that baby brings her peace and happiness.”

“Yeah,” he clears his throat, keeping his eyes on the invite for a moment, then claps his hands and looks up. “Alright, dinner. Then dessert. Hyde, assume you’re joining us?”

“If our wife is dessert, shit yes.” He leans in and kisses my neck, sending heat down my spine. “If it’s cake, I’ll pass and head back to Hell.”

“Don’t you dare.” I dig my nails into his hand. “You’re staying here.”

“Pet, there is nowhere I’d rather be.”

He kisses the side of my head and Kai grips his shoulder.

Sometimes it’s weird to think Hyde was once a part of Kai. I’d always thought of them as their own beings and getting used to them as separate individuals had been easy. But seeing them together could sometimes be a trip.

They’re so different, and yet, balance one another out. Dark and light. Each their father’s son. Kai teaches Hyde patience, and Hyde teaches Kai how to deal with anger and frustration.

The four make me deliriously happy and own my heart entirely. I couldn’t imagine my existence any other way.

We head out of the office and make our way to the elevator taking it up to my parents penthouse. When we hit their floor and get out, Declan grabs my hand and stops me. “Princess, wait.”

I stop and turn, my smile fading when I see the look on his face. “What is it, love?”

“That invite...three years we haven’t heard from her and now suddenly she’s back, with a baby? Has Liv said anything?”

“No,” I shake my head, “they’re not exactly friends.”

While their family history was complicated, like all the demigods, the issues between Liv and Thea apparently went back to when they were kids. She hadn’t said much, but from the way it sounded, Thea hurt Liv, which made me dislike her even more.

“Are you worried she found a family member to knock her up?” I ask, seeing the furrow in Declan’s brow.

“Well, yeah,” he admits. “I mean, what if this baby you’re carrying isn’t mine. Then I don’t have an heir and she does and it makes things...precarious.”

Tucking my bag under my arm, I press the hold button the elevator, and turn to him. I have my own surprise up my sleeve for tonight, and I think it may put whatever concern Declan is having right now to rest once he knows. But I don’t want to ruin the surprise, so I tell him something else instead. Something he needs to remember.

“Thea is not your mother’s descendant. That was always the hole in her plan. It doesn’t matter if she did find someone to get her pregnant, her child does not have your mother’s blood. It will not be the son of Athena’s.”

He opens his mouth to say something, and I place a finger on his lips, stopping him. “*You* are the son of Athena. The seat goes to *your* heir. Okay?”

When I drop my finger he grabs my chin and pulls my mouth to his. “Have I told you lately how much I love you?” he whispers against my lips.

I let out a little moan as his mouth commands mine. “Maybe a time or two. But you can tell me again.”

“I love you, princess. You are my moon and stars.”

He kisses me again and when it turns heated, as most of our kisses do, I lace my fingers through his and drag him out of the elevator before this turns into an epic quickie.

When we get to the dining room, everyone I love is there and when I share the news that we’re expecting not one, but three babies, everyone is thrilled, including the guys who start taking bets on who was virile enough to knock me up three times.

But later that night, as I fall asleep with each of my husband’s with me, I can’t help but think something’s coming.

Something dark, and full of malice.

THE END...FOR NOW
WHEN YOU'RE ETERNAL, IS IT EVER REALLY
OVER?

COMING IN 2024

After The Fall, Generation Three

Games of Blood & Malice

Thank you for reading *A New Reign*. If you enjoyed it, please leave a review. I would greatly appreciate it! And thank you for reading my *Children of The Fallen* series. If you enjoyed this world, stay tuned...Nev, Declan, Luca, Kai, and Hyde will make an appearance in the next installment of my *After The Fall* Universe, *Games of Blood & Malice*, a series of standalone interconnected stories from the worlds of Olympus and Valhalla, coming next year!

In the meantime, want to know what happened once Nev and the boys got home from family dinner and had dessert? [Sign up for my newsletter](#) and receive a special bonus chapter in my inaugural newsletter, *Lush Lore*, coming November 2023.

Acknowledgments

I can't believe Nev, Declan, Luca, Kai AND Hyde finally got their happy ending! It was a long road, and one filled with more than a few tears and twists, as well as pleasure and pain, but they got there, and the journey was worth it.

These five characters will forever stay with me. They opened my heart to new depths of love. They are brave, fierce, and forthright, and a little piece of each is now a part of me. Thank you for embracing them. For loving their reckless hearts and beautiful spirits. Fuck the haters as Nev says, Love Always Wins.

Thank you to my Street Team, ARC readers, and After The Fall fans. Your excitement, enthusiasm, and love for these characters encouraged me in more ways than you know. I mean it when I say I could not have done this without you. You have become friends that I adore, and I am thankful this world brought us together.

This was in some ways the hardest book I have written yet, and in other ways the easiest. These characters kept me up at night with their whispers, and I hope you enjoyed their journey because it is theirs, I was just the weaver of their words.

Lastly, to my family...my boys, Scott, Greyson, and Jack. I know I am always promising "just let me finish this last line," but I hope you know you are the most important line I have ever written. I adore you to the moon and back.

-xo, D.M.

About the Author

D.M. Simmons is an Amazon Top 25, award-winning author of swoon-worthy stories. She believes in love of all kinds: new, old, young, lost, unrequited, forbidden, and everything in between. When she isn't writing, she can be found reading, binge-watching TV shows, listening to music, running her kids around, creating aesthetics, and wondering where the time goes.

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