



BLOOD

&

REIGN

RUMER HALE

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Blood and Reign

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BLURB

It's time...

Time to end this once and for all.

With my mates by my side, I know we can get through anything...even if the world burns around us.

It all started with King, and it will end with him too.

Even if that means I have to hunt him to Hell to finish this.

One way or another...

One thing's for sure.

King's reign will end...

That I can promise you.

* * *

Blood and Reign is book 3 in a paranormal reverse harem trilogy. It contains violence, adult themes, bad-language and content which some readers may find upsetting.

For those lost in the dark but still never give up...

CHAPTER 1



THE SLEEPY FOG clears from my mind as a spike of energy slides down the front of my body, making me gasp. Squeezing my eyes tighter, I arch into the pleasure that slowly slithers down to my core, heating my entire body and making me instantly wet.

Keeping my eyes shut, I lean into the delicious feeling, letting it take over every thought and need.

If this is a dream, let me at least finish.

Fisting the sheets, I pause, sensing someone in the room. A smoky scent seeps around me. It's followed by a familiar deep, raspy chuckle.

"Axel," I moan, as another spike of energy shoots through me.

"Yes, princess?" I hear the smile in his voice, the slight taunt that is all Axel.

I slightly open my eyes, a reply on the tip of my tongue. But I don't get the chance to murmur a word before the fucker expands the energy across my entire body, lighting it up from the inside out and making me whimper in need.

Axel chuckles, his raspy voice full of amusement. "No peeking... keep thinking of me while I make your body bend."

"Fucker." I pant, just as the energy turns hot, testing and teasing me as it gets me closer and closer to that edge.

"Admit it. You're loving every minute of it."

He was right. I knew it, he knew it, but I'd rather face demons again than admit it out loud.

"If you don't make me come, I'm going to—" I gasp, opening my eyes as the tangled sheets around my body disappear. My clothes follow next as they all turn to ashes, leaving only a lick of flame behind.

Squeezing my eyes tight, I let the warm sensation wrap around me, holding onto it for as long as I can.

I sense Axel move closer, his heady scent drifting over me, seeping into every inch of my skin. The bed dips in front of me just as his warm breath whispers across my cheek.

"Don't worry, princess..."

I slowly open my eyes just as he pulls back, his wicked smirk growing. "When I'm done with you, your body won't just bend for me, it will fucking bow."

"Not a chance—"

A delicious spike of energy shoots over my body, effectively cutting off what I was about to say.

My brain turns numb as pleasure assaults my body on repeat. Over and over, it travels in waves, reaching peak after peak before spreading outward.

I'm lost in the rising sensation when it all becomes too much.

One minute I'm slowly climbing to reach that edge, ready to fall over it when suddenly I plummet headfirst, diving straight into a tidal wave of pleasure.

I scream as I come apart. My body arches, greedily holding on to every sliver of Axel's energy as it continues to prolong the orgasm. It comes in slow, drugging waves until it pulls back and eases, the tips of my fingers and toes still tingling from the aftermath.

I'm still panting, trying to catch my breath, when I'm finally able to fully open my eyes.

I find Axel staring down at me, wearing a wicked smirk. The smug fuck knows exactly what he just did to me.

He fucking *destroyed* me. In the best way.

And all without even touching me.

Axel's eyes slowly trail down my bare body, now slick with sweat. His eyes turn darker the further they move down it.

“Fucking stunning.”

“Isn't she?” The bed dips beside me as a woodsy scent hits me.

How the fuck did I not sense him coming in?

“Morning, baby.” Jax's rough whisper teases my ear, sending warm shivers down my spine. “Now that you're warmed up for us. I think it's time to *really* play.”

My eyes widen as my brain short circuits. “That was a warmup?”

Axel's smile turns savage. “That was *nothing* compared to what we have planned.”

Wait...

“*We?*” I glance between the both of them, noticing Jax is completely naked and... *hard*. “As in... *both* of you?” They must hear the shock in my voice as they both chuckle.

Jax places soft, open kisses along the length of my neck and shoulder. “We can play nice... When the incentive is right...”

“The... incentive?” My voice is breathless as he continues his slow trail up and down my neck.

“You.” Jax bites my ear before taking it into his mouth and sucking it. I bite my bottom lip, holding back a moan.

I feel Jax's smile against my neck as he continues. “Besides, Axel wants to watch you scream for me when I knot you.”

My eyes jump to Axel just as he rolls his eyes at Jax. “I said I could make her scream louder than you did.”

Jax shrugs, the smile never leaving his lips as he trails a finger down the middle of my chest. “I’ll still win, so either way you get to watch.”

Axel’s eyes narrow on Jax, but he stays quiet. I’m still confused about what they both want. Neither of them seemed up for the idea of sharing in that way. Their constant bickering proof of that.

“So, what... you’re both just going to watch while the other—”

“Makes you scream?” Jax says before trailing his lips along my jaw.

Axel steps closer, the dark look in his eyes expanding. “Makes you come apart over and over until you’re begging us to stop?”

Fuck.

Axel’s smirk turns savage. “You want us both, don’t you?”

I open my mouth to reply when Jax’s hand slides down my stomach to my core. I gasp as his fingers slide between my slick folds.

“Fuck, she’s dripping for us.” Jax moves his hand. I lick my lips and moan, the teasing friction slowly building inside me once more.

“I think we’ve got our answer,” Jax tells Axel, wearing a smug grin.

“I want to hear her say it.” Axel moves closer, his dark eyes turning soft before the glint of carnal need returns.

“I want her mind and heart as much as I want her fucking body. So, tell us, princess... Tell us you want us both, and we’ll make all those dirty little fantasies a reality.”

They both pause, waiting for my answer. Jax tenses the longer I wait. But with Jax’s touch and Axel’s words, my brain fucking short-circuits again.

When it finally catches up and realizes what they want, I practically shout my answer.

“Yes.”

Jax relaxes, chuckling as Axel whips off his shirt and throws it to the side, his eight pack fully on display.

“Show off,” Jax murmurs while continuing to explore my body, moving his hand up my chest.

Axel stares right at me as he takes his jeans off. His long, thick cock springs free, making my mouth water. I open my mouth, ready to ask for a taste, when Jax shifts me so I’m on my side, facing Axel. His hand trails over my hip to the curve of my backside.

“Have you ever had anyone...” His fingers slide down between my cheeks until his thumb circles my ass.

“No...” I shiver, pushing back into his touch.

“But you want to.” I hear the smirk in his voice as he leans in, the tip of his cock rubbing against my ass making me shiver.

“Yes.” With the way he’s touching me, I can tell it’s something I’d enjoy.

Jax and Axel pause, each narrowing their eyes on one another.

“I call dibs on your ass virginity,” Jax rushes out.

Axel’s eyes widen. He looks at Jax like he just lost his damn mind. “You can’t call dibs on her ass.”

“Looks like I just did.” Jax reaches around and tilts my neck so I’m looking straight at him. His eyes dilate and he smirks down at me. He drags his thumb down my bottom lip. “Open up and take it like you would my cock.”

He smirks at me as I narrow my eyes but open my lips and take his thumb into my mouth. I suck it, running my tongue up and around it, getting it nice and wet.

“That’s it.” Jax’s eyes are blown wide with lust as he watches me.

I lick along the length of his thumb before looking straight at him and slowly sliding my mouth down it. I drag my tongue back up, enjoying the way his breath quickens and eyes turn dark.

His hand tightens on my chin as he pulls me forward, his lips meeting mine on a throaty moan. He bites the bottom of my lip before pulling back with a smirk.

“Good girl.”

He slides his hand down my body, over my hip before grabbing my thigh and pushing my leg up. He moves his thumb back to my ass.

“*Fuck.*”

I glance over and watch Axel slide his hand up and down his cock, his eyes dark as he watches us. Jax smirks up at him as he pushes his thumbs slightly inside, making me gasp at the new sensation.

Fuck. It feels so good.

“I already want my knot inside you.” Jax leans down and kisses my neck, he slides a finger into my slick heat while adding pressure to his thumb.

“Yes...” I moan, as I close my eyes absorbing the feel of him. My overheated body shuddering at each sliding thrust.

I hear a low groan and glance over to Axel. His eyes are dilated following Jax’s hand as it moves inside me.

“You want to watch?” The idea of him watching makes me wetter by the minute.

“I want to *play.*” Axel moves closer, kneeling at the edge of the bed. “But not just play. I want to fucking destroy every inch of you before watching you come apart for me.”

“Fuck, yes! Let’s *play.*” Jax slides his hand out of me and quickly yanks us up until I’m on my knees, his front to my back. He wraps an arm around my waist as his other hand slides down to my ass, sliding a finger in, making me gasp.

I tilt my head up, leading back into him as his finger slowly slides in and out of me, the pleasure building once more.

Axel moves forward until he's right in front of me, leaning down, his lips instantly meeting mine. My mouth opens and his tongue tangles with mine, slow and teasing. Needing to touch him, I run my hands up his chest and feel the vibration as he groans.

His lips trail over my chin and down my neck to my breast. Just as his tongue circles my hard nipple, a slow, drugging wave of energy starts to build inside me. It spread out to every limb making me lose my mind.

Axel's low chuckle sounds out around me as he does it again and again.

With Jax's fingers and Axel's mouth, it only takes seconds before I'm burning from the inside, begging for release.

Axel curls his tongue around my nipple one last time before pulling back. He looks down at me with a devilish smirk, as he moves a hand up to my neck and chin.

Jax leans down and kisses the back of my neck and shoulder just as Axel widens my legs and lines his cock up to my core.

Jax's grip tightens around my waist, his fingers continuing to slide in and out of me as Axel thrusts into me.

"Fuck." I'm panting, barely hanging on, when an added lick of heat slides down my chest, straight to my core making me gasp and moan. He does it again and again and by the third round I'm slick with sweat, breathless and begging for release.

As if in tandem, Axel's thrusts grow deeper, harder just as Jax's pace quickens.

Lost in their sinful scents and the feel of them, I writhe between them as the pleasure expands to every nerve.

"That's it, baby," Jax whispers along my neck.

I arch into their touches, hoping to reach my climax faster when a spike of sizzling energy shoots across my body

stopping me from moving any further.

“Dicks.” I pant as their grip tightens and they continue to work my body.

Their deep chuckles blend together as I lose myself, the build continuing to roll up and down my body.

I try to move again when another shot of energy shoots through me, making me gasp and moan.

“*Fucker.*” I breathe, trying to move against both of them to push myself over.

Axel chuckles right before the energy hits me again, except harder this time. It seeps into every pore and every nerve.

I’m so close when Jax adds another finger, and it’s all it takes to push me over the edge. This time I don’t just plummet, I shatter, screaming as I come so hard, I see stars. My toes curl, my stomach clenches, and even my fingers turn numb.

Axel thrusts one last time before spilling into me. He slides out of me, his breathing ragged as he watches me writhe in pleasure, the aftermath still riding me hard.

“Fuck, princess...” He swallows hard, his heated eyes following the length of my body just as Jax removes his fingers, pulling me against his body as he slowly slides his hard cock into me.

My body is still shuddering from the aftermath when Axel moves back and Jax pushes me forward. I catch myself with my hands, gripping the side of the bed.

“We’re still not finished with you, babe.” Jax grunts as he leans down and bites my ear, never stopping his slow thrusting pace.

“I love watching my cock disappear inside you. And the feel of you...” Jax groans as he slows down, dragging out each thrust.

Fuck, if they kept this up, we’d never make it to the Underworld.

I must have mumbled it out loud as I hear Jax's whispering reply. "That's the plan."

I freeze. So, this was their plan all along... distract me long enough to forget about the Underworld?

Idiots.

I open my mouth to call them out on it when Axel's energy slides down my body once more, slowly building until it spreads across me in waves.

I grip the bed tighter as I start to reach my release. I'm so close to it when the fucker pulls the energy away, leaving me stuck at that edge with nothing to push me over.

They both chuckle as I curse them, calling them every name I can think of.

I gasp as Jax's thrusts get deeper, the grip on my hip getting tighter, holding me in place. I grab the bed harder, meeting him thrust for thrust.

"That's it, baby." Jax grunts as he slams into me harder.

Without warning the energy hits, shooting straight to my core. My next orgasm hits me out of nowhere, making me scream with how hard it takes me but instead of spilling into me, I feel Jax grow and expand as he knots me.

Fuck... My eyes roll to the back of my head as it drags out the orgasm further making me whimper at how full I feel.

Jax chuckles. "That's my girl."

"Ours," Axel groans. "*Our* girl."

Jax grunts an agreement as he leans down to kiss the back of my neck.

I ignore their bickering, concentrating on the feel of his thick cock as it stretches me to the hilt.

I'm so damn full, I can't even see straight. I try to move but a surge of pleasure shoots through me making Jax growl.

"*Fuck...Fuck..* You feel so good." He pushes further into me with short, quick thrusts.

Every slight move makes me shudder with pleasure. He keeps his pace until my entire body is trembling trying to reach that shattering release I know is coming.

A lick of flames slides down my chest, curling around each nipple before sliding down my stomach to my core. I glance up and watch Axel's eyes darken, his wicked smirk growing as his energy sides around my clit.

Jax's grip tightens as he widens my legs and grinds into me. It's all it takes to push me over that edge.

My mouth drops open as an intense orgasm rips through me, stealing my breath away. It keeps coming wave after wave as ripples of pleasure assault my body on repeat. Finding my voice, I scream as Jax surges up into me, making me tumble into another orgasm. It slams into me, radiating to every part of my body before slowly ebbing away.

"Kiarra..." Jax growls, thrusting into me a couple of more times before I feel him pulse and spill into me.

He releases me and I fall to the side, my body completely spent and ready for sleep.

Jax maneuvers us until I'm back up at the top of the bed with him behind me. Axel disappears as I close my eyes. I hear water before the bed dips and a warm cloth gently cleans me.

My eyes slightly open, finding Axel leaning over me, the look in his eyes holding nothing but love. He leans down, giving me a quick kiss before throwing the cloth away and getting in beside me.

Jax moves closer to me, placing a soft kiss on my shoulder before glancing at Axel, wearing a wicked smirk. "I made her scream first."

Axel slides his hand around me, pulling me over to him and making Jax follow. "She screamed for both of us, dick."

I ignore them both, my eyes closing on their own.

"Fine, it's a draw... Round two?" Jax trails his hand down my stomach. I stop it from going any further and hold it in

place.

“Sleep first,” I murmur, already drifting off. They both pause as I snuggle into Axel’s side, feeling happier and more relaxed than I have in a long time.

Axel kisses my head. “After a nap.”

“Deal.” Jax kisses my shoulder, snuggling in behind me.

I drift off, not an ounce of tension in any part of my body.

* * *

I WAKE to soft kisses across my body. “Where are the rest of the guys?”

Jax slides a hand down my body. “Rion and Luka are out. Kai is in a meeting.”

Another one? How much longer can they talk about the same thing over and over?

Although if I’m honest, it doesn’t surprise me. Most of the leaders like to hear the sound of their own voices over anything that might actually be helpful.

“Why didn’t you wake me?” I move to get up when Jax pushes me back down, a savage smirk on his face.

“You’ve been in enough of those meetings. We both know they never change.” Jax kisses up my stomach just as Axel walks in with a plate full of food.

Placing it down on the bedside table, he picks a piece of fruit up and places it at my lips. I open my mouth and he pulls it back. I narrow my eyes on him, his smirk growing as he leans down and kisses me. He pulls back and places the piece of fruit in his mouth.

Axel picks up another piece of fruit, a strawberry this time, and slowly takes it into his mouth, sucking the juice around it before he eats it.

Heat pools at my center the longer I stare. Jax chuckles as his hand slides slowly down my stomach to my core.

Axel leans over me, dripping the strawberry juice across my chest before leaning down and sucking it.

I moan, arching into their touches. “If we keep this up, we’ll never leave this room.”

“That’s the plan.” Jax’s words make me freeze.

I *knew it*. I smile to myself, sitting up.

“So *that* was your plan? Give me a shitload of orgasms until I forget about King and the Underworld?”

“Idiot,” Axel mutters to Jax.

Jax narrows his eyes on him before focusing on me. “Or just long enough for us to come up with a better plan than the half ass one we have now.”

“I get that. But we can’t put this off much longer. King needs to be stopped.”

“And we will stop him. But when we have an *actual* fucking plan first. Going to the Underworld when we don’t know what we’re up against will get us all killed.”

I freeze at Axel’s words. The thought of them being hurt makes my insides turn to ice.

“I don’t want anything to happen to any of you. If you think that I’d ever willingly put any of you in danger—”

“Now who’s the fucking idiot,” Jax mumbles at Axel before pulling me closer to him. “Axel is just word vomiting, baby. None of us think that you’d ever put us in harm’s way.”

“Shit. That’s not what I meant.” Axel scrubs a hand down his face.

“Kiarra...”

I look at Jax, thanking him with my eyes, before turning to Axel.

“I just need *you* to be safe, princess.”

“I know, and I love that about you.” I glance between them both. “About you all, but I’m not some weakling. I’m going to fight for the future we deserve.”

Jax takes my hand. “None of us think you’re weak, not even a little.”

Axel nods, a soft look on his face. “You mean more to us than anything in this world. But being strong and powerful doesn’t make you invisible. Shit happens, things get out of control and *that’s* what we fear... The thought of *anything* happening to you is fucking torture. You’ve fought for long enough; you deserve a fucking break.”

I shake my head. “No, what I need to do is make sure King can’t hurt any of us again, and the only way that’s going to happen is with him dead.”

Axel sighs, mumbling something about a stubborn woman.

“Or...” Jax trails his hand up my leg and around my hip, making me shiver.

“We could stay here and make you...” Jax leans down, placing open wet kisses along my collarbone.

Just as Axel leans in to join him, I come to my senses, pulling away from them. “I love every minute I get to spend with you both, but I can’t just forget about what’s going on out there.”

People were dying and many more were fighting for their lives. More and more demons were showing up, gaining ground on us. They already have Staten Island and are pushing further out.

The time for waiting is over.

Axel shares a look with Jax before narrowing his eyes on me. “You couldn’t remember what day it was last night.” He glances over at Jax. They silently communicate between themselves, a glint of a challenge in their eyes.

“Let’s go another couple of rounds. She won’t remember her name; let alone what day it is after we’re finished.”

Before they get a chance to grab me, I roll off the end of the bed landing on the balls of my feet. Jax’s hand reaches out just as I take a step back, a smirk on my lips.

“I’m going to have a shower and then try to come up with a plan for us.” One that hopefully keeps us all safe.

Jax jumps off the bed, his abs on display as his eyes trail down the length of mine.

“Need some company?”

I smile and turn heading for the bathroom. Just as I reach the door, I glance over my shoulder, catching both of their heated looks burning a trail down my body. “If either of you come with me, none of us will be showering.”

Jax’s smirk is savage as he steps closer, his cock already hard and ready. “I see no problem there.”

“We’ll be quick. It can be our first quickie.” He moves closer, blinking down at me, his expression shifting to an innocent look on his face.

I shake my head at him, still smiling. “I doubt anything would be quick with you.”

Jax nods his head with an attempt to look serious slashed across his face. “True. I’m not a one-hit wonder like Axel.”

Axel growls, making his way over to us. “What the hell is that supposed to mean? I made her cum so hard she fucking creamed me.”

And... now I’m wet again.

Jax scoffs. “That was obviously a fluke.”

Axel clenches his jaw as Jax raises a brow. Neither willing to give in. The glint of challenge in both of their eyes makes me slowly take a step back as I try to slip into the bathroom. But my slight movement doesn’t go unnoticed as a double pair of eyes veer toward me, both of my men wearing savage smirks that slowly slide across their faces, making me shiver.

“Princess...”

“Baby...” Jax moves so fast, he has me over his shoulder and into the bathroom.

Axel follows behind us wearing a wicked smirk. “Might as well make you nice and dirty before you get clean.”

Fuck. I guess we were going to be a bit longer, after all.

CHAPTER 2



MOVING THROUGH THE LOUNGE, I head toward the kitchen, the smell of fresh coffee hitting me. The pot is still steaming, so I know one of my mates must have made it recently.

I pour myself a cup and head over to the window. The clouds are dark and gloomy as they cast shadows on the city below, with each one threatening to rain.

There's no one out. Not a single soul.

The entire city went into lockdown as soon as we could push back the demons, with a barrier placed around the border hoping to stop them from getting in.

So far, it's been holding up. But for how long?

We have groups of supes going out on patrols to ensure nothing is getting past our defenses. And so far, nothing has. But the last couple of days, it's been quiet.

Too quiet.

Like the calm before a storm. That peacefulness that settles over you just as everything goes still. But you know the worst is still to come. You can feel it as it rises up from somewhere deep inside you, telling you it's only starting.

And when it does, nothing but complete chaos will be unleashed.

I just hope we all make it safely to the other side of this.

Shaking off my turbulent thoughts, I reach out to each of my mates. Their lights so much brighter in my mind than the

supes around them.

Ever since I let go and opened up more to my abilities, I can sense their whereabouts whenever they're not beside me. It soothes something inside me, knowing I can find them when I need to.

Like a tether that binds us, instincts take over and I zone in on each of them.

Kai, Axel and Jax are still in the building, with Rion and Luka still out in the city, but close by.

Another connection pulls at the corner of my mind, right before the shadow beast appears.

I sip my coffee, narrowing my eyes on the beast.

The shadow beast disappeared soon after the demons left, and I haven't seen it since. "I was wondering where you went."

The strange beast sits on its hind legs and gives me a look no animal should be capable of... a look of annoyance.

"You're annoyed that I was looking for you?"

It gives me another look, as if to say, silly girl, and stays still as if waiting on something.

"What?"

The shadow beast tilts its head, waiting. But on what? "We helped get each other free. Shouldn't you be off doing whatever you want to do now?"

The fucker raises a hairy brow. At least, that's what it looks like as it stays still, waiting.

"What? You want something to do? Fine. Guard the border and update me if the demons move closer."

Shadow disappears immediately.

I shake my head to myself. *What a strange beast.*

Why does it still take my orders? It makes no sense when it could be out there causing its own havoc. Maybe I should be grateful it's helping and not adding to my long list of troubles.

Finishing off my coffee, I make my way to the meeting room.

There's been non-stop meetings since King hightailed it to the Underworld, leaving the demons behind to continue their destruction.

How he's able to command the demons is still something we have yet to figure out. The carnage they've continued to inflict is beyond what we thought they could achieve in such a short space of time. And more and more are still showing up, trying to gain ground on us.

After the ambush, any of those able to wield magic helped to erect a barrier around Manhattan. But it grows weaker by the day, with the demons draining it slowly. It won't be long before it's completely gone, and the demons move their destruction to here and everything else around it.

We all know going to the Underworld is a trap. But this needs to end and the only way that's going to happen is with King gone.

Once I reach the hall, I sigh hearing shouting. Loud, boisterous voices that have been nothing but aggressive and argumentative since Draven's men and all the leaders of Manhattan arrived. They may have originally worked together to erect the barrier, but after that, they went back to hating each other.

And the so-called battle meetings have been nothing but a room full of arrogant alphas trying to see who has the largest dick.

The real answer being none of them, including Draven and his men. Their constant bickering would rival Axel and Jax by tenfold, with none of the comrade and family mentality behind it.

It's beyond draining, listening to them night after night. There's not one thing they can agree on, with the demons, warlocks, and witches all disagreeing just for the sake of it. They still don't trust their kin here that left their precious

segregated Island. And are even more distrustful of the leaders that took them in.

But now is not the time to be divided amongst ourselves. If we're going to win this, we need to stick together and focus all that pain and anger toward the true evil that has caused this.

King.

The shouting grows louder as I walk toward the open doors of the meeting room. There's about a dozen people inside with Draven and a few of his leaders stationed to the left. I spot Kai immediately leaning against the window with a few of the shifters from here around him. His scowl is evident, the lack of sleep making him look much older than he is.

The rest of my guys are missing, but it shouldn't be too long before they show up too.

No one pays me any mind as I head straight in and over to Kai. He looks up from his position the minute I start toward him. His eyes lighting up the nearer I get.

Once I'm close enough to him, he takes my hand and spins me, so my back is to his front. Wrapping his arms around me from behind, he nuzzles into the side of my neck, and he takes a deep breath.

"Sleep well?" he murmurs, a glint of humor in his tired voice.

"I did." I tilt my head to look up at him. His smile turns soft as he brushes his hand down my cheek.

Closer up he looks more than just tired. He looks exhausted. Like he's wearing the entire world with all its problems on his shoulders. My hellhound is always juggling way too much for his family. Not caring about what he has to go through once his family is safe.

I turn in his arms. "When was the last time you took a break?"

Kai sighs, glancing over at the others as they lay into one another. He looks down at me, his hands rubbing up and down my back.

“You haven’t, have you?” I ask him, already knowing the answer.

“I can manage on a lot less sleep. I need to make sure they don’t end up killing each other before we leave.” He smiles down at me before narrowing his eyes around him.

“You need to rest too, Kai. You’ll run yourself to the ground at this rate.”

“Worried about me, Kiarra?”

“Always.”

Kai shakes his head, the smile still on his face as he leans in and places a kiss on my head.

“I’m fine.” Worry seeps into his face as he looks out the window, darkening the circles under his eyes.

“What is it?”

Kai looks down at me, his grip tightening on me. “King. He’s been... busy while we were looking for you.”

Something in my stomach drops at the worry and anger in his voice. “With the demons?”

“More than just them. He’s somehow contacted those outside the supe territory and got the humans on his side. They no longer believe what we say to them. They now think that we’re the threat they should watch out for. That Manhattan and its alphas are dangerous and should not be trusted.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

Kai nods his head, agreeing. “They’re ready to attack us should it come to it. If the demons take a step onto any other land, we’ll get the blame for it and dealt with accordingly.”

Great. So now we have the humans and their weapons to worry about.

“What are we going to do?”

Kai sighs. “What we always do. Focus on one thing at a time and take it from there.”

“We need to get teams together. Bring the fight to them!” A young demon draws my attention, his voice cutting over the loud shouting in the room.

“We can barely hold them where they are. Going into Staten Island now would be suicide.” One of Kai’s men speaks up, looking at the demon like he’s an idiot.

The young demon fists his hands, his body vibrating from anger. “That’s our home!”

Draven sighs, shaking his head. “I understand your concerns. But we have to be smarter than King. And this is exactly what he wants. He wants us to fight with one another. To divide us.”

The leaders grow quiet, finally listening to someone else for a change.

Draven looks to one of his men. “Has there been any update?”

The demon steps forward. “Sir, we’ve sent out multiple groups to check for survivors. They’ve confirmed that King is nowhere to be found on this plane. The witches have also done multiple location spells and say the same. The barrier is holding for now, but there are some spots that are weakening.”

Draven looks up. “We’re running out of time.”

He’s right. The longer we put this off, the worse it’s going to get.

“This meeting is over. Keep us updated with the patrols.” The room slowly clears as Draven makes his way over to us.

Just before the door shuts, Jazmyn walks in. Draven’s demeanor changes immediately as he watches Jazmyn’s every move. “Jazmyn? Is everything okay?”

She completely ignores him and heads straight over to me. “I heard you’re going soon?”

“Yes. I think we’ve talked about it enough.” I give Kai a look agreeing with him.

Jazmyn swallows hard, a frown marring her face. “How do we know he’s definitely in the Underworld? You could be heading straight into a trap.”

“We more than likely are. But there’s no other choice. This ends with King and if we’ve to go to the Underworld to do it, then so be it.”

Jazmyn clenches her jaw, a look of determination settling over her. “Fine. Then I’m coming with you.”

Draven steps up beside her. “You most definitely are not.”

She whips her head around to him, the look she gives him making me wince. Grown men have run from that look whereas Draven simply raises a brow. “You do not get a say in what I do.”

“You’re needed here.”

“He’s right,” I tell her as Draven gives me a look of surprise, probably thinking I’m agreeing with him when really this is about Jazmyn. “This once,” I add before focusing on her.

I take her hands in mine. “We need you here to help protect Manhattan while we’re gone.”

“Kiarr—”

“They’ll listen to you, and if they don’t, I’m sure you’ll find a way to make them.” I give her a smile.

“Besides, Malik is still adjusting. He needs you here.” Jazmyn narrows her eyes on me, giving me a look telling me that was a low blow. But she knows it’s true. The witches and demons were working with him to help remove the control King took from him. Most times, the only one who can help him snap out of it is Jazmyn.

“Fine. But you better not get hurt.” Jazmyn glares at Kai. “If anything happens to her, I’ll personally hunt you down.”

I bite my lip to stop the chuckle from escaping as Kai smiles at her. “I’ll take good care of her.”

“There’s been another update.” Jazmyn clears her throat, avoiding looking at Draven. “More demons from the Underworld are still escaping somehow, even with the portals all now shut down.”

“They shut the portals down?” I look at Kai and catch him frowning. Draven looks weary as he leans against the table.

“Why?”

“To try stop more of them escaping.”

“All portals?” I ask him.

Axel walks into the room and heads toward us as Draven continues. “No, just those to the Underworld.”

“How fucking convenient,” Axel mumbles as he stands beside us.

“Then how are we going to get there?” I ask.

Draven looks at us. “It looks like you’ll have to go the old-fashioned way. Enter the first realm through one of the old entrances. The nearest one is here in the US.”

Kai takes my hand. “We’ll figure it out.”

Draven nods, a faraway look on his face. “I have someone that may be able to help guide you through the realms. We’ll keep this city protected for as long as we can.”

“Thank you.” Kai nods to Draven.

Jazmyn turns to me. “Have you got a minute?”

“Now?” She nods, giving me a soft smile, before narrowing her eyes on Draven and making her way outside.

Draven stares after Jazmyn before he starts up a conversation with Kai and the others about a couple of shifters and demons that have been playing up, causing trouble.

I follow her out, leaving Kai to finish up with Draven. “Everything okay?”

Jazmyn turns to me with a worried look on her face. “Do you know anything about the Underworld? It’s pretty bad, Kiarra.”

I glance back at Kai just as the door shuts, giving us some privacy. “Draven said there’s five realms, and each one is worse than the next.”

“That barely sums it up. The idiot.” Jazmyn rolls her eyes. “I’ve heard stories of the first three realms, and none of them are good. The first level is filled with shadows of lost souls. They wander there. The land is barren, starved of anything, just like them. We were threatened as kids to be placed there and have the life sucked out of us should we misbehave. The second level is said to be the home of the damned, and the third level is where the Infernal City resides. All higher-level demons live there and the home of some of the most powerful and terrifying demons.”

Jazmyn shivers, a look of fear slashed across her face.

“What about the demons that appeared on our plane? Where do they come from?” I ask her.

Jazmyn’s frown deepens. “I’ve never seen anything like them, but if I had to take a guess, I would say the fourth or fifth realm. Creatures that big couldn’t be held anywhere else.”

Here’s hoping King is somewhere in the first three then.

Jazmyn shakes her head. “Anyway, I just wanted to make sure you were okay before you left.”

Warmth spreads across my chest at her words, making me smile.

She shoves her hands into her pockets, clearing her throat. “Come back as soon as you can. I don’t want to be stuck with all these possessive assholes by myself.”

I bump her shoulder. “Someone has to stay and make sure they don’t burn the place down.”

She swallows hard. “Just come back.”

“I will.” I promise her and myself. This wasn’t going to be the end, just a new beginning for us all.

She turns and leaves without a backward glance. I leave Kai to finish up with Draven and head back upstairs.

I'm halfway down the empty hall when the Shadow beast appears. "I'm guessing you got bored?"

It tilts its head, staring at me with those dark eyes. "Why do you only speak when you want to?"

Again, it tilts its head. "I'm heading to the Underworld soon, but I need you to stay here and protect them." I glance back to the direction Jazmyn went.

"I need you to protect her." I glance down at the shadow beast just as he dips his head, making me smile.

"Thank you."

He disappears into the shadows, taking some of my worries and fears with him.

CHAPTER 3



AN ICY COLD shiver rushes through me as we travel through the portal, Luka and Jax on either side of me, with Kai and Rion in front of us. Axel is the last to come through the portal, closing it behind him.

We arrive in the middle of a large forest with thick green trees everywhere. I catch a glimpse of the rocky mountains from the small opening in the trees. It's a bit away but not too far to make it on foot.

"Where are we?" I ask.

Kai turns to me. "Vermont. This is as close as the portal can take us. Something to do with the energy from the old entrance messing with the portal."

Rion glances around. "The cave isn't too far." He tilts his head toward the Rocky Mountains I spotted a moment ago. "We can walk from here."

Jax turns to me wearing an innocent smile that slowly grows into a wicked smirk. "Let me know if you get tired and I'll give you a ride. Or you can give me one."

Luka sighs, shaking his head. "How are we even related?"

"Guess you just got lucky, brother." Luka shakes his head as Jax slaps him on the shoulder, looking proud of himself.

I bite my lip, hiding my smile. Their normal bickering easing the knot in my stomach as we head into the unknown.

Kai turns to us, a worried look on his face. "Even with the guide, we're basically going in blind. So, there'll be a few

ground rules that you all will follow.”

“Yes, *Alpha*,” I tell him, biting my lip. I guess some of Jax’s playful humor rubbed off on me. The other guys turn to me, but I stay focused on Kai as he narrows his eyes on me. The spark of heat in his eyes telling me I would definitely be exploring more of Kai’s dominant side.

Maybe I could push him enough to break those tight restraints he likes to think he has full control of. Or maybe just break them completely.

“Behave.”

“Yes, *Alpha*,” Jax replies to Kai, saluting him before sending me a wink.

Kai narrows his eyes on Jax before releasing a harsh breath.

“Rule one. No heroics that will get you killed.” His gaze stays on Jax, raising a brow before looking at Axel. Axel rolls his eyes, mirroring his raised brow as Kai continues. “Even with the upgrade to our abilities, we don’t know if being in the Underworld will stop us healing or getting stuck down there.”

The gravity of where we’re heading hits me, making me lose my smile. This was my idea, after all. If anything happened to them...

The knot in my stomach twists just thinking about it.

“We stick together. No matter what. There are a lot of unknowns in the Underworld. Many of which none of us have seen or ever heard of. If we get separated, it might stay that way for a very long time.” Kai pauses, looking at each one of us before looking right at me, the worry slashed across his face. Jax and Luka take each of my hands, squeezing them tight.

The air around us turns thick with apprehension the more Kai talks. Dread fills me as I think about anything happening to them, and from the slight glances from each of them, I can tell they feel the same.

Luka swallows hard, clearing his throat. “No straying from each other and no heroics. Got it. Anything else?”

Kai nods, looking back at me. “We know you’re powerful, but even powerful beings can die.”

The air swiftly changes around us at the mention of death.

Jax clenches his jaw. “The only one that will be dying is King.”

Kai nods at Jax, but there’s a glint of worry in his eyes. “If something happens to one of us...”

“Kai...” The mere mention of one of them being hurt tears me apart.

“If things get out of our control, I want you to get out of there,” Kai demands, narrowing his eyes on me.

I mirror his demanding body language. “No. I’m not leaving without any of you.”

“Kiarra—”

“You can’t ask me to leave any of you there.”

“Kiar—”

“Would you leave me there?”

Kai’s mouth snaps shut.

“Well?” I raised a brow.

Kai clenches his jaw. “No.”

“Then how can you ask me to do the same? I will destroy everything in the Underworld before I leave any of you there.”

The guys chuckle as Kai’s eyes soften, his shoulders and jaw relaxing. “Fine. We stick together. No matter what.”

I let go of Jax and Luka’s hands and step toward him and into his embrace. “And we leave together. With King finally gone for good and out of our lives.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Jax rubs his hands together.

“Where is this guide, anyway?” Jax asks.

Rion shares a look with Kai, but it's Kai who replies. "Draven said he'd meet us at the entrance."

Axel starts for the mountains. "Let's get moving then."

We start walking forward, moving deeper into the forest until there's nothing but tall beautiful green trees all around us but the apprehension is still thick, smothering the air between us.

Nobody talks, mirroring the quiet forest, the only sound coming from the birds above and the slight warm breeze as it moves through the trees.

I take a deep breath of fresh air, the scent of pine and damp moss assaulting my senses instantly and soothing my restless thoughts.

After a couple of minutes, a small nudge of strange energy enters my mind, making me slow my pace.

"You, okay?" Luka asks, noticing I've slowed down. I glance around, but there's nothing out of the ordinary. Giving Luka a small smile, I carry on. "Thought I saw something."

Luka frowns, glancing around before moving closer to me.

I smile to myself as we continue on. Even after seeing everything I can do and how much my powers have grown, they still want to protect me.

I push the strange energy to the back of my thoughts as we move further through the forest; the ground becoming rockier as we move closer to the huge mountains.

Looking above, I watch as the sunlight chases shadows along the canopy of trees above us.

I forgot how nice being out in a forest like this is. The last time being when I was a child.

Luka bumps my shoulder. "We'll go on camping trips when this is all over."

I smile. "Sounds perfect."

"I think I see the entrance," Jax says from further up ahead.

Coming through a thick shroud of trees, the strange energy needles my mind once more, but this time it feels... closer. I pause, stopping in my tracks, and focus on the energy.

“What’s wrong?” Luka asks, making the others stop and turn to me.

Reaching out with my senses, I follow the new energy in my mind. It’s colorless, but stronger the closer I get to it. It’s not like any of the supes I’ve come across before, feeling dark and old but not malicious. Instead, the energy feels... curious.

Tilting my head, I focus on the energy and try to find its location.

“Kiarra?” One of my men calls, but the voice feels distant as I zone in on the new energy and pinpoint its location.

Finding it not too far behind us, I narrow my eyes and slowly turn in its direction. “If you’re going to follow us, the least you can do is introduce yourself,” I tell our stalker.

I fully face the direction of the energy just as a tall man with black hair walks out from between the shadows. A smirk on his pale face.

He’s older than the guys but not by much, maybe a few years. But his energy *feels* old and powerful. I don’t fear him, something deep inside me telling me I have nothing to worry about, but I keep my guard up, anyway.

He tilts his head as he looks straight at me just as the guys position themselves around me. Jax loses his playful attitude, his eyes glowing as his wolf comes to the surface. “Who. The fuck. Are *you*?”

Axel slides up beside Jax, his dragon ready for a fight. All the guys move until they’re in front of or around me, each tense and ready to attack. I shake my head, keeping my sigh to myself. I could probably take out an entire army and they’d still treat me like I’m made of glass.

“How were you able to follow us without any of us sensing you?” Kai asks, narrowing his eyes on our intruder.

“It seems not all of you have that problem.” The guy looks straight at me, a smug smile on his lips.

Why he would feel smug right now when he’s surrounded by five powerful alphas, all ready to go crazy on his ass, confuses the hell out of me. Either he’s really powerful or a complete idiot.

“Kiarra.” The guy dips his head. Low growls sound out as Axel and Jax take a step toward him.

“How do you know my name?” I ask, but he ignores my question, his smirk growing as he continues.

“It seems the rumors are true.” The guy continues to stare at me, or through me. A look that tells me he knows a lot more than he’s letting on.

“Rumors?” I ask again, with no reply.

“I can’t wait to see what else you can do,” he tells me, looking awfully happy.

“You won’t be going anywhere near her to find out,” Axel tells him.

“I’m afraid that’s going to make things between us a little difficult then.” The guy steps forward just as flames travel up Axel’s arm, instantly burning away his jacket as his eyes pulse gold. “More like difficult, for *you*.”

The new guy laughs, taking a step closer. “I’m Soren, your guide to the Underworld.”

The guys don’t ease up one bit, still tense and ready to attack. Axel’s flames grow, his eyes like flaming orbs.

“Why would you be following us instead of just coming out and introducing yourself?” Rion asks.

Soren turns to Rion, looking him over before answering. “I wanted to see what type of people I’d be risking my life for.”

Risking his life? Was it really that bad in the Underworld, even for those that live there?

“Draven said you grew up in the Underworld,” I say, drawing his attention back to me.

“The Underworld isn’t a place any would call... *home*. I’d avoid going back if I could. But thanks to your little friend, that isn’t an option.” Soren sighs as if put out.

It’s not like the world is at risk with the threat of demons destroying it. Demons from a place *he* was born.

“King is *not* my friend. He’s a sadistic psycho.” He ignores my statement and continues to stare at me. Another knowing smirk on his face.

His stare is apparently a bit too long for Axel’s liking, as he raises his flamed hand at Soren. The flames pour out of Axel and head straight for him

Soren’s smile grows, a sparkle of delight in his eyes. Just before the flames touch him, he disappears and reappears behind me.

“A tad bit over dramatic, don’t you think?” Soren reaches out and grabs my arm before the guys get a chance to turn around.

Complete darkness surrounds me before light quickly filters back in. Soren drops my arm and quickly takes a step away.

I glance around to find us inside a cave, the guys nowhere to be found.

“Where did you take me?” I demand as my powers bubble beneath my skin.

“Calm down. We’re just inside the cave, near the entrance to the Underworld.” Soren leans against one of the walls, his smirk still on his face.

I take a step away from him and closer to the entrance.

“And you couldn’t have waited for the guys?” They were going to be mad as hell. A few minutes into this, and I’ve already unintentionally broken one of Kai’s rules. I cringe, thinking about it.

Soren shrugs, unaffected by the guys and what they’ll do to him when they find him. “I wanted a minute with you without the possessive alphas hovering over you.”

“Anything you tell me will be shared with them, so your little plan is pointless.”

Soren narrows his eyes before nodding his head. “Fine. Tell your mates. I agreed to do this because Draven asked, but I want something from you in return.”

I narrow my eyes on the demon. “I’m not in the business of making deals with demons.”

Soren smirks. “I’m not a demon. But good to know. Make sure you don’t forget that when you’re in the Underworld. Demons never play by the rules.”

“Noted. But what are you then, if not a demon?”

Soren winks at me. “That’s a story for another time. Now on to our little deal.”

If he thinks I’m going to make any type of deal with him, he’s definitely lost his mind.

“We can always get another guide.”

Soren smiles, knowing it’s a complete lie. “On such short notice?” He raises a brow. “And one willing to risk the mess that’s more than likely going on down there. Not likely.”

He moves closer to me, making me take a step back. “Also, I can assure you, you won’t find anyone like me. Nor will you get as far down there without me. I know the Underworld like the back of my hand and can get you through places many don’t even know exist. I’m sure you’ve been made aware of just how dangerous it is but add the imbalance on top of that and you’ve got realms full of chaos and mayhem ready to implode. Another guide won’t be able to get you to your goal, not without one or more of you becoming a permanent resident of the Underworld or worse... a permanent fixture with no chance of an afterlife.”

Damn it. He was right. And from that damn smug look that was now plastered across his face, he knew it, too.

Even if we could find another guide on such short notice, I had a feeling what he was telling me was the truth. There would be no one like him. There is something about his

energy. Something almost familiar that says I can trust him. But actually doing that is another thing. I learned my lesson long ago not to trust so blindly.

“Why me?” I ask him.

“Because you’re the only one that can do it.”

I narrow my eyes on him. “And you’ll get us all safely through the Underworld to find King.”

“You have my word.” He dips his head.

I release a harsh breath, looking out of the cave and back to him. “Then what do you want?”

Soren’s smile grows like the Cheshire cat. “When the time comes, I’ll call on you for a... *favor*.”

“I’m not dying for you. Neither are any of my mates,” I tell him.

Soren’s eyes soften. “I would never ask you to, nor put you in danger like that.”

Soren looks around me, his eyes narrowing on something outside the cave. A smile appearing on his face. “You’ll need to make up your mind. One of your mates has found us and looks awfully pissed.”

I look behind me but can’t see anything. I reach out with my senses and find Kai rushing forward, his light pulsing red and growing the closer he gets.

“He’s definitely pissed.”

Soren looks at me. “Rightfully so. I took his mate without asking.”

“You knew they were going to be pissed, and you still did it?”

“Of course. Now, do we have a deal or not?” His smirk grows, a glint of humor in his eyes as I narrow mine on him.

“Fine. I’ll help you with your favor, but if you do anything to betray me or my mates, you will pay.”

Soren bows, still smiling. “You have my word.” He grabs my hand once more. Heat travels up my arm as Soren’s eyes flash red. “Deal.” He lets my arm go just as quick.

“What was tha—”

A dark shape flashes by me just as the cave shakes, something slamming into the wall a few feet in front of me.

I look over and find Kai with Soren by the throat against the cave wall. “If you ever touch my mate again, I will rip you apart before turning you to ash.” Kai slams him into the wall, leaving a large indent behind before yanking him out and throwing him to the other side of the cave.

Before Soren hits the wall, he disappears and reappears further down the cave, laughing. “I see your lineage is as strong as ever. Orthis will be glad to see the line has not weakened.”

The rest of the guys appear around me, Jax pulling me into his arms. “Did he hurt you?”

Soren brushes the dust off himself just as Kai steps forward. Soren puts his hand out. “I can do this all day. And all it’s doing is wasting time that we don’t have. So, let’s save the possessiveness for another time, shall we? I’ll stay away from your little mate.”

Axel flashes forward and punches him, knocking him backward . Soren goes flying before disappearing and reappearing on the other side of the cave, not a scratch or hair out of place.

“How did you do that?” I ask.

Soren winks at me, giving me a smirk. It grows hearing Jax and Luka growl in his direction.

“*Run*,” Jax tells him, stepping forward, his eyes glowing bright in the dark cave.

“We don’t need a guide. We can figure this out ourselves.” Luka growls out, stepping closer to me and taking my hand.

Soren shrugs, folding his arms as he leans against the wall. “I’m your best and only option.” He gives me a look

reminding me of our conversation.

“He’s right,” I tell them, reluctantly.

Five sets of glowing eyes, pissed as hell, all veer to me. “You’re agreeing with him now?”

“We have no other option on such short notice. It’s either him or no one. And Draven wouldn’t have sent him if he wasn’t good. We need him to find King. And soon.”

“Seconds was all it took for him to take you away from us, Kiarra,” Luka tells us.

“Apologies, I only wanted a little chat with the new anomaly that has become the talk of the supernatural world. Her power fascinates me.”

“He also added another facet to helping us,” I tell them as Soren’s expression remains unchanged.

The guys tense up, the air around us goes still as they aim their glares at Soren.

“And you still think we should trust him?” Jax scoffs.

Axel cracks his knuckles, a savage smile on his face as he steps closer to Soren. “Which part of him do you want me to break first?”

“What did he want?” Luka asks, tightening his grip on me.

“That I owe him a favor,” I tell them all before glancing over at Soren’s calm expression.

“No fucking way.” Axel narrows his eyes on Soren.

“She already made the deal. And if you don’t already know, it’s not something that can be broken anytime soon,” Soren announces happily.

Dick.

The guys swing their glares at me, making me wince. “What was I supposed to do? We need his help.”

“Not enough to put you at risk,” Kai tells me, his eyes glowing red as he narrows his eyes at Soren.

“Why the hell would you agree to this?” Jax asks, the look on his face telling me he feels more betrayed than anything.

“He didn’t exactly give me time to think it over.” I aim my glare at Soren.

Axel steps closer to Soren, a crazy smile on his face. “It won’t be an issue when I break the little deals he’s made.”

Soren gives Axel an arrogant look. “Magical deals can’t be broken that easily.”

Axel’s smile turns savage. “They can, if I break *you* with them.”

Soren smirks at his threat, not one bit bothered by it.

“What does the deal involve?” Rion asks, ignoring Axel.

I wince before looking to Rion. “That I owe him a favor he can call on when the time comes.”

“Fucking hell.” Axel growls as flames light his eyes. He steps closer to Soren as if he’s about to go through with his threat. Soren doesn’t even flinch.

“That could be anything,” Luka says.

“It can’t involve putting any of us at risk or in danger,” I tell them, trying to ease their worries.

“We need his help to find King,” I push, trying to move this along.

“Again. Not at the risk of your—” Kai starts, but Soren cuts him off.

“I’ve already promised not to put your little mate at risk, nor would I try to.” Soren glances over his shoulder at the cave. “Now, if we could move this along? Even though time works differently in the Underworld, it doesn’t on this plane. And time isn’t exactly on your side.”

“Why you—”

“Yes, yes. I’m a lot of things right now but the main one is your guide. My main aim is to get you all safely in and out of the Underworld. The favor I call on will harm none of you.

You have my word.” Soren looks at each of the guys before stopping on Rion.

Rion walks closer to Soren, staring him down before tilting his head. “I sense no malice toward her or any of us.”

Jax rushes forward, slamming his fist into Soren’s face before casually walking back to us. “Fine. But he stays far away from you.” Jax takes one hand and Luka takes the other.

Soren does his disappearing and reappearing act but narrows his eyes on Jax.

Soren takes a hesitant step back as Kai walks over to him. “If you double-cross us. I’ll hunt you down to the ends of the earth and make you pay,” Kai tells him.

“Understood,” Soren tells him. “Now that the threats are out of the way, let’s get a move on.”

Kai raises a brow. “Lead the way.”

We follow him, heading further into the dark cave. A couple of minutes pass as the light slowly fades from behind us. Axel lights up a hand as soon as it becomes too dark to see. He sends me a wink, making me smile.

The air soon changes, becoming stagnant. A strange energy settles over me, making me want to find it.

“Anyone else feel like they should be making a run for it?” Jax frowns, looking alert for an invisible threat.

Small carvings of weird symbols start to show up on the walls of the cave. More and more appear before they become clusters, all different with strange shapes and swirls surrounding them.

“My skin is fucking crawling.” Axel scowls at the walls around him.

“It’s the wards that’s built into the cave walls. It stops anyone from getting too close. I’m sure a powerful alpha like yourself can ignore a little ward and push through. Don’t be afraid to hold your mate’s hand, should you be afraid.”

“Dick.” Jax growls, making Soren chuckle. He squeezes my hand tighter as we move forward. “I don’t need an excuse to hold your hand.”

“Never.” I smile at Jax, making him smirk. My smile slowly falls the closer we get to the weird energy. I didn’t feel what the others did. Instead of running away, I wanted to run toward it. It feels... *familiar*.

“How long will it take us to get there?” I ask, worrying about the time we’ve already lost and wondering about Jazmyn and the others.

“We should start seeing the rivers soon. But it will take some time to move through them.”

“Isn’t there a quicker way?” I doubted the demons would take a break while we hunted their new master down.

“The portals were the only other way. But don’t worry, we’ll make the time up once we start moving through the realms.”

“How?” I ask him.

“Time works differently in the Underworld. In some realms, a few days or weeks could be a few minutes in your world,” Soren tells us, not looking back.

Maybe we could make up for the time we lost so far.

Luka squeezes my hand. I look up at him, finding a small smile on his face. A look that tells me he knows exactly where my mind went. “We’ve got this.”

I nod, feeling like we’re walking into a whole other type of chaos. One we’re definitely not prepared for.

We walk a few minutes before I hear a whirl. A second later I find Rion in front of me, a sharp metal arrow in his hand, two inches from my face.

Soren glances back at the guys’ shocked and pissed expressions. “Oh, and watch out for booby traps trying to deter us from going any further.”

Kai holds Jax back as he tries to attack Soren, his wolf at the surface, ready to attack.

Luka tightens his hold on me, his body vibrating with rage. “You couldn’t have told us that *before* the arrow nearly took Kiarra out?” His voice grows deeper with each word, turning to a near growl as dark orange flames light the orbs of his eyes.

Soren gives Luka an innocent look. “Apologies, I assumed you all knew it would be dangerous trying to enter the Underworld.”

Axel clenches his fists, moving closer to my side. “We’re not fucking stupid. But you are supposed to be our guide. A little heads up isn’t too much to fucking ask for.”

Kai narrows his eyes on Soren. “Tell us what we’re heading into now *before* we move any further.”

Soren narrows his eyes. An aggravated look on his face. I guess he wasn’t used to being told what to do. But one look around at the cave full of pissed off alphas and Soren sighs, giving into Kai’s request. “As we move further in, there will be more traps set up. I can’t tell you exactly what each will be as I’ve never used this entrance before—”

“Then why the fuck are you our guide?”

Soren narrows his eyes on Jax. “But I have used many others like it. The setup is the same. Barriers, traps and spells all to deter any who enter.”

“But you have no idea *what* types of traps or spells?” Kai clenches his fist.

“Afraid not. But once you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. It more than likely won’t be anything I haven’t seen before.”

“Your confidence is making me feel all warm and fuzzy inside,” Jax says with a deadpan expression and a tone that’s void of emotion, earning a smile from Soren.

“Maybe try keeping your ears and eyes open and that little arrow won’t get near your little mate again.” Soren gives Jax a

smug look before turning and moving further into the cave.

Jax narrows his eyes on Soren's back, mumbling profanities and death threats his way.

"I'm fine, guys. Let's just get on with this." I give Rion a look, thanking him. His fist tightens on the arrow before he sends it flying through the cave wall behind him. The force of the throw sending it straight through the wall, only leaving the end visible.

Kai moves over, checking me over once before nodding to himself. "Stay close."

We barely make it a few feet before the next booby trap hits, multiple small star-shaped razor blades shooting from each side of the cave wall.

Rion whips out his swords and knocks the first batch down. Kai takes the next, while Axel blows back the last of them.

Jax and Luka are on each side of me, ready to take the brunt of anything that may get past the others. I open my mouth to tell them they don't need to be so overprotective when Luka narrows his eyes on me. "Don't even say it. Healing doesn't mean you can't feel it. And there's no way in hell any of us are letting anything happen to you."

Another few arrows fly out of the walls, distracting us. Kai and Axel destroying most of them, with Rion stopping any from getting near us.

"There must be pressure points in the base of the cave or some type of sensor spell," Luka says, glancing around.

"So much for having a fucking guide. Where the hell is he?" Soren appears in front of us as if hearing Axel.

"Glad to see my absence is missed." Soren's cool and collected attitude soon drops, leaving him wearing a frown.

"What is it?" Kai asks him.

Soren frowns. "Something is... *off*."

"What do you mean? You said the traps are normal," I ask.

“They are, but the spells are different. The energy is also different.” Soren shakes his head.

“How so?” Rion asks him.

Soren ignores Rion, glancing around the cave, narrowing his eyes on something further into it. “I didn’t think it would move this quickly.” Soren frowns, mumbling to himself as if forgetting we’re here.

“Anyone else think the old demon has lost a few too many screws?” Jax raises his brows at the lot of us.

“Speak fucking English.” Axel growls.

Soren gives me an exhausted look. “How on earth do you put up with them?”

“We give her plenty of orgasms.” Jax winks at me before looking back at Soren and narrowing his eyes. “Don’t get any ideas.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” Soren runs a hand down his face.

“What are we dealing with?” Kai asks him, getting us back on track.

“The balance, it’s unstable,” Soren tells us.

“The what?”

“The...” Soren shakes his head. “Did they teach you nothing?”

“Obviously not. So why don’t you break it down for us?” Axel crosses his arms waiting for Soren’s reply.

“The balance of good and evil. There always needs to be a balance between the two. One scale tipped to one side too much will throw off everything.”

“What does this mean for our plane and the Underworld?”

Soren gives Kai a serious look full of worry. “Nothing good.”

“How far until we reach the first realm?” Rion asks him.

Soren frowns, looking into the cave once more. “Not far. If we move quickly.”

“Then let’s get moving. The quicker we get there, the quicker we can find King and end this before it gets out of hand,” Kai tells us as he begins forward. But something in the look Soren shares with Rion tells me it already has.

A few minutes pass before the next trap attacks. This time it’s dozens of small metal balls that explode on impact.

Before one even heads my way, Jax and Luka block most of them, using their bodies as a fucking shield to stop them from reaching me.

Soren raises a brow, a small tilt to his lips. “Here I was under the impression that your mate was quite capable of looking after herself?” Soren glances at me, raising a brow. “But maybe I misheard.”

He quickly turns, leaving us glaring at his back. But he wasn’t wrong, either. I am capable of looking after myself.

“Dick,” Jax mumbles, glaring at Soren’s retreating back before looking to me. “You, okay?”

Luka nods. “Ignore him. We’re a family. One that protects each other.”

“A family that’s going to let me also help protect you, too?” I look at them both. “I’ve already proved that I can look after myself. I can look after you all too if you stop being so overprotective and let me.”

“Being overprotective will never fucking change. It’s not in me to let anything hurt you, whether you can protect yourself or not. Besides, it’s whoever stops them first.” Jax winks at me, making Luka chuckle.

So, this is all just a game to them? Why didn’t he say so? I give them both a look that makes them lose their smug smirks quickly.

“Fine,” I tell them, making it look like I’m agreeing with them and knowing damn well it’s not anywhere near the truth.

Jax narrows his eyes at me. “I don’t like that look in your eyes.”

“What look?” I ask with my most innocent smile.

“The one that tells me you’re up to something.” Jax shares a worried look with Luka.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I step out of the little shield they’ve provided me with their bodies and reach down inside me, pulling my power up to focus on the small black balls in the cave wall.

Each time, I feel the change come over me, I know my eyes are black now with the illusion of stars speckled throughout them. But I’ve worked hard to contain my dark tendrils, so now they only appear when I call them.

The guys can’t see my face, so they don’t know what I’m up to as I focus on the black balls now heading straight for us.

Soren was right, these weapons aren’t any normal type of weapons. The energy inside them acts like an entity of its own.

Just like with the demons, my power finds the energy inside them, burning them from the inside before turning them into dust.

I leave my abilities sitting at the surface and reach out further for any more traps, sensing dozens more all along the cave walls.

I focus on them all, letting my powers build until each of them shatter, shaking the walls they’re hiding in.

The guys all turn to look at me with a mixture of shock and desire splashed across their faces while Soren is just plain shocked.

“What?” I shrug, giving them another innocent look before winking at Jax and Luka. “It’s whoever stops them first... *Remember?*” I smile to myself, stepping past them and on to the next *game*.

CHAPTER 4



WITHOUT THE WORRY of random weapons attacking us, we move quicker through the cave. A rush of water hits my ears just before we come to a thin stream. It runs right down the left side of the rocky cavern.

As we move further in, the pathway opens up into a larger cavern with high ceilings and multiple passageways. The stream now a large river that takes up half of the wide room.

Soren frowns. “This is new.”

“Which way?” Axel asks him, glancing around at the multiple routes. Soren shrugs. “Beats me.”

Axel’s eye twitches as he grinds his jaw, glaring at Soren. Soren smirks, the glint in his eyes reminding me so much of Jax and his mischief, before he heads off into one of the passageways.

“Then why—” Axel starts his eyes brimming with anger, but Kai cuts him off, dragging him toward one of the openings.

“Let’s just check them out.” Kai glances over at me, worry threading his brow, but before I can ask him what’s wrong, Rion speaks up.

“We’ll stay here. There’s no point in everyone going off in different directions. Find the right path and come back.”

Kai relaxes, nodding to him. “Good. We’ll be quick.” He turns to Axel, Jax and Luka, telling them to divide up, check

out the other passageways and not to go too far. They're gone before I so much as open my mouth.

Just as the rest of the guys completely disappear from view, Soren appears through the nearest exit to our left. "Well, that was a dead end."

He glances around. "I'm guessing your mates have the other passageways covered?"

Rion nods before glancing at me. I give him a smile before checking out the large cavern we're in.

Moving close to the river, I get a better look at the dark, murky water. Small waves move along it like a dark storm, heading out into several cracks and dips along the wall.

Something bubbles up and ripples on the surface, drawing me closer. I'm so focused on finding whatever caught my eye that I don't notice Soren slip up beside me, making me jump.

"Once the water is dark, it's safe. It's when it starts turning bright and shimmers, should you worry."

"Why?" My eyes turn back to the dark water.

"It's the River Oblivion. A place where souls go to forget before they move on."

"Isn't that a good thing?"

Soren gets a faraway look in his eyes, one filled with sadness. "Not all souls are good, and many don't want to move on, let alone forget about the lives they lived, the people they grew up with... Many would rather try claw their way out than move on."

Soren looks down at me, a small smile that turns into something twisted as it grows. He takes a step back. "Try not to accidentally fall in. The souls will be quicker to drown you with them than help you escape."

Another small ripple catches the corner of my eye, as if answering him. An icy shiver runs down my back as I glance back at the spot now unnaturally still, as if there's something beneath, watching me.

I take a step back, keeping my eye on the spot. “Good to know.”

Turning around, I take another step when I find Rion right in front of me, his eyes focused on Soren’s retreating back. “I don’t trust him, but I can’t find anything malicious about his energy, either.”

“Maybe you just can’t get a read on him? His energy feels old,” I tell him, looking back at Soren as he inspects the wall on the other side of the cave.

“Maybe.” Rion frowns before looking down at me, his eyes softening.

“Come on. Let’s get away from the water. I don’t want you accidentally falling in.” Rion takes my hand as we make a move toward the passageways.

I roll my eyes at him. “I’m not that clumsy.”

“No, but the universe likes to fuck with us, and I’m not taking any chances when it comes to you.”

“What would happen, if someone were to fall in?”

“You might manage to escape the souls, but it’s river oblivion. You’ll also forget everything and everyone else, too.” Rion’s grip on my hand tightens. “So, stay close.”

Kai walks into the cave, followed by Axel. “The passage just loops around. It was a dead end.”

Luka appears with Jax right beside him. “We had a quick look. It goes on for a bit but there might be a way out through ours.”

Soren moves from his stationary spot of inspecting the wall and heads toward the passage Luka and Jax had just come from. “Good, let’s move—”

The ground beneath us begins to shake, gaining momentum quickly. Dust falls from the cave ceiling before pieces of rock follow.

Rion’s grip is like a vice on my hand as he pulls me closer to him and out of the way of a large chunk of rock. We make a

move toward the guys, only getting a couple of steps before the ground beneath us splits apart.

Seconds drag in slow motion as I lift my head to look over at them. Kai's eyes widen as he tries rushing toward us, but it's too late as the ground beneath me and Rion completely collapses, pulling us down with it.

* * *

ROCK SLIDES and collides around us as we plummet down an endless descent. A rock hits the side of my head, making me dizzy just as Rion pulls me tighter into his hard body.

"Don't let go," Rion grunts. I hold on tighter as the rocks continue to strike us from every angle, leaving every part of my body feeling broken and bruised.

Just as my healing ability kicks in, another rock hits the spot, starting the process all over again.

The longest minutes pass before the tunnel- like structure we're falling through opens up, and the rocks fall more sparsely around us.

A sliver of relief slides through me thinking we made it through the worst of it. But then I hear a grunt just as Rion's arms loosen and fall away from me.

I reach out to grab him, but it's too late, as I get yanked in a different direction. Something hits me hard, making my head spin.

Splashes of water hit my ears just before I drop into icy cold water. I'm dragged down by the force of the fall, but instincts soon kick in and I push through the pain and start swimming upward as if on autopilot.

It's so dark and murky I can barely see anything around me, everything slightly blurring in and out of focus as my healing ability takes its time kicking in.

I ignore my surroundings and keep swimming upward, hoping to break through the surface soon. My lungs starting to

burn already from holding my breath.

The dark murky water clears a little, giving way to light that makes my sensitive eyes squint, but I know I must be near the surface, so I push my legs harder. The burning in my lungs grows as my chest turns tight, but I keep pushing hoping I'm getting close.

My fingers are a couple of inches to the top when something yanks my leg back, pulling me further away from the surface. Air bubbles escape from my mouth as I feel long, claw-like fingers wrap around my ankle and yank me deeper down into the darkness.

My eyes widen, my hands flailing as I try to pull back against whatever is dragging me further into the depths.

My mouth opens on a scream, forcing gulps of water down my throat. Every gasp of burning like thousands of sharp needles. My healing ability works overtime trying to stop my body from passing out, but without air, it can't do much more than slow the process.

My body starts to spasm and twitch on its own as the cold water fills my lungs. Shadowy spots enter my vision, blending in with my murky surroundings as my body grows weaker.

I try to push upward again when a mass of shadowy forms enters my vision, surrounding me. They grow closer and closer until I make out their dark bodies just as they reach out to me.

Icy claws slash through my skin, the sharp sting draining me quicker. I'm seconds away from passing out from the pain and tightness in my chest when my powers spark inside me, reminding me I'm not weak or defenseless anymore.

The flicker of power soon becomes a flare, growing until my entire body is brimming with energy, ready to explode.

My energy lets out a small pulse-like warning, forcing the dark beings back.

For a moment, my body floats aimlessly in the water as my energy builds and builds, my tendrils of shadows floating out around me like dark ribbons.

As if sensing their incoming demise, the dark beings surrounding me quickly scatter back, keeping a far distance.

I'm about to release the built-up energy and finally be rid of these beings when a body collides with mine, quickly pulling me upward.

Seconds pass before I reach the surface and take a large gulp of air, my healing ability kicks in forcing most of the water out. I continue to cough and spew up the water as I'm pulled out onto a rocky ground.

"Kiarra?" A familiar voice sounds distant as I'm laid down on a hard rocky surface. My head spins, making everything around me tilt and sway.

Blinking the dark spots from my vision, I glance up to find Rion's worried gaze down on me. There's a small gash healing on the side of his head with streaks of dry blood down his face.

"Kiarra... I can't lose you... Not again." Rion mumbles things that make no sense.

Why would he lose me? I'm right here.

I frown, trying to shake the spots from my vision, and wonder if the concussion is making me misunderstand what Rion is saying.

I open my mouth to ask him if he's okay but instead turn to the side to spew up more water, my lungs still on fire as they heal.

Glancing down at my hands and legs, I see black marks in the shape of hands and teeth. Some are already slowly disappearing as they heal. But with my ability focusing on that, my head and throat seem to take longer to heal.

I try to focus on Rion, or one of them, as two now appear in my vision.

Must be a bad concussion. I squint, trying to reassure him that I'm here and everything will be fine, but the look in his double pair of eyes tells me he's panicking.

He *knows* I'll heal so why he's this worried doesn't make any sense.

Maybe I look worse than how I feel?

The calm and reassured Rion I know is gone, leaving behind a completely different person. One who looks lost.

But why? I try to ask him, but my throat is still raw, my ability still focusing on whatever those dark beings did.

My vision slowly starts to clear as I glance around, squinting at our new surroundings. Another cavern by the looks of it with higher ceiling walls and a larger underwater river running alongside it.

Annoyed at myself that my healing ability isn't fixing what I want it to fix first, I quickly glance around before focusing back on Rion.

"It's okay. I've got you. I know you don't understand any of this, but you'll heal, and we'll figure the rest out as we go."

Understand what?

"Where..." I start, but have to stop to swallow, the raw burn choking me. The dark spots finally leave my vision and the dizziness eases enough to only see one of him.

I go to try again, swallowing hard, as I look at Rion.

"I know you're confused right now, but I'll explain everything once we get out of here." Rion glances around, looking lost. His expression is full of heartbreak and sorrow as he glances back at me.

"Kiarra..."

A dark shadow catches the corner of my eye, distracting me. I glance over at the water, finding the dark being watching us, its shadowy head inches from the surface.

"Who... is..."

"Damn it!" My eyes jump to Rion and the look of complete and utter distraught etched across his face, just as his body starts to tremble.

“I can’t lose you. Not again. Not like this.” Rion squeezes his eyes shut, moving his hands up to his head. He grips it tight as the rise and fall of his shoulders grows sharp.

What the hell?

“Why?” I start coughing, cutting off my question.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I should’ve held on tighter to you. It’s my fault you’ve...” Rion swallows hard, his hands moving to the ground as he stumbles back.

He grabs a fist of hair, his eyes wide as they glance from me to the ground. “Maybe we can start over...”

“But how...” He squeezes his eyes tight, shaking his head.

I glance around wondering if he’s seeing some sort of illusions. Maybe his head injury is affecting him... But then, shouldn’t he have healed by now?

I quickly push up on my shaky hands, needing to comfort him. To help him move past whatever he’s going through right now.

“Rion...” My voice is barely a whisper, but it doesn’t stop Rion from hearing it as he whips his head to me, his eyes widening. I lean forward and place my hand on the side of his face.

“Kiarra? Do you... Do you remember...*me*?” His tone is filled with bewilderment.

I frown, not understanding why he’s asking. Maybe this place messes with your head and it’s already got to Rion.

I cough a bit, but my ability has finally worked its way through my body. My throat is nearly fully healed now. “Why wouldn’t I?”

Rion slowly leans closer to me, his eyes wide as he stares at me, unblinking.

“Rion?”

“You really remember?” Rion’s whole body is tense, his face in a frozen state of heartache and hope.

“I could never forget you. Any of you?” I tell him, but still, he doesn’t move an inch. I rummage through my brain for something, my mind trying to understand why he would think I would forget them.

“You’re one of my best friends and a part of my soul. I would never forget you.”

Rion’s tense body shutters before he moves quickly, pulling me into a tight hug. “I thought you forgot us... forgot *me*...”

“*Never.*”

I pull back slightly, Rion’s grip not letting me get far. “Why would you think that?”

Rion’s hands move to my face, his eyes searching every inch of it. “You were in the River Oblivion, Kiarra. Souls don’t just go there to move on. Their memories are wiped, too. I thought...”

My eyes quickly glance over to the dark river, widening when I realize what he means. I shudder. “That’s something that could have happened?”

Rion leans forward, pulling me tighter against his body. “I was only in it long enough to pull you out. I don’t know how you still have your memories, being in it as long as you were.”

I glance back at the water; the dark being is now gone, but the strange stillness in it makes me shiver.

Rion pulls back, sliding a hand up to my cheek. “How are you feeling? Are you still in pain?”

I check my injuries, but most are already fully healed. Once I take note of my body, the cold numbness from the river drifts away. Warmth begins to seep into every nerve just before my heartbeat kicks up a notch.

I flinch back as a bolt of energy shoots through me. Glancing down at my body, I frown as energy floods it all at once.

Rion frowns. “What’s wrong?”

The energy thrums underneath my skin, pulsing back and forth. I try to pull it back, but it's no use.

"I think it's my powers. They were building just before you pulled me out. I'm having a hard time pushing them back down." I glance around the cave, looking for an outlet. For something that I can push it toward, but unless I want another cave-in, it is out of the question. And the water is not an option with those shadow things in there.

I glance down at my hands as they start to shake. Rion grabs them, squeezing them gently. "I have an idea, but we'll have to be quick."

I look up at Rion and watch a wicked smirk light up his entire face.

"What—" He pulls me to him, crushing his body to me as his lips hungrily meet mine. I'm momentarily confused and it takes me a moment for my brain to figure out what's happening.

As soon as I do, I wrap my arms around Rion's neck and deepen the kiss. He moans, sliding his hands up my back.

It only takes a couple of seconds before I'm lost in the taste of him. Each brush of his lips and swirl of his tongue is addictive, making me crave more. More of him, more of his scent and touch.

My hands move, trailing across his shoulders and down his wet shirt. His muscles tense under my fingertips as he moans against my lips.

"Siren..." He kisses me deeper pulling me in, like he doesn't want this to end anytime soon.

I pull at the hem of his shirt as he drags his lips away from me. His gaze hooded as he stares at me.

Another spike of energy shoots across my body reminding me why we started this. "Shouldn't we be quick?"

He chuckles, and the low husky tone of it sends warm shivers down my spine. "Forgive me but when it comes to you, I want to savor every moment." He places a kiss on my

lips. “Every taste.” He slides a hand up my back. “Every touch.”

He leans in and brushes his lips to mine once more before getting up and undressing, his eyes never leaving mine.

My mind and body heat up as I get lost in every muscle and curve of Rion’s body, his entire build looks as if it were carved from stone. My gaze trails down to his Adonis belt and lower to the large erection before moving back up to his face, where a wicked smirk is in place.

“It’s lucky this needs to be quick, because I’m not going to last long with you looking at me like that.”

I smile, shaking myself out of my daze and standing up to whip off my clothes, throwing them beside Rion’s.

Rion’s eyes darken as he pulls me into his body, his lips meeting mine once more. I moan as his hands trail down my back to under my thighs. I wrap my arms around his neck as his grip tightens. He lifts me up, gripping him tight as he lays us both down.

I barely feel the ground beneath me, my entire focus on Rion, as his warm, hard body leans into me.

Sliding my fingers up to his hair, I trail the tips of them along his scalp. It pulls a low groan from his lips as he pulls back, his eyes hooded as he gazes down at me. Placing a hand on each side of my face, he hovers over me, staring down at me like I’m his entire world.

“I love you, Kiarra. I’ve loved you since the day we met and will love you until I take my last breath.”

I reach up and cup his cheek. “I love you too, Rion. Always.”

His smile is soft as he leans down to kiss my lips, brushing his tongue along the seam before melting into me.

Our heated bodies grow more urgent as his kisses turn hot and hungry, moving down my neck and across my chest. I arch into his mouth as his lips close around my nipple, sucking and nipping it until I’m gasping for more.

“Rion...”

His lips trail down my stomach to my core. The first swipe of his tongue and my mind turns to mush, my body heating, at each teasing swipe.

He groans once more and the vibration from it shoots up through me making me gasp. I moan gripping his hair tighter as his tongue drags along my slick folds, each stroke bringing me closer and closer to coming apart.

“Rion...” My fingers dig into his hair and along his scalp as he keeps his punishing pace, pushing me to the brink of pleasure.

“Rion, you said we need to be quick. I want to feel you inside me... *please*.” But he doesn’t listen. Instead, his tongue changes, growing, thickening as it thrusts into me.

Fuck. My eyes roll back as his tongue, now the length and girth of a cock, thrusts into me over and over.

I’m panting, gasping and so close to coming when he moans and the vibration shoots up through me, pushing me over the edge.

I cry out as an orgasm rips through me, my body spasming around his thick tongue as I fall apart, some of the energy slowly seeping out around us as I do.

Before I get a chance to come down from my high, Rion slides up and over my body, pushing his hips against mine before he surges into me in one swift thrust.

I arch into him as he stretches and fills me.

He moves his hips in long, undulating strokes, teasing me, making the heat build once more. His slow punishing pace continues, burning me up from the inside until my legs shake from the slow- building heat.

Smoldering eyes draw me in with each surge becoming more possessive and reckless until I’m shuddering with desire.

Ripples of pleasure rush up and down my spine.

He leans down to kiss me, his tongue swirling around mine once, twice, before it changes, growing once more in length and width. I moan around his thick tongue, sucking and licking it like a cock.

I twirl my tongue around it before pulling back and sucking the tip. Opening my mouth wider, I take as much of his tongue into my mouth before moaning.

His body shakes as he tries to maintain his agonizingly slow pace, but I was so close to that edge, and I knew from the tremor in his tense body, he was too.

One push, that's all it would take to make us both fall over.

I add pressure, sliding my mouth up and down his tongue as I arch up into him. It's all it takes to make his relentless control snap as he begins to *really* move. My legs wrap around him as he surges into me, harder and faster.

His tongue starts fucking my mouth, just as ruthless as he drives into me.

And I fucking love it. This new, wild and reckless side of him is something I will definitely be exploring more of.

But right now, I can't think past anything but the feel of him as I slowly start to come apart.

So close...

I'm panting, my legs gripping Rion like a vice as he drives into me over and over. I push up into him again, this time tightening my muscles around him, and the sound that escapes his throat undoes me. I do it again, and his tongue quickly changes back as he moans, cursing under his breath.

Small tremors start as I moan into the rising pleasure. "Don't stop." I stare into his eyes, arching up, meeting each of his thrusts.

"Not even if I wanted to." He grunts and growls and the sound of it pushes me over the edge, my muscles clamping around him as I come apart. This time the orgasm is much stronger as it ripples across my entire body, down my legs, and into my toes.

With a couple deeper thrusts, he groans spilling into me before falling forward. Before he drops onto me, he slips out of me and rolls us to the side. The only sound around us is our ragged breaths and the water behind us.

Rion gazes at me, his eyes soft. “So damn beautiful.”

My eyes trace every inch of his face, the glint in his eyes and the tilt on his lips. “You are.”

Rion’s golden eyes sparkle with humor. He chuckles and the low rasp slides down my back like silk. “I’m glad you don’t find me hideous.”

Just as quick, his smile drops, along with the glint in his eyes.

“Hey. There is nothing hideous about you.”

Rion looks up at me, a small smile on his lips that doesn’t reach his eyes. “Not even on the inside?”

“Definitely not. Why would you think that?”

He sighs. “I’ve killed people. I’ve ripped them apart with my bare hands and not once felt guilt for it.” He reaches a hand up and traces the tips of his fingers along my jaw, his eyes following it.

“Does killing without conscience make me a monster?”

I take his hand and hold it close while looking straight at him. “You don’t kill innocent people, Rion. You fight for what you believe in and take care of your family. Each one of us would do the same without thinking twice. We all choose to fight for something none of us are willing to lose. That choice doesn’t make you a monster and it never will.”

Warmth floods his eyes as he smiles. “Thank you.” He pulls me closer, placing a kiss on the side of my head. “How do you feel?”

“Much better.” I chuckle, curling into the side of his body, my body now boneless and utterly relaxed.

“Good.” He nuzzles my neck, pulling me closer. I bask in his warmth, happy and content when water splashes from

somewhere in the distance, popping our little serene bubble.

We both tense up before glancing over at the water.

“We should get going.”

Rion nods, placing a kiss on my forehead. Finding his clothes, he brings mine over before throwing on his trousers.

I have my top on when he bends down and cleans me using his vest. His smirk grows wicked as he slowly swipes the soft material along my core.

He adds a bit of pressure to the next swipe, making me gasp. I narrow my eyes on him and his growing smirk. “If you keep that up, we won’t *ever* get out of here.”

He chuckles, before throwing the vest to the side and helping me up. Bending down, he places a kiss on my thigh before helping me into my jeans.

It takes a bit of wiggling with them still wet, but eventually I get them on. I glance over at him as he picks up his shirt and throws it on, his eyes never leaving mine as he buttons it.

Rion smiles, giving me a knowing look before dipping his head, and placing a soft kiss on my lips. He pulls back looking at me like I’m everything.

His everything. And I feel the exact same, with all of them.

“Come on. Let’s go find the others before I reconsider staying here and having my way with you.”

He turns to go, but I stop him, an idea coming to mind. “Let me see if I can sense them.” With my abilities still bubbling inside me, just not as intense anymore, I focus and reach out to the rest of my mates, quickly sensing them nearby.

“They’re close.” Opening my eyes, I focus on the spot and see a long passageway leading in their direction. “Let’s go this way.”

With a tight grip on Rion’s hand, we follow the long entrance out. After a couple of minutes, we finally spot a light, moving toward it until the cave opens out to a whole other world.

One that is desolate and barren of any living thing.

CHAPTER 5



WE BOTH MOVE further out of the cave and get a better look at our new surroundings. The barren land is like a desert that looks as if it goes on infinitely in every direction.

There are two suns above, one in front and the other behind us. The heat coming from each is probably why the land is barren and completely parched from any nourishment.

I take a step into this dark world, pausing when loud shrieks hit my ears.

Wails of the lost souls echo around us, each one drenched in pain and sorrow. Something on the ground catches my eye. I move closer to it and watch as dark shadows crawl along it making me shiver.

I share a look with Rion as we move further out into the desolate land. We only make it a few steps before we hear voices calling out.

Turning to my left, I release a breath as I watch the rest of my mates moving toward us, coming out of another cave further down.

“They all must be connected.” Rion tilts his head, glancing along the long wall of the cave-like structures behind us.

Seconds pass before Kai has me in his arms, holding me tight. “Are you okay?”

I share a smile with Rion. “We’re fine.”

Kai releases a harsh breath, squeezing me tight one last time, before releasing me and moving over to Rion.

Jax and Luka take his spot, both holding me and hugging me just as tight. "I'm fine, guys."

"I told you they'd be fine," Soren tells them, unfazed by their glares.

Luka takes hold of my hand. "What happened after you fell? We tried going after you, but the entire floor caved in." I share a look with Rion, his eyes softening before looking at the guys. "We ran into a couple of complications, but it was nothing we couldn't handle."

Kai's eyes check me over once more, frowning at the bloodstains. "We knew from the bond you were close, but we had no way of getting to you."

"Yeah, it was Hell... Oh wait..." Jax smirks at his own joke, but as always, it breaks the tension.

"Idiot," Axel murmurs as he hugs me from behind, but I feel the small smile on his lips as he kisses my neck.

"Glad you're okay, princess."

I give him a soft smile before I look over at Soren. "What is this place?"

"The Shadow realm." Soren frowns but starts moving forward. "Keep moving forward and ignore the souls that call out to you. Nothing here is what it seems."

"You can say that again." Axel releases me but stays close by, just like the rest of them. Luka keeps my hand in his as we follow Soren.

"Nothing here is what it seems," Jax repeats, earning a glare from Axel. Jax gives him an innocent look. "What? You said to repeat it."

Axel narrows his eyes to slits. "You're such a fucking child."

"No. I'm a man with a huge cock. Just ask Kiarra."

Not willing to break the easy-going mood, I play along, nodding my head with a serious look on my face. "It's true."

Jax's smirk only grows, the glint in his eyes lighting up his entire face. "Told you."

Axel sighs as the others chuckle around us. "Don't encourage him."

I shrug, giving him my own version of Jax's innocent look. "I'm just telling you the truth."

Axel's eyes narrow on me. From the look on his face, I can see that our little game is hitting a nerve.

"I've seen the little dick's prick. There's nothing fucking impressive about it."

I smother my laugh as Jax moves closer to him. "We both know she screamed louder for me."

"She screamed for both of us, idiot."

Jax gives him a patronizing look. "But I was inside her."

Axel's eyes widen with anger. "And my cock was fucking her mouth. What's your point?"

Soren raises a brow before shaking his head and walking further ahead and hopefully out of ears' reach.

Axel scoffs. "Fuck that. We both know I can make her scream the loudest."

Jax gives him a pitying look. "That's because I was there with you. I did most of the work."

Axel clenches his jaw so tight; he looks like he's about to bust a vein in the side of his head. "Fine. Then let's find out for sure. We'll both take her, one after the other. The one who makes her scream the loudest here and now wins bragging rights for a year."

I chuckle. "As much as I'd love to play along with that entire little scenario. I'd rather not do it in front of the creepy shadow things crawling on the ground." I point down at one as it slithers past us.

They both freeze as if just realizing where we are. Axel frowns while Jax sighs dramatically, looking put out.

“It’s okay, we all know the truth.” Jax shares a devilish look with me. I nod, still playing along.

Axel looks at him like he’s ready to pummel him into the cave wall. “No, we fucking don’t.”

Jax chuckles before patting him on the shoulder. “Don’t be such a fucking child. We’re all adults here.”

Jax walks off, leaving a pissed off dragon with a permanent eye twitch in place. Axel starts after Jax when a heart-wrenching scream sounds out around us, stopping us in our tracks. I glance over at the source of the sound, my eyes widening at the scene in front of me.

A shadow rises up, swirling to form a large circular frame of black smoke. The center of it glitches like the display of an old TV just before a video of a woman stumbling out of a car appears. She watches the car burn with a man out cold inside. The car suddenly explodes, leaving her screaming over and over.

The complete anguish and torment from her cries break something inside me. I go to move forward when a hand reaches out and stops me. Glancing up at Soren, I find him wearing a somber expression, his eyes on the heart-breaking scene as well.

Axel steps closer, glaring at Soren. He rips his hand off me, pushing him back. “Keep your fucking hands to yourself.”

Soren raises his hands, a small smirk on his face. He ignores Axel’s pissed off glare while continuing. “We can’t intervene.”

I ignore the alpha male pissing contest and look back at the woman. She’s still calling out, kneeling on the ground. Everything inside the strange shadows slows down as if moving in slow motion before shifting.

“What’s happening?” The scene in front of us glitches again and moves backward as if rewinding before starting again, the heart-wrenching scream shuttering through my chest once more.

“She’s living her worst nightmare over and over.” Soren’s eyes glow as he looks at the scene. He frowns before shaking his head. “She’ll be here a while before she can move on.”

“What? Why?” She doesn’t deserve this. Not to watch someone she cares about die over and over. No one deserves that.

“She doesn’t look... evil,” Jax tells him.

“No one does. But you’d be right; she’s not a bad soul,” Soren tells him.

“You can tell?” I ask him. He nods, not saying anything more on the subject.

“Many souls come here to deal with their guilt before moving on. But guilt is a powerful thing, and sometimes the hardest thing to do is forgive yourself.”

Her screams echo around us as the glitch repeats once more.

“Can we help her?” I plead. If she was a good soul, surely, she didn’t deserve this.

“It would make no difference. She needs to be the one to realize it wasn’t her fault or if it was, to take responsibility for it and know that it was a mistake and move on. If we try to interfere with her progress, we could end up making it worse and stop them from moving on completely.”

Them?

I glance back at the scene. The man from the car glitches and moves behind her, holding her tight.

My head whips to Soren. He smiles. “Don’t worry, she’s in good company. Even humans have soulmates. He’ll be by her side until they can move on together.”

“The Underworld is not what I expected,” I mumble, taking one last look at the couple before following him, the guys close beside me.

Soren smirks. “Let me guess... You were picturing ash falling from a dark sky with pits of flames?”

“Something like that.” We move past the scene quickly. Jax and Luka keep their eyes on me, as if waiting for me to try something. I glare back at them.

Even if I wanted to help ease her suffering, I wasn't stupid enough to risk her passing on. Either of them. Knowing she has someone there with her eases the knot in my stomach. Hopefully, they both can pass on soon.

We quickly move further into the barren land until there's nothing but a complete desert around us. We spot a couple more shadowy frames of smoke but they're more grayed out than the first one, the glitches too erratic to see what's going on inside them.

“There are a lot fewer souls here than there usually are.” Soren frowns, stopping as a wisp of shadow quickly passes us before disappearing into nothing.

“Isn't that a good thing?” Maybe they all moved on. At least that's what I hope.

“No. The energy here... it's all wrong.” Soren bends down, touching the cracked ground.

Kai glances down at him, frowning. “How?”

“It's off. As if it's been stolen or... absorbed.” Soren shakes his head, getting up to look around.

“It doesn't make any sense. Not in this realm.”

Stealing energy...

“Do you think?” I share a worried look with Kai.

“King. It has to be.”

* * *

THE SUN to my left shutters in my vision, drawing my attention. I glance over to it and stop short.

A large demon-like creature with wings flies about the sky like a vulture waiting for its food. “I thought you said this realm was just for the souls.”

“It is.” Soren doesn’t even turn as he continues on, but the others stop and look over at me, following the direction I’m looking at.

Jax mumbles a curse while Axel’s eye twitches as he turns to Soren. Soren still moves forward, oblivious to our new intruder.

“Then what the hell is that?” I ask him, pointing up at the winged demon.

Soren finally turns, following my hand, his eyes widening when he spots the creature.

“This is bad.”

“How bad are we talking?” Kai asks him.

Soren glances at Kai before veering his eyes back to the creature. “That demon is from the Prison realm. It shouldn’t be here.”

It flies away, disappearing within seconds.

Axel smirks. “Looks like it’s not our problem anymore.”

A loud shriek draws our attention to a dark spot further down from us. Axel’s smirk falls as he sighs. “What now?”

Soren moves toward the dark spot without a backward glance.

“I guess we’re following him.” Jax rolls his eyes before grabbing my free hand as we follow after Soren.

With the rest of the guys in tow, we catch up to him, finding him still as a statue as he looks down at a large burned spot with chunks of black slime scattered about it.

“They’re feeding on them.” Soren’s pale skin turns white.

“What are? The creatures? What are they feeding on?” I glance around, but there’s no other demon or creature around.

“The souls.” Soren turns to us, looking older than he is, the worry etched into his face like a second skin. “They’re feeding on the souls here.”

Jax glances down at the black stain. “I’m guessing that’s a bad thing?”

Soren nods. “Passing through the realms won’t upset the balance too much because once they die, they’ll be reabsorbed. No matter where they are, they start over. But to mess with the energy inside each realm is a whole other ball game. The balance will be ruined if these demons keep feeding on the souls in this realm, and it will have devastating consequences.”

The air around us turns stagnant as we process what Soren said.

“What happens to the balance if it’s off? Will it affect more than just the Underworld?”

“It will affect everything. Every plane and realm including yours and eventually if it gets bad enough, it will lead to the end of everything.”

“What about the demons on our plane? What will happen if we destroy them there?” If we have to bring them down here first, that’s going to be one hell of a problem.

Soren shakes his head. “It doesn’t matter where they’re destroyed. The Underworld is their home, they’re connected to it. Once they are destroyed, their energy returns to it, evening out the balance once more. The only thing we need to worry about is if that energy is stolen or absorbed. Once it’s absorbed, it becomes tainted.”

Great. Not only do we have to catch up with King, but now we have to fix the mess he’s made. And if we don’t do it as soon as possible, King will be the least of our problems.

“End of the world? Hate to tell you, but we’re already there.” Axel scowls at Soren.

Soren shakes his head. “A few hundred or thousand demons in your realm is nothing compared to how bad it can get. I’m talking about multiple worlds of chaos and corruption, eventually leading to life itself withering away.”

“So, just your average Monday? Fun times.” Jax nods to himself before turning and pointing at the sky.

“Oh look, another demon.”

The winged demon is larger and a whole lot meaner looking than the last one as it heads straight for us.

“Damn it.” Soren scrubs a hand down his face.

Kai frowns at Soren’s panicked look. “It’s fine. Let’s just kill it and we can move on.”

“These demons aren’t that easy to kill. They—” One swoops down ready to attack but Kai is already there meeting it on its descent and ripping it in two before Axel turns it to ash.

Soren’s mouth drops open as he stares at Kai and Axel heading back to us. “Those demons are not supposed to be that easy to kill.”

Jax shrugs. “Maybe the imbalance is making it easier for us.”

Soren frowns. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Don’t worry about it. Most of what comes out of my brother’s mouth makes little sense.” Luka takes my hand, heading in the direction Soren was before we all got distracted by the demons. “Let’s get moving.”

Jax opens his mouth to protest when a loud shriek sounds out, followed by another and another. We glance up at the source, watching as more and more demons appear, all circling right above us.

Jax smirks, rubbing his hands together, a devilish glint on his face as he eyes up the score of demons flying above us. “Let’s take turns and see who can kill the most.”

Soren looks at him like he’s lost it. “This isn’t a game—”

“What does the winner get?” Axel ignores Soren, narrowing his eyes on Jax, but it’s Luka who answers.

“Whatever they want.”

The guys all look at me wearing matching savage smirks. I roll my eyes at them. “You already have me.”

“Yes, but the winner gets to do whatever they want to you... I mean *with*...” Jax smirks.

“You didn’t, but I’ll agree either way,” I tell him, watching his smirk grow, his eyes burning with heat.

Luka turns, eyeing up the demons. “Let’s split up.”

“I’ll just wait here, shall I?” They ignore Soren as each of the guys eyes up a section of the demons above us. They’re about to make a move to shift when I call out, making them pause.

If they thought I was going to sit this one out, they were in for a rude awakening.

“What’s in it for me?”

“You’re not—” Axel doesn’t finish his sentence with the glare I give him. Clearing his throat, he looks away, rubbing the back of his neck.

Jax chuckles at him before looking at me. “Whatever you want, baby. Whoever you want and whenever. Lady’s choice.”

My smirk grows wicked. “Don’t I already get that?”

Kai’s answering smile is anything but innocent. “True. What is it you want? Name it, and it’s yours.”

“If I win... sorry, *when* I win, I want... Axel to take me up flying on his dragon, Jax and Luka to take me out for a run on their wolves. I want to see Rion’s basilisk up close and Kai, I want to spend time with *all* three of your hounds.”

The guys freeze, each wearing a matching expression of shock and desire.

Jax gulps. “Maybe we should just let her win.”

I roll my eyes at him. “You’re not *letting* me win anything. I’ll win fair and square without any of your help.”

Axel smirks, walking backward. “When I win, you can still ride my beast, but not before you ride me first.” Before I get a word in, he quickly turns and shifts into his dragon, taking out a couple of the nearest demons before moving on to

the dozen, heading straight for him. He turns them to nothing but flames before circling around and heading for the rest of them.

The rest of the guys turn, ready to shift, but before they get the chance, I pull my power to the surface of my skin, feeling the energy around me grow and expand. Focusing on the demons above, I zone in on each one and push the energy into them.

Within seconds they burn, turning to ash, and falling from the sky.

Soren gives me an incredulous look. Axel swoops back down to us as the guys chuckle, shaking their heads. But all wearing proud smiles.

“Not sorry you lost?” I ask Axel just as he shifts back with a smile on his face and heat in his eyes.

“The only way I’d lose is if one of these fuckers won. They’d hog you all to themselves.”

Jax scoffs at him. “We already know I like to share, and I’d be willing to—”

“Now that the demons are no longer a problem here, how about we move on?” Soren looks at us all with an unreadable expression as he starts moving forward.

“Such a buzzkill.” Jax groans but follows him. He glances over at me. “Can we add him to the challenge? I’ll take his life as my winnings.”

“I heard that,” Soren shouts over his shoulder.

“Glad to hear your hearing isn’t gone with your old age,” Jax shouts as if he is deaf.

“Apologies for delaying the orgy about to happen when the world is about to end.” Soren narrows his eyes on a spot in front of us.

My mouth drops open as Soren walks over to a dark stained spot on the ground. “No one was talking about an orgy...”

“Well—”

Jax doesn't get to finish his sentence as our surroundings quickly change before our eyes, morphing into something far more terrifying than the shadow realm. One that truly envisions the nightmare of Hell.

“What's happening?” I glance around as ash falls from the sky like heavy snow as it lands in front of us.

“Welcome to the Realm of the Damned.”

CHAPTER 6



CLOUDS overcast us as the sky grows gray, slowly turning it into the darkest night. It ripples around us, the ground and air soon stained by its black taint.

Huge, flamed pits grow from the ground with embers coating the air above them. They shed sparks of heated light that spit and suffocate. But with the heat comes flames.

Flames so hot they scorch the land dry.

A shriek calls out as winged demons appear, flying above us as if they were always there, while hundreds of shadow creatures appear, crawling along the scorched ground.

“Fuck. Me.” Jax gapes around at our new surroundings. A place you would imagine the true nightmare of Hell to look like.

Axel stands next to Jax, a mirror expression of shock on his face. “I think I’ll leave that to Kiarra. You’re not pretty enough for me.”

My mouth drops open at Axel’s joke. Turning to him, I catch Jax’s smirk grow out of the corner of my eye.

“Lies. I’m prettier than everyone here.” Jax winks at me. “Apart from you, of course.”

Luka gives Jax the side eye before glancing at Axel. “I think you two are spending too much time together. Jax is starting to rub off on you.”

Jax, seeming to have already shaken off his shock at our surroundings, turns to Luka, a wicked smile on his face. “Axel

is very... *accommodating* when it comes to rubbing anything off Kiarra.” He smirks but quickly covers it, looking the picture of innocence as Axel gives him a slanted look.

“Let’s get through this realm as quickly as possible. What’s left of the souls here is nothing we want to run into.” Soren has a grim look on his face, making us all pay more attention to our surroundings.

Moving forward, I notice the ground beneath us is much rockier than the Shadow realm, the heat more stifling even without the sun.

I glance over at the huge pits of fire and smoke, feeling the heat even from here.

“Aren’t those a little cliché?” Jax asks, nodding at the pits.

“If you can find another way to burn impurities while also tormenting the unforgivable, please do tell us and I’ll pass it on to management.” Soren gives him a mocking smirk before moving around the inflamed pits, unbothered by the scorching blaze.

We follow him, steering well clear of the pits and their hellish heat.

“What’s the difference between the souls in the Shadow realm and the Realm of the Damned?”

Soren’s eyes flicker to me before he answers. “The Shadow realm contains souls that have the ability to move on. The Realm of the Damned is what’s left of the souls when they can’t move on, their souls too rotted to be saved. They become soulless creatures far too lost to become redeemable.”

“What the—”

Our eyes jump to Axel’s line of sight only to see a group of human-like creatures, their bodies completely made of a black tar substance with shadows that cloak them. They have no eyes, just a hollow, dark space filled with more swirling shadows.

Although they have a similar shape to a human body, that’s where the similarities end. Their limbs bend at awkward

angles as they crawl along the ground, scavenging the land for... something.

“Are they demons?” I ask, having never seen anything like them before and hoping to never come across them again.

Soren shakes his head, steering clear of them. “They’re soulless.”

They’re the soulless? A shiver works its way down my spine the more I look at them.

Even with the scores of flames around us, there’s no warmth in their appearance or energies. They’re just... hollow. Hollow and endlessly cold.

“What happens to them? After this?” I keep my eye on one that claws closer to a flamed pit.

Soren keeps moving while answering me. “For any being that no longer carries a soul, there is nothing more. They will wander here before becoming a part of the realm itself. It’s a cycle that keeps everything in balance.”

Balance... apparently everything needed a balance.

I turn away from the soulless and move closer to Soren. “What about the Gods? Couldn’t they help with the balance?”

Soren scoffs, giving me an amused look. “The Gods abandoned us long ago. The only remains of them are what essence they left behind and, of course, their descendants.” He gives Kai a pointed look before doing the same to the rest of us.

“Wait. There are no Gods left?” I glance at the guys, wondering if they’re as shocked as me. Luka mirrors my expression while Jax looks unbothered by the news.

Rion and Kai both wear a similar expression of acceptance, like they already thought as much.

Axel rolls his eyes. “Doesn’t surprise me. Most Gods are dicks with too much time on their hands. And I of one am fucking glad they’re gone.”

Luka frowns at him. “You’ve never met a God. How do you know they’re all dicks?”

Axel shrugs. “You’ve met one powerful being, you’ve met them all. We have enough powerful people in the world fucking it up, adding Gods and their kind of power to it is a shitstorm waiting to happen.”

Kai shakes his head, glancing ahead. “They’re no longer here, so it’s pointless to keep talking about them. Let’s focus on the sadistic psycho gaining too much power instead.”

Gaining too much power...

Something niggles at the back of mind, stopping me from moving past what Kai said. “With no Gods, then who’s in charge?”

We avoid a large group of shadows clambering over to a pit. It’s not until we’re well past it does Soren answer my question.

“Apart from descendants and Guardians, there are the Lords of the Underworld. They’re powerful beings and the closest thing we have to Gods.”

“What happens if something were to happen to these powerful beings?”

Soren smiles at me. “You don’t have to worry. There’s nothing but the Gods themselves that can destroy the Lords.”

I pull back to the guys. They slow their pace while Soren moves ahead, not noticing we’re lagging behind.

“What if Soren’s wrong?”

Kai gives me a look. “You’re thinking that King might be down here to kill them?”

I nod. “King always wanted to rule. Maybe his plan is a lot bigger than we think it is.”

The guys share a worried look.

“Is that even possible? Someone making themselves a God?”

Soren glances back, finally noticing we're not right behind him. We catch up to him just to see the annoyed look on his face. "And here I thought we were in a hurry. We need to get to the Infernal Kingdom as quickly as possible."

"How do you even become a God?" I ask him.

He gives me a strange look. "Some beings are born powerful, while others amass it over time. If you gather enough power and are able to sustain it, you can make yourself all-powerful. Others will fear you and through that fear you can control them."

Jax scoffs. "Sounds like a simple plan. Gain enough power and then knock out the competition, then make everyone fear you."

Luka frowns. "Would any of this... competition happen to be from the Underworld?"

Soren stays silent while listening to us, his eyes widening as if something clicks. He moves quickly, not looking to see if we're following him. "Once we get to the gates, I'll need to look into a couple of things."

"The gates? What gates?" I glance around, seeing nothing but the dark fiery pits and creepy soulless.

Soren is lost in his own thoughts, his head down as we move through the realm, avoiding the rest of the soulless. A few minutes pass in tense silence before the realm shifts and changes before our eyes.

"Your plan might need a slight adjustment," Luka tells Soren.

"What? Why?" Soren glances at Luka before looking ahead, stopping dead in his tracks.

Two large black gates stand in the middle of nowhere with a very large and very mean-looking demon in front of it. Hundreds of demons swarm around it like its minions. They gather in groups, trying to get past the enormous gates.

"They are not supposed to be there," Soren tells us, stating the obvious.

“No shit.” Axel scoffs at him while eyeing up the demon and its horde.

Soren curses. “Not only are they not supposed to be there, but Orthis is missing.”

“Who’s Orthis?”

Soren’s eyes flicker to Kai and then over to the horde of demons crawling all around the gate. “It doesn’t matter right now. All you need to know is that our only way in is through those gates.”

CHAPTER 7



“LOOKS LIKE IT’S MORPHIN’ time, boys.” Jax rubs his hands together, a crazy smile on his face as he eyes up the large demon.

Axel looks at him like he’s lost his damn mind. I guess their bonding only went so far.

“We’re not the fucking Power Rangers.”

“But *you* knew who I was talking about?” Jax nods, a smug smirk on his face.

Axel narrows his eyes on him, a slight swirl of steam coming from his ears.

I share a smile with Kai.

“Exactly, *dude*.” Jax moves, shifting into his wolf before Axel has time to reply.

Axel turns to Luka, shaking his head. “How the fuck are you two related?”

He doesn’t wait for a reply as he steps forward, flames engulfing his entire body as his dragon emerges.

They both head straight for the old demon first. Just as Jax hits the horde, instinct kicks in and my power surfaces and strikes, clearing a path for him.

I hear the guys chuckle beside me but stay focused on Jax and Axel.

“I guess we’ll just wait this one out.” I glance at Kai just as he smirks at me.

Turning back to the scene in front of me, I focus on the horde, ripping through any that get too close to either of my mates. By the time Axel and Jax have destroyed the old demon, the horde is already gone.

I pull my power back to find three proud mates smiling back at me.

Soren raises a brow. He opens his mouth but stops himself, shaking his head. "Let's get this over with."

I glance around at the destruction left behind, the ground now scorched by the horde remains and a large pit of flames where the large demon once stood. We avoid it as we make our way closer to the large black gates.

Axel and Jax have already shifted back and are eyeing up the monstrous thing.

This close up I can see each detail vividly, with black ornate carvings and strange shapes. Two large black snakes sit on each side, curling around the strange symbol designs as if alive and moving.

"I don't suppose you have the key?" Jax raises a brow at Soren.

Soren glances up to the darkened sky as if he's contemplating his life choices. "No key would allow you to open these gates, nor spells or trickery. Only Orthis can allow you to pass through."

"Right. Well, Orthis seems to be taking a little vacation right now, so how do we get in?" Jax looks at Soren like *he's* the idiot here. I bite my lip to stop the laugh bubbling up my throat. I didn't think Soren appreciated Jax's sense of humor.

Jax sends me a sly wink as if knowing, making me smile.

Soren starts pacing up and down, lost in his thoughts. We group together, letting Soren have his moment and try to figure out how to get through the gates.

"Any ideas?" Kai asks.

Axel eyes up the gates. "Maybe if we work together, we might have enough power to destroy them?"

Soren sighs, loud enough for us to hear him. “You can’t destroy the gates. They’re impenetrable.”

Axel scoffs. “Like you can come up with anything better.”

Soren narrows his eyes on him. He opens his mouth but quickly shuts it before turning and walking further away from us, mumbling something about foolish kids.

“Looks like the old man has finally lost it.” Jax fist bumps Axel’s shoulder, smiling. “Good job. I was wondering how long it would take him to crack.”

“He doesn’t look that old.” Maybe a few years older than us. But I guess you could never really tell with supes. He could be a few centuries old, for all I know.

The guys all swing their narrowed gazes at me, growing quiet.

“What?”

Kai sighs, shaking his head, while Rion shares a frown with Luka. It takes a second, but it finally dawns on me what conclusion they’re jumping to.

Idiots.

“I wasn’t looking at him as another prospective. Fuck, guys, tone down the possessive streak a little.”

“What do you mean, *another* prospect? As in there was someone else?” Jax’s brows reach his forehead as he steps closer to me, Axel right by his side.

I guess the bromance is back on.

I give them all a look; the others back down realizing how stupid they’re acting but Axel and Jax continue to stare at me with murderous glares, waiting for a reply. I glance over at Soren, finally getting it.

They *are* fucking children.

“Well?” Axel pushes, still waiting for a damn answer.

I don’t bother looking at him, instead I glance back at the gate and wonder how we all ended up here, talking about shit

that doesn't matter when the world is going to hell. Literally.

“Rion? Does the heat damage brain cells while you're down here?”

Kai and Luka chuckle while Rion gives me a smile. “Unfortunately, not. Whatever damage done was always there.” He gives Axel a look full of humor. Axel does a double take, not used to Rion joking with him before glaring at him.

Jax joins him, the bromance still on for now.

Over their idiotic cave man display, I walk over to them and hit Axel upside his head while Luka does the same to Jax.

“Stop being fucking idiots and let's figure out how to get into the next realm.” I move closer to the gates and away from dumb and dumber when arms come around me from behind. Jax's woodsy scent hits me before he places a kiss on my head.

“I will not apologize for being a possessive ass. No one gets to touch or even look at you unless it's one of the five of us. But I will apologize for jumping to conclusions and thinking you would ever want anyone more than us.” I open my mouth to tell him to just forget about it. I knew signing on to this would involve their possessive asses being idiots every now and again, but the fucker continues talking, not letting me get a word in.

“I mean, we're fucking perfect, so why would you?”

“You're a dick,” I tell him, making him smile.

“Yes, but *your* dick.” The playful tone in his voice has me smiling for some stupid reason. He catches it, making his own grow. He hugs me tighter before letting up, but still wrapped around me.

“Now, what can we do about these impenetrable gates?” Kai glances up at the colossal thing, frowning.

Jax glances from the gates back to Kai as if just realizing something. “Aren't you a descendant of Cerberus? Can't you just...I don't know...*Open* the gate?”

Kai gives him a deadpan look. “It doesn't exactly work like that.”

“But maybe it can.”

We all turn to look at Soren, a glint of glee in his eyes as he stares at Kai.

“After all, you are a descendant of Cerberus. In theory, you should be able to open the gates.”

“In *theory*... *should*... All things that are just *possibilities*. Doesn't mean I can do it.”

But it was better than nothing.

“It's all we've got right now,” I tell him.

Kai sighs, his gaze moving to Soren. “What do I do?”

“Shift and move before the gates. Then let your instincts take over.”

Kai sighs before rolling his shoulders back and stepping forward. His body quickly expands, giving way to his hellhounds.

I'll never get used to seeing just how magnificent all their beasts are.

Soren splutters, his eyes growing wide. “He... He has *all* three heads?”

“He only recently grew into his third.” Jax shrugs, as if it's no big deal.

Soren ignores Jax, turning to the rest of us. “How does he have all three heads?”

“Is that a bad thing?” I glance back at Kai as he moves toward the gates.

“What does it matter?” Kai is stronger now, harder to kill. That has to be a good thing.

Soren exhales a long breath. “It matters because it means he's a lot closer to Cerberus' bloodline than we thought.”

“Is that good or bad?” Luka asks, frowning.

“It's neither. Just tell me how he—”

Axel cuts him off. “Kiarra gave us an upgrade. Once we completed the bond, we all grew more powerful.”

“That so?” Soren’s gaze veers to me, his eyes piqued with interest. He nods to himself as if answering his own question.

“Let’s hope this works.”

Let’s.

I turn to watch Kai as his beasts move closer to the gate.

* * *

KAI

LIKE A MAGNETIC PULL, I’m drawn to the gates, wanting to protect them like they’re something precious. My legs move as if on their own, closer and closer, until I’m standing right in front of them.

As if by instinct, I close my eyes and focus on the energy the gates are emitting. The energy snaps out before slithering around me. It tests my energy, only pulling back a moment later, satisfied by what it finds.

Opening my eyes, I watch the two large black snakes on the gates begin to move as if alive.

“What the—” I hear a familiar voice but stay focused on my task at hand.

The snakes slither up and over to the other side, disappearing before my eyes. The two gates morph to become one translucent gate with dark shadows slithering throughout it.

“Quick, before it closes again.” Another familiar voice calls out, reminding me of my family. I look down and watch as my brothers and mate move through the shadowy gate.

I start to follow them but stop when instinct that comes from bloodlines before me rises up and demands I stay and guard the gate.

Stay. Protect. Guard.

The command rings inside my beast's heads, urging us to stay and protect the gate. I turn to stand guard against all who dare enter.

"Kai."

I pause. That voice. My mate. I turn and glance down. So small from up here. She looks fragile, but I know she's anything but. Her power is vast and still something we don't understand.

Nevertheless, I need to protect her, to protect them all. If I stay here, I won't be able to do that. I move to follow them when a pulse of energy shoots through me, trying to anchor me to stay where I am. I pull back from it, but it's like moving through thick quicksand. I only get so far before I have to stop the pull drawing me back. I glance over at the gate and then back down to my mate and brothers. I'm frozen on the spot, like I'm stuck between two worlds.

Stay. Protect. Guard.

The pulse shoots through me once more, the need to stay by the gate growing the longer I stay here.

I glance back down at my mate, her green eyes the beacon I need that draws me to her, holding nothing but warmth and patience.

As if she can sense my indecision, she reaches out to us. "Please come with us. We need you. *I* need you. Always."

She needs me... *us*. Those three little words are all it takes to break whatever power the gate has over me. I move toward her, our mate, our light in a world of darkness, and follow each step she takes.

She glances back at us a couple of times, but I'm not going anywhere. The thought of leaving her too much to bear.

Once my body enters the shadows, I shift back and take a step into the next realm.

I glance over my shoulder, watching the gate morph back to the large black gates as it was before, the two snakes now slithering from this side over to the other.

“Are you okay?” Kiarra asks me, that worried look in her eyes. A worried look that *I* put there. My chest turns tight with the thought of ever leaving her or them, the thought itself sickening me.

“I’m fine.” I take her small hand in mine, holding it tight as I glance back to the gates, now slowly disappearing as if they were never there.

The connection of energy slowly drifting away until it leaves me completely, making me feel nothing but relief. With the pull of the energy gone, I feel like I can take a deep breath again. I look around at my brothers, each one of them mirroring my expression of relief.

Rion comes over and grabs my shoulder. The look in his eyes tells me he knows what just happened.

As we have done since we were children, we silently communicate with one another with just a look.

I nearly left her... left you all.

I would never have let you. None of us would.

I nod. The relief spreading to every limb in my body, slowly taking the weight of guilt away. He’s right. They would never have let me stay.

I glance down at my mate. Her worry is now gone, a soft smile on her face easing the last bit of nerves in my body.

“Where are we now?” she asks, looking around at our new surroundings. The place is empty, not a soul or demon to be seen. Destruction is all around us like the aftermath of a war that’s already taken its toll on everything.

Most of the tall dark buildings are crumbling or nearly completely gone.

“The Infernal Kingdom. A realm that is slightly more civilized with the main population being higher level demons.”

“Civilized doesn’t always mean better. It just makes them smarter about how they kill you.” Rion gives Kiarra a look. One that tells her to stay close and not try anything foolish.

She smiles, shaking her head at him before pulling me along with her as we move further into the realm. I grip her hand like a lifeline, knowing she'll always be mine. No matter how strong we all are or pretend to be.

Movement from our left catches my eye. I glance over but find nothing there, not even a shadow.

I catch Rion looking at the same spot. He nods, telling me he saw something too.

“Keep your eyes peeled,” I tell everyone. Unlike the Shadow realm and Realm of the Damned, there are higher level demons here that are smarter, more sly, and stealthy about their movements. And even though we were strong, I wasn't taking any chances in the Underworld. Everything has its limits, including us.

The words are only out of my mouth when chaos descends around us, and we're surrounded.

Men in full-body black armor and a red crest of a snake wrapped around two swords, form a circle around us, their weapons all pointed at us.

Soren gives them a bored look. “Is this really necessary?”

The guards ignore him, not moving from their frozen positions.

I inch closer to Soren, blocking Kiarra from view while keeping an eye on how close the guards are to my family. “Who are they?”

“Higher level demons, guards of the Infernal Kingdom.”

Kiarra moves around me, narrowing her eyes on me. But there's no anger in them, only warmth. “What do we do? Fight or?”

“We go with them.” Soren rubs a hand down his face. “We'll get answers quicker if we do.”

Axel narrows his eyes on the guards. “If anything happens ___”

“Yes, yes, you chop me up into little pieces and feed me to one of your beasts.” Soren rolls his eyes before turning to the guards. “Lead the way.”

The guards move as one, parting to make way while also keeping us within their formation. Jax and Luka move to each side of Kiarra, while Axel moves in front of her, Rion moving behind her.

Kiarra narrows her eyes on us, knowing exactly what we’re doing. I give her a look, telling her to let us have this one.

We’re all on edge right now and having a damn army near the one person we need in this damned world isn’t helping.

I glance over at the others and catch each of their eyes flicker over to Kiarra before returning to the guards closest to them.

I knew we could easily take them. Any of us, especially Kiarra, but putting her at risk when this can be done peacefully was acting foolish.

We quickly make our way down the long road, coming to an open area with high pitched red tents.

The guards part, with two staying to the front and another to the back of us. They usher us inside the largest tent in the middle. I stay close to Kiarra as we walk inside. There’s a large table in the middle of the tent with a half a dozen stationary guards along the walls.

Two men in similar black armor are hovering over the table, though they look more like the leaders than a soldier. One is older, with a gray streak through the side of his head. His dark eyes are shrewd as he looks at each of us. The other is about the same age as us, or at least looks it. His brown hair and matching eyes narrow on me.

Soren dips his head to the older man. “Ivor.”

Ivor steps around the table. “Soren. Things must be desperate if you’ve come back here.” He chuckles to himself, clearing his throat when no one laughs.

Soren ignores Ivor's joke, getting straight to business. "Orthis wasn't at the gate."

Ivor's expression grows distant until his eyes find Kiarra. They widen slightly but he covers it quickly, clearing his throat to focus back on Soren.

"We know, but it *was* locked."

"Where is he?" Soren pushes, a hint of anger in his tone.

I share a look with Rion.

Let's see how this plays out...

Rion nods his eyes at Kiarra and the guard closest to him.

Ivor ignores Soren's rise in temper. "Tell me how you made it past the gates?"

Soren clenches his fists by his side. "Tell us where Orthis is and we will."

The temperature in the room shifts as the guys around me narrow their eyes on Soren. I keep my smile to myself at their protectiveness.

Kiarra moves closer to me, gaining the attention of Ivor once more. The guys cover their smirks and chuckles as she tries to block me from Ivor's view.

Warmth floods my chest as I look down at her slight frame, someone half the size of the men around her and still she stares each one down without an ounce of fear.

I take her hand, pulling her beside me. She glares up at me, her eyes demanding I let her look after me. But if it's between me and her, I'll always pick her.

Besides, Soren isn't that stupid to hand me over. He's seen what we can do, and even with an army around us, we'd rip this place apart if we had to.

"As stubborn as always." Ivor moves over to Soren, slapping him on the back. Something Soren doesn't appreciate, but Ivor doesn't seem to notice or care.

“Orthis is in the Prison realm helping out with an incident.”

“Why would he—” Soren begins but Ivor cuts him off.

Ivor’s face ages in an instant. “The Lords of the Underworld are dead.”

CHAPTER 8



KIARRA

SOREN TURNS PALE. “How is that possible? They’re immortal beings, touched with the essence of Erebus himself.”

Ivor shakes his head as if he still doesn’t believe it himself. “They were destroyed. When we found them, there was nothing but shells left of their existence. There was no essence left.”

Shells...

My head whips to Kai. He finds my eyes immediately, his own full of worry, as he nods his head, confirming my fears.

King. It has to be.

But that means he’s a lot stronger than we imagined. A lot stronger and gaining more power by the minute.

Soren takes a staggering step back, shaking his head. “Destroyed? By what? There’s nothing in any of the realms that could—”

“There *was* nothing in the realms.” Ivor sighs. “But a powerful being appeared from nowhere and shattered that illusion. He bypassed our defenses and unleashed the old demons from their prisons. Once they were out, they began wreaking havoc between each realm. Orthis is still in the Prison realm as we speak, trying to get as many of the old ones back to their prisons while attempting to restore some semblance of balance.”

“He?” Soren asks.

Ivor nods. “The being has taken the form of a male.” Soren glances over at me, his eyes telling me he’s come to the same conclusion as me and Kai.

Jax levels his hand around his height. “He wouldn’t happen to be this tall with dark hair and creepy eyes?”

Ivor’s eyes narrow in suspicion, choosing his words more selectively. “You’ve met him?”

“Unfortunately,” Axel mutters.

An understatement of the century. “It’s the reason we’re here. To stop him.”

Jax points around the room, not bothered by the glares from each soldier. “So, if you could point us in the direction, you last saw him. We’ll be on our way.”

Ivor’s suspicions don’t let up, instead growing as he shares a look with his men. “How do you know this being?”

Luka sighs, his frustration growing at the time we’re wasting. “It’s a long story, but we don’t have a lot of time—”

A loud alarm rings out around us, cutting Luka off. The room grows quiet, turning tense as Ivor’s guards burst into the room.

“Sir, it’s another attack. This time it’s coming from the east side. We need to go now.” Ivor nods, stepping into his general role.

Getting up, he moves toward them but stops and turns to us. “Take them to—”

“I can vouch for them,” Soren tells him, giving him a firm look. “They’re not here to cause you trouble.” He smiles, a sliver of warmth in his eyes. “That’s my job.”

They stare each other down, doing some form of communication between each other before Ivor relents.

“Fine, if I can trust them, then tell me how you all made it past the gate?”

Soren looks at Kai as if asking for permission. My respect for him kicks up a notch just as Kai nods.

Soren turns back to Ivor. “Kai is also a descendant of Cerberus. A direct one.” Soren gives him a look as if to say, yes, I’m shocked too.

Ivor’s eyes grow wide before he frowns. “We weren’t told of any other descendants.”

Soren crosses his arms. “It seems Cerberus’ lineage had more fun on earth than we knew about.”

Ivor shakes his head in disbelief before exhaustion takes over his face. He looks at Kai before nodding to himself. “That might come to aid us.”

Ivor looks at us all. “Can you fight?”

“Yes,” Soren answers for us. “They destroyed the horde of demons at the gate without breaking a sweat and took on realm demons as if they were flies.”

Ivor’s eyes widen, a look of complete shock slashed across his face. He shakes his head again, looking at each one of his, his gaze landing on me. After a second, I catch the slight flare of his eyes before he whips his head to Soren, his eyes asking him a question. Ivor nods to himself before a small smile releases a slight bit of tension from his face.

The demon guards grow restless, inching forward. “Sir?”

“Yes, yes.” Ivor waves them away before turning back to us. “We’re under attack. Again. Old ones from the prison keep passing into our realm, while hordes are attacking daily and growing by the hour. Come with us and show us what you can do, and we’ll help you any way we can.”

Ivor leaves without a backward glance. He must assume we’ll choose his option, but from the looks that each of the guys is giving me, they’re not too set on it.

They aim their glare at Soren. He raises his hands and takes a step back. “I’ll let you have a moment alone.” He quickly leaves, but the tension in the room stays.

It takes seconds before Axel blows up in anger. “We didn’t come here to fight their battles.”

Kai sighs. “What other choice do we have? It’s either help them or—”

“Or find King ourselves?” Axel says, as if it’s the obvious answer. But even I know that will not be as easy as it sounds. King has been three steps ahead of us this whole time. While we were fighting to survive each day, he’s been working on some larger plan that he set in motion years ago.

Kai releases some alpha power, glaring at Axel to stand down, the others flinch at the power behind it, whereas I’m brought back to when he used it on me with just him and Rion. I immediately get overheated and turned on. I shift my thigh, trying to get it under control, but my body just doesn’t want to listen.

The guys freeze, all turning to me with heat in their eyes.

“Kiarra?” Kai’s eyes darken as he looks at me.

Stupid shifter sense. “It’s not my fault. You’re the one who used your alpha powers.”

Kai smirks, amused at my temper. “To get everyone to calm down.”

I clear my throat, looking everywhere but them and their savage smirks. “Well... it obviously has the opposite effect on me, so maybe try something else next time.”

Jax steps closer, making me look up at him. “Nah, just means we’ve got more to work with.”

What the hell is he talking about? He must see the confused look on my face as he dips down. “Kai’s not the only Alpha here, baby.”

Oh. Fuck.

Jax’s chuckle is echoed by the others as they see me finally catching on. “We’re definitely trying that out when we get the chance.”

“We’re in Hell.”

“That’s not going to stop me, babe. The world is already burning around us. Why not have a little fun while it goes up

in flames?” One glance at the others, and I can see they all feel the same.

I shake my head to myself. “You’re all crazy,” I mutter.

I’m not embarrassed, knowing my body craves each of them, each of their touches and kisses. But right now, we need to focus.

If anything, it breaks the tension that was in the room a moment ago. Even if it does still leave my body overheated.

Rion is the first to speak up, taking over where Kai left off. Kai’s eyes still burning right through me, making me shiver.

“King has changed the setup down here. Even Soren can’t lead us directly to him. Our best option is to gain their favor and then let them help us. If we don’t help them now, their battles will become our battles, and then we’ll have a war none of us want to fight.”

Axel clenches his jaw but keeps his mouth shut. He grabs my top, pulling me backward into him and wrapping his arms around me. Jax narrows his eyes on him but stays where he is. The rest just look at him, waiting for some type of answer.

“You already know how I feel, but if you want me to stay quiet, I’m holding on to my mate to distract me from your shitty decision- making.”

“Who said I agree to this?” I tell him while leaning further back into him. His scent easing every tense nerve in my body.

His head dips to the side of my neck. I feel the hint of a smile at the side of my face. “We both know you’ll take *anything* I give you.”

I freeze, my body going taunt before quickly making a move forward and away from the dickwad and his assumptions. But the fucker’s grip tightens on me as he laughs. “Don’t even think about moving away from me now. Hell, or not, I’ll chase your ass down and give every fucking demon here a show and tell they won’t forget.”

“You’re a dick.”

“Yep, and we both know you love it.”

I keep my mouth shut, knowing he's right and from the way his chest vibrates behind me, he knows it too.

He makes my blood boil with how pissed off he makes me, but that heat always turns into something else. Something that makes me crave every heated look and touch. But no matter how much he pushes; I'd still give it back to him tenfold.

I elbow him in the side, reminding him who's really in charge here. It barely harms him with his stupid rock abs, instead making him laugh harder.

I sigh, trying to ignore the dick behind me. The dick with the even *larger* dick rubbing up against me and I try to focus on what we're supposed to be doing.

"Let's move this along," I tell them, hoping we can make some sort of decision before Ivor and his men decide to forget about their deal.

"Yes, let's. Our mate is horny as hell and is starting to get cranky." Axel's deep chuckle rings out around me. I aim for his kidney this time, hoping to do some damage, but the fucker dodges me laughing.

"Rion?"

"Yes, Siren?"

"Where're your swords? I'm gonna stab the fucker."

"If you want to poke me with something, you're picking the wrong mate. I'm not into knife play."

Jax raises his hand. That innocent look slashes across his face, making him look like a sinful angel. "I am."

He steps closer, his innocent look transforming into something sinfully wicked. "I'll play with all the sharp, spiky objects you want, and unlike this pussy, I'll fucking bleed for you."

Axel rolls his eyes. "I'd die for her, and she knows it."

"Nobody is dying," I grit out, my temper going from horny to pissed in seconds. The thought of anything happening to them like a slash through the heart.

“Kiarra’s right, nobody is dying. Not on my fucking watch. So, let’s move on from this... conversation.”

Jax chuckles at Kai’s reaction. “Too kinky for you, Alpha?”

A laugh falls from my lips, garnering everyone’s attention.

Jax smirks, his gaze shifting from Kai to me. “Something you’d like to share with the class, babe?”

Kai’s heated smile finds mine. “Nope.” If anyone was kinky as hell, it would be Kai. I could see him being into anything and everything. Once he has the control, that is.

Kai’s smile grows as if hearing my thoughts.

“Let’s get back on topic. Do we all agree?” Kai asks everyone but looks straight at Axel, waiting on his reply. Axel sighs, kissing the top of my head. “I still think this is a shitty idea, but I’ll follow you all to the end and then whatever comes after that.”

Kai’s eyes soften. “Let’s catch up with the others.”

We head out of the room, finding Soren still waiting for us.

“How much did you hear?”

“Enough to know you like pointy objects. I’ll make sure to let everyone else know it, too.”

Jax laughs. “I knew we’d eventually grow on you.”

Soren raises a brow. “Like fungus?”

We move around the edge of the tents until we come to a large black arched stone. The door similar to a portal but one full of dark shadows.

They swirl and slither like snakes coiling in and around it. Soren doesn’t stop, heading straight for it.

Kai catches my eye before looking around at everyone. “Stay together.” Luka grabs my hand just as we step through the cold portal and straight out into a war zone.

CHAPTER 9



HORDES OF DEMONS, unlike anything I've seen before, span out across the battlefield with six large demons spread out between them.

The destruction is on every surface of the battleground, the demons more vicious and powerful as they attack, leaving nothing but pieces behind. They tear into Ivor's men like they're nothing before moving on to the next.

The fight between Ivor's men and the hordes of demons makes Manhattan look like a fucking joke. But we're in their domain after all. It makes sense that they would be more powerful down here.

Axel's eyes widen. "What the—"

"Hell? Yeah, this is definitely not Kansas, Dorothy." Axel is still in shock at the scene in front of us that he doesn't even snark back at Jax.

"We thought Manhattan was bad, but that wasn't anything close to... *this*." Luka frowns at the chaos ahead of us.

"And this is what our world will look like if we don't stop King," Kai tells us.

"Worse." We all turn to look at Soren as he stares out at the battle, a somber look on his face. "This isn't even a patch on what your world will look like if we don't stop this soon."

Ivor appears out of nowhere, standing right next to Soren as if he's been there the whole time. He glances at all of us, a

glint of intrigue in his eyes before his demeanor quickly changes.

“The demons have disarmed the barriers and are working together to take down the next one. If they manage to get past it, they’ll rip through the other realms and head into yours. Do what you can but pull back if it gets too much.” Ivor gives us all a strange look before disappearing again.

“Kiarra—” Kai starts, but I cut him off, not wanting to hear his speech of, ‘let’s all protect Kiarra.’ I think I’ve proved myself over and over that I can not only take care of myself but them too.

“Don’t even think about trying to exclude me from this. I’m more than capable of fighting in this battle.”

Kai smiles softly. “I was going to say, be careful... please.”

“Oh... you too. All of you. Don’t even think about trying something stupid.” I narrow my eyes on Jax and then Axel, knowing the two of them are the most likely to try something reckless. “And if any of you get hurt, the horde of demons will be the least of your worries.”

“Stop fucking flirting with us, babe. I can’t go out and fight with a fucking hard on.” Jax sighs loudly, as if he’s really struggling.

“I have to agree with the idiot. Your vicious streak is turning me on, and I need to go fight.” Axel adjusts himself, proving just how much my little speech is affecting him.

“You’re both crazy.”

“And you love it. Watch my back, babe.” Jax winks before running into a shift.

“Nobody wants to watch your furry ass,” Axel tells him, but he’s already heading straight for the battle. Luka looks on, his face drowning in worry for his twin.

“Go, ” I tell him, but he hesitates, not wanting to leave my side.

I glance around at the guys, but they let me take the lead on this. “How about another game? First one to kill most of the demons gets whatever they want?”

Luka smiles. It turns soft as he reads right through my reason for playing this game. “Whatever they want?”

I nod. “Whatever your heart desires.”

He chuckles, quickly coming over to me and wrapping me in a hug. “Be careful.” He turns without a backward glance, his entire body tense as he shifts into his shadow wolf.

Axel nods before following them, shifting into his dragon as flames burn a path for Jax and Luka to head straight into the middle of it all.

Kai steps up to me, his hand cupping my cheek and placing a kiss on my forehead. “Give us a head start?” He turns, running into a shift, his huge three-headed hound emerging and bulldozing his way through the hordes of demons.

That little...

Rion chuckles, seeing my expression before following Kai, jumping straight into the fight. Using hand-to-hand combat, he slices through the demons as he makes a move toward one of the larger old ones.

I stay back a moment, watching all my mates look for the best angle to attack from that will weaken them the most.

I spot Jax and Luka taking on a large group of demons, holding their own easily. Axel and Kai are holding their own, attacking the larger demons while using a tag team formation similar to back in Manhattan.

I find Rion just as he shifts into his basilisk. It looks like it's doubled in size as it coils its enormous body around one of the large demons, squeezing it to death. It bursts into a mass of flames and ashes before Rion uncoils and moves over to the next one.

That's enough of a head start. I smile to myself as I let my power rise up and take over. I move toward the hordes,

releasing my power outward as I do.

Once I step into the chaos, the power ripples out of me in waves, turning the closest demons to ash as I walk through them.

None of them get close enough to touch me, let alone hurt me. Some of Ivor's guards spot me, their eyes widening as I move past them, but I ignore them, focusing on the demons closest to me and my mates.

Kai, Rion, and Axel have four of the six demons already gone by the time I make it to the middle of the battleground, with them both heading on to the last two. Jax and Luka are ripping through the horde, making up for missing out on the larger demons and taking out as many of them as possible.

More smaller demons appear trying to join the rest of the horde, but they won't get that chance if I have anything to do with it.

It was time to end this.

I pull up my power from what feels like the very core of my soul and push it out toward every demon around me, including the larger ones Rion and Kai are attacking.

Within seconds they begin to burn, shrieking into a mass of black flames before turning to ash.

The battlefield turns quiet as all of Ivor's men look from me to my mates. They give me a wide berth as I move toward my mates.

They've already shifted back and meet me halfway, each wearing a smile. Kai is in front of them, coming up to me first. "You knew you were going to win that bet."

I smile, looking at Luka. "Maybe."

"So, what does the winner want?" Luka asks, a small, knowing smile on his face.

I'm about to answer when Ivor comes up behind us. "Well. That was—"

"Impressive?" Jax asks with a raised brow.

Ivor nods his head. “She was right. But let’s see how far your power truly goes.”

Red flags go off upon hearing his words. “*Who* was right?”

“What are you—” Kai reaches out to him just as everything slows down to a stop. The world shifts on its axis, dissolving into darkness before swallowing us whole.

* * *

I WAKE WITH A START, my dreams endlessly dark, begging for some light to filter through. When the light finally filters around me, it reveals a plain room with no windows or door.

My racing heart starts to slow when I see each of my mates around me, the rise and fall of their chests telling me they’re all alive and okay, for now.

Shaking the remaining slumber from whatever spell Ivor used, I sit up and glance around getting a better view of the room.

The walls are white and gold. There’s a small two-seater gray sofa with a black table across from me. There’s a wooden bed beneath me, large enough to fit all six of us, but Jax and Axel lie on the floor as if placed there. Luka and Kai on each side of me, with Rion by my feet.

Kai is the second to wake, while the others slowly stir around us.

“What the—” Kai’s eyes widen before he finds mine. He releases a harsh breath before glancing at each of his brothers. His panic turning to rage as it slowly builds behind his eyes.

“Where’s Soren?” Kai grits out looking around the room.

“He probably double-crossed us, just like Ivor. Dick.” Jax rubs his eyes and gets up to come over to the bed beside me.

Axel scoffs. “I fucking told you we couldn’t trust him.”

Rion rubs a hand down his face, his eyes finding mine. “Let’s just focus on getting out of here.”

“There’s no door or windows.”

Luka’s eyes trail over me before he stands up stretching his body. “Maybe it’s some sort of illusion or spell. They brought us in here. There has to be a way out.”

We all get up and start searching for a hidden door or anything at this point.

After a couple of minutes with no luck, Kai looks to the others. “Luka? Rion? Can either of you sense any build-up of energy?”

Luka shakes his head but stops, looking down at his wrist. “What’s this?”

A black bracelet with a line of beads is on it. Rion has the same one. I glance down at my wrist and find the same bracelet on me, too.

“We all have them.” I try to pull mine off, but it won’t budge. “It won’t come off.”

They all start pulling at their own and short from ripping their hands off, it doesn’t budge.

Kai frowns down at his. “Neither will mine.”

“Shit. Same here.” Jax yanks at his with no luck. I inspect mine, noticing the beads looking completely dull with not even a sliver of light to them.

“Guys?”

“Why would he put us in a room with no window or door and put some strange ass bracelet on us? I mean... it’s not even my style.” Jax glares at the thing as if it insults him by existing.

Kai ignores Jax’s humor. “It has to be spelled.”

Axel scoffs. “He must know by now that we can just—”

“GUYS!”

We all turn to Luka and the panicked look on his face. “I can’t shift.”

The guy's eyes turn from pissed to panicked in seconds. "Fuck."

I reach down inside but feel... empty. Like someone has flipped a switch and made my powers disappear.

Panic chokes me, twisting knots in my stomach as I realize how vulnerable we all are now. "My powers don't work either."

"Damn it." Axel slams his fist down on to the black table, breaking it in two. "I'm going to rip Soren and Ivor apart when I see them. They're going to wish they never met us."

"Get in line." Jax growls, his focus on the bracelet as he continues to try to rip it off.

"How is this possible? How can they just block us from using our abilities?" So much for being super powerful. A shit lot that's done when all it took was a snap of Ivor's fingers, and here we are. Imprisoned in some room with no way out.

Rion sighs. "It could be the bracelets or the room itself."

Kai folds his arms. "Let's think. What did Ivor say before he knocked us out?"

I rummage through my brain for when I last saw him. His face flashes before me, a smile across his lips as he mentioned our powers.

She was right.

That's what he said. Or maybe I misheard him? Maybe he meant he?

"He said something about him seeing how far our powers really go. Maybe he wants to test them?" I glance up at the guys as they steadily grow angrier.

"They could've just fucking asked," Jax growls, narrowing his eyes around the room. "I would've given them a personal demonstration."

They'd deserve it, too.

The wall to our left begins to shimmer before disappearing, revealing a hall. We head over to it only to stop

before it, a translucent barrier shimmering in place.

“No one tou—”

Jax curses, shaking his hand as he pulls it away from the barrier. “That fucking stings.”

“I wouldn’t try it again if I were you. It gets stronger each time you try.” A guard wearing Ivor’s crest reveals himself.

“Who are you?”

His dark eyes narrow on me. “Lucian, second in command of the Infernal army.”

“Like we give a shit. Let us out of here now.”

Lucian ignores Jax. “I’m afraid that will not be possible. You’ve caught the attention of one of the Guardians. They want to see just how powerful you really are.”

“Release us and we’ll fucking give you a first-hand demonstration,” Axel growls.

He ignores him, glancing down at our wrists. “Each of you has a bracelet that you will need to... charge.”

Charge? I glance down at the black bracelet and dull beads. How are we supposed to do that?

Axel voices my thoughts. “And how the fuck are we supposed to charge them?”

“In order to move onto the next trial, you’re going to need to charge those pulling true emotions from within each of you until they’re full.”

“I’m feeling some pretty strong emotions right now, and nothing is happening.” Axel grits out.

Lucian chuckles, looking at Axel like he’s an idiot. “Getting pissed off isn’t a strong enough emotion. You may want to kill me, but unless you actually perform the act and fully commit to it, those beads will remain empty.”

Axel stalks closer to the barrier. “Come in here and we’ll see how long these beads stay empty.”

Lucian smirks. “I’m afraid I can’t help you with this. You’re going to have to figure out another less violent way to gain power.”

Lucian glances at me before looking at the others. “You’re going to need it for the next trial... That is, if you survive this one.”

Jax rushes forward, forgetting about the barrier as he heads straight for Lucian. Before we have time to stop him, he’s thrown backward cursing as he slams into the side of the bed.

“I’d hurry if I were you. Time is ticking and once the room disappears, so does anything that’s in it.” Lucian chuckles as he walks away.

“Let the games begin.”

CHAPTER 10



AS SOON AS Lucian is out of sight, the barrier shimmers and the white and gold wall reappears. Luka and I move over to Jax, helping him up.

He looks to me with a pout. “I think I have a boo boo. Kiss it better?” That innocent look he has nailed down is back, making me chuckle.

“And where exactly is this so-called injury?” I ask, knowing damn well whatever comes out of his mouth will be anything but innocent.

Jax’s smirk turns savage. “Well, my dick—”

Luka slaps him upside his head before yanking him up.

“Hey!” Jax narrows his eyes on his brother.

Luka glares at him as he grabs my hand, pulling me over to the others. Jax follows, still pouting.

Kai shakes his head, a small tilt to his lips as he watches us. “We need a plan, and fast.”

I glance over at the wall that was non-existent minutes ago. There has to be a way to control it from the inside. “Let’s take another look around the room. Maybe there’s some sort of escape or backdoor.”

With not much room in the first place, we turn, and each takes a spot to search. It takes us less than a few minutes before we all come up empty.

“Keep looking. There has to be something here.” Kai frowns as he tries to punch the wall. The hard thump causes no damage in the slightest, sending us immediately back to the drawing board.

I’m about to move to another spot when I notice a change in the gold pattern on the wall. It no longer meets up, and the space between the chair and the wall is now closer.

“Is it just me, or is the room getting smaller?”

Kai comes over to me, placing a hand on each side of my face. “Just breathe. We’ll get out here. I promise.”

I’d chuckle if I wasn’t still fixated on the spot in the wall like I’m trying to win a staring contest.

There. The gold pattern shimmers as it draws closer together, becoming more asymmetrical.

I look up at Kai as he frowns down at me, his eyes soft with a glint of worry. I catch the others peeking over, all checking in on me. It warms something inside my chest, spreading out to each limb and lighting the heavy weight that I once carried alone.

Knowing I’m not alone anymore isn’t the same as truly feeling it.

They all think I’m having a panic attack and even though this is a fucked-up situation, having each of them around me eases something inside me, lessening the panic.

Kai’s grip tightens on me the longer I stare up at his green eyes. He’s about to pull me into him when I take his hand, giving him a soft smile.

“No, I mean, I think the actual room is getting smaller.” I point to the chair. “That wasn’t that close to the wall, and the gold pattern on the walls is now uneven on that side.”

“She’s right.” Luka moves over to the wall to get a closer look. “It’s moved inwards.”

“When Lucian said the room would disappear, he didn’t actually mean...” Jax chuckles, but the sliver of panic in his eyes is evident.

Axel rubs a hand over his face, narrowing his eyes on the wall. “Fuck. Okay, let’s think.”

“Lucian said strong emotion would charge these.” Rion lifts his bracelet and looks at it. “If we’re able to charge them, we should be able to get access to our powers and get out of here before the room... disappears.”

“Yeah, with us in it,” Jax grumbles.

Luka gives him a sharp look. Jax glances at me, an apology on his face.

I shake my head, telling him it’s fine. We’re all in a messed-up situation right now. We’re bound to feel a little hopeless. Once we were together, I was good.

Kai looks at the others. “What if we fight one another?”

Rion’s eyes grow distant as he thinks it over. “But will that manifest a true emotion?”

Axel shakes his head. “That dick, Lucian, said nothing short of killing him would do it and as much as some of you annoy the hell out of me most days, I don’t want to fucking kill any of you.”

“Like you could.” Jax scoffs, but there is a soft look in his eyes that wasn’t there a moment ago.

Axel shoves him hard, earning a glare from him. Jax shrugs. “What have we got to lose by messing around? Let’s just give it a go and see if we can charge the bracelets.”

They all agree with Kai, grouping Rion with Luka and Jax with Axel.

“Who will I team up with?” They all turn to look at me like I’ve lost my damn mind.

“No one is touching you,” Kai growls as Jax rolls his eyes at him.

“No one would fucking try.”

Luka nods, agreeing with his brother. “I’d rather break off my own arm and kill myself with it than lay a finger on you.”

“Even I agree with them. You’re sitting this one out, Siren.” Rion places a kiss on my head before heading over to one side of the room with Luka.

I glare at them all, making them chuckle. But I relent, letting them have this one. I know even with my basic skills; I can’t take them. At least not without my powers.

Axel and Jax both wear matching savage smiles as they size each other up, moving over to the other side of the room. Jax slightly crouches as he eyes up Axel with murderous glee. “Don’t hold back, brother.”

Axel’s smirk grows as he slightly dips his head. “Ditto.”

Kai moves to stand in front of me as we stand in the middle of them, watching both. I raise a brow, giving him a look. “Those two like to make a mess. I’m sure you don’t want to become part of it.”

I roll my eyes at him, doubting either of them would accidentally hurt me, but I knew my answer would fall on deaf ears. Especially with him in overprotective alpha mode.

The room shakes at the force of the slam as Axel and Jax collide. Kai gives me a look as if to say, ‘I told you so’.

I shake my head and glance over at Rion and Luka, their moves more calculated. Rion moves in silently to attack Luka’s left, but Luka swiftly moves out of his way, avoiding it. Rion advances immediately, striking him from the right side, with Luka missing it by inches.

They go back and forth attacking and advancing until both groups are sweating. I watch the room grow another couple of inches smaller just as Axel gets the upper hand.

While Jax is distracted glancing over at me, Axel lands a hard punch to his face. I wince at the impact as Jax goes down. I go to move to him when I hear a low chuckle as he spits out blood. “Fucker.”

Jax frowns as he feels his lip. “It’s healing. Guess they didn’t block everything.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. At least there’s that.

Axel rolls his shoulders back, a smile on his face as he helps Jax up. They come over to us to watch Rion and Luka.

Jax frowns. “I thought my wolf was gone, but as soon as I started fighting, I could feel him. It’s like he’s... caged. Pissed, but caged.”

“Same.” Axel nods as he watches Rion’s movements with interest, his strikes against Luka now coming from every angle.

Seconds later, Rion takes Luka down. He catches him from behind, holding him in a chokehold before bringing him to the brink of unconsciousness. Just before he passes out, he releases him.

“Well? What’s the verdict?”

We move closer and take a look at the beads on the bracelet. Not even a shimmer of a glow is on any of them.

Jax scrubs a hand down his face. “Well, that was a colossal waste of time.”

“I wouldn’t say it was a complete waste of time.” Axel smirks at him. Jax punches him in the shoulder. “I’ll get you back, fucker.”

“Anytime.”

“Why didn’t they even light up a little?” Jax shakes his bracelet like it’s a fucking glow stick that’s broken.

“Because none of us truly wants to hurt the other,” Rion tells us.

“Any other ideas?” Axel asks, turning to kick the end of the bed and breaking it.

Kai shakes his head but stops, whipping his head to me. His eyes widen slightly as if he just realized something. Before I get the chance to ask him what it is, he moves closer to me with a roguish glint in his eyes.

“Do you trust me?”

I nod. “Of course.”

He leans down and presses his soft lips to mine, trailing his tongue along the seam of my lip. I melt into him, getting lost in his kiss.

I swallow his low groan as I trail my hands up his chest to around his neck. It's not until one of the guys clears their throat, do I realize where we are.

Kai pulls back, his eyes dark as they stare back at me, unblinking.

“As fun as this is to watch, I'm guessing you had a reason to get us all turned on when the room is about to go poof?” I glance over at Axel, finding his fists clenched at his side, his eyes as dark as Kai's as he trails them down my body.

Kai smirks as he lifts his hand. A glint catching my eye. Looking closer, I find one of the small beads slightly glowing.

“What the—” Luka's eyes widen when he sees it.

Axel huffs, rolling his eyes. “Guess the dick was right.”

“So, if fighting each other won't work...” Jax doesn't finish his sentence as he stares at me, the atmosphere in the room swiftly changing.

Glancing around, I find five hungry dark gazes staring right back at me.

CHAPTER 11



JAX LAUGHS, breaking the tension. “Anyone else have déjà vu?”

Axel frowns at Jax, a confused look similar to my own on his face. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“In the Cardinal where we all met again and that purple fucking spelled aphrodisiac?” Jax’s smirk grows as he looks over at me. “Looks like it was fate after all.”

I shake my head, smiling at the cheesy romantic. Jax covers a lot of his darkness with humor but he’s always the first to try to cheer up the rest of us, to break the tension in the room, or help Axel get out of his head.

“Well... *I* for one am up for an orgy.” Jax smirks, wiggling his eyebrows at me.

Luka’s hand whips out, but before he gets the chance to hit him, Jax moves out of the way, his smirk firmly in place.

Luka sighs before glancing over at me, a frown on his face.

Kai takes my hand. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.”

They seem to take my silence as an answer, all frowning trying to think of something else, but the idea of having all of them together, turns me on, making me instantly wet, while turning my brain to mush.

Kai glances around the room. “We can try to figure something else out.”

I roll my eyes at the five idiots in front of me. “You’re my mates. I love you all. I have no problem with any or all of you watching or joining in.”

“Fuck.” Axel breathes, his eyes dark as he stares right at me.

“I’m all for watching for now. Just make it good.” Jax winks before moving to the one-seater. He leans back, giving me a wicked smirk.

“So how do we...” I glance around at them when Kai steps in front of me, blocking my view of the others.

“We’re just going to do what comes naturally. It’s just us. Don’t worry about anything else.”

I give him a soft smile. “I’m not worried.”

“Good.” Kai leans in, his lips brushing against mine softly as he wraps his arms around me pulling me closer. The world around me slips away as Kai deepens the kiss and we get lost in one another.

Kai molds his body to mine, his length hardens against my stomach making me moan. He drags his lips away from mine as he helps me take off my top.

I bend down, pushing my jeans off, and kicking them to the side when I hear groans and curses around the room.

“Look what you do to us.” Kai leans in, placing a kiss on the back of my neck as I glance around at the others. All of their dark eyes are on me, each one of them leaving a trail of heat across my body.

Kai’s lips brush under my ear. “Lie down, beautiful.”

I turn and meet his lips, a soft brush that lingers as I sit down on the bed. I slide back while Kai moves forward until he’s between my legs, hovering over my body.

Leaning down, his lips brush against mine, soft, hot and teasing. His tongue tracing the seam of my bottom lip, making me moan.

I reach around his neck to pull him closer and deepen the kiss when he pulls back, placing open kisses across my jaw and down my neck to my chest.

Gripping my legs, he spreads them wider, placing a kiss on my inner thigh. He leans down and places a kiss on my core before sliding his tongue along it. I moan as he drags it up and down my core as sounds around me disappear and small warm waves of pleasure start to build and grow inside me.

He slides a finger inside me while his tongue teases my clit, each brush of his tongue sending a spark of pleasure that builds and spreads outward to every nerve making me lightheaded.

I arch into his mouth and absorb the slow-building heat as it continues to slide across my body.

The bed shifts beside me as a musky scent envelops me. Soft lips tease along my neck making me shiver. I turn to smoldering eyes so dark and alluring, they instantly draw me in.

“Siren.” Rion cups my cheek before leaning down to take my lips. His lips are soft as they caress mine, his scent and touch making my body shudder in desire.

I slide my hands around Rion’s neck, moaning into his lips as I arch up into Kai’s mouth and fingers.

Rion slides a hand down to my breast, slightly squeezing it as his lips work down my neck and chest to my breast.

Kai’s fingers thrust inside me, his pace quickening as his tongue continues to tease my clit and work me up. Along with Rion’s soft kisses and touch, it all becomes too much and my body surrenders to them. I grip onto Rion as the delicious pressure releases, spreading in warm tingling waves that radiate out across my entire body to the tips of my fingers and toes.

Before I get the chance to fully come down from my high and catch my breath, I feel Kai and Rion switch places until Kai is smiling down at me.

“Beautiful... Every inch of you.” Kai leans down to kiss me, taking my breath away and making the sizzling heat linger and burn.

Kai drags his lips away as Rion slides up my body, every inch of him bare and hard against me. He drops soft kisses along the way before his hard cock lines up at my core.

Rion gives me a look, opening his mouth to say something when I cut him off.

“We need to be quick?” I raise a brow, reminding him we’ve already been here. He chuckles, the low husky sound sliding down my back as he leans down to kiss me.

As soon as his lips touch mine, he slides into me making me gasp at the feel of him. I wrap my legs around him as he starts moving, thrusting into me, his pace slowly growing faster.

It doesn’t take me long to get worked up again and before I know it, I’m gasping and moaning for more.

As if reading my mind, Rion leans up, placing his hands on each side of me, and drives into me. The angle is so much deeper, that he hits that delicious spot making my eyes roll to the back of my head.

“Yes.” My voice comes out in soft, raspy moans as I arch up into him, meeting him thrust for thrust.

The aching tension builds as each thrust grows more frantic, more wild and reckless. I’m lost in his scent, and the velvet feel of his cock as it slides into me over and over when he rolls and grinds into me and up against my clit.

It’s all it takes to push me over as my body shudders, and my core clenches around him as I come.

One last thrust and he spills into me, his breath ragged as it slides across my cheek. He pulls back looking down at me, his eyes filled with a soft warmth. It settles inside me, spreading throughout my chest.

“I love you, Siren.” He bends down and brushes his lips against mine before pulling back.

I smile, reaching up to cup his cheek. “I love you too.”

He moves and I turn, my eyes widening at how much closer the wall is. “The room...”

Rion freezes as he stands, his eyes moving to Kai before he glances back down at me, shifting his expression to a determined look. “I won’t let anything happen to you. None of us will.”

But it’s not just me, I’m worried about. The guys shift around me, mumbling as the pleasure in my body slowly turns to panic, wondering if we still have time. Maybe we should try something else... But what?

I’m frowning, staring at the wall trying to think of something, when a calming scent that reminds me of warm nights and silent chaos surrounds me, seeping into my chest and easing my tense muscles.

“We still have time. Don’t think about it.”

I turn to find Luka smiling at me. “Do you still want to continue? We can try something else...”

But the reality of it is, we have nothing else. Time is running out and from the glow on my wrist, I know this is working.

And it’s not as if I’m not enjoying myself. If it wasn’t for the room closing in around us, I’d completely lose myself to each one of them, and not think twice about time as it passed us by.

Pushing my worries to the back of my mind for now, I answer Luka by sitting up and pulling his lips to mine.

His throaty moan slides down my back, making me shiver.

“Are you sure?”

I nod my head, as I help him slide down his trousers, revealing his thick cock. I wet my lips reaching for him, when he pulls my body onto his lap, his hands roaming my body. He grinds up into me, the length of his cock, sliding against my core making me moan.

Every nerve in my body slowly becomes oversensitive, every touch, every brush, pushing that slow build of pleasure into overdrive.

He slides his hands down to the curve of my ass and squeezes it while grinding into me.

Jax's woodsy scent hits me as Luka continues to work me up until I can't see straight.

Jax places a kiss on the back of my neck. I tilt my head to the side and find his eyes blown wide with lust.

“Hey, baby. How about two for the price of one?”

Someone chokes behind us, making me smile. “Sounds like fun.”

Jax shares a wicked smirk with Luka before looking back at me. “Oh, it will be. Especially when I deflower that ass.”

Axel splutters. I turn glancing over at his wide eyes as he steps forward while Luka tries to reach around me to Jax.

I laugh and they freeze. “Better make it good then.”

Jax's grin grows. “That's my girl.”

“*Our*. Fucking. Girl,” Axel grits out.

Jax turns to Axel, sending him a wink. “Our girl, but *my* ass... got it.” He turns back to me, nodding his head, and ignoring Axel's rising temper.

Jax smirks, stepping back to strip. His hard abs are on display when Luka's hand brushes up my slide as he places slow, soft teasing kisses up my shoulder to my neck. I turn back to him when he pulls me forward, meeting my lips and lifting me up. I wrap my legs around him, my body moving on its own, grinding into Luka, making him grunt. He takes hold of my hips and lifts me higher, before sliding me down onto his hard cock.

I moan at the feel of him, the angle sending a shock wave of pleasure up through me. Luka's hot breath slides against my neck, his hands tightening on my hips as I roll into him.

“Ride me, Kiarra. Let go and take me with you.” Luka thrusts up into me. I gasp as I let it consume me, welcoming every ripple as it courses through me.

I start moving, sliding up and down onto him, meeting him thrust for thrust. Luka moans, picking up his pace before slowing down again, making me lose my damn mind. He does it again and again until my body is lost in a haze of pleasure. I soak it up until the tension is so built up, that I’m moaning and begging for release.

Luka’s eyes close as he tilts his head back. “Fuck, Kiarra, you feel so good.” His rough, husky voice drives me crazy, egging me on.

I widen my legs as he drives up into me, each heated thrust shooting through me before spreading out to my thighs and down to my toes.

“Fuck.”

I glance over and watch Axel reach a hand down to grip his cock, his dark eyes on my body as I slide up and down on Luka. His throaty grunts and groans as he watches us only add to the pleasure as it unfurls in my lower stomach.

Jax steps in front of him blocking my view of Axel with a cheeky smirk. “I’m much better to look at.” He winks at me as he moves to the bed. Just as he bends down, my eyes widen as I catch a look at the room... The smaller room.

Jax moves behind me, his cock at my ass, slightly distracting me from my moment of panic as he tilts my chin up to him. “Let’s play a little game. You notice anything but us and you’re out.”

He says as if his large cock rubbing against my ass isn’t enough of a distraction, but I nod and try to zone out everything but my guys.

Now was not the time to panic.

I focus back on Luka, my mouth opening with a gasp as the slow build grows, becoming a sea of pleasure that slides up and across my entire body.

“Luka,” I gasp, the sensations becoming overwhelming. Heat builds in my lower stomach, gathering before shooting straight to my core. I gasp as an all-consuming climax radiates through my body making me scream.

Luka groans as he spills into me, just as hands wrap around my waist from behind.

I’m panting slick with sweat as Luka slides out of me.

Jax tilts my head to the side. “Watching you come is my new favorite thing.” His hard cock rubs against my ass making me shiver and the heat builds once more.

Jax tilts my head back to Luka. “Look at him, Kiarra. Look what you do to us.”

I glance at Luka, his eyes glazed with carnal lust as he dips his head to meet my lips before trailing a path down my neck. I grip onto his shoulders as Jax widens my legs and tilts my ass up to him.

Jax leans forward, his breath whispering across my ear. “Just relax.” He slides his cock along my slick folds as Luka works his way down to my breast, his tongue swirling around my hard nipple making me moan.

Jax slides his cock back to my ass, his tip lined at the entrance. His body is tense as he pushes in painstakingly slowly, making me feel every inch of him as he stretches me.

I tense up at a slight bit of pain from the fullness of him.

Jax pauses, his whole body turning stiff as Luka shares a look with him.

“I’ve got you.” Luka slides his hand down to my core, his fingers circling the small bundle of nerves as he moves his lips back to mine.

My body relaxes, leaning into Luka’s kiss and the feel of his touch. When Jax moves, pushing into me, I whimper at the feel of him. The new sensation, intense and overwhelming but so fucking good.

Once he’s fully sheathed in me, his hands move up my hips, his lips sliding across the back of my neck. “Fuck baby,

you were made to take my cock.”

I moan pushing back into him and close my eyes. “Move... *please*.” I wanted to feel every inch of him as he fucked me.

Jax slowly slides out of me, leaving just the tip in, before pushing back into me. Luka takes up the same pace with his fingers, sliding them along my core.

They keep their agonizingly slow pace, working my body up until my legs start to shake, my body shuddering in anticipation.

I’m so close to the edge that when Luka slides his finger inside me, my body spasms around him, pushing me into a mind-numbing orgasm that expands to every part of my body.

I moan, the pleasure assaulting my body when I feel Luka slide his fingers out of me. He stares right at me as he brings them to his lips, sliding his tongue down them as he sucks them into his mouth.

Fuck.

Jax’s grip on my hips tighten as he starts guiding my movements, moving me faster as he starts to twitch and pulse inside me.

“Fuck,” Jax grunts as he thrusts into me one last time, groaning as he spills into me.

“Fucking perfect.” He places a kiss on my neck and shoulder before sliding out of me and dropping beside me with Luka on my other side.

I’m still on my knees, my whole body trembling from the aftermath when I glance around, my stomach dropping at how small the room has got.

Kai steps in front of me. “Don’t look at it. Just focus on us.”

“But Kai—”

“We’re going to be fine.”

I glance down at my beads, finding them full. I try to reach down and pull up my powers, but they're still blocked.

I frown looking back at Kai. "They don't work."

He shares a look with Rion before caressing my cheek. "We'll figure it out."

"But—"

Kai raises a brow. "Trust us?"

I sigh, trying to relax. "Always."

Luka and Jax move off the bed while Axel moves to the middle of the bed, whipping off his top. "Then come over here and give me a kiss. I've had to sit back and watch these fuckers while trying to not blow a load in my pants like a fucking teenager."

I laugh and crawl toward him when he grabs me and lifts me up, placing me on his lap. He moans taking my lips as if he's starving and I'm all he needs to fill his craving.

He pulls back, licking his bottom lip. "This is going to be quick, but I promise you we'll make it good."

Kai moves behind me. I feel the smirk on his lips as he presses them to my neck. "Oh, it will definitely be good. I would *never* leave you unsatisfied, beautiful."

I lean back into Kai as Axel slides down his pants. He quickly pulls me back, lining up to my core and sliding into me. I gasp at the feel of him.

Kai disappears behind me, the rustle of clothes hits my ears just as Axel starts moving, thrusting up into me. Using his shoulders as leverage, I lean back and look down at us joined.

"You like that, don't you? You like my cock filling you up and making you mine."

I glance up at his dark hooded eyes and lean forward to kiss him, sucking and biting his lip, and moaning a yes.

Trailing my lips across his jaw, I lick and suck a path up to his ear. "Fuck me," I whisper.

Axel's hands spasm on my hips as he groans. But he doesn't move faster. Instead, the fucker slows down, making each thrust agonizingly slow.

I push back onto him needing more, needing him to let go and fuck me hard and fast. But instead, he chuckles, running a hand down to my throbbing pussy.

“Impatient, are we?”

“We need to be quick.” I pant.

Axel smirks at me shaking his head. “If you think I'm going to sacrifice your pleasure for whatever the fuck this is, then you're crazy. If this is our last minutes in this shit hole, I'm going to make you feel every second of it.”

Axel smirks at something behind him, but before I get the chance to see what it is, he slides a hand down to my core and circles the small bundle of nerves.

I moan and gasp at the sensation, my body still over-sensitive and heated.

While Axel is dragging out the next thrust, Kai slides up behind me, his hard cock rubbing against my ass.

Kai places a kiss just under my ear. “Let's have a little fun.”

Axel narrows his eyes on him as he continues to work my body into a frenzy.

I knew what Kai was doing. I knew he was trying to distract me, to get me out of my head. I felt it each time my guys moved closer as the room grew smaller, letting me know that we were running out of time.

But even though I was panicking on the inside, I didn't want to ruin this moment either. I didn't know how it was possible, but I felt the bond between us all grow stronger as we shared a piece of ourselves openly in front of the other.

It wasn't just about the sex. It was something deeper that felt more intense, and more powerful.

“What do you say?” Kai tilts my head to the side and takes my lips, making sure my only answer could be yes.

I moan my reply as he pulls away.

“Good girl.” Kai smirks at Axel before positioning us so I’m completely leaning against him, his cock pushed up against my ass. He places my arms around his neck as his hands run across my stomach and up my breasts making me shiver.

Axel curses as I grind and roll my hips onto his length.

Kai’s lips trail up my neck as he squeezes my breast. “Let’s make him be the first one to break.”

Axel gives Kai a savage smirk, always up for a challenge. But I had a feeling this was one he wasn’t going to win.

Using his arms, Kai takes most of my weight and lifts me slightly until it’s just the tip of Axel’s cock inside me. Knowing exactly where this is leading, I move my arms to Axel’s shoulders and look him straight in the eye before slamming down on him.

“Oh, fuck.”

I hear Jax’s whispered groan but stay focused on my little game. Kai lifts me back up before I slam back down onto Axel again. I keep doing it until my legs are trembling and my core is dripping.

Axel’s mouth drops open with a groan, his head tilting back as his eyes slide shut in ecstasy.

“Fuck... Fuck.”

I know he’s close when I feel him twitch inside me, so I slam onto him, rolling my hips as I grind into him. It’s enough to push him over as he spills into me groaning.

Kai chuckles, before placing a kiss on my shoulder. “Good girl.” His praise slides down my back to where his hard length still sits against my ass.

Axel shakes his head, smirking at us both while sliding out of me. He narrows his eyes on me, but there’s no malice in it,

just pure unadulterated lust with a dark promise of more.

“I’ll get you next time, princess.”

I give him a wicked smirk. “Looking forward to it.”

As soon as Axel gets up, Kai pushes me down into the bed and enters me in one swift thrust. I’m already dripping from Axel that when he fills me, I nearly come.

“Harder. Please, Kai.” I bite down on my lip, as he starts moving, driving into me, each thrust harder than the last. I moan as I fist the sheets, my mind and body completely focused on the building sensation as it overwhelms my body once more.

Just like I did to Axel, Kai grinds his hips up into me. It’s all it takes to push me over into an earth-shattering climax.

I scream as I come, my vision going dark for a moment, as a haze of pleasure assaults my body. Another deep thrust and Kai comes, spilling into me.

I fall sideways, breathless and ready for bed. My eyes start to close until someone groans. “Fuck. That was hot... Do it again.” I look up at Jax, and flinch at the wall behind him. There’s about a foot between it and him. The same for the entire room.

The rest of the guys are standing around the bed, the room too small to move anywhere else.

Jax adjusts himself as he stares at me. We literally just had an orgy and he’s hard again.

I raise a brow at him.

“What? It will never be enough when it comes to you. And you lying there completely naked, looking fuckable isn’t helping.”

I laugh when my eyes catch on the glow from my beads, each one of them full. Moving my eyes to the others, I see theirs are glowing just as bright.

“What now?” I ask, hoping someone will have an idea.

Kai sits up throwing on his trousers while sharing a worried look with Rion. I'm about to ask him about it when Jax starts rubbing his chest frowning.

“Do you feel that?”

Kai looks at Jax. “Feel what?”

Jax cringes, shaking his head. “Ignore me, it's probably indigestion.”

I look around at the rest of the guys, all wearing frowns as they reach up and touch their chests. I focus on the spot inside me and that's when I feel it, too.

A warmth that spreads outward to every inch of my body, before seeping deep inside me, as if settling inside my soul.

Glancing back at the guys and their confused expressions makes me believe that maybe they feel it too.

I open my mouth to ask them when a beam of light flashes through the small room, blinding us all just as the room falls away.

CHAPTER 12



LIGHT FLICKERS behind my eyes as I open them to find myself in a cave with thick metal bars glinting back at me. Still feeling the aftereffects of our group... *activities*, I glance down and find myself fully clothed.

One less thing I have to worry about.

“Kiarra?”

Whipping around, I find Luka heading straight for me. He wraps me in a hug as I breathe a sense of relief at seeing him here. Pulling back, I glance over his shoulder, finding nothing but a dark empty cave, the light that filters in from the bars not reaching it.

“Where are the others?”

“I don’t know. The cave doesn’t go all the way back. There’s a wall. I woke up right beside it.” I glance over Luka’s shoulder to try to find the wall, but it’s so dark I can only see a few feet in, the shadows consuming the rest of it.

Luka glances around, his gaze finding the open bars. “Let’s figure out where we are and then we can go look for them.”

We move toward the bars, finding no lock or any way to open them. It’s as if they’ve grown from the cave wall itself.

Luka reaches out and touches them. Hissing, he quickly pulls his hand back.

“Are you okay?” I pull his hand to mine, seeing a line of raw skin starting to blister.

“I’m fine.”

It begins to heal within a couple of seconds, making me breathe a sigh of relief.

Luka inspects his hand as it heals, but my eye catches on a glint from his bracelet. I look closer and watch as one bead flickers and dims right before my eyes.

“Your bead, Luka. It looks like it’s... draining.”

Luka frowns, glancing between the metal bars and his hand.

“You think it might be from touching the bars?”

“There’s always a catch.” Luka scrubs a hand down his face.

Or another part of this twisted game Ivor came up with. “What was the point in charging them if we can’t use them?”

“They must have something else planned for us. Let’s just stay away from them for now until we figure out what’s going on.”

Something that looks like it’s going to take time, time we didn’t have.

My thoughts turn to Jazmyn and the others, hoping they’re okay. “Soren said time was different down here, do you think...”

“Don’t worry. It might feel like we’ve been here a while, but it’s probably only been a few minutes or a couple of days in our world. We have time.”

I nod my head, the knot in my stomach slightly untwisting.

“Are you... okay?” The hesitance in Luka’s voice makes me look up at him. He shuffles, looking unsure of himself. Clearing his throat, he looks down at his hand, now nearly fully healed. “You know... after what we... did?”

The tilt in my lips grows into a smile. “Out of all the things down here, that is definitely something I don’t want to forget. I’m also expecting a repeat performance when we’re not under constant threat of demons and assholes playing games.”

Luka chuckles, pulling me into him and kissing my forehead. "I'm sure none of your mates would refuse you."

"Including you?"

Luka groans into the curve of my neck. "If we didn't make it clear enough that we all enjoyed ourselves, then we didn't do a good enough job."

I laugh. "Repeat performance it is."

Luka shakes his head. We stay holding one another for a moment before reality slowly creeps in, the worry and fear soon following it.

Where could the rest of the boys be? Are they okay?

I reach down inside me, trying to sense them. I feel the connection, but it's completely dulled, as if lost in a fog.

Though feeling a connection at all is at least something.

I try my powers next, but just like in the room, they're gone, making me feel hollow.

Which makes no sense. Shouldn't I be able to access them now that the beads are charged? I sigh, pulling back from Luka. The worry also slashed across his face.

"We'll find them," he says as if reading my mind.

I nod, pushing the thought of my missing mates away to focus on the problem at hand. "Can you shift?"

Luka focuses, but after a moment, it's obvious he can't. His frown deepens. "What about you? Are your powers gone?"

I try again to pull something up, but it's like pulling from a dry well.

Shaking my head, I walk over to the bars and glance out at the large area. It looks like an arena. There's a wide-open circular space with nothing but sand and rock on the ground. I can't see what's above, the top part of the bars is covered in rock that juts out like a ledge blocking my view.

I go to move back when a shadow flickers in the corner of my eye. A moment later a guard with Ivor's red crest shows up outside the bars. "You both are up in ten. Be ready."

"Hey!" He leaves before we get the chance to ask what we need to be ready for.

Luka squares his shoulders, a hard set to his jaw as he stares out at the arena. "Whatever happens, we stick together."

I grab his hand, squeezing it. "Promise."

The bars slowly slide upward, releasing us from the cave prison. As soon as I walk past them, something inside me snaps like an elastic band, and my power rushes through me.

I rub my chest as the bond follows, feeling stronger than ever. I reach out for them, trying to get a fix on their location.

They feel close, really close. But it's also like they're blocked or behind a barrier of some kind.

I glance around the circular arena that stretches about forty feet wide, the wall enclosing us in made from small prisons similar to the one we just left. The wall stretches straight up until it meets a black net covering it, stopping anything from getting in or out.

I turn to Luka to ask if he can shift now too when I see him in distress. Shaking his head, his eyes are squeezed tight with his fists balled at his side.

I move over to him. "Luka? What's wrong?"

"It's my shadow wolf. He feels trapped when we can't shift. He wants out."

My worry for Luka and his wolf gets put on hold when the ground beneath us rumbles, shaking the dust from it as a loud stomp sounds out from the other side of the arena, drawing my eyes to it.

"What the—"

An enormous beast similar to the old demon's steps into the arena, followed by four smaller human-like demons, two

on each side. Luka reaches out, pulling me behind him, his eyes flickering from gold to dark green and back again.

Before I have time to figure out what's happening, the two smaller demons make a run straight for us.

I don't get a chance to move before Luka steps forward, shifting into his shadow wolf, meeting them halfway.

I keep an eye on the larger demon beast behind them as it watches Luka viciously rip through two of the demons in seconds. He leaves nothing but scraps of them behind before his focus shifts to the other two heading right for him.

I pull my powers up, the energy right under my skin ready and waiting for me to use it and push it toward the last two smaller creatures as they try to catch Luka's wolf off-guard. They burst into a mass of flames, turning to ashes, and fall to the ground.

The large beast shrieks, the sound cutting through my skull and making the world around me tilt and spin. I'm still trying to get my balance when it slams its fist down in front of it, making the ground rumble once more.

But with the shaky rumble comes a large crack that splits the ground open, heading straight for Luka.

Instincts take over and my powers snap out, wrapping around his wolf, yanking him out of the way.

The large crack grows wider, cutting through nearly a third of the arena. Luka's wolf moves beside me, sliding his body along mine in a *'thank you'* before maneuvering around the large hole.

I keep my eye on him as he quickly makes his way toward the large demon, its size at least three times that of Luka's wolf.

Just as Luka's wolf reaches the demon beast, flames light up his entire body.

With my power right at the surface, I let the energy slide over my skin, building to a peak before focusing it on the demon now eyeing up Luka.

As soon as the beast makes a move, I let go.

A mass of shadowy tendrils lashes out, coiling around the beast before dragging it upward and slamming it on to the ground.

Luka's wolf whips forward with his flames alight and rushes through it over and over, making the demon nearly encased in his flames.

A slice of panic spears through me as Luka slows down, his flames dimming.

The beads must be losing their energy.

Needing to end this, I tighten my shadows on the demon, and with Luka's flames already burning through it, I push more power into them. It speeds up the process, burning through the large demon, leaving nothing but embers behind.

The embers fall to the ground as everything around us turns silent.

Luka's wolf turns and shifts back before slowly making his way over to me. I catch a slight movement from the dark remains of the demon beast. My eyes stare unblinking at it, wondering if it was just my imagination or a breeze. Then I remember, there is none. The air is stagnant and stale.

Like thousands of crawling ants, the dark spot spreads backward, moving until it's covered the entire arena behind it.

Once it reaches the cave-like walls, it starts moving forward, straight for us.

"Luka." I take a step back and glance over my shoulder at the cave with the bars still up.

Fuck. I guess that's our only option right now.

The ground rumbles again, but this time it starts collapsing in on itself, with the crawling darkness still moving closer and closer to us.

Luka makes it back to me, and we make a run for it. We make it into the cave just as the ground we stood on seconds

ago collapses, completely disappearing into a black hole full of spiraling shadows.

The bars shoot down, locking us in once again, but I'd rather be locked in here than the alternate of what's outside.

I bend over trying to catch my breath, feeling completely drained. The energy that was flowing through me a moment ago, now completely dulled.

I look over at Luka, my eyes drawn to his bracelet, where nearly all of his beads are drained. But it's his clenched fist and stiff body that tells me something isn't right.

"Luka?"

Luka's head whips up, his eyes glowing as he growls. "Mate." He takes a step toward me, tilting his head.

My eyes widen when I realize it isn't Luka talking, but his shadow wolf.

"How?" I take a tentative step toward him and when he doesn't growl at me to stop, I continue until I'm in front of him.

The veins in his neck bulge as he clenches his jaw. "Mine."

His mouth moves again, but no words come out, as if he's finding it hard to speak.

"Are you okay? Is Luka..."

"Mate."

"Yes." I reach out and cup his jaw. He relaxes into it immediately.

"Protect, mate."

"Yes. You kept me safe. We're okay." For now, at least.

"Trapped."

I glance around the cave. "Yes, we're trapped, but hopefully not for long."

He shakes his head, thumping his chest. "Trapped."

"You feel trapped?"

He nods his head before stepping closer, placing his hand on my chest. “Need.”

Before I get the chance to figure out what he needs from me, he walks us backward until he has me pushed up against the wall. He takes both of my hands, raising them above me and holding them in place.

“Luka?”

His head dips down to my neck as he runs his nose up the length of it, making me shiver.

“Mate.” I feel the pull of air as he breathes me in, growling deep and low as he moves closer, lining every inch of his body with mine.

“Need... mate.” He grinds into me, and I feel his hard cock against my core making my body shudder with desire.

“It’s not exactly the time to—” He nips my lip, silencing me before trailing down my neck, placing wet open kisses that are rough and quick, and nothing like when Luka kisses me.

But I fucking love it. I love how open Luka’s wolf is with me.

His kisses turn desperate as he grips my wrists tighter.

“Are we really doing this? Here?”

He growls, as he releases me and steps back to rip his top off. He flings it to the side before he looks down and tries to claw off the button of my jeans.

I take my top and bra off and throw them to the side. Glancing up, I chuckle as he looks at his hands in disgust.

I guess he didn’t take into account the cave taking away his ability to even partially shift. He growls as his gaze moves from my jeans to his. I just get mine open when he starts to yank and pull at his own, nearly tearing them apart.

I pause to help him, doubting Luka would appreciate walking around the cave naked.

Not that *I’d* have a problem with it.

I help him push his jeans down over his hips, and his thick cock springs free, making my mouth water.

He glares at his clothes, kicking them away as I move back to mine. My jeans are around my hips when he yanks me forward and starts placing open kisses along my jaw.

He must've been paying attention to my time with Luka because last time he wasn't much of a kisser. And this time, he fucking aces it.

I moan as he sucks and nibbles his way across my body as if he wants to mark every inch of it. His hands follow leaving a trail of heat behind.

His kisses grow desperate as he starts trying to pull down my jeans. I break away from him to bend over and push them down my legs. They're around my ankles when I feel the air shift as Luka moves behind me.

I feel a little push as I fall forward, my knees and hands catching my fall.

What the—

I push up on my hands, my ankles still stuck together by my trousers, when Luka grips my thighs hard and yanks my ass up in the air.

“Luka?”

“*Mine*,” he growls, leaning over me.

“Yours,” I groan, as he pulls back and widens my knees with his legs, gripping my waist.

I feel a breath of air along my core before his tongue slides up and down it, making me shiver.

Fuck. My eyes roll to the back of my head as his tongue slides along my core right down to my clit, instantly making me feel swollen and needy. He growls and the vibration travels up through me, making me lose my mind.

I can't believe we're doing this here, but the longer he glides his tongue along my core, the less I start to worry about it.

A few more long-drawn-out swipes and I'm panting, begging to be filled when the fucker pulls back.

I feel the air hit me again just before he slams into me without warning, making me gasp. His grip tightens on my thighs as he thrusts into me over and over.

I push back into him, needing to feel every inch of him.

My legs start to shake as my whole-body shudders riding that fine edge. As if he can tell how close I am, he quickens his pace, driving into me without restraint.

I moan and pant, my core dripping wet as it gets closer and closer to my release.

He growls, pushing against me harder, grinding up into me and it's all it takes to push me over.

Just as I come, he yanks the rest of my jeans off and widens my legs. His grip tightens around my hips before his cock fills me to the hilt, drawing out my orgasm as I cry out in pleasure.

I don't get time to come down from my tingling high before he's pushing me further into the ground and driving into me with wild, savage strength. My hands claw at the rocks beneath my fingers as his punishing pace quickly pushes the slow-building heat into overdrive.

He slams into me, thrust after thrust until I can't see straight. Until all I can feel is him.

I push back onto him, needing to feel every inch of him as he moves with a wild and fierce possession. Sharp spasms shoot through me at each deep stroke, teasing and tormenting the need for release.

His thrusts grow harder, deeper making me moan. I reach out trying to grip onto something but there's nothing but bits of rock and ground beneath my hands.

"*Mate,*" he growls, thrusting into me over and over until I'm spiraling into another shattering climax.

I scream as I come apart, my core clamping around him, drawing out every second of pleasure. But he doesn't let up or

stop his punishing pace. Tingles slide across my shoulders and down my spine, prolonging my orgasm and drawing out another moan from my lips.

“Mine,” he snarls, as he presses into me and leans over to bite my neck. The minute his teeth break my skin, the sizzling orgasm that was easing off, comes alive and shoots through me once again. I scream out as my body comes apart.

He surges into me one last time and comes growling, pumping his hips as his cock swells and spills inside me.

He licks and kisses the spot he bit, before sliding out of me. My body turns limp, every muscle relaxed and sated as he twists us both until he’s on his back with me leaning against his side, both of us catching our breaths.

I place my hand on his chest. He takes it, moving it over his heart and grips it tight.

“Wolf?”

Luka looks down at me with those glowing eyes. He stares at me like I’m his everything. I reach up and kiss his lips.

He blinks at me staring at my mouth as he runs his tongue along his bottom lip. Leaning forward he does the same to me, mimicking my kiss as he molds his lips to mine.

He pulls back and I give him another smile before cuddling into him.

“More... Soon.” He growls, making me shiver in excitement. But before I get the chance to reply, his eyes dim returning to their normal green as Luka comes back to me.

“Fuck...” Luka sighs.

“Kiarra I’m—

I place my finger on his lips, stopping him. “Don’t even think about apologizing. That was fucking amazing and an added bonus? Our beads are charged again.” I lift my wrist, showing him the beads are all now fully charged and glowing.

Luka chuckles, kissing my fingers before I pull them away.

His smile falls as he glances down at his bracelet. “I thought I was learning to trust him, and vice versa. But when I couldn’t push him back...”

“You got scared he wouldn’t let you out?”

“I never thought he could actually do it. It was always just a possibility.” Luka’s eyes grow wide.

“But the fucker locked me in. He’s never been able to do that before.”

I glance around the cave. “I think it’s something to do with being down here. The energy is different. He told me he was trapped.”

Luka slowly nods before frowning. “I can still hear him, even when I can’t shift... even now. But this place weakens it, somehow making it feel like he’s barely there, like he’s far away. Once we passed the bars, he rose up and nearly took over then and there, but once we saw the demons, we worked together.”

Luka sighs, pulling me closer. “Then when we were going back, he caught me off guard and pushed hard. By the time the bars locked, he was in charge, and I was pushed back.”

I trail my fingers down his chest. “Is he talking to you now? Did he say anything about why he took over now when he hasn’t before?”

Luka mumbles something that I can’t make out.

“What?”

Luka clears his throat, his cheeks turning a slight red. “He’s pissed that he never got a turn when we had our group thing.”

I bit my lip, fighting my smile. “I don’t think he’d ever do anything to hurt us or... you. He was just feeling a bit left out. He is also my mate.”

Luka smiles, shaking his head. “True.”

Dark spots mark my vision, and the cave tilts and spins around me. “Not again.”

Luka calls out, but he sounds far away.

Everything around me turns black once more as the cave disappears.

CHAPTER 13



AXEL

A COUPLE of hours have passed since I was ripped from my mate and placed in a shitty cave with bars that fucking zap you if you touch them.

I'm losing my damn mind not knowing if Kiarra and the others are alright. I look over at Jax trying to make a dent in the wall beside us, but every time he gets deep enough, it just fixes itself. I gave up after trying a couple of times with no luck, whereas the stubborn fuck just thinks he needs to be quick enough before whatever spell sets in and fixes it.

“What is the fucking point in this?” I glance down at my wrist, the glow from the beaded bracelet fucking mocking me.

“We charged the beads.” And loved every fucking minute of it. I wouldn't mind a round two, three, and then some.

Jax walks over to me, hopefully done with his pointless digging. I take a seat on the dirty cave floor and glance through the bars, looking out at what looks like one of those large gladiator pits for fighting. Maybe that's why they have us here.

Jax seems to think the same as me as he takes a seat across from me. “Maybe they're going to make us fight?”

Good. I need something to burn off this energy. My dragon is pissed as hell that we can't shift, the shitty cave blocking it just like the room.

I can barely talk to him, his thoughts further away instead of sitting right there beside me.

I can't hear him all the time, and I fucking *hate* it.

I rub my chest; the tightness expanding the more I think about it. The thought of losing him makes me feel like my fucking soul is being ripped out.

Fuck. Look at me being all dramatic and shit. I've been around Jax too long, and now the fucker's starting to rub off on me.

Jax picks up a rock, throwing it to the back of the cave. He picks up another, frowning. "What if they make us fight each other?"

I chuckle, looking forward to a good fight. Jax doesn't hold back like the others. He's the only one willing to push and pull and keep me right on my fucking toes. "Then you're getting your ass kicked."

Jax rolls his eyes before growing quiet. "I mean, *really* fight, like, to the death?"

"I'm not killing you," I grit out. The stubborn fuck annoys the hell out of me, but he's my brother, my family. I'd kill for him and if it comes down to it, I'd fucking die for him too.

Jax huffs. "So, if it comes down to it, you're going to have to make the killing blow. You annoy the hell out of me, but I fucking love you, brother."

My eyes widen, but I quickly cover it with a scowl. I guess we're more alike than we know.

Two stubborn fools in a world that's always trying to beat us down.

But no way in hell am I letting any of my brothers die down here. I'd rather split my soul in half than see anything happen to them. And as for my mate... *who better be fucking safe and unharmed...* If anything happens to her... the world won't just burn, it will fucking blaze to ashes.

"Neither of us is dying, so get that fucking stupid thought out of your head." I look around at the shitty cave again. "I doubt they'd go through all the trouble of setting this up if they just wanted to have us kill one another."

Jax leans back against the cave wall, sighing. “I’m just fucking sick of always being pulled away from her. Every time we think she’s safe, she gets yanked away from us. I don’t like her being alone. She spent the last six years alone. I thought I could at least make sure that never happened again.”

“Stop being so damn hard on yourself. We’re literally in fucking Hell, and we don’t exactly have control over anything right now. But we will, and when we do, whoever separated us will pay. You have my word, brother.”

Jax slides his hand across his eyes, trying to hide the fact that the little shit is crying. Okay, not *actually* crying, more like a couple of stray tears, and if we weren’t in this shitty situation, that’s making him all emotional and shit, I’d tease the fucker endlessly.

But I guess he’s not the only one missing his mate. Kiarra is more than my world. She’s the fucking air I breathe.

And I can’t take a deep breath unless I know she’s safe and happy.

My dragon growls loud enough for me to hear, agreeing with me. It eases some of the tightness in my chest, knowing I can still hear the moody fuck.

The fucker laughs.

Fine. We’re *both* moody fucks.

He huffs an agreement and I imagine the fucker smirking at me, all smug and shit.

Jax is still lost in his thoughts. The sad fuck. I mean, I’m sad too...well more like fucking angry, but it’s basically the same thing. I glance around the cave, trying to figure out what to say to the fucker to pull him out of it. Luka is normally the one who bounces off him and makes him quickly snap out of it.

I kick the fucker’s feet. He looks up at me, narrowing his eyes, the dim light in them pissing me off. “Look, they put us together, right? I’m guessing it’s the same for the others, so our little mate is more than likely with one of them.” I will myself to believe it too.

Jax's dimmed eyes start to fade as he nods his head. "You're right."

"When am I not?" I give him a smug smirk, but the fucker doesn't miss a beat replying to me.

"Every other day? Fuck, probably ninety-nine percent of the time if we're talking statistics."

And... the fucker's back. Thank fuck for that. There's only so much mopey Jax I can take. "When the hell do we... talk statistics?"

Jax shrugs. "I don't know. I thought it sounded smart."

"You're fucking weird."

Jax laughs, the glint of light in his eyes nearly back to its normal state now. "I'd rather be weird than fucking boring like you."

"Our little mate doesn't think I'm boring." Especially when I make her come so fucking hard, she screams my name.

My cock stirs just thinking about it. The way she grinds down on me, swaying her hips and taking every inch of me. And those little soft gasps she makes when I slide in and out of her slick heat nearly fucking ends me.

Fuck. I really need to stop thinking about her or Jax will be the one to fucking tease me endlessly when I start walking around the cave with a hard-on.

He hasn't noticed my switch in thoughts and gives me a look full of pity. Still trying to make me take the bait.

The dick.

He nods his head, all fucking condescending and shit. "She does, she just doesn't tell you 'cause she doesn't want to hurt your little feelings." He nods as if believing the shit that's coming from his mouth.

"My little—"

The bars beside us shake, making a screeching sound before dragging upward, releasing us from our caved prison.

Jax's wide eyes glance at me before we quickly scramble out of the cave.

Once we're out, my dragon rises to the surface, grouchy as hell that he's being pushed down so much. He wants to shift, but we can't risk it yet. This could be a trap or another game or test that they've pulled out of their asses.

Smoke crawls from my nose and mouth, telling me he's still fucking grouchy, but he settles down long enough for me to get a better look around us and figure out where to go from here.

I was right. It is like a fucking gladiator pit. There are cave walls that look similar to our little prison all around us, blocking us in. They climb upward before meeting some black net that covers the entire pit. I had a feeling it had that shitty zapping thing the bars have, except on a much larger scale.

My dragon growls in the back of my head, pissed that we can't just fly the fuck out of here.

I glance over at Jax, seeing him struggle with his beast to push back a shift. He turns to me, his eyes revealing just how close his wolf is to the surface. "What now?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"There's no one to fight other than each other—"

"I'm not fucking fighting you. No matter how much they want it. Not like this, so just drop it."

Jax sighs, nodding his head as he looks around. He opens his mouth to say something when he pauses, looking down at the ground just as it starts to shake, and a horde of demons appears from nowhere on the other side of the pit.

About fucking time.

I meet Jax's smirk, his own beast at the surface looking back at me.

"You're late," I tell them with a smug smile on my face as I crack my knuckles and start forward, my dragon fucking itching for this.

They waste no time attacking, their claws slashing out at us as soon as they're close enough. I dodge them easily, the fuckers too slow.

Damn, my granny could hit faster than them... well, if I had one, she would.

A sly fucker tries to catch me off guard, trying to jump me from behind while his buddy in front aims for my face, but my dragon is having none of it.

My body lights up in flames, turning them both to ashes before they even touch me.

I glance over at Jax, making sure the fucker isn't dead, and see a savage smirk on his face as he bounces around the demons, making them work for it before ripping them to shreds.

I focus back on the group, trying to surround me from every angle, rolling my eyes at their sad attempt to overwhelm me. Ripping the heads off a couple of them, I break off two clawed hands from one before shoving them into its chest. Yanking them out, I watch the fucker drop to the ground before turning to the next one.

I catch a demon running at Jax from behind and even though I know the fucker can take care of himself, I still throw one of the clawed arms like a spear toward it. It skewers the fucker, killing it instantly.

Jax whips his head around as it drops to the ground before he glances over at me and down at the other clawed arm in my hand. His brows raise before he smirks, turning to rip two arms off a demon closest to him and using them like weapons against the other demons around him.

Fucking copycat.

We get through the rest of the horde within minutes without breaking a sweat, let alone having to shift.

Something my dragon is pissed about.

Jax saunters over to me, smiling down at the clawed arms still in his hands.

He looks up and raises one of them to me, a dopey happy look on his face. “High five.”

I drop my mini demon weapons and roll my eyes at the idiot. Not deterred by my lack of interest, he uses one claw to smack the other, chuckling to himself like the little weirdo he is.

Eventually he loses interest and throws them to the ground beside the rest of the dead demons.

“That’s it?” Jax glances around, looking disappointed. It turns into a pout, making him look fucking constipated.

But the fucker has a right to be disappointed. “I’m hurt that they think we’re this weak.”

“What now?” Jax asks but the hell if I know. Glancing around, I get a good look at the pit. Maybe we can destroy it in our beast forms. My dragon can burn through anything. Surely a little fucking rock and net are nothing.

My dragon huffs, annoyed that I even question it.

I turn to Jax. “Let’s shift and see if we can destroy the pit.”

Jax smirks, a glint in his eyes that tells me he just thought of something stupid. “First one to cause enough damage wins.”

“What do we win?”

Maybe not a stupid idea after all. Both of us look at one another, wearing savage smirks.

“Mate privileges.” She doesn’t have to be here to agree. I know she’ll agree when she finds out what I have in store for her.

“Although. We never got that second round with just the two of us.” Jax raises a brow in question, wondering if I’d be up for just the three of us again. But what the fucker might not realize yet is that anything to do with our mate, and I’m automatically up for it. I fucking loved our group thing, and I can’t wait until we have alone time to do it again... and again.

The smug fucking smile I give him lets him know my answer.

We turn to head off in opposite directions when another rumble shakes the ground, making us pause.

I share a look with Jax before we both turn and stare in the sound's direction. Three large demons the size of my dragon stomp into the pit. I try to glance behind them to see where these fuckers are coming from, but there's nothing there, so it must be some sort of portal sending them here.

"Looks like the bet is going to have to wait," I tell Jax, rolling my shoulders back as I ready myself for round two. By the looks of these demons, they wouldn't be easy pickings like the others.

"Or we could kill two birds?" Jax raises a brow.

"Kill the demons and destroy the pit?" I look at Jax, actually fucking impressed he came up with a decent idea before nodding my head. "Let's do it."

I nod to Jax before shifting. Energy slides over my body, encasing it in warm flames that make me feel alive. Shifting always does that, makes me feel like I'm part of something bigger than myself.

My dragon roars, making sure the demons below us know who's fucking coming for them just before flames pour down around them, forcing them together.

I watch Jax shift into his shadow wolf as he uses his shadowing ability to move through the flames and right into one of the demons. I focus on the same demon adding my flames to it and watch as it lights up, burning from the inside out.

Flying up but keeping low enough to avoid the black net, I circle back around and head for the demons. When I'm close enough, I release more flames around them, enclosing them in a ring of fire before burning them, too.

Instead of exploding, they start to burn alive and slowly turn to ash.

It's apparently not quick enough for Jax as he speeds up the process by shadowing through the flames and demons until there's nothing left of them other than a blackened stain.

If this was their so-called backup, then they're all fucking weak. My dragon huffs, agreeing.

I fly around the large pit trying to find an exit or way out, but apart from the cave wall with more prisons, there's nothing.

But maybe there's something else I can do.

I eye the black net above, coming up with a plan. If I absorb the energy, maybe I can break it and get us out of here.

I get halfway when a heavy weight settles over me, making me feel like I need to take a long nap. I shake it off, trying to move as close to the net as I can, but before I can reach it, my dragon starts to pull back.

What the fuck?

My wings grow heavier and heavier as I try to stop a shift from taking over. It's as if most of my energy has been yanked away from me.

I'm forced to the ground as I grow weaker, my dragon no longer able to stay in his form. I glance over and see Jax is fairing the same, he's already shifted back and is bent over struggling to get back up.

I can't hold it anymore as I shift back, my dragon roaring in pain.

My hands slam to the ground as I pant through the quick shift, my eyes catching on the bracelet and the beads. Every single one of them is dim, nearly completely black.

Fuck.

So that's what happened.

A loud buzzing shakes me out of my murderous thoughts, my eyes draw to the dust rising and falling from the ground as if something is moving it. Looking over at the spot all the demons come from, my eyes widen.

Where the ashed remains of the demons once were, now in its place is a creepy black thing that moves and spreads as one. It grows, multiplying as it expands backward before swarming toward me and Jax.

I share a look with him before I push myself up, watching Jax do the same as we make a move toward the only place we can go right now.

The shitty cave.

We've no choice, it's either that or the creepy black thing moving toward us and like hell was I about to test that thing touching me.

We can't shift, anyway.

We make it inside the cave and the bars slam down, locking us in once more. I glance back out and watch as the black thing rushes right toward us. Jax and I take a step back just as it reaches the bars.

"Maybe we should—"

All of a sudden, the black thing stops, staying right outside the cave. A loud shrill sounds out just before the blackened ground collapses in on itself.

"That's fucking messed up." Jax stares at the weird large shadow hole, his eyes wide.

"You can say that again."

Jax faces me, giving me a deadpan look. "That's fucking messed up." His face switching to a smirk. "Any other requests?"

I shake my head at him, still trying to catch my breath from the forced shift and running from whatever that thing is, when dark spots start to enter my vision.

"What the fuck was that?" I don't hear whatever else Jax says as a loud ringing shoots through my ears, making everything tilt and sway around me.

My legs buckle beneath me as my vision goes dark.

Fuck, not again...

I feel my face cushion my fall just before I black out.

CHAPTER 14



RION

A FEW HOURS AGO... *or what feels like it...* Kai and I woke up in a cave. There's an arena right outside, making me think we are in for our next test. Or game, depending on what way you look at it. I'm sure the fools who set this up are enjoying watching us.

Once we realized we couldn't rip through the cave wall or break the bars that shock us if we so much as tip them, we settled down and waited.

Or *I* did.

Kai has been pacing back and forth, his temper rising the longer we're apart from our mate and brothers.

The beads are charged, but neither of us can shift. The cave must be similar to the room we were in, blocking us from shifting. My basilisk hisses in the background, too far away for my liking.

Whatever spell they're using to block us from our beasts is powerful. So much so that I don't feel as connected to my basilisk as usual. He's in the distance of my mind, masked behind a fog I can't get near.

It makes me feel hollow on the inside, reminding me of a time when that's all I felt, the emptiness all-consuming as my parents showed me no care or love.

They left me alone until they needed a killer. Someone they could use to do their dirty work. Being a child didn't matter to them, and to this day, it never has.

Kai speaks his thoughts aloud, making me snap out of my own somber ones to focus on the task at hand. “They wanted us to charge the beads, then separated us and placed us here, still blocking us from shifting...”

I narrow my eyes at the large arena outside. “They want us to fight.”

Kai nods. “Yes, but why?”

“To test our abilities,” I tell him, my eyes still narrowed on the large arena, waiting for whatever is coming while my mind works through what I know so far, piecing everything together like a puzzle.

We’re being tested. That part is obvious, but who is doing the testing and why is still not clear.

For the first test we needed to be able to control our emotions to charge the beads. Now it looks like it will be a physical test.

As always, it’s like Kai can read my mind and come to the same conclusion. “First test must have been to see if we could charge the beads. Once we passed, we move on to this. From the looks of our surroundings, I’d say they’ll have us fight something. Probably demons of some kind to test our strength. While the beads and the bracelet keep us in line.”

I nod. “They don’t trust us, and they also need leverage. Making sure we have some cap on our abilities ensures we don’t lose it and kill them as retribution.”

Kai growls, his eyes glowing red. Something that shouldn’t be possible right now. “That’s still going to happen either way. They took our mate and brothers. They’ll pay for that alone.” His voice grows deep, his eyes pulsing.

“And I’ll help.” I nod, telling him, but my focus is on Kai as he comes close to a shift.

“Kai? Can you shift?”

Kai squeezes his eyes shut. “I think I might be able to push through and force one. Just give me a minute.”

His body starts to grow in size, slightly at first, before lines of black crawl up his body. My eyes catch on his bracelet as his beads start to dim.

“Stop.” The sharp tone in my voice makes him freeze.

Kai glances up at me, giving me a questioning look. I nod toward his bracelet. “Your beads, they’re losing their power.”

“Damn it.” Kai squeezes his eyes tight, pulling back the shift before opening them and rolling his shoulders back. Still tightly sprung, he picks up pacing back and forth as he tries to subdue his hounds.

I glance back out at the arena, wondering how long it’s going to take before something happens. “Let’s wait to see how they’re going to play this out and use your shift as a last resort.”

Kai sighs, closing his eyes as he dips his head. “I hope the others are all okay.”

“I’m sure they’re fine. They’ve put us together for a reason. They more than likely placed us in groups of two. Our mate isn’t alone, and even if she is, she’s more than capable of looking after herself.”

“I know, but it’s ingrained in me to watch over you all. To keep us all together.”

Kai’s face is drenched in guilt as he leans against the cave wall. I wish there was some way I could shake him out of it, but he still feels guilty for not keeping us together as kids when Kiarra was taken.

No matter how many times I tell him, it isn’t his fault, he never listens.

What Kiarra went through... What happened to Luka and Jax... What happened to Axel...What my parents made me do...

In his mind, it could have all been avoided if we had stayed together.

“We’re not kids anymore. We were all lost and broken after Kiarra. Our families were supposed to look after us.”

“They were never truly family,” he grits out.

“No, but *we* are. The six of us, and we’ll get through this just like we do with everything else that comes our way.”

Kai clenches his jaw, glancing out at the arena, still too stubborn to admit the truth to himself.

I narrow my eyes on him. “Keep up worrying about us all and you’ll start growing gray.”

Kai gives me a tired look. “Shifters live a long time and we’re basically impenetrable now. I doubt that’s something we have to think about anytime soon. Besides, it’s the least of our worries.”

“Then I’ll tell Kiarra about how morose you’re being, and she’ll add you to the list of people I need to knock some sense into.”

Kai finally smiles, shaking his head. “Ah, the invisible list that’s never executed.”

I raise a brow. “Who says it’s never executed?”

Kai’s smile grows. “You’re telling me you’ve followed through every time she’s mentioned adding someone to that list of hers?”

I nod my head, making him laugh, but I’m damn serious. “What my Siren wants, she gets. Even if that means knocking some sense into one of my brothers for pissing her off.”

“Including me?”

“Especially you. Alpha of alphas or not, I’ll still take you down a notch to prove a point.”

Kai shakes his head, the smile still on his face making him look a little lighter. “Looking forward to it, brother.”

He gives me a look, thanking me for getting him out of his head. For helping him move past the guilt and worry just like every other time his thoughts consume him.

It happens too often, but I’ll always be around to remind him just how much we need him. To not let him forget Kiarra is our heart and soul, but he is our balance, and the thing that

keeps us all grounded and united. Without him, we're just six strands of the same thread floating aimlessly through life.

A loud shriek makes me wince as the bars move up, freeing us from our cage.

"Looks like it's finally time." I share a determined look with Kai as we step out of our cage.

The arena is larger than I expected, spanning at least forty feet each way. There are more cave prisons all around the wall of the arena, the wall itself climbing high until it reaches a strange dark net.

With my abilities finally unleashed, I sense every vibration of every type of energy around me. The ground beneath my feet is the most powerful one I've seen in a long time. I frown, glancing down at it, trying to make sense of the energy.

I kneel down and touch the ground, hoping to get a better read on it. The energy flickers as if glitching.

Kai moves, kneeling next to me. "What is it?"

"There's something... *off* about the vibration of energy in the arena itself."

Kai frowns, standing up. He looks around, trying to pinpoint it. "Like what?"

"It's as if it's layered with another. Like it's trying to mask its true form."

"Like an illusion?" Kai asks, frowning. "Like..." Kai clenches his fists as we both think of one of Kiarra's betrayers. *Morana*.

I nod, not willing to even utter that woman's name after what she did.

"So, the arena is an illusion?" Kai asks.

I stand, taking another look around the arena, trying to see past the illusion, but it's no use, the illusion is too powerful to see through. At least with only a fraction of access to my abilities.

“No. I think the arena is real, but parts of it are... *hidden*. At least to us.”

“Then let’s keep our eyes peeled. Anything could just show—”

As if Kai summoned them, a horde of demons appear on the other side of the arena with four larger ones between them.

My basilisk slithers under my skin, ready and waiting to fight. I glance over at Kai, his eyes red-rimmed as he stares down the demons waiting for them to come to him.

They move at a running pace, straight for us.

No longer able to hold back, I shift as scales slide up my arms and legs before my body expands, making way for my basilisk.

Still in his human form, Kai slashes through the hordes of demons as I turn my focus to the larger ones.

Moving straight for the one closest to me, my tail lashes out, taking out a few from the horde as I make my way to them.

The large demon raises its meaty claw, aiming for my head, but I bare my teeth, hissing before striking, ripping its arm off. I do it again and again until all that’s left are pieces. I move to the next one and coil my long body around it, squeezing tight before striking again and again, shredding its top in half.

The ground beneath me shakes once more, making me pause. I glance over and see the other two large demons trying to throw Kai off by splitting the ground beneath him. He moves fast, avoiding the large cracks they create in the ground and instead use it to his advantage to throw some of the horde down into it.

Focusing back on the second demon, I release my hold. What’s left of the body drops to the ground with a thump.

By the time we’re finished, there’s only two of the four larger demons left, with the entire horde completely destroyed.

The two larger demons spread out, their attention divided between me and Kai. Both suddenly pause, taking a slow step back as they stare in Kai's direction. I look over at him to find he's already shifted into his hounds.

Glancing back at the demons, I watch their behavior quickly change. It's as if they fear him.

I use this to my advantage and take out the one closest to me, quickly coiling around it, tightening my hold, and squeezing the life from it.

By the time it's nothing but ash, Kai has destroyed the last one, leaving only a blackened stain on the ground.

I feel a pull, like something has zapped my energy all at once. I quickly shift back, swaying a little as I move over to Kai. He's already shifted back and is making his way over to the spot where the demons first showed up.

Kai glances around. "They obviously came in from somewhere around here. Look around and see if you can find a break or glitch in the illusion."

I nod, moving further out to the cave wall. There has to be an entrance, or maybe they used a portal.

Neither reveals itself to me, and the longer I look, reaching out with my senses to find the glitch, the weaker I grow.

"Rion!" Kai's panicked tone makes me whip around. My eyes widen on a large black swarm from where the beasts were killed as it spreads and heads straight for me.

I'm surrounded with no way out.

I open my mouth to tell Kai to stay where he is, but he's already moving toward me, jumping and tumbling over the black mass before he's right next to me. "I can't shift. My beads are dead."

I want to shake the foolish idiot but know it's too late to do anything about it now. "Mine too."

His eyes find the black mass as it moves closer. "Maybe it's another illusion..."

I shake my head. “There’s real energy coming from it. Whatever that thing is, it’s as real as you or me.”

“Damn it.” Kai turns to me, a fierce look in his eyes. He grabs my shoulder. “Whatever happens next will not be the end of us. I will find you, brother. No matter what it takes.”

“And I you.”

The shadows envelop us whole, pulling me and Kai apart until I slowly drift into the darkness.

CHAPTER 15



KIARRA

DARKNESS SURROUNDS me as I look around for a way out of its vast blackness. I know I'm alone this time, the hollow cold etched into my skin like a sharp breeze.

I'm alone, but not for long. This is just another stupid game someone in the Underworld is playing. One I will figure a way out of and then I'll find my mates.

They would never abandon me.

"Are you sure about that?"

I freeze as the strange male voice echoes around me. "Who's there?"

I whip around, trying to find the source of the voice, but it's so dark I can barely see my hand in front of my face.

Reaching out in front of me, I take a hesitant step forward. I keep moving until the voice speaks again.

"Your mates have left you here to rot."

I don't recognize the voice. It's toneless, almost robotic. But it's obviously part of this illusion. One I won't be given in to anytime soon.

"They would never leave me."

"Are you sure?" The voice changes, becoming more human-like, a self-assured tone layered underneath it. But no matter what way he speaks, I don't ever need to question if my mates will leave me.

"Positive."

His dark chuckle slithers down my back like an icy finger.

“Liar...”

I glance around looking for a flicker of light but there’s nothing but darkness. I center myself to focus on my powers, trying to pull up anything but I feel nothing. No power, no energy, just... *nothing*. Like my powers never existed in the first place.

“You’re never going to get out of here, and your mates will move on without you.” The voice changes again, becoming smoother, his confident tone only growing.

I freeze as a seed of doubt creeps in. I know my mates would never leave me, but what happens if I can’t get out of here. What if they’re left to wander the Underworld looking for me for the rest of their lives?

I didn’t want to be stuck here, but I didn’t want them to waste their lives looking for me either.

As soon as the thought forms, I shake it off. No, none of that will happen because I’m not going to let it. I’m not going to be stuck in this place, so worrying about it is pointless.

It’s all just a game. One I have to figure out how to play.

Before I can figure out where to start, my surroundings slightly shift, and the vast darkness lights to deep shades of gray. It’s enough to make out what’s around me. A long room that opens up in every direction with no end in sight.

Where am I?

“Someplace you’ll never escape.”

“Stop trying to get in my head. It won’t work.” Clenching my fists, I whip around trying to find the source of the voice again, but he’s not here. I look up and around before moving forward. But the layout never changes no matter how far I walk.

His dark chuckle grows louder, before his voice slides across my ear in a whisper.

“It’s already started...”

An icy chill runs down my spine at the complete surety in his tone.

But he's wrong. He's just trying to mess with me. Once I stay focused—

“Kiarra.”

My heart stutters to a stop, my entire body turning stiff at the sound of my mother's voice.

I shake my head, my chest growing tight. This is just a trick. None of it is real. Stay focused. Stay—

“If it wasn't for you, I'd still be alive.”

I take a shaky step back, glancing around. It's not her. It's not her.

“I died to protect you.” My mother's voice breaks, and the last memory of her flashes across my mind. The sound of her screams. Her body as it lies on the floor, unmoving. Her eyes as they stare blankly ahead.

The memory plays on repeat as my mother's voice continues to talk and shout at me. I cover my ears trying to drown out the sound, but it's like she's inside my head and no matter how hard I squeeze, it doesn't stop.

Please, stop.

My mother loved me; I know she did. She gave up everything for me. This isn't her. This is jus—

“I never really loved you.”

No. Please...

It's not real. *She's* not real. None of this is.

I repeat the words over and over until my mother's voice disappears. Until the only sound I can hear is my racing heart and the rattle of my ragged breaths. I swallow the hard lump in my throat and push back the burn of tears threatening to spill.

Just when I think they've given up, another familiar voice speaks.

Alana's.

“You were always a goal and nothing more.”

I squeeze my hands tighter over my ears, dropping to my knees as the voice changes to Kai and then Luka and Rion. To Jax and then Axel. All telling me horrible things I never thought I would hear from them.

“You will always be alone.”

“I don’t love you... I never have.”

“You’re too broken for me.”

“We’re better off without you.”

“All you bring is pain. Why don’t you just leave?”

It goes on and on until I feel each word slice through my heart, shredding it and leaving it raw.

“Stop. Stop!” I beg the voices as more and more deep-seated doubts come alive. Doubts that I thought were long gone.

But they don’t stop. They get worse and louder until their harsh words are all I can hear. All I can see and feel.

A storm of emotions swirl around me, threatening to break me from the inside out. It keeps circling me like the tail of a whirlwind, building speed and gathering more and more strength before striking me down.

Until finally it reaches its peak.

Just like the eye of a storm, everything around me stops and turns silent. So silent that I can hear the loud thump of my racing heart and the rattle of my chest as I fight in vain to calm down and take a deep breath.

But just like every storm, there’s always an aftermath of chaos in its wake.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I bend my head and try to calm my turbulent thoughts. I don’t get time to push down my doubts when I hear footsteps draw closer to me.

Opening my eyes, I find a pair of black men’s shoes in front of me. I follow the line of gray trousers up to a familiar

black buckle. My heart doubles in speed as my eyes move up and up to eyes so dark, they still haunt my dreams, turning them to nightmares.

Just when I think the mind games can't get any worse, I find myself staring up at King. The chaos of my storm revealed.

* * *

LUKA

IT'S DARK. So dark that I'm starting to question if my eyes are even open.

“Kiarra?”

No one replies, making my heart drop. I clench my fists as they shake.

I'm sure she's fine. She has to be.

Figure out where you are and then go find her.

I nod to myself, a plan now in my mind and away from visualizing everything bad that could have happened to her.

Moving aimlessly through the dark, I finally see a dim light and hurry toward it. The closer I get, the more I can make out a room.

It's not until I'm only a few feet away do I recognize what room it is, stopping dead in my tracks.

It's the room where Cillian performed all his spells on me. The place he nearly achieved splitting my soul in half, separating my shadow wolf and me forever, where torture and pain were branded across my skin. The room where my nightmares still come alive, and my shadow wolf cries out in pain.

I never thought I'd see it again, thinking that if I did, I'd burn it, leaving no trace behind.

But seeing it now, fear grips me by the throat like icy claws, making my whole body turn to stone.

The fear drags on, making my chest tighten the more I stare at the table in the middle of the room.

Not only because of how real it all feels as it drags up every sick and twisted memory like it was yesterday. But because the room isn't vacant.

Cillian is right there with a younger me strapped to the table, tears trailing down his face, begging him to stop.

But I know he won't. No matter how much younger me cries or screams or begs. He never stops. I try to take a step back, to get away from the nightmare in front of me when my world tilts and shifts. I blacken out for a moment and when my eyes open, I'm the one strapped down on the table, my top half bare.

No... *No. No. No.*

The tight rope burns against my skin as I pull against it. But just like when I was younger, it doesn't budge. I could never escape with the spelled binds he placed on them. All I could ever do was prepare myself and try to go somewhere else in my mind.

My breathing becomes shallow as I try to make myself realize that this isn't real. It can't be.

This is a dream... an illusion...

But my mind doesn't want to listen anymore. It's gone into full panic mode as I start yanking against the burning ropes, making my skin raw in seconds.

"Don't waste your energy. This will all be over in a minute."

I freeze hearing his voice.

"You're not... you're not real."

Cillian turns to me with a blade in his hand, a cruel smirk on his face. The same smirk he wore every time he came up

with something new to strip my shadow wolf from me, finding joy in every minute of my pain.

“I’m as real as you are, boy. Don’t worry, though, I’m going to take that evil from you, even if I have to rip it out with my bare hands.”

My eyes widen in horror as he bends over me and places the blunt of the cold steel to my stomach. Once it touches my skin, a blaze of heat scorches the spot traveling inward, making it feel like my organs are fucking melting.

The agony only grows, the longer the blade touches my skin, spreading to every part of my body. I try arching away from the pain, but the binds hold me in place. Cillian pushes the blade further into my stomach, and that’s when the pain grows tenfold.

There’s no outlet for the overwhelming pain I feel, so I do the only thing I can.

I scream.

I scream so loud; my voice turns raw within minutes. I scream until my lungs burn and I can no longer grasp the air around me long enough to whisper a single plea.

I scream until my tears run dry and my eyes are as raw as my throat.

The pain drags on, just like every time before this. Hours pass, or what feels like it, until finally he pulls the blade away and steps back.

My body turns limp, weak as the aftermath of agony sticks to me like a second skin. I’m finally able to take a deep breath when I blink and I’m on my stomach, the blade carving into my back.

The pain this time is so intense, so *real* that it only takes seconds before I black out for a moment.

I come to, only to find myself standing on the other side of the room, finally free of the binds. I rub a hand down my stomach and around to my back, but there’s nothing there, just the old, scarred skin from long ago.

I'm about to make a run for it when my eye catches on something on the table.

No, not something... someone.

Jax.

CHAPTER 16



JAX

WHERE THE HELL AM I?

Squinting my eyes, I watch the darkness around me get lighter until I find myself outside, standing by a park. A breeze wisps by, the cold bite of it making me shiver.

I'm about to move away when I see a kid by himself on one of the swings. Not just any kid, it's me when I was younger.

I walk over to... *me*, well, younger me. His head is tilted down, his shoulders slumped. He's wearing a t-shirt and jeans that are a size too big, and shoes that have fucking holes in them.

Damn, I was a scrawny-looking thing. Thank fuck I filled out.

I clear my throat, bending down to him. "Hey." Talking to myself makes me feel fucking weird. He doesn't hear me, still lost in his thoughts with the saddest look on his face.

"Chin up. Whatever it is, it can't be that bad." I move closer, my agitation growing when he still doesn't move, that sad fucking look still on his face.

I reach out to him to give his shoulder a shake, but my hand goes right through him.

What the fuck?

"Oh look, it's the freak." I turn around, my eyes widening when I spot one of the boys from down the street where I used

to live.

What's that fucker's name?

I snap my fingers as it comes to me. Trent.

That's it. I fucking hated him. He'd always go out of his way to make my life miserable. Or at least tried to.

Wait.

It dawns on me that this isn't another game, it's a fucking memory.

I whip my head from younger me to Trent before getting a better look at the park around me. The familiar faded blue swings and peeling red painted slide.

Fuck.

Glancing back down at younger me, I remember this day. It wasn't long after Kiarra was... taken. We couldn't find her, no matter how hard we looked. No matter how hard we tried or hoped.

The adults told us she and her mom didn't like it here anymore and just left.

None of us believed them. Even when we broke into her house and saw it in perfect condition with all of their stuff gone. Even when the neighbors told us they saw them leave in a moving van.

We all knew it had to be a lie. Kiarra would never just leave without so much as a goodbye. If it came down to it, she would've sneaked out and told us beforehand.

It wasn't until the years passed did doubt grow and festered into something else, making us think maybe she did leave us.

All without so much as a fucking goodbye.

That maybe we just imagined the bond we all had together. We were only kids, after all.

"Hey, I'm talking to you."

Younger me ignores Trent but the little fucker keeps on trying to push him to react.

“Where’s your little girlfriend?” I freeze and catch my younger self doing the same and then smile when I remember what I did next.

“You scared her away, didn’t you?”

I can see the storm build in my eyes the longer he talks about Kiarra. My little body starts shaking from the slow build of rage inside me.

“She probably left because of you.”

Hitting too close to home, younger me snaps out and decks the fucker, giving him a broken nose.

I remember how good it felt to feel someone else suffer when I was drowning in it.

Trent curses out in pain, his eyes watering from the hard hit. Instead of crying about it, he looks down, noticing the blood, and gets pissed. *“You’ll pay for that.”*

Younger me steps forward ready to beat the shit out of him, not caring either way when my little wolf rises up wanting to join in on the fun as blood thirsty as me, even at that age.

But turns out *Trent* is just a bully that’s all talk as he stumbles back a step, the look on his scared shitless face, fucking priceless.

The smell of urine permeates the air, as the little bully wets himself. His eyes widen in horror as he stumbles back another step before spinning around and running away.

“Freak!” he shouts over his shoulder before he disappears out of the park.

I shake my head at the dick and turn back to little me. He sits back down on the swing and starts fucking crying like a big baby.

I sigh, getting down to eye level with him. “Come on. It’s not that bad.” But I remember at that age, it couldn’t get any

worse.

“Why did she have to go?” he mumbles to himself, the tears growing as he rubs his chest.

I remember feeling like there was a wide gaping hole there, like something was ripped from me but too young to realize it was the bond and my mate being taken from me.

I wish I could shake him out of it and tell him in the end it all worked out. That going through everything after this was worth having her now... worth having his family back.

But if there's one thing I could change...

As if I'd summoned the memory up myself, the landscape starts to change and shift beneath my feet. The world around me moves by in a blink, and before I know it, I'm back home.

Not a real home, but the place me and Luka were born.

Younger me is a little older but still as sad and fucking heartbroken. But now there's a dark look hidden in his eyes, one that he tries to cover with humor.

Liam, Benji, and Joel, my three idiot cousins, surround me as I stand there ready to shift. I knew I'd get my ass beat by my parents if I shifted in to my shadow wolf even if it was just to defend myself. But the beating was always worth it when I overpowered them and took them down a notch or two.

Even at that age, my shadow wolf was more powerful than the three of them combined.

But before younger me gets a chance to teach them a lesson, Luna runs up to him with a scared look on her face.

She's the only one Luka and I cared about here. The only one that treated us like people instead of pariahs.

“You need to hurry. Luka's in trouble.”

Luka's in trouble. I remember my heart fucking stopping when I heard those three little words just before I ran as fast as I could with Luna to find my brother.

I move forward, trying to catch up with them when the world around me spins and tilts, but this time when I open my

eyes, I'm inside little me, watching the memory unfold as a passenger.

But one who can feel everything, just like that day.

I run to a metal door that looks like it grew from the forest surroundings, most of it covered in dirt and vegetation.

"I can't... I can't go in. I'm sorry, Jax." Luna gives younger me one more frightened look before turning and running away.

I didn't blame her. Not for running or not helping. She was better off staying far away from all this, anyway.

My younger wolf picks up a scream. A scream that sounds all too like my twin, the pain in it alone making me rush forward.

A strength I didn't realize I had, rises up inside me. I act on instinct, snapping the lock, and move inside.

My heart rate picks up speed as I try to figure out where to go in the dark. My wolf senses my struggle, coming to the surface so I get a good look at my surroundings.

I'm in a long hall with a gray floor and white walls similar to a hospital. There are a couple of doors along the way, but my wolf senses don't pick up any sound from them.

I keep moving, following the murmurs and screams and trying to stay as quiet as possible. The best way to get Luka away from whoever has him is by catching them off guard.

The hall leads to an open room. A room that's nearly as dark as the hall outside, but in the middle of the room there's a metal table, one with Luka strapped down with ropes.

Our so-called fucking uncle Cillian is there standing over him with a dagger in his hand, mumbling a language I've never heard before.

I slink closer to them until the stench of blood assaults my senses and a haze of red enters my vision.

Before I know it, I've shifted and my wolf is on top of Cillian, ripping a chunk out of the fucker's neck.

Thinking the fucker is dead, I shift back and turn to my twin.

“Brother, it’s me. It’s me. I’m here.” My voice breaks as I try to get Luka to see me, to hear me, but he’s so lost in his pain he can’t.

My hands shake as I reach for the ropes, flinching back when they fucking burn me. My eyes whip to Luka’s face and then back to where the ropes touch his skin, where they’re leaving it raw from whatever spell is on them.

Gritting my teeth, I place both my hands on them and pull. I pull and pull until my hands feel like I’ve placed them in open flames. I keep pulling when the burn turns sharp, slicing into every nerve in my hands leaving them raw red. I pull until eventually they tear and break, freeing Luka.

By the time it’s done, Luka has stopped screaming, his eyes in a daze as he glances around him like he’s not really seeing anything.

“I’m here, brother. I’m going to get you out of here.” I help Luka off the metal table, placing his arm around my shoulders and basically carry him out of there, spitting on the piece of shit on my way out.

“Jax?” Luka’s voice is barely a whisper, his voice raw from screaming so much.

I swallow hard before speaking while I keep us both moving forward and far away from our so-called families. “It’s me. I’ve got you.”

I grit my teeth, supporting Luka’s frame while heading out of the torture chamber he was in. “Where are we going?”

We start through the forest, going in the opposite direction I came.

“We’re leaving. Now. And we’re never coming back here. I’d rather be homeless than...” Than letting anyone hurt him again.

Luka nods before wincing.

“What’s wrong?” I cringe when I realize how stupid of a question it is. Every inch of his body is probably in pain.

“I just need to sit for a minute.”

I find a patch of forest with soft vegetation and help him ease down onto it. His hands shake as he hunches forward.

I feel so helpless not knowing where to touch, as every part of him looks fragile right now. My eyes catch a drip of blood as it lands on the forest floor. I follow its source, finding the back of Luka’s black shirt drenched in sweat... No, not sweat. Blood.

With my own hands shaking, as gently as possible, I lift the back of his top up. I don’t get further than a couple of inches, the extent of the damage done visible even this far down. Not only are there fresh scars but there’re also older scars sitting right underneath them making my heart sink.

How long was this going on for? All without me even knowing my twin was in pain.

Luka turns to me, catching the fucking devastated look on my face. My eyes burn, the lump in my throat following it as I try to get my shit together long enough to get an answer.

“Why, Luka?” My voice is raw, the pain behind it making it sound like I was the one broken here.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Luka drops his head to his hands. The slight shake from his shoulders telling me he’s crying. I don’t know what to do to ease his mental pain right now, and I can’t even fucking touch him without hurting him, so I do what I do best; fuck it up more and push him for an answer.

“I could’ve helped you. I would’ve done *something*.”

“Like what?” Luka lifts his head and looks away, but I catch the pained look on his face, his eyes rimmed-red and swollen. “We’re just kids. We couldn’t even find our... We couldn’t even find Kiarra.”

“We’re not just kids. We’re fucking wolves, shadow wolves, making us a hell of a lot more powerful than any of

them.”

Luka’s shoulders drop, as if the weight he’s been carrying is too heavy to bear. “Maybe that’s the problem. Maybe we shouldn’t have this.... *power*. Maybe Cillian was right... Maybe we are evil.”

Hell-to-the-fucking-no!

“Look at me now, brother, because when I tell you this, I need you to see the fucking truth on my face.”

It takes a moment, but Luka eventually shifts, wincing as he turns to look at me, his eyes dipping every now and again as if he can’t even bear to look me in the eye.

I move forward until I’m face-to-face with him. Until he can see every fucking line and expression on my face and in my eyes.

“*Nothing*, and I mean *nothing*, Cillian or any of those fuckers told you is true. Not a *single* fucking word.”

I gently place my hands on his shoulders, continuing to look him dead square in the eyes.

“You. Are. Not. Evil. There isn’t a fucking evil bone in your body.” The vehemence in my voice makes him flinch, but I continue on, knowing he needs to hear this. Hear just how much I believe how wrong they all are.

“Just stop for a moment and think about it, brother. Who was the one that strapped you down to a table and did that to your back?” I wait for Luka to answer me, to see the truth himself. But maybe that psychotic asshole has already dug deep into his mind, and maybe it’s going to take a lot longer than a few words to make him believe me.

I glance back at the direction we came, wondering how many of them I could take out and make it back before Luka notices.

Maybe I should wait until night—

“He said...” Luka swallows, frowning. “He said... he was going to rid the evil abomination from my body. That we’re cursed and never meant to be born.”

Rid the evil... from his fucking body. The evil...

My eyes grow wider with each of Luka's words and the meaning behind them. Cillian wasn't just fucking torturing Luka; he was trying to remove his *fucking wolf*.

I swallow hard but no matter how many times I do, I can't swallow past the hard lump in my throat, or stop the heavy lead in my stomach growing heavier as it sits there switching from ice to flames.

I glance back in the direction we came.

Fuck it. I'm burning them all. The entire fucking place. They can all go to hell and if it comes to it, I'll fucking greet them when they arrive, ready to fuck up their lives all over again.

I get up, my wolf riding me hard, ready for a shift, when a hand lands on my shoulder, making me pause.

I look over my shoulder as Luka sways. "Don't leave." His grip tightens as he uses my body to keep himself up.

I clench my fists, wanting to punch a hole through something. Preferably Cillian's face over and over until it's nothing but bits and pieces. "Luka, they—"

"I can't... shift."

The knot in my chest starts to grow and tighten, traveling up my chest as it chokes me.

I thought I made it in time.

It's not supposed to be possible. Luka would be... dead. But I never checked. I never checked or asked... I just fucking assumed I made it...

I turn to Luka, my eyes wide. "Luka... Please tell me he didn't..."

Luka shakes his head. "No, he didn't..." Luka swallows as I try to calm myself and stop my heart from jumping out of my fucking chest.

"But..." *But* the idiot says, and my heart kicks up a notch as I go into full panic mode.

“But what? But what, Luka?” I search his eyes, trying to find the answer myself, but see nothing but pain, so much pain.

“Fucking tell me already,” I beg.

“He... split us.”

Split? My head reels back as if someone has punched me. He... split them...

What does that mean?

I glance up, about to ask, when Luka tells me.

“I don’t... I don’t think I’m whole anymore, brother.” Luka’s voice is raw, broken.

I freeze. I freeze and then I move until I’m in front of the nearest tree, slamming my fist into it as hard as I can. The impact and speed of the punch send a vibration that ripples up through it, making it shatter instead of breaking and falling.

Pieces of branch and tree fall around me as I eye up my next target.

I slam, punch, and kick everything around me until there’s nothing but broken branches and flames around us. Until the outside of the forest feels like the inside of me.

All broken, blackened, and burned.

“Are you done?” Luka asks, his voice drained of any emotion. A mirror to his physical appearance.

I heave a breath, each one burning my throat as I let the rage consume me. “No. I want to go back there.” I take a step forward, ready to let them all see it too. Let them see my rage before they feel it.

“If we do, I’ll never make it out of there.”

I stop in my tracks, my body tensing up as I realize the truth of Luka’s words.

Damn it.

He’s right. I won’t be able to protect him if I go back trying to burn them all. Whatever they did to him has made it

so he can't shift right now. Whether that's permanent is another thing.

Thinking of it alone makes the rage burn hotter. It burns through my body until there's nothing but devastation left behind.

Devastation and guilt. So much guilt it devours the rage leaving a pit of agony behind.

"I should've got there sooner. If I had run faster or—"

"It's not your fault."

I laugh, but I'm anything but amused. Of course, it's my fault. If I had seen the signs earlier, I could've stopped it from happening. If I hadn't been so absorbed in my own problems, then maybe none of this would have gone so far.

It's not your fault... Yeah, right. Of course, he'd say that. After all, the idiot believes it's his fault.

"But it's yours, right? It's yours for being born a shadow wolf." Luka looks down at his hands growing silent.

I shake my head at him, or the world. I didn't know. Maybe fucking both at this point.

Why couldn't he just see what's right in front of him?

"I'm a shadow wolf too, brother." Luka's eyes widen as if he just realizes that little fact.

"Am I *evil* too?" I ask, my tone low.

Luka shakes his head. "Of course not."

"Then why do you think *you* are?"

He clenches his jaw, looking away. But I'm not letting him off that easily.

"*Why* Luka?" I demand.

He whips around to me, wincing at the quick move but there's finally color in his cheeks as he directs his anger at me. The sight alone makes the tightness in my chest ease slightly.

"I don't know, okay!" He growls, shaking his head but giving me hope.

“Maybe because it’s *my* fault.” He punches his chest, each slam making me wince as his internal pain and rage finally surface .

“It’s all *my* fault because I let him get to me. I let him get inside my head and even now I can hear his voice telling me how much better everything will be when he *fixes* me.”

“There’s nothing to fucking *fix*,” I spit out.

I watch as Luka quickly loses that temper, his body sagging as he sits down, curling his knees up to himself.

I move toward him, taking a seat next to him. He looks at me with tears in his eyes before they dip, as if he can’t hold my gaze. Like he’s ashamed of something.

But he has no reason to feel shame. Not for what that monster did to him.

I open my mouth to tell him as much when his soft voice stops me.

“He made it sound like I was giving something extra by mistake and that if he just removed it, our lives would be so much better. That mother and father would finally love us.”

Luka sighs. “Like that would ever happen.”

I swallow hard at the emotion in his voice. “We don’t need their love. We just need each other.”

We just need each other...

The world shifts, tilting on its axis. I blink and I’m back in the park it started in, all grown up, but still feeling the pain my younger self felt as if it only happened moments ago.

I drop to my knees, catching myself as I dip my head forward.

What a fucking emotional rollercoaster that was.

I let the image of Cillian bleeding from his neck play over and over in my mind until I get myself together. Too bad the fucker lived.

It isn't until later that we find out he survived the attack. Not even a scar left behind thanks to his shifter abilities.

It was another thing I had to add to the ever-growing list of regrets I still have.

Fuck.

Watching everything happen all over again was fucking surreal. But looking back now gives me a whole other perspective on it.

We *were* just kids, and even though I experienced a lot more than most at that age, I didn't understand everything either. How could I?

Thinking about how I told Luka that he shouldn't be feeling guilt or shame for anything makes me sound like a fucking idiot when I turned around and did the exact same thing.

I blamed myself and felt nothing but guilt and shame for not being there. To this day, I still feel fucking guilty for not being there for him...

Feeling guilty for something that was out of my control.

I used to think I could've protected him when I was younger. That if I had gotten there sooner or found out about everything before it all kicked off, then I could've stopped it.

But the truth of it is that there probably would have been two metal tables in that room instead of one.

And even though I will always choose to be by my brother's side no matter what, I'm also glad I was able to get him and us out of there. Something that might not have happened if we were both in that basement.

There'll never be anything I can do to go back and change Luka's or Kiarra's past but they're alive and surrounded by family now.

They're happy and safe.

I let those four little words repeat over and over in my head until I start to feel them. Until they take root in my chest

and heart and grow, spreading out to every inch of my body.

They're happy and safe...

And I'm going to make damn sure they have a good life from here on out. To make up for all the pain they went through.

I can't change the past, but I sure as hell can change the future.

A heaviness that I didn't realize was sitting on me, lifts, making me feel lighter than I did before.

Standing up, I watch my surroundings brighten, just like my thoughts.

A new world opens up inside my mind, shining light on everything I thought was real. When it was really just my guilt and pain talking. Pain I've been holding on for far too long.

But I think it's finally time to let it go...

CHAPTER 17



AXEL

WHAT THE FUCK? Why am I... here?

I glance around at my old bedroom. The shitty gray carpet and curtains that I was sure weren't their original color, the broken window that always leaked in the winter, and the second-hand small drawers that fit all my belongings, with space.

Fuck. I hate this place and everything that comes along with it. I hate my aunt and what she put me through for just existing.

She wasn't even my fucking aunt, not by blood or any other means for that matter. Just someone my sperm donor and step-bitch paid off to get rid of me.

What they put me through at least had an expiry date. Once I was gone, I thought the bad shit was finally over. But then another nightmare began.

I traded torture for beatings by new men every week and an aunt who couldn't give two shits about me or whether I starved or keeled over and died.

That was probably what the bitch wanted, anyway.

Why the fuck am I here? How did I get here?

Last thing I remember was the cave and fighting the demons in the pit with Jax, then everything went black.

Is this really my room or just another one of their games?

I move over to the door, but it's locked. I slam my foot against it a couple of times, but unlike my actual room, the door stays in place as if I barely touched it.

So just another game then.

Fucking Ivor and Soren. I don't know what they're playing at, but when I get the fuck out of here, they're going to be playing *my* games. The kind where both of them become nothing but fucking ash.

I try to shift, but just like in the cave or that room, it's useless. I can't even hear my dragon making me feel more alone than I have in a long time.

I shake off my weak ass thoughts and head for the window, ready to smash my way out, but just like the door, it barely fucking shakes.

Over these shitty games, I start upending the room, thrashing my bed and drawers, but within seconds it's back to normal, as if the room was never touched.

Damn it.

Glancing around the room brings back a shit ton of memories I thought were well buried, making me feel like that weak little boy all over again. The one who just wanted someone to fucking love him.

Fuck, I would've taken someone who just cared.

"It's because you were never enough."

What the—I whip around trying to find the voice, but there's no one in this shitty room but me.

"Let me the fuck out!" I wait, but the sound of my heavy breathing is my only reply. I'm about to upend the room again, if only to release some of this pent-up energy when the fucker speaks again.

"You're never getting out of here." It's followed by a chuckle, making me want to rip the entire house apart before burning it to the ground.

“Fuck you! I’m over your fucking games. Come out and let’s end this.”

The chuckle grows before disappearing. I’m seething by the time it speaks up again.

“You were never enough.” The rage drains from me, turning to ice at the sound of Luka’s voice. But it couldn’t be him. There’s no way Luka would talk to me like that.

“Maybe not to your face.” The voice changes to Jax’s, laughing once again. But this time the anger doesn’t come, instead his words hit too close to home as they drag up old doubts and fears.

“I’m sick of your bullshit. I’m over it. You should have never been part of this family.”

I squeeze my eyes tight, shaking my head.

It’s just their mind games. It’s not real. Luka would never...

But that little doubt in the back of my head grows louder with the voices until the fears and doubts I hide deep within rise to the surface like a fucking tidal wave.

“Stop it.”

“You know it’s true.” This time the voice is Kai’s and fuck if it doesn’t hurt even more coming from him.

“We never wanted you to be a part of our family. It was pity that made us take you in. Nothing more. It’s time for you to leave.”

“Fuck. Off.” My hands are shaking as I fist them, my entire body as stiff as a board as I try to get the fuck out of the mental trap I placed myself in.

Kai would never say that. I’m their family, their brother.

“You’re nothing.” It’s Rion this time announcing my fears before changing to the others.

“You meant nothing when you were born, and you’re still nothing.” Louder and louder their voices get until I can’t take

it anymore. The voices become too much, all sounding like my fucking worse nightmares coming to life.

“You don’t belong with us. You’re weak.”

I’m not weak. I’m not! I work fucking hard to make sure I never am. To never let them see the weak little boy I once was.

“But you are. We all see it. We always have.”

Kai’s voice is soft, almost like he can’t bear to tell me the truth. As if all this is actually real and not some fucked up illusion.

Even my dark heart feels fucking battered and bruised. My chest is tight, my stomach twisted in knots. This may not be real, but every part of my body contradicts it.

I try to focus on something... *anything* other than the shitty voices beating me down making me feel worthless.

“You are worthless.”

My hands start to shake, my mind running a mile a minute as Kai’s words hit me hard.

Worthless... Maybe, maybe he’s—

No. I squeeze my eyes tight, clenching my fists. I can’t let them get to me... I can’t—

“I don’t want to be with someone like you. I don’t love you. I never have.” Kiarra’s voice is the last straw as my knees slam to the floor, my hands catching myself as I bend over.

Fuck.

Maybe they’re right and I *am* fucking weak. I sure as hell feel it right now.

The pain from each of their words plays on repeat in my mind, each one a physical assault on my mind and body. Over and over until Kiarra’s last words nail it all home.

I was a piece of shit then, and I’m a piece of shit now. Why the fuck would they want someone like me to be in their family anyway?

What the fuck do I bring to it?

Just when I think it can't get any worse, the bedroom door opens and in walks one of the dead beats from my past.

"Nothin'. You bring nothin' to this family or any other. You never have. And I'm about to show you why."

Jones, one of the few men *that bitch* had around longer than a couple of weeks, stands before me, his belt in hand ready to use against me like every time before.

I start shaking as if I'm that little boy waiting for the first slash of pain.

I catch a shadow out of the corner of my eye and glance over at the door. The bitch stands there with a fucking smirk on her face, enjoying the fear all over mine.

But why the fuck am I afraid of them? I'm not that little boy anymore.

Just as the thought crosses my mind, I feel something inside me shift. I glance down at my hands and watch as they shrink before my eyes. My whole body changes as time rewinds and I turn back into that little boy I once was. Weak, malnourished, and nothing but skin and bone.

Fear strikes my chest as I glance up, the smug smirk on his face growing along with him as he steps forward, looking more like the tormentor he always was.

"It's about time I taught you a lesson."

You're not a little kid anymore. I try telling myself that, but the little frail body I'm in starts shaking as Jonas's large figure starts moving toward me.

Just like when I was a little boy, I raise my arms and squeeze my eyes tight, hoping it will all be over soon.

But it never was...

There was only ever darkness and pain with no light and no way out... not until the others came along. Not until Kiarra...

"You're mine. You'll always be mine." Kiarra's soft voice filters through the haze making me pause. Why would the

voice...

But I realize it's not the voice speaking to me again but a thought from inside my mind. A memory from when we were together.

I hold on to it and another rises up.

"We stick together."

I grasp the next one and let each of my family's *true* voices wash over me until they drown out my doubts and fears this game has conjured up. I let them play on repeat until I start believing them myself. Until I can feel each one inside my broken soul.

"We're a family. Always and forever."

More and more memories filter through my brain as the looming shadow of Jonas's body steps in front of me, pulling the belt back. Just as he raises his hand, the belt swinging in it; I hear one more memory that snaps me out of the frozen state I'm in.

"You annoy the hell out of me, but I fucking love you, brother."

I'm not that weak little kid anymore. The one who can't protect himself. I stare up at the fucking dickhead in front of me, his smug smirk slightly wavering as I come to my damn senses.

I'm a powerful alpha dragon with an even more powerful family at my back.

Once I realize that and feel it in my very soul, my body shifts from the little boy I used to be, to the man I am now.

I stand up to the dead beat in front of me and punch the fucker square in the face. He drops to the ground like a dead weight.

Looking at him now, sprawled out and moaning, I see how small and insignificant he really is and how that's always what he was. Small and insignificant, just like all the rest of the people who tried to beat me down in this world.

Jonas tries to get back up, stumbling a couple of times, but I'm over these games.

Well-and-fucking-truly over it.

One last hard punch and the fucker is out, disappearing into a puff of smoke. I glance over at the bitch as the smug smile drops from her face, just before she fucks off too.

I glance around at the room as it slowly disappears too, knowing that it won't be long before I join it. This fucked up mind game over for now.

The bed and dresser start to turn to smoke and dust, leaving the room bare as it becomes nothing but shades of gray. It's so similar to the shitty life I once lived. All kinds of different fucked up shades of gray.

But just like gray can't be created without a lighter shade, my life wasn't all that dark. It had moments of light, especially when my real family came into it.

I've always felt like I was never enough. That maybe my shitty attitude will push them too far. Or that maybe my past will drag them down. But in reality, they've never pushed me away for being a grumpy ass. They never acted differently when I pushed them too far. Or treated me any differently than anyone of them.

It's me and only me who thought that, and it's only ever been *me* that doubts them.

The sperm donor never accepted me, even when I was born with his special fucking blood. Something that's supposed to be respected and revered.

Whereas my *real* family, my mate and brothers, accept me unconditionally. Even when I make shitty decisions and fuck up so bad, I hate looking at myself in the mirror. Even when I say shitty things that make me feel like a piece of shit.

They accept me. All of me. And never question my place with them.

Never...

Just as I start to disappear, a sense of calm and peace settles over me.

I *am* enough. At least for my family... the family I chose, and that's all that really matters.

CHAPTER 18



RION

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING through the rooms in my parents' house for what feels like hours. The cold dark mansion has as many rooms as it does dark secrets, and I've still only gotten through half of them so far. Most were empty with the exception of a couple of wandering dark spirits.

Something that isn't a surprise considering what went on here.

If it wasn't a party full of killers and politicians, then it was a summons, a trial, or a massacre.

Nothing went on in House Dufort that wasn't over the top, extravagant, or full of bloodshed and mystery.

And usually tipping the scales between the two wouldn't take much.

I remember hiding in my room most nights, preferring to starve than be around their *friends*. None of them had a kind bone in their body and if it wasn't for the Dufort name attached to my own, then they wouldn't have thought twice about gutting me purely for their entertainment.

It wasn't until I was older, did I garner their respect... and fear. Fear because of what I did and what I became.

A cold-blooded killer that hunted down any and all of their enemies. In the end, I realized what I really was... their personal assassin.

They manipulated me until I believed all their lies. Until I couldn't tell the difference between the two, even when it was

staring me right in the face. Even when my basilisk tried showing me the truth.

I ignored it all, and for what? For their love that I never received. For their care or kindness, that was never shown.

The truth was, I wasn't their son, but a weapon they could wield. One they didn't care if it lived or died.

If it wasn't for Kai, I'd still be here playing their dutiful son, killing those who wronged them. And although most of the people I hunted were corrupt and vile beyond words, most did not need to die by my hands simply for going against my parents.

Only one was innocent, but by the time I realized it, it was already too late.

I shake off my past and move along the long hall to the next bedroom, pausing when I spot a shadow shift out of the corner of my eye.

Grabbing my dagger, I swiftly turn, ready to attack, but there's no one there.

On silent feet, I move forward, checking the spot where the shadow last was, but it's gone, leaving no trace behind.

Keeping my eyes peeled, I move into the bedroom just as it shifts beneath my feet.

The moment the movement stops, and I glance around at my surroundings, I instantly know where I am... Or where I once was.

My parents' basement.

The last time I was here was when I killed that innocent man... Or at least helped kill him.

The room is as dark and cold as I remember. Empty, with only two high arched windows in the basement, shedding barely any light into the room.

A man in his early thirties with dark brown hair is bound and gagged to a chair in the middle of the room. His eyes are

covered by a white cloth, but I know they're as blue as the deep sea, his wide eyes never leaving my memory.

Younger me walks in; his eyes empty with not a speck of warmth in them.

Just before he reaches us, I reach out and try to grab the man's shoulder, but my hand goes right through him, just like I expected.

Sighing, I stand back and watch my past unfold in front of me.

Younger me is as silent on his feet as I am now. The man doesn't know I'm in the room until I bend over, placing the hilt of the knife to his chin.

I feel the shift beneath my feet again, but instead of the room moving, I do. This time I'm inside my younger self, but only as a spectator as I dig the hilt of the blade further into his skin.

"Tell me who your boss is, and I'll think about making this quick. Attempt to lie to me, and I'll make sure you know the true definition of pain."

"I don't know... I swear. They set me up." I narrow my eyes on him, hearing nothing but lies. Even though deep down I know there's something different about him than the others I've killed. Something in my gut telling me this isn't right.

But back then, I only believed what my parents told me. Never questioning their motives. Too naïve and stupid to think they would lie to me.

"If you're not going to tell me anything of value, then there's no point in wasting my time."

The sound of the blade as I unsheathe it rings out around the silent room, making the man cry out and beg for his life. I ignore his pleas, moving the sharp edge to his throat.

He passes out.

Just before I swipe it across his neck, I freeze, my head whipping up to one of the windows just as Kai pushes it open and jumps down from it, landing on his feet.

I feel the anger bubble up inside me the closer Kai gets, remembering how my blood boiled, seeing him appear out of nowhere after all this time.

He was no longer my family. My only family are my parents now.

“Leave, Kai. We’re no longer family.” Anger laces my voice as I try to get control of my emotions. I remember hating myself for letting Kai’s presence alone evoke something inside me when I could usually push every other emotion away to focus on the tasks laid before me.

Kai stays calm, his face never changing from the peaceful negotiator he always is. “We’ve always been family, and that will never change. No matter how far apart we are or how long it may take us to come back to one another.”

Lies. I remember thinking, just as I start to shake from the build-up of rage inside me needing an outlet.

Kai continues, not seeing how volatile I am at that moment. Or he does, and he doesn’t care. “I should never have let you all go. No matter what your families wanted. We should have stuck together.”

“What does it matter now? It would never have lasted. We’re all too broken to put back together now that Kiarra has left. Let’s leave it that way and move on.”

“No.”

One word that sounds more like a command than a statement, and I want to turn my blade on him. “My place is not your choice. Now leave.”

Kai opens his mouth to reply, but pauses, looking at something over my shoulder. His eyes narrow to near splits as he snarls toward the spot.

“Yes, leave.” I turn my head to my mother just as she walks into the room, followed by my father.

She gives me a disapproving look; one I’m used to by now.

“I’m not leaving without Rion,” Kai grits out.

My mother doesn't reply to him, instead she looks at me, raising a brow. I nod my head as she turns back to Kai, a slight smile now on her face.

"I'm not going anywhere with you, Kai. Not now, not ever. My place is with my parents."

Kai frowns. "The parents who don't give two shits about you? They're using you, Rion. Why can't you see that?"

"Nothing but lies," my mother tells him, raising her chin.

Kai's eyes pulse red. "I've never lied to Rion."

"You brainwashed him," my mother snarls, losing her composure while my father merely rolls his eyes. Already over this.

"We gave him a family. Something you never did. One who cares for him... loves him." Kai looks at me, his eyes softening. "You're my brother, Rion, no matter what our blood says. And *nothing* about that will ever change." The vehemence in his tone shakes something inside me, but I push it away.

"Don't believe a word he says. He left you. We never will, son."

Kai winces before shaking his head. "They didn't tell you, did they?"

"They didn't tell me what?" I'm over Kai's games, but something in the back of my mind niggles at me, telling me to hear him out.

Kai nods his head toward the unconscious man. "That he's innocent?"

My mother cuts in before I have time to reply, scoffing at Kai. "In this world, there is no such thing as innocent."

Kai narrows his eyes on her with nothing but hate in his. Surprisingly, it doesn't bother me as much as it should.

"In *my* world, the real world, there is." Kai looks at me. "The others they made you kill were criminals, dirtbags, and vile creatures that never should have walked the earth, but this

man did nothing but call your parents out on their own vile behavior. And now they're using you to cover their tracks and do their dirty work for them."

No. They would never set me up. This is just Kai trying to get me back to where he wants me. I freeze for a moment just hearing what Kai really said.

"How did you know about my other... jobs?"

Kai looks at me as if I'm an idiot. "You didn't honestly think I wouldn't check up on you guys."

I frown, sensing nothing but honesty in his voice. "Why ___"

"Who cares if the boy followed you around? None of this matters now. Just kill the man and let's be done with this." My mother gives me another one of her disapproving looks, making me sigh.

"Of course, Mother."

"Rion, stop. You don't want this on your conscience."

I shake my head at Kai, disappointed in him. "You never really knew me then. Because I'll go to great lengths to protect my family."

"Our family would never send you off to kill an innocent man, and you know it."

I ignore his words even when they strike a chord deep within me, pulling until it tightens against my chest.

I ignore him and everything else as I step forward, only to freeze at his next words.

"They've been having you tailed."

There were a few times when I thought someone was following me, but no matter how hard I looked, I couldn't find any evidence to back it up.

Was I right all this time?

I turn to Kai. "What are you talking about?"

Kai wastes no time telling me. “Should you not fulfill their duties, they’ll pull the plug on you. They have someone following you to make sure you go ahead with your... jobs.”

Why would they...

I turn to my parents, giving them a questioning look. “Is this true?”

My parents share a hesitant look, giving me my answer. My mother looks worried but quickly covers it. “At first, we needed to make sure we could trust you to do what needed to be done. That’s all.”

I tighten my hand on my blade. *Trust?* After everything I’ve done for them.

My mother continues not noticing the shift in me. “Trust takes time. Something you need to earn.”

“Have I not earned it, Mother? Have I not killed enough of our enemies to satisfy your blood lust?”

She raises her head, a haughty look on her face. “There’s always room for improvement. Besides, those *friends* of yours brainwashed you. Do you know how many times Xavier had to work with you to get you to this stage?”

I freeze, the blood in my veins turning to ice. “What are you talking about? I *never* worked with Xavier.” Xavier was a warlock who liked to dabble in the black arts. He was double my age and loved playing mind games, especially when he made them do things they didn’t want to do. But he was never able to deceive me, my mind not weak enough for him to command.

Or at least, that’s what I thought.

My mother blanches, turning white before trying to cover it with a laugh. One that’s hollow and fake, it seems just like her. “Of course, you did. Maybe you’ve simply forgotten about it.”

“Tell me!” Both my parents flinch at the rage in my voice. But it’s my father who answers.

“With your abilities, you could be anything you wanted, but you were always too soft. The more time you spent with your little friends, the less you wanted to take on your responsibilities here.”

I hear Kai scoff. My father ignores him, continuing. “But when you came back to us, you were different.”

Yes. I’d lost everything, including the one thing that makes this world worthwhile.

Kiarra.

Without her, everything fell apart.

“You were more... subdued.”

Kai snarls at him. “You mean easier to control.”

“I was broken. Weak. Just what you needed to use Xavier on me.” My voice is as hollow as I feel. I stare down at the blade in my hand, its weight feeling a lot heavier than it did a moment ago.

“How did you do it?” I wanted to know exactly what happened when my and Xavier’s paths crossed sometime very soon.

“At night. When you were sleeping.”

“Still, I should’ve been able to block him...” Xavier was strong, but even in my weakened state, I should have been able to at least mentally fight him off.

“And you were, so we slipped you a little help to ease you into it.” My father’s words hit me like a physical punch to the gut. My eyes widening when I realize what they’d done.

“The teas you gave me to help me sleep.” I couldn’t sleep when I came home, barely getting a couple of hours, so when my mother suggested a herbal tea to help me, I jumped on it, thinking they finally cared.

And just like that, everything starts to fall into place, and why they suddenly changed their attitude toward me. Why they were more attentive, and what I thought was caring. My eyes close as my shoulders drop.

They never really cared, did they?

My heart aches deep inside my chest proving to me that it's not made of stone. All while the world I built slowly crumbles around me making me realize just how alone I really am.

As if Kai can hear my thoughts, he steps forward, placing a hand on my shoulder. "I'm here now, and I'll never leave you again. You have my word. Our family will be back together. And this time, none of us will leave one another again."

I frown as Kai looks at me, his eyes full of hope. But before I can agree, something stops me, making me pause.

Could I just go with Kai and forget everything? What about the others?

"This is all very touching, but you still have a job to do," my mother states as if the last few minutes never happened.

"Is he innocent?" I ask, not able to look at her.

She sighs loudly, as if put out by the question. "What does it matter if he's innocent or not? He needs to be disposed of for the family. Our family, and that's all you need to know."

My stomach churns at her words. I glance up at Kai and see my pain reflected in his eyes, followed by guilt and sorrow.

But I'm the one who should feel remorse, not him. I'm the one who killed all those people just because my parents told me to. I knew many of them were not good people, but I never questioned whether any were innocent.

I craved their love so much that I turned a blind eye to what my gut had been telling me all along.

That this is *wrong*.

But no more. No more will I be their personal assassin. No more will I be their... son.

I never was to begin with, anyway.

Glancing up at them, I look them both in the eye. This time I'm the one wearing the disapproving look. My mother

narrows her eyes on me, opening her mouth to speak, but I'm done with both of them and their lies.

Throwing my dagger to the ground, I glare at them. "I will not kill an innocent man. I'm done being your personal killer."

My parents' faces grow shocked before anger leaks out around them. I turn to Kai, ready to get out of here, when I hear the clank of steel.

Whipping around, my eyes widen as I watch my mother use my dagger to slice the man's throat, all while wearing a satisfied smile. The man chokes on his own blood, dying instantly.

"If you don't go with us, then this *innocent* man's death will be on your hands." My mother shares a smile with my father, making me feel nothing but disgust.

How did I let them get inside my head when their true colors are as obvious as the day and night?

Kai steps up beside me wearing his own smug smirk. "You don't think I'd come here unprepared, do you? I did a little digging on the Dufort name and couldn't believe my luck when I ran into an old friend of yours, a demon named Hyde."

My mother turns white, this time staying that way. This man, Hyde, was obviously someone she feared.

"We had a nice little *chat*. Apparently, you owe him something. A life."

A life... I stare at my parents and watch as my mother leans against my father for support, both of them now truly fearful.

Kai looks at me. "Did you know they were eventually going to trade your life for theirs? All to cover up their little secret."

My life. Not theirs. They were willing to sacrifice their only son so *they* could live.

Finding out your parents would give you up to save themselves is a step further than simply not caring.

Any love or respect I felt for them shrivels up and dies in that instant.

Kai continues to push them, oblivious to my own inner turmoil. “It seems you like to play games. Especially with those that are well out of your league.”

“If you’re mixed up with demons, you’re no good for—”

I laugh, but there’s no amusement in it. “You were going to trade my life for yours and yet you *still* think you have a right to question who I spend my time with.” I shake my head, feeling like an idiot for how blind I was to them.

“Hyde will come after you,” my father tells me like a threat. Kai steps forward as they take a step back. My amusement flares seeing two grown people fearful of someone a lot younger than them.

“Only if you try sending him to us. But I’d advise against it. Hyde and I already had a little chat, and he doesn’t dare want to cross a descendant of Cerberus, no matter the price you give him.”

My head whips to Kai at his little reveal. Something I didn’t know about either.

He turns to look at me as if sensing my eyes on him. He gives me a look telling me we’ll talk... soon.

I nod as he turns back to my parents. I guess I wasn’t the only one that had a few revelations while our family was apart.

“You’re a... you’re a...” My parents back up, making us follow them until they’re at the basement door.

Kai grins a wicked smile. “From the bowels of Hell itself. Or as the saying goes. So, here’s what’s going to happen from here on out. You’re going to leave Rion alone.”

My father opens his mouth to object when Kai gives him a sharp look, his red-rimmed eyes pulsing again, making my father snap his mouth shut.

“And if we don’t?” My mother’s hands dig into my father’s arm as she stares down Kai. Or at least, attempts to. The fear leaks from her in droves and we all can smell it.

Kai's grin widens. "Then I'll set my hounds free and drag you to the Underworld itself. I'm sure there are more than one or two demons you've crossed that might want to settle a score."

My parents' eyes widen just before they scramble out of the basement and hopefully out of my life for good.

Kai turns to me, a soft smile on his face. I open my mouth to apologize, but he raises a hand, stopping me.

"We cannot change our past, but we can make sure we have a better future. Now let's go get the rest of our family back."

I nod and follow him out just as the ground shifts beneath my feet.

The world around me stops as I'm brought back to the bedroom it all started in. I look up and catch my reflection in the long-standing mirror in the corner of the room. I'm no longer younger me but I don't feel completely back to myself either. I feel... unsettled.

The memory of finding out my parents never cared about me, and the blood of the innocent man still sits with me, as fresh and as raw as if it really happened moments ago.

How could I have been so blind?

I shake my head at my stupidity. After what happened that day, I promised myself that I would let no one use me again. I was meticulous with everything, training myself to be two, three, and ten steps ahead of everyone else, so history did not repeat itself.

But still, that day has never truly left me. The fault still lies with me.

"You're right. It was your fault."

I narrow my eyes on the ceiling, the spot where the voice came from.

"Who are you?"

The voice ignores me as I search the room. But there's nothing but old furniture and dust. "I'm afraid you're going to have to work harder than that if you're trying to deceive me. I learned my lesson the first time."

The voice still ignores me. I move to leave the room when it once again speaks, but this time it sounds like Kai making me freeze.

"You're a killer."

"I am," I tell whoever it is. It's the truth, after all. I have killed many people.

"Your hands are filled with each of their deaths."

Again, I agree with the voice. "There's nothing you can tell me that I don't already know."

The voice changes from Kai to Luka. *"You deserve to stay in Hell."*

I raise a brow, taking another look around the room. "More than likely. It's something I've already accepted. Try again."

I smile as the voice keeps going, changing from Axel to Jax and back again.

My smile freezes when I hear my mate's voice, my heart stopping as I wonder where she is and if she's okay.

"Would you kill for me?"

I answer without hesitation. "In a heartbeat." Whether it's Kiarra or not, it's the truth. I'd kill for any of my family.

If I'm a killer, then I'll gladly be one to protect my family. Something I will always do to keep them safe. No matter what.

Instead of the voice's words trying to mess with my head and make me believe I'm still the cold-blooded killer my parents made me, it gives me a sense of calm knowing that I *can* and *will* go to great lengths to protect my family. And that gives me strength.

My parents said I was a cold-blooded killer but instead of feeling cold, I feel warm.

I let that warmth fill me up, thinking of each of my brothers as they add kindle to my blood. I then focus on Kiarra, my mate, my Siren. I let her light up every piece of me as a blaze of flames rushes through my veins.

The room around me grows darker, but a sense of peacefulness settles over me. As I finally accept myself for who I am, I feel the light inside me and the warmth of it giving me strength. I slowly disappear, smiling into the dark as it swallows me whole.

CHAPTER 19



KAI

“THEY’RE DEAD, and it’s all your fault.”

The voice has been at it for what feels like hours. Not only a voice but illusions of some kind where my brothers are killed over and over again and no matter how hard I try, there’s nothing I can do to stop it.

My hands are drenched in their blood as I look down at Axel’s lifeless body. His skin is so white, the blood against his stomach wound stands out even more.

An unknown enemy appears from nowhere and attacks before I get a chance to stop it. It never shows its face, striking and killing my family before I can save them.

No matter how fast, or skilled, or strong I am. They die.

Each. And. Every. Single. Time.

This game the Underworld is playing is so much more than a mental game with some mind tricks because not only do they get inside your head, but they also get inside your fucking heart, too.

It’s as if they know our deepest fears and bring them to life. Everything I’ve gone through feels real. So real that even though I know on some level, this can’t be real, my heart still fucking shatters each time I lose one of them.

I don’t know how long I can keep this up before it starts messing with my head. I haven’t seen any of the guys and Kiarra...

I don't even want to think about where she might be. If she's going through anything like this, I can only imagine the pain she's in.

Axel disappears as I fist my bloodied hands. If she's hurt, in any way, those who have caused her pain will pay.

The ground beneath my feet shifts and changes like every other time before it. The scene rewinding and starting again all new as if no destruction or death were here moments ago. The only thing that never disappears is the blood on my hands. It coats them each time as if reminding me that every one of their deaths is my fault.

A nail in the coffin for the past fuck ups I can never fix.

I stand up, readying myself for the next attack. I tried sitting out on one but watching my brothers call out to me, even as an illusion, felt all too real, making those deaths even worse than the rest.

So, I keep trying, hoping this time will be the time that I save them.

I turn to my left, knowing from the last few times the attacker will come from this direction. But looking at it now makes me pause. The dark alley is no longer there and instead I'm standing in a room, a lab.

The room lightens and reveals a wide lab with white floors and walls. There's an empty metal table in the middle of the room with utensils on the tray beside it.

There's no one else here, but I know it won't be too long before someone or something shows up.

I walk over to the wall lined with various sharp weapons. I pick up a small dagger just as I hear a gasp from behind me.

Tightening my hand on the hilt of the blade, I whip around ready for the oncoming attack but freeze with what I see, the dagger clanging to the ground as my heart fucking stops.

Kiarra is tied to the metal table with blood all over her as a man with no face walks up to her, a gun in his hand.

“Please, please don’t do this.” Kiarra’s pleas break my heart.

“Please.” I snap out of my frozen state and push forward, making it over to her in seconds only to be blocked by some invisible force a couple of feet in front of her.

My eyes widen in horror as I realize what’s about to happen. “No.”

I punch the invisible barrier again and again as Kiarra’s pleas grow louder the closer the man gets.

“Don’t do this. Let me save her. At least let me save her.” I punch harder and harder, my hands going numb from the force of it, but still the barrier stays in place.

The man raises his hand and points the gun straight at Kiarra’s head. She squeezes her eyes shut just as he pulls the trigger.

“Please.” The gunshot rings out alongside Kiarra’s final whispered plea as I’m brought to my knees.

Blood splatters my face as everything in the room turns silent, the only sound my rattling chest as I try to catch my breath.

My eyes are on the ground, the once white ground now covered in blood.

Kiarra’s blood.

This is what she lived day after day for six years. This torture. And it’s *my* fault.

I stare at the bloodied floor until it’s all I see. Until my heart is bleeding alongside it, ripped and raw from watching this one moment.

One moment is all I saw, and Kiarra went through this torture hundreds of times... maybe more.

It doesn’t take a psychologist to tell me that this is my subconscious way of dragging up the nightmares of what Kiarra went through all those years with King. And how much

guilt I feel for not looking harder, for giving up when I never should have.

The scene rewinds and resets itself, the lab immaculate with Kiarra and the man gone. The only thing left behind is the blood on my face and hands.

This is what I deserve for giving up on her. I sigh, working on autopilot, and move to get up and go through it again and again. I push myself up to stand, but a force similar to the barrier stops me from getting up.

I frown, trying again, but only move a few inches before a slight weight sits on my bent knees. I blink and Kiarra is in my arms, dying slowly in front of me.

“No. Please, not like this.” Kiarra looks up at me with so much sadness and pain, it rips my heart out all over again.

“It’s okay,” I tell her, gripping her frail body tighter to me.

She opens her mouth to speak but sputters up blood.

“Kiarra? Kiarra baby, stay with me. Please.”

I watch the light slowly dim in her eyes just as her body grows heavy and stops moving completely.

I pull her into me, holding her body against mine. My own, trembling with the agony I feel inside me.

I should have seen the signs. Even as kids, I knew there was something about King that wasn’t right.

“I should’ve taken you away. I should’ve taken you all away. Rion would never have become a killer for his parents. Luka, Jax, and Axel would never have gone through what they went through with their families, and we would’ve all been safe together.”

I rock her body from side to side, holding her for as long as I can. “I was supposed to protect you all and look out for you. You all trusted me, and I let you down. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, baby.”

“*You’re right. It is all your fault.*” The voice above me echoes my thoughts, sending another shard to slice through my

shredded heart.

“It all started with you. Without you, none of this would have happened.” The voice is right. None of this would have happened. I should’ve stayed away from them all... I should’ve...

My body freezes as a thought hits me.

No. If I never had met the boys, then Rion would still be with his parents and Jax and Luka... I can’t even imagine what would have happened to them. Axel would never have met us, still lost and alone.

And Kiarra... She would have still met King either way.

Like a ton of steel has hit me, I blink as the realization of what could’ve been, sets in. Without me there, we’d *still* all have gone through our struggles. Our own versions of Hell.

We may have broken apart, but in the end, I made sure to get each of my brothers back together. And even though the guilt of not looking harder for Kiarra won’t leave me, I have to accept the things I cannot change in order to move forward.

Even though I would’ve preferred a different outcome for us all, I wouldn’t change the outcome we have now. One where we’re altogether with Kiarra.

I need to let the rest go. And leave the past where it belongs... In the past.

It’s the only way we can all move forward.

I hug Kiarra once more, feeling her body grow lighter as she disappears. “I won’t let you down this time. I promise.”

The lab resets itself, the blood disappearing from everything but my hands—

My eyes widen as the blood starts to disappear from them too, the tightness in my chest slowly easing. I release a breath, finally starting to feel a bit lighter as the lab around me grows darker.

I take one last deep breath, closing my eyes as I’m consumed by the darkness, welcoming it one last time.

* * *

MY EYES SQUINT OPEN, slowly adjusting to the harsh light. I'm lying on the floor in a bare room. The walls are black, the floor gray with a type of thick metal paneling on it.

“What the—”

I turn and find Axel sitting up, looking around. A couple of feet beside him is a passed out Jax. Further down lies Rion. I nod to Axel, asking him if he's okay. He nods back, the same look in his eyes telling me he went through Hell but made it to the other side, just like me.

Axel moves to Jax, and I make my way to Rion, both waking before we reach them.

“What's going on? Where are we now?” Jax asks, jumping up.

I help Rion up as Axel lightly punches Jax in the arm. “I don't know. I woke up here just like you, shithead.”

Jax pats himself down before doing the same to Axel. Axel frowns at him, pushing him away. “What the hell are you doing?”

Jax turns around just as Rion and I reach them, a hopeful look on his face. “Is this real, or is it another test?”

“It's real,” I tell him. I don't know how I know, but I know this moment is real, and so are each of my brothers.

“Good. The last test kind of sucked.” Axel frowns at Jax but nods his head, agreeing with him.

“You can say that again.”

Jax opens his mouth, but Axel places his hand over it to stop whatever he is about to say. Jax narrows his eyes on him, smacking his hand away before looking at me. “So, I'm guessing everyone else just lived through their worse fucking nightmares and memories?”

“Pretty much.” Axel grumbles as he looks around the room. “Where’s Kiarra and Luka?”

Jax freezes as if he just realizes they’re missing. He opens his mouth to say something when Axel’s frown deepens, taking in the room again. “And why the fuck aren’t there any windows or door in this room?”

As if he’s summoned an answer, a door appears from nowhere on the other side of the room.

We all look at one another, sharing a promise to stick together no matter what happens next before making a move toward it.

A couple of steps is all we take before it opens, revealing Ivor and Soren. The minute they step into the room, the entire atmosphere changes.

Axel cracks his knuckles, narrowing his eyes. “Good timing. I was looking for something to release this built-up energy. You two fucking traitors will do.”

They both take a step back just as the door behind them disappears, leaving them trapped inside with us.

Ivor raises his hands, his eyes wide with fear. “Wait. Just let us explain.”

Rion unsheathes one of his daggers from his side. “The time for explaining has passed.”

Soren swallows hard. The fear on Ivor’s face mirrored on his own. “Please. Let us explain. I promise you, it will all make sense soon.”

“First, take us to Kiarra and Luka.”

Ivor and Soren share a look, one filled with worry. “That’s not feasible right now, but I promise you, they’re both safe.”

“Your promises mean shit to us. Take us to them or King will be the last thing you need to worry about.” Jax’s eyes flash, his wolf ready to attack.

“Look at that. Looks like I can shift now, too.” Jax laughs just as flames light up Axel’s arms.

Axel's grin turns cruel as he steps forward. "I'd start begging for my life if I were you. We might make it quick."

Axel shares a look with Jax before shaking his head. "Scratch that, this is definitely going to hurt."

"Wait." Jax and Axel freeze as soon as I mutter the word.

"Why?" Axel grits out, but I know his anger isn't aimed at me.

"I want to know why they put us through it all. The Underworld has nothing to gain from our personal issues."

"Maybe they fucking feed on our fears." Jax shrugs, not looking bothered either way.

Ivor takes another step back. "We don't. That's not what the trials were for."

"Then what are they for? Start talking. Now."

Ivor grunts as my alpha power spreads out around the room demanding an answer. "The minute you used your abilities on the battlefield, we knew you were special, but we could sense your potential was being blocked by something inside each of you. Something was holding you back. Rielle —"

"Who's Rielle?" I ask.

"She's the guardian that created the trials for you. Each one was supposed to help you overcome a barrier each of you placed within yourselves. In order to move past that barrier, you needed to work through each trial before moving on."

"Moving on to what?" Axel asks, his flames still burning brightly along his arm.

Soren glances at Ivor before answering. "Power. True power. The kind that could create or destroy worlds."

I share a look with the guys before nodding to Ivor to continue. "Why three trials?"

"You were all blocked emotionally, physically, and mentally. There was a trial for each. The first was to open up

to each other on a deeper level. Channeling that bond is what powered the bracelets.”

“Channeling what?”

Ivor frowns with Soren before glancing back at us. “Your inner bond. By coming together and reaching deep within, you can channel your bond and create a stronger soul bond.” Ivor’s frown deepens, a look of confusion slashed across his face. “If you didn’t tap into the inner bond, then how did you charge the bracelets?”

I clear my throat as Jax chuckles. “Oh, we definitely tapped into something alright... Let’s just say we found an... alternative way.”

Ivor nods, his frown still in place. “Either way, you passed releasing the block that was stopping you from forming that connection. Once that was complete, you moved on to the arena. Each of you is extremely powerful, but you all have a deep-seated fear of not being strong enough to do what needs to be done.”

I share a look with the guys, the truth of Ivor’s words hitting me in the chest. We all fear not being able to protect one another. No matter how strong we are, there is always someone stronger out there.

“We needed you to prove to yourselves that even with a limited amount of your strength, you can do whatever you put your mind to. That no matter how much power you have, the only limitation is how you use it.”

Jax moves to go to Ivor. I stop him before he knocks him out, and we don’t get our answers to where Kiarra and Luka are. Jax starts pacing as Ivor keeps a watchful eye on him.

“And finally, you’ve all had traumatic pasts that needed to be healed.”

Jax’s eyes narrow on him. “Healed? You messed with our brains, fucking ripped out our hearts, and call it healing?”

Ivor’s gaze softens, but it looks more condescending than anything. “We needed you all to move past the barriers you

had in place so you could access the true bond and power that comes with it.”

Rion narrows his eyes on them both. “For what? What was the point in all this? I have a feeling the Underworld doesn’t do therapy sessions for the broken. Besides, we’re already bonded.”

Soren sighs loudly, making my right eye twitch. “Yes, but as Ivor points out, you’re all special. Meaning you have something no one else has, or at least no one I’ve come across has. And I’ve been around a while.”

Jax mimics Soren’s sigh, making it louder and more obnoxious. “Okay, *old man*, then explain what super special stuff we have that no one else has?”

Soren rolls his eyes, mumbling about idiots. “Do you have any idea who your mate is created from?”

We all freeze.

Jax frowns. “Draven said she was created from the power of the pits of Hell.”

Soren scrubs a hand down his face, nodding. “Yes, she was created from its core, but did you never think about *where* that power came from? The very core of the Underworld? The power that contains the Underworld itself?”

With my fists clenched at my side, it takes everything in me not to go over and rip the answers from his throat. Anything to do with my mate’s safety would not be taken lightly.

“Why don’t you tell us instead of talking in circles?”

Soren’s eyes find mine. “Erebus.”

One word and we all freeze. Axel’s flames die out, and Jax drops his arms as he looks at Soren in shock. “A God?”

“Yes. Kiarra was created from the power of the God of Darkness himself, and if you think you’ve seen even the tip of her powers, you’d be sorely mistaken.”

Axel frowns. “But what has that got to do with us?”

Soren and Ivor share a look, but it's Soren who answers. "Kiarra is the closest thing to what's left of the Gods. She might even be as powerful as Erebus himself, and you all share her blood. Technically, you *all* are the closest thing to Gods, if not as powerful as them. We need you all to be able to access that power, but to do that, you needed to let go of your doubts and fears."

"Why? Why now?" Although I'm glad to feel the relief from realizing some hard truths, we could've spent this time looking for King together. Instead of chasing demons and fucking nightmares.

I glare at Ivor as he looks at us all before focusing on me, completely oblivious to my rising temper.

"King. He's more powerful than we expected and more dangerous, too. If he's not stopped soon, your world won't just be destroyed, but many other realms will fall with it."

Soren gives us all a serious look. "Basically, you're our only hope."

"So... no pressure?" Jax scoffs, shaking his head. "Fine. We get it. But a fucking heads up would've been nice."

Ivor gives him a look of pity. It only pisses me off more. "I'm afraid time is not on our side."

Axel's eyes grow wide. "Says the fucking people who placed us in some twisted nightmare games."

"It wasn't—"

I sigh, cutting off Ivor's reply. "Just take us to Kiarra and Luka, and we'll figure this out."

"Well..." Ivor and Soren share another worried look.

"What? You said they were safe." I take a step forward, ready to rip their throats out and burn this place down if they lied to us.

Ivor looks straight at me, wincing when he sees the look on my face. "They are, but they seem to be... struggling a bit."

CHAPTER 20



LUKA

“No.” Fear strikes through my chest as I watch Jax being tortured by Cillian instead of me.

Jax’s scream bellows out around me, pushing me forward.

I make it a couple of feet in front of the table before an invisible barrier stops me from going any further. I move around it, trying to find a way in as Jax’s screams grow louder but the barrier encases both Cillian and Jax, leaving me no way to get to him.

Not ready to give up, I clench my fists and punch as hard as I can at the barrier. I punch and kick and throw my whole body weight into it again and again, but no matter how hard I try, it won’t budge.

The energy in the room shifts as the scene changes to Jax on his back, with Cillian carving symbols into him. The same symbolized scars I have on my back now.

I can still remember the sharp burn from each cut as it sliced through my skin, but I would take it again and again if it meant Jax wasn’t the one on that table.

Jax’s cries soon turn to whimpers as the pain becomes too much. I swallow hard, remembering my voice was raw for days afterward .

My chest gets tighter and tighter the more Jax cries. The more I hear his pain mirror my own.

“Stop. Stop it. Please, just... *stop*...” I squeeze my eyes shut, blindly thumping the barrier as I beg anyone to make this

stop.

But no one listens to my pleas, and Cillian doesn't stop torturing Jax.

I can't watch it anymore. I can't watch my brother being tortured while I'm helpless to do anything but watch.

My knees hit the floor as I dip my head, leaning against the barrier for support.

I hear Jax's screams pick up again and feel nothing but weak and useless. I drown in the agony, letting it consume me whole.

"This is how he felt." I pause, hearing my voice. Turning around, I look for the source but no one's there.

"Who felt what?" I ask.

"Jax. Our brother."

"*Our?*" The room around me disappears, bringing me to another one full of darkness. A light flickers on just as... I walk up to me.

The other version of me has two gold glowing eyes that stare at me unblinking. There's a translucent shade of gray and dark orange flames around his body similar to my wolf.

But it couldn't be...

"Who are you?"

The other me tilts his head. "I'm... *you*."

I glance around the darkness but can't see anything beyond the two of us. "Is this another test? How can you be me?"

The other me tilts his head, a frown marring his head. "I'm... part of you. Half."

I mirror his frown. *Part of me? Part...*

My eyes widen when I realize what he's saying. "You're... you're him... my wolf?"

He nods his head as I walk around him. "How? How is this possible? How are you able to talk to me like this?"

Usually when we communicated, it consisted of one-word replies or a grunt or feeling.

“I don’t understand it myself.” He looks down at his hands, inspecting them before looking back up at me just as I move in front of him.

“But I know I need to be here. To protect you.”

I frown. “Protect me from what?”

My wolf turns and nods his head in the direction behind us just as it lights up, revealing the back of Cillian as he leans over the table.

“Him,” he snarls, pointing at Cillian. His flames grow as he clenches his fists. His face contorting to look more beast than man.

“I protected you then, and I’ll protect you now.” He looks back at me and the image disappears.

He frowns, a sad look in his eyes. “Even if you fear me.”

“I...” I sigh, stopping myself from lying to him. He’s a part of me, which means he knows what’s in my mind and heart. “I’m sorry.”

I glance back at the spot where Cillian and Jax were, the spot now shrouded in darkness. “How did you protect me?”

He sighs. “When *he* was trying to split us. I made the pain stop.”

“No...” I shake my head, remembering nothing but darkness once it got to be too much. “I... we blacked out from it. It was too much.”

He shakes his head, wearing a look of despair. “You were weak. I was able to push forward and pull you back. Protect you while he... continued to hurt us. You had taken most of the pain for us. It was my turn.”

“No... I...” I shake my head, not wanting to believe him, but something stops me. Something deep inside me tells me he’s speaking the truth.

I think back to when I passed out from the pain. When I came to, the sharp burn that sliced through every nerve came back with a vengeance. I couldn't see or feel anything beyond the agony.

And then I sensed him somewhere in the corner of my mind.

Jax. But I still couldn't move past the pain, not until Jax got Cillian away from me.

"I remember Jax was there when I woke up," I tell him.

He nods, the somber look in his eyes still there. "I held out as long as I could. When I sensed our brother, I knew you would be okay soon."

If someone had punched me in the chest, it wouldn't have hurt this much. I stumble a step back as the realization of what he's saying hits me hard.

He protected me...

I look up and catch him staring at me, wearing a frown. The same frown I have when I'm worried about one of the others.

I protected you then and I'll protect you now...

He's worried. He's worried about *me*. I close my eyes, releasing a harsh breath.

I'm an idiot. Worse than an idiot. How could I ever have pushed my wolf away? How could I ever have feared him?

I open my eyes and look at him, *really* look at him. The more I look, the more of me I see.

He is me... He's a part of my soul, no matter if it's split.

If I had ever taken the time to look a little deeper, I would have found out that my wolf has always looked out for me. Whenever I was in pain and slowly healing, the pain would suddenly stop. It would cut off out of nowhere instead of healing slowly, like any other shifter. I thought it was just part of my strange abilities because of the split.

But it was him.

He's always looked out for me and instead of seeing the truth that was right in front of me, I've blamed him for everything that is wrong about me.

"It's my fault that we're like this. I wasn't strong enough to—"

I cut him off, stepping closer to him. "No. It's not. It's *his*. It was never *our* fault. We're not broken. We're just different but that doesn't mean there's something wrong with us. I promise I will never push you away again."

My wolf nods, the sadness finally leaving his eyes as a glint of hope replaces it. He glances over my shoulder. It's still too dark to see anything, but he narrows his eyes, snarling at the spot.

"*He* needs to pay."

Instead of helplessness or fear, I feel nothing but rage. Rage for what he did to us, to *my* wolf.

I nod. "He will." No matter what happens from here on out, Cillian will pay for what he's done.

I reach out, placing my hand on his shoulder. He frowns, glancing down at it, but doesn't push me away, either. It's a start. "We've been apart for too long, and that's my fault. I'm truly sorry for causing you so much pain."

He shakes his head, the rage from moments ago simmering into a soft look. "We'll work together from here on out?"

"I promise." We may have been two parts of a broken soul, but I have a feeling that wasn't going to hinder us anymore. It was only going to make us stronger.

Something shifts and settles inside me, making me feel lighter. The small light in the room slowly dims just as my wolf's flames grow lighter, turning into a bright incandescent orange that brings warmth with its blaze. The warmth brushes over my skin, settling inside me like a healing balm to my soul.

Just as we fade into the shadows, my wolf smiles.

"Thank you, *brother*."

* * *

KIARRA

“HOW... HOW ARE YOU HERE?” My heart is racing so fast it feels like it’s ready to jump from my chest.

“I’m here to show you the truth.” King’s smile grows, turning into something ugly as he glances down at me.

He keeps looking at me with his unnerving stare as I quickly get up and put some distance between us. He doesn’t move an inch, making me question if he’s just another trick like the voices.

I glance around the open gray room looking for an escape, but as soon as the thought enters my mind, the long open room shrinks to a smaller one with no doors or windows.

I glance back at King. He’s still in the same position with that twisted smirk on his face.

Taking a deep breath, I tell myself that he’s not real, that this is all just another test. Gaining some of my strength back, I narrow my eyes on the imitation and play along with his little game for now.

“What truth?”

King’s smile grows, his face full of shrew confidence. “Of you. Of who and what you *really* are.”

“I already know who and what I am.” I nearly took a breakdown when finding out, but his words were nothing new and if this was the angle he was playing, then he was going to be sorely disappointed in the reaction he receives.

King sighs, that smile never dropping. “I don’t think you do. Nor do your mates. You’ve been hiding it from them.”

Hiding it from them... I frown, shaking my head at his asinine words. My mates know everything about me.

“I’m not going to play your mind games.” This fake imitation has nothing on the real one. This King evokes none of the true fear and pain from me, when the real one can do it in a single glance. And although the real King looks more put together, he is completely volatile and would never have allowed me to put distance between us, let alone talk to him like this.

King places his hands behind his back and begins slowly walking around me, keeping a couple of feet between us.

“I know what you are. I know what you’ve been hiding from everyone.”

I watch him warily, making sure he keeps his distance. Just because he wasn’t the real King didn’t make him any less dangerous.

“So, what am I?”

King stops in his tracks, his smile growing into something darker. “You’re a monster, just like me.”

I want to laugh at him, to tell him how foolish he sounds, but even when I force a chuckle out, shaking my head at him, I know deep down that it’s something I’ve always feared becoming.

King stares at me before narrowing his eyes and nodding to himself. “This is why I was drawn to you. This...” He raises a hand and waves it around the room. “...is all happening because of *you*.”

I shake my head. “No. It’s because of you.”

He barks a laugh, making me jump. “I may have been the one to set things in motion, but you are the catalyst to it all. If we remove you, none of this would have happened.”

It’s not true. It can’t be.

I’m too lost in my thoughts to notice him step closer. “Admit it, you’re a monster, just like me. You love the power that runs through your veins.”

I’m nothing like him. I may not be perfect. I may have made many mistakes, but I know I’m not an evil monster like

him. I'm not cruel and heartless, with no love or warmth.

"No. I'm nothing like you, and I *never* will be."

King steps back, tilting his head. "But what about your mates?"

"My mates love me."

"But would they love and accept you if they knew the truth, if they saw the *real* you?"

"This little speech is getting old quick. I'm *not* a monster."

"Are you sure?"

I feel a shift of energy over my skin just as it changes in front of my eyes, my body turning into something bloody and mangled.

I glance down at my clothes, now torn and sliced with large, bloodied gashes and cuts all seeping out.

The same strange energy shifts over my face. I reach up, my hands shaking as I feel my face... or what's left of it. My left eye is swollen shut with the entire side of my face full of deep ridges and dripping blood.

I look up, using my good eye to find King to my right, just as a mirror appears in front of me.

My stomach drops as I stare back at my mangled face and body on display.

My face is as horrible as it feels, my left eye is barely visible from how swollen it is. The entire side of my face is scared, with blood oozing from some of the fresher scars. And there's a large, jagged wound that runs down the entire left side of my body, the sight alone something from nightmares.

"This is what you are. What you *really* are."

I shake my head, watching as the mangled girl in front of me does the same. Her visible eye wide, her face full of horror. "No."

"Broken. Fragile. Useless. *This* is how your mates see you and how you *really* see yourself."

They don't see me like this. They can't because I haven't told them everything I went through for this very reason.

I wanted to push it all away and forget about it. Forget about what King did to me all those years and move on. I didn't want them to think of me like this, a damaged mess. And the thought of seeing their pitying looks makes me feel weak and useless.

The energy shifts over me once more and I watch in the mirror as the mangled face slowly disappears. I release a harsh breath before freezing, my eyes growing wide with disgust at what I see.

Like I've been shot over and over, holes appear all over my body and face. The wounds bleed, running down my body to the floor.

Seconds pass before it changes again to one where I'm missing a limb and then a finger.

My chest grows tight as it goes on and on, the energy shifting over me again and again, showing me all the things King did to me. All the horrible things my body went through over the years.

The more I watch my body change into the broken mess before me, the more the small light inside me dims. It's not long before I feel more fractured and fragile than I have in a long time.

Or maybe I've always been this broken and just hid it well. I thought I was stronger. That I had become the person I always wanted to be. But as I continue to watch the images of my tortured body grow more mangled and disgusting, I start to feel anything but strong.

The small seed of doubt grows into vines that wrap around me, holding me hostage. My knees meet the ground as I look down at my scarred hands full of open cuts and bruises.

"You finally see the truth. Your mates have already given up on you, so you might as well give up too."

Back then, giving up was never an option, not when other lives depended on me. Not when I had something to fight for.

It's not in me to give up, so what am I doing now? Am I really giving up? Is it that easy to break me?

I fist my hands tight and watch the cuts bleed and cover my hands.

No. No one can really break me unless I give them the power to do so. And Hell will freeze over before I let someone have that control over me.

My past may be full of memories I'd rather pretend don't exist, but I can't just push them to the back of my mind and ignore them, either.

A sliver of energy slides through me, growing until I find the strength inside me to stand back up and face my fears.

I look in the mirror just as my body morphs once more, but this time I look past the grotesque wounds and scars and see them for what they really are... remnants of my strength. Of when I never gave up and fought to survive long enough to be free.

I *am* strong and just like every time before this, I will fight and be free once again.

The scars on my hands start to heal as I turn to King and I look right at him.

"You're lying. My mates would never leave me." Reaching down inside me, I push and push until I feel the connection between us. I pull it to me, letting it wrap around me until it's all I feel.

The connection is right where it's always been, and it's stronger than ever.

A smile crawls across King's face. "Are you sure?"

My lips twitch as I give him a blank stare. "Positive."

His smile wavers. "They lied to you."

"No, *you're* the liar. You've always been the liar, the manipulator."

He takes a step back as I move forward.

“Without you, I would’ve had them by my side all these years. There would be more people around me that cared for me. I was foolish once, but not anymore. I see you for what you really are. *Nothing*. And that’s all you’ll ever be.”

His smile drops as he takes another step back. He keeps going until suddenly he stops, dipping his head.

I feel a shift of strange energy again, but this time it’s in front of me. This time it’s coming from King.

King’s entire demeanor changes as he lifts his head, sending me a soft smile. Something that looks strange on his normally cold face.

“Well done, Kiarra, I’m so proud of you,” King speaks, but it’s not his voice, it’s a soft woman’s voice I’ve never heard before. Though the familiarity in her tone would say differently.

I open my mouth to ask what’s going on, but King shakes his head, that soft smile still firmly in place. “I’ll explain everything soon, I—”

King frowns, his eyes widening before he grabs his stomach and disappears.

I glance around the room, but everything has disappeared. Another type of energy settles over me, making me shiver as it slowly seeps into the room.

The dim light shutters before turning off completely, encasing me in the dark.

“Hello?” My voice echoes out around me with nothing but silence to greet me. I reach out in front of me and take a step forward. As soon as I do, the light beams back on, momentarily blinding me.

I blink away the light, trying to see my surroundings, when an icy feeling trails down my back.

Turning around, I come face to face with King. And this time, I know he’s not an imitation.

“Hello, *Kiarra*.”

CHAPTER 21



KIARRA

“YOU’RE NOT AN ILLUSION.”

King smirks as I take a step back. “We both know that I’m not.”

I eye the room around me, knowing that there’s no way out. That this is created from the depths of my mind and not something easily escaped.

I glance back at King as his smirk grows, sensing my fear. It makes me pause.

Why am I trying to find a way out? This is what I came to the Underworld for... To end this once and for all. The time for running is over.

The tension in my shoulders releases as I stop looking for a way out and focus on King.

“How did you get in here?”

King glances around, a look of disgust on his face. “The very root of your insignificant fears? It wasn’t hard to push my way into the connection created for you. We are *linked*, after all.”

An icy shiver crawls down my back at the look he gives me and the little reveal that makes no sense.

“What link?” There was no way I’d ever be connected to *him*.

A long shadow slithers up the side of his face, growing sharper and more pointed. His eyes glow an eerie white.

“What are you?”

King ignores me as the shadow-like snakes continue to slither on his skin, moving down his arms. He smirks as one lifts from his hand.

I flinch back just as it whips out, missing me by an inch.

King chuckles, the low sound of it making the hair on my arms stand up.

“I was once weak. Too weak to do anything but follow others and their commands. But now... now I’m *so* much more.”

The room around me shifts and changes to a dark prison cell, the walls and floor made from a jagged black rock. The temperature in the room drops, a shiver running down my spine at the energy in this place.

There’s a shadowy figure in the middle of the cell, hunched over. I hear the squeal of a small animal before a moment of silence echoes around us, quickly followed by the sound of gnawing and chewing.

King moves into the middle of the cell beside the shadowed being, walking right through it as if it were made of smoke.

“I hated this place. Born from the very depths of it.”

My body turns to ice. “You’re from the Underworld?” Like me? I keep the last question to myself. There’s no way I’m anything like him.

King glances around the cell, his disgust growing the longer he stares. “I was meant to rot in this prison.”

He was a prisoner here? But he got out. If there’s a way for it to happen again, we need to stop it.

“You escaped... How?” I don’t expect him to reply, but he shocks the hell out of me when he turns to look at me, a sinister glint in his eyes as he answers.

“*You.*”

One word and my world is turned on its head.

“What?” I shake my head. How could I have helped him escape?

“You’re lying.” I slam into the wall as his power whips out and holds me in place.

“Look familiar?” A dark tendril coils around my neck, tightening. Dark tendrils that look similar to mine.

He must see recognition in my eyes as his smirk grows.

“We’re the same, you and me. Because this...” he waves a hand as the black tendrils curl around it. “...all came from you.”

He chuckles. It’s fucking creepy, echoing around me and sending an icy shiver down my spine. He pulls back, dropping me to the ground. I cough and splutter, trying to catch my breath and try to get my head around what he said.

No. *There’s no way...* This was just another one of his tricks. Another way to manipulate me to get what he wants.

King slowly steps forward, a cruel tilt to his lips. “You not only helped me escape, but you helped make me what I am today. You gave me the power to build my empire.”

He’s crazy. He has to be to make up something like this. Maybe the power has finally gone to his head.

I glance around the room, wondering if there’s a way out. I can’t use my powers in here, but if he’s in here with me, that must mean he’s close by.

I need to figure out a way out and quick. Once I have my powers, I can end this once and for all.

King is oblivious to my inner thoughts as he continues to walk around the cell.

“You were barely a prick in your mother’s womb when I clung to your power and escaped.”

Wait. “What?”

“A link was forged between us, and it kept me alive long enough to gain strength. Feeding from your pain and suffering while growing more powerful was... simply an added bonus.”

I kept him alive all these years... by feeding him my pain? That's so messed up. In more ways than one. I push it to the back of my mind, not ready to process it just yet.

“Why do you think I kept you close all these years?” he asks me like I'm an idiot. And maybe I am if any of what he's saying is true.

The only reason I came up with was that he's sadistic and fucking psychotic. If he fed on my pain and suffering, I must have been a fucking buffet with how many ways he killed me.

“After a while, I found a little flaw in our arrangement. It would seem everything has its balance. You gave me strength and power, but you also became my one weakness.”

I flinch at his words, my stomach twisting into a mass of knots. If what he's saying is true, it really does come down to me.

“I thought your mates would be able to break the link once bonded, but it never happened. Fortunately, it had an interesting... side-effect.” King lifts his hand as black scales trail up his arm, his finger changes to long back claws.

“I thought I was powerful before, but I had no idea what else was waiting for me.”

Fuck. That's all we need. King to gain even more power.

Apparently, I've no one but myself to blame for it, too.

“What do you want from me?”

“I finally figured out a way to break this little link between us, and you're going to help me do it.”

King steps back just as the ground beneath us shifts once more. This time we're in a large circular room, a huge sphere in the middle of it.

King steps up beside it, eyeing it with something akin to lust before turning to me.

I fist my hands, trying to summon up the strength needed. “I'll never help you.”

King raises a brow, still smirking. He steps back and waves to the floor. “No? Not even for one of your little mates?”

My mates?

My heart stops as Luka appears lying on the ground right beside King. I stare at Luka, watching the small rise and fall of his chest, and wonder if this is real.

“How is he here?”

My eyes widen as King leans down beside him, closing his eyes as he takes a deep breath. “So much pain...”

“No!” I move without thinking, getting a couple of feet away from them before I’m thrown backward, slamming into the jagged wall before hitting the ground.

I gasp, glancing down as blood dribbles down my lip onto the floor. Groaning, I push myself up; my ribs and back feeling bruised and broken.

Still trying to catch my breath, I glance up, finding King staring right at me. “I’ve switched up your little mind game, so anything that happens in here is permanent.” King smiles, glancing down at Luka. “So, if your little mate dies in here...”

He dies out there too... *No!*

“I may not be able to gain power from him, but that doesn’t mean I can’t kill him. Even with your ability, he *will* die.”

He could be bluffing. Most injuries the guys have been able to heal from...But we’re in the Underworld now and King is a lot more powerful than we thought. There are so many things we don’t know.

If there’s even the slightest chance that he could be telling the truth... I couldn’t take the chance and risk it.

King opens his mouth; it expands unnaturally as he bends back down to hover over Luka.

“No!” I rush forward again, immediately getting shoved back. I try again and again but end up further and further away

from them.

King's shadow snakes slither onto Luka's body, coiling around it. The minute they touch his skin, Luka turns pale, so pale he's nearly white.

"Stop. Please." I beg just as blood begins to drip from Luka's ears and nose.

He knows I'll choose my mates, but still, he toys with me, proving how weak and useless I really am. My knees drop to the ground as the tears run down my cheeks.

"Stop, and I'll do whatever you want."

King's shadows slowly lift as he looks up at me, the smile he's wearing unnerving. It grows as my shoulders drop.

He knows he has me where he wants me.

"Just let him live," I beg. I'll plead and promise, whatever he asks, if only to keep him alive.

My mates are the *one* thing I can't compromise on in this world. Now that I know what it's like to have them in my life, *truly* have them, I can't live without them. I don't want to.

Without warning, King's shadows fully lift from his skin and join to form a thick tendril. It wraps around Luka, lifting him in the air and slamming him into the ground.

I jump forward, forgetting about the barrier only to be thrown back again, this time harder as I slam into the wall, leaving a cracked imprint.

I slide down to the floor as Luka coughs, spewing up blood.

Squeezing my eyes tight, I reach down and try to drag up any sliver of power. I pull and pull, feeling the drips of sweat slide down my face. But no matter how hard I tug it; I can't access any of my power.

"Please..." I beg again, watching the rise and fall of Luka's chest making sure he's still alive.

King stands up, fixing the cuff of his shirt. "You're going to pull the power from the core into you. It will break the link

between us.”

The core? I glance over at the large sphere in the middle of the room.

“And then what?”

“And then... I feed.” What he says hits me like a ton of bricks and what it means.

He’s going to feed from me, taking that power into him, making him much stronger than he is right now.

King glances at the sphere, smiling. “You will do what I say... or he dies.”

I swallow hard, looking over at Luka, his face now completely white, the circles under his eyes dark and hollow.

I try to stall to come up with something, but I know I’m running out of time. “I can’t use my powers. They don’t work here.” If they did, you wouldn’t be standing there with that smug look on your face.

King smirks. “This isn’t your mind anymore... It’s *mine*, and I make the rules here. I will release us when *I* choose.”

Damn it.

The longer I stare at Luka, the more blood I see until my mind imagines him bleeding out and leaving this world. I grab my chest as the tightness nearly chokes me.

I can’t lose him. No matter the consequences. And if that makes me selfish, or evil, or the monster here, then so be it.

King smiles, seeing the answer on my face. Using his tendril, he pulls Luka to him, the dark tendril wrapping around his whole body, keeping him in place. “One wrong move, and your little mate is never waking up.”

King closes his eyes and just like before, I feel the shift beneath my feet.

I blink and I’m lying down in the room I was in moments ago but whereas that was an illusion, this is not. I feel my power pulse inside me, calling out to the familiar energy in the core.

I look over and find Luka in the same spot, still out cold and bleeding, with King right beside him, his shadows coiled around him.

“No tricks or he dies.”

I get up and glance around to see that our surroundings are still the same. The core is still in the middle of the circular room. The only difference is the energy and power I feel inside it and around me.

It’s vast. So vast, it feels infinite.

And something this powerful should never be in the hands of someone like King.

But I can’t lose Luka either. I can’t lose any of them.

I try to think of something else. To come up with another way out of this, but I keep drawing blanks, my thoughts scattered between Luka and my other mates.

Where are they? Did King get to them, too?

I glance at the core just as a pulse of energy spans out around me.

“Why not just take it yourself and break the link?”

King’s reply is a cruel laugh. “Do you think if I could take that power, I’d need *you*? You’re the only one who can even touch it.”

“Why?”

“Why? Because you’re the same and like calls to like.”

I glance back at the sphere. It pulses as if confirming King’s answer. “Once I take the power, what will happen to the Underworld?”

King’s twisted smile grows. “It will throw off the balance, plunging the world into destruction and chaos.”

My stomach drops. When I do this, I’m not only releasing a powerful monster, but I’m also helping destroy the world, too.

I close my eyes as anguish settles over me, coating me in it until it weighs heavily on me.

“Enough stalling. Let’s begin.”

I clench my jaw as the blood in my veins begins to heat. I focus on King and his arrogant smirk as I reach out and feel for the energy of the core once more.

It hits me like a ton of bricks.

King is right, at least with this. The energy feels familiar yet... different. *More*.

I begin to pull, the energy flowing into me like the rush of a river while I stare down King, promising myself that somehow, I *will* fix this.

* * *

KAI

“I’LL TAKE YOU TO THEM.” The door appears once more. Ivor nods to Soren before they both head out. I follow them close behind, keeping my eyes peeled for anything and everything.

What started as a hunt for King has ended up as a twisted game of horrors.

As we make our way along a long hall with gray walls and a granite black floor, I catch Soren and Ivor trading worried looks. Rion gives me a nod, telling me he’s noticed it, too.

We follow the hall, taking a sharp left and right that eventually leads to a downward spiraling staircase.

After a few steps, the staircase opens up, becoming as wide as the entrance growing more rocky and uneven the further we move down it.

“Where are we heading?” Jax asks, eying the dark steps.

Ivor sighs as if it’s an inconvenience to share even the slightest piece of information. He moves forward, not looking

back. “To the core of the Underworld. We need to move through the Prison realm to get there. Orthis has got most of it under control but keep your eyes open.”

Jax scowls at his back, mumbling something about dickheads and liars while Axel looks like he’s ready to tear this place apart, his agitated state growing the longer our mate and brother are missing. I didn’t blame him; I wanted to rip this place apart just as much.

Soren gives me a look. “If you get a chance, Orthis will want to meet you. He’s your family, after all.”

“The only family I’m interested in right now is my mate and brothers.” Blood means nothing when it comes to *true* family. Most of us learned that firsthand and Orthis is just another stranger.

The staircase opens out into another wide hall, but one that looks like they carved it in a mountain. The black rock that starts halfway down the stairs lines the floors and walls.

Soren turns to us, a serious look on his face, before turning back to Ivor. “Keep your guard about you. This is where most of the demons in your world came from.”

We make it less than a couple of steps before the growls and screams of the prison assault us.

Axel freezes. “What the—”

I mirror Rion’s frown before looking at Ivor. “Isn’t this a prison for the worst of the worse? Meaning demons. So why do we hear screams?”

Soren passes us, waving us to follow. “Demons aren’t the only evil in this world. There are many different creatures and beasts, including humans, that are more vicious and viler than some of the demons in the Underworld.”

Something didn’t add up. “Why not just leave them all in the realm of the damned?”

Soren looks at me with a smirk. “Because we cannot destroy most of the demons down here for fear of upsetting the balance, and they need to be fed.”

Fed...

Axel stops in his tracks. “Wait... you *feed* the demons down here? With what?”

Soren shares a wicked smile with Ivor before looking over his shoulder at us. “Some beings are beyond reform, their sins too vile to be forgiven. This is one of the ways they pay. Their souls are completely gone once fed upon by the demons, making sure they’ll never be reborn again.”

Jax chuckles. “Good fucking riddance. Feed them all to the fuckers. It’s the least they deserve.”

We keep moving, but I glance at Rion, a seed of a plan forming. As always, Rion knows exactly where my thoughts have gone. He nods his head, giving me a small smirk.

The hall soon opens up to a wide-open area with the ceiling disappearing into an infinite night sky. Thick jagged rocks are randomly spaced ahead, with each spanning about twenty feet tall.

We start moving through them when the screaming grows louder. Soren and Ivor ignore it, keeping their pace.

Glancing around, I notice something is missing. “Where are the prisons?”

Soren glances over his shoulder before tilting his head at the thick, jagged rocks. “You’re looking at them. Each contains a prison that locks away a demon. No one should be able to bypass that lock. So, you can understand our frustration. Not only did King rip a hole in this realm, opening it into your world. He somehow tore open the lock on most of these cells, unleashing the demons inside.”

Ivor grunts. “Not an easy feat.”

I share a look with the guys. We’ve underestimated King and his power for too long but no more.

More and more jagged prisons appear, placed randomly around us until we make our way through a labyrinth of them.

Axel rolls his neck, scowling at Soren’s back. “This place is like a fucking maze.”

Soren nods, waving his hand around us. “That’s the point. Should any try to escape or get in, those that don’t know the secrets to work the maze will be lost forever.”

“Sounds like fun.” Jax gives him a deadpan look.

Soren’s mouth twists into a smirk as he narrows his eyes on Jax. “Why don’t you give it a go?”

Jax chuckles. “Trying to get rid of me, old man?”

“One can only hope.”

Jax walks over to him, wrapping an arm around his shoulder. Soren stares at it like he would a snake.

“Don’t be like that. You know you’d miss me if I were gone.”

“I really wouldn’t. I have a feeling the only one who would miss you is your mate.”

Jax nods like that’s a given. “Of course, she would. I’m her favorite.”

Soren looks over at the rest of us as if waiting for one of us to deny it. But we all know what Jax is like and even though he likes to vie for Kiarra’s attention, we know he doesn’t mean it. It’s just his way of lighting the mood when everyone gets too serious, including himself.

Soren drops Jax’s arm, giving him a look of warning, making him laugh. He sighs before moving closer to Ivor.

A low growl hits my ears just as we round the next corner, making me pause. Rion whips out his blades just as a large beast surges forward, leaping up to attack. Before it reaches us, I shoot forward, grabbing it by its neck, holding it in place.

The beast is nearly the same size as me as it growls, trying to snap at me. I tighten my hold and it whimpers.

My senses pick up more just as three more hounds surround us.

My own hounds rise up as I push my alpha power out around us. “*Yield.*”

One word and they all freeze. I release more power and narrow my eyes on them. I feel a mental tap as they try to push back, but I push harder and watch as each of their heads dip, baring their necks to me.

Dropping the beast, it walks backward to its kin, avoiding eye contact with me. I pull back my hellhounds just as I sense another presence nearby.

“Not bad.”

I turn around, only to find an older version of myself staring back at me. His dark hair is longer, tied back and he wears more of a laid-back, easy-going attitude.

Something stirs inside me; my hounds move to the surface once more.

His smile grows, but there’s nothing but warmth in his eyes making me pause. “Now is not the time for a challenge, little bro.”

Jax’s head whips from mine, to whom I can only assume is Orthis. “Bro?”

Orthis’s eyes pulse as he tilts his head. I feel a brush of energy as it slides over me. “Half. We definitely had the same father.”

“You knew he was your brother?” Ivor’s eyes widen, his voice reaching another octave.

“Of course, I did. How do you think he’s avoided all of you this long?” Orthis chuckles as Ivor’s face turns beet red. “He should’ve been brought here the minute you found out.”

Orthis shrugs before pinning me with a look. “He deserves to make his own choices.”

I frown, not understanding why he’d help me, and wonder if he has a reason for it. If there’s something he wants in return for this so-called protection.

After all, blood means nothing in our world.

A howl sounds out, shaking me from my thoughts.

“Go. I’ve got this covered.” Orthis looks toward me. “We’ll catch up another time.”

I nod before sharing a look with the guys as we follow Soren and Ivor. Soren’s wearing a smile while Ivor is pissed as hell as he curses Orthis out.

I ignore them, my agitation growing the longer it takes to reach Kiarra and Luka. The rest of the guys are in a similar state, with even Jax quieter as he snarls at everything around him.

The labyrinth suddenly opens up, the infinite sky disappearing as we come through another long hall with double doors at the end of it.

Even from here, I can feel the energy pulsing from it. One look from the guys and I know they sense it, too.

Once we reach the doors, Ivor mumbles something in a strange language, and they glow before sliding open.

Like everything in the Underworld, the outside of the room is deceiving as the room opens up to a large circular dome with enough space to fit our entire apartment with space.

The source of the pulsing energy is a large black sphere that sits in the middle of the room. It isn’t until I look closer do I see Kiarra and Luka laid out on the ground beside the sphere.

I make a move toward them when a transparent barrier stops me in my place. I whip around and spear Ivor and Soren with a furious glare. The others try but come up with the same resistance before moving to stand beside me, each ready to attack the two idiots now in front of us.

“What the hell is going on?” I grit out, sounding more beast than man.

Soren grimaces, looking at Ivor as the idiot demon takes a step back from us, raising his hands. “You were all in here. You needed to be close to the core and its power for the last trial. Once you passed, you were then transported to the room we just left.”

“Why can’t I go to them?” I glance back at Kiarra and Luka. They both look serene, as if they’re just taking a nap, but after going through the mental test myself, I know that’s anything but true.

They’re both in fucking hell right now. Their own *personal* hell.

“If anything happens to them, you’re dead,” Axel warns, before moving as close to them as the barrier will let him.

“Let’s give them a little more time.” Ivor shares another worried look with Soren. It doesn’t go unnoticed by any of us.

Minutes pass by agonizingly slow. I’m pacing back and forth beside the barrier when I notice a shift on the other side. Glancing over, I watch as blood starts to leak from Luka’s nose and ears.

Jax notices it too as he tries to punch a hole in the barrier. “Fuck this. Just get them out of there.”

Ivor shakes his head. I sense his fear as he eyes us. “It’s not possible. Rielle—”

“*What’s* not possible?”

Ivor shares another look with Soren before turning to me. “Their minds have been connected to the core power of the Underworld. It would be like pulling someone out of a coma when they’re not ready. It’s too dangerous.”

Jax points toward Luka as the blood pools around him. “And that isn’t?”

Soren looks at Ivor. “They’re not supposed to be capable of getting physically hurt while in the link.”

Ivor tries to reassure us, but not even Soren believes him as he grows more worried.

While both are talking, I feel the energy shift behind the barrier just as Kiarra wakes. My heartbeat trebles as she stands up and glares at the empty space beside Luka.

“She’s awake. Kiarra’s awake,” I tell them.

The guys freeze before whipping around. But the longer I watch Kiarra, the more I know something isn't right. I can feel it.

They need to get out. Now.

“Kiarra!” Jax moves, ready to go to her, forgetting about the barrier. Axel stops him centimeters from hitting it.

Axel narrows his eyes on Ivor. “Why can't she hear or see us?”

Ivor swallows hard, growing paler. “She was supposed to be sent to the room you woke up in once she woke. Not here. Whatever is happening in there is not our doing.”

Damn it.

Soren frowns, watching her. “What is she doing?”

Kiarra turns toward the large sphere in the room. Focusing on it, I watch as energy slides over her body, moving from the sphere to her and then onto a spot beside Luka.

“Look. The energy is going somewhere. It's not staying with her.” Axel points to a spot beside Luka where the energy seems to just disappear.

What the hell is going on?

“Rion?” One word, and he already knows what I want to know.

Rion narrows his eyes on the spot. “There's something else in there. Something powerful.”

I frown as I try to sense anything familiar on the spot, but all I feel is something off. Something that unnerves even me.

Rion's eyes widen. “It's King.”

Turning around, I rush forward and grab Ivor by the throat, pinning him against the nearest wall. “Drop the barrier or I'll rip your throat out.”

There's no fucking way I'm leaving my mate and brother in there alone with *him*.

“I agree. Something isn’t right. I’ll do it.” Soren steps forward, raising his hands toward the barrier. He closes his eyes as I snarl at Ivor before dropping him to the ground and moving beside Soren.

We ignore Ivor’s splutters and gasps as the barrier shimmers in front of us. Soren’s body grows stiff, making my stomach drop. He opens his eyes wide, turning to look straight at me. “We’re locked out.”

Ivor scrambles up to Soren’s side. “That’s not possible.”

Ivor does the same thing Soren does, but just like him, he comes up empty, the barrier still in place.

I can’t take it anymore. I lose it and start to shift; each of my hounds out for blood.

Dark lines of ash trail up my arms as my body expands. It draws the attention of others.

“You shouldn’t be able to shift in here. How...” Ivor stumbles back as my hounds come out to play.

I catch the guy’s savage smirks as they span out around the barrier, ready and waiting for me to destroy it.

I wasn’t losing my family or mate *ever* again.

The time for waiting was over.

CHAPTER 22



I CLOSE my eyes and focus on the core and its power. It brushes up against my senses, gliding over my skin before seeping into every cell in my body.

I step into it, letting it consume me.

Soon it's everywhere. I taste it on my tongue and smell it in the air around me.

I pull the energy to me, and a connection forms. It flows effortlessly, the power feeling endless.

Within minutes I'm full. Too full. The power filling up every nerve and cell in my body.

But I don't stop.

More... The thought is all it takes before the energy swells up and expands. I gasp as it surges into me, the core flooding me with more power than I can handle.

But I keep pulling it until it's brimming inside me and overflowing out around me. It builds and builds until it consumes me, slowly burning throughout my body.

I grit my teeth as it quickly turns painful. A sharp slash that expands to every nerve.

My legs start to shake, and I know it won't be long before I hit the ground. Instead, my body turns as stiff as a board as a sudden tug starts dragging the power from me.

Panting through the pain, I slowly turn my head and watch as King stands there, his mouth unnaturally wide, his eyes

completely white as he feeds from me.

But instead of feeling some relief, the pain intensifies, shooting through my head and body in agonizing waves.

I try to pull back, to stop for a moment, but it's relentless as it rushes through me to him. I try again, if only to break the connection for a moment, but nothing happens.

Seconds pass as I stand there, no longer focusing on anything but the pain. It grips me like a vice, holding me as its captive.

It's then that I realize I'm not the one in control.

King is.

A loud rumble echoes around the room. My eyes widen on the core, as small fractures appear, splintering up through it.

The small cracks split open and rupture as the core becomes unstable.

A blaze of heat sears through my skull just as lava spills from the core onto the ground. Flames igniting everything they touch before they expand.

The endless power continues to flow through me and into King while the destruction spreads to the rest of the room.

I'm helpless to do anything but stand here and watch as the devastating damage mirrors the agony inside my body.

The core shakes and groans as it loses more and more power. While the pain intensifies, my chest grows tight as flames engulf the walls. I start to panic when I realize there may be no coming back from this.

Before I can think of a way out, the core gives one last rush of power, surging through me to King and forcing me to my knees.

Just as I hit the ground, something splinters inside me, cracking open to release a weight I never realized was there.

But instead of feeling less of a person, I feel more of one. Like a heavy weight on my shoulders has finally lifted, releasing the silent dark cloud over me.

It's the link, it has to be.

I take a deep breath, relief shuddering through me as my healing ability slowly kicks in.

I glance around for Luka, but all I can see is the chaos I caused. My stomach drops, twisting into knots the longer I look around the room.

What have I done?

I watch in horror as the destruction spreads further, trying to escape the room. It won't be long before it expands outside it and then true hell will break loose.

Shaking off my spiraling thoughts, I push myself up and look for Luka.

King is nowhere to be found, but I spot Luka over near the entrance. The flames haven't reached him yet, but it won't be long before they do.

He's safe... *for now.*

I turn back when a shimmer from behind Luka catches my eye. I focus on it when it shimmers again. But this time I could've sworn I saw something else... A large dark form with familiar red eyes.

Thinking the core must have messed with my head, I turn around and focus on it when the room starts to shake. But this time it's as if it's coming from the outside and working itself in.

The core's lack of power must already be affecting the Underworld.

There has to be *something* I can do.

A beam in the ceiling collapses, making me jump out of the way. I fall back, catching my hand on something sharp, slicing it, but it heals within seconds.

My healing ability... King took the core's power through me, but I still have *my* powers. I glance up to the core just as King's words come back to me.

Like calls to like...

Maybe I can fix this after all. I get up, feeling slightly more confident with a plan in mind.

You're the same... If we're the same, then maybe I can give back what I took. Or at least mend it long enough until I figure something else out.

"Kiarra..." I hear a whisper of my name and know it must be Luka. I glance over at him as he stirs, his eyes widening when he sees the chaos around him.

"Kiarra!" He stumbles up, looking around. When he finds me, terror fills his wide eyes. They quickly narrow, morphing into a determined look as he tries to find a way over to me.

He glances at the flamed path between us. His hands shaking as he stumbles forward.

"Stop!" I shout, hoping he'll listen. Luka looks up hearing me even among the devastation.

"It's too dangerous," I plead.

Luka narrows his eyes on me, shaking his head as he tries to find another way over to me. His stubbornness knowing no bounds.

"Stay where you are. I'm coming to you."

I glance back at the core. Luka catches me, his frown turning into a pissed-off glare. With one glance, I can tell he knows what I'm about to do.

"Don't even think about it, Kiarra."

But I have no other choice. If I don't try to at least fix this, none of us are making it out of here alive.

"I'll be fine, I promise." I turn quickly, ignoring Luka's protests, and make my way around the flamed cracks until I'm close enough to the core. Once I'm near enough, I reach down inside me and pull up everything I have left. I gather every sliver of power inside me and drag it up and push it toward the damaged core.

As if it can sense what I'm trying to do, it quickly forms a connection and pulls the energy from me.

“Kiarra!”

I hear Luka once more, but he sounds further away. I try to turn to him, but I can no longer move, my body consumed with its task to give back what it took.

Black dots appear across my vision as the room tilts and sways. I blink, forcing myself to stay awake long enough to fix this.

Suddenly, the destruction in the room slows down to a stop as everything freezes. I glance at the core and watch as it slowly starts to mend itself, my power closing the large cracks until they're nothing but small fractures.

I start to relax, thinking it's working when the pull turns to a sharp yank and it grows, pulling everything from me.

No...

I try to pull back, to cut the connection, but it grips on tighter, clawing at every nerve and pulling every ounce of energy from me as if it's been starved.

“Kiarra... No! Kiarra, stop!” Luka's voice drifts around me as the core continues to replace what was taken.

What *I* had taken from it.

It pulls more and more power from me until I start to feel weightless. Until the room spins and starts to grow dark.

Too much. It's too much... I need to pull back.

“Stop Kiarra. Stop, baby. *Please.*” Familiar voices float around me as more and more of my powers are drained from me. More dark spots enter my vision as I realize my body is crossing a line it won't be able to return from.

I try again to break away from the core, but it's like pulling against a steel tonne. I try again and again, but instead of stopping it, it speeds up, pulling more and more from me until my body turns numb. Until it slowly starts to shut down.

No matter how hard I try, I can't stop it.

Familiar voices shout around me, begging me to stop as I continue to grow weaker.

But I *can't* stop...

Tears flow freely down my cheeks as the realization of what's about to happen fully hits me.

I drop to the ground, not feeling my body hit it as everything turns cold and numb. The only thing I can feel is my heart as it cracks and rips open.

This isn't what I wanted...

My mates' faces float in and out of my vision as the world around me slows down, turning silent. That's when I realize... that this is it. This is the end for us.

After everything we've been through... *this* is our end together.

I try to open my mouth, but my lips no longer work, my energy too depleted as the world around me slowly fades into a black haze.

I'm sorry. I try telling them with my eyes, but it doesn't feel like it's enough.

And it never will be.

I drift away into the darkness, my last thoughts of the five men who own my heart, and how cruel our ending turned out to be.

After all, *death is no more an escape than it is a curse...*

CHAPTER 23



BUT LOVE... love is endless. Becoming an infinite place where hope is born, and life begins once more...

* * *

A LUMINESCENT LIGHT wraps around me, encasing me in its warmth. It fills me up making me feel safe. Whole. Loved.

I drift off for a second, or what feels like it. When I wake, the light above glows bright, so bright it glares down on me, taking me a minute to fully open my eyes.

When the light slowly dims, it reveals a small white room. *Everything* is white. From the bed I'm lying on to the floors, the walls, and the door. My eyes catch on the walls as they glimmer and shine, like there's some weird type of glitter on them.

Where am I?

The last thing I remember was... the core. And then there were flames and— My eyes widen as everything comes flooding back to me.

The core. Luka. The Underworld.

My chest grows tight, as the small room closes in around me. My mates. The bond... the—I pause, placing my hand to my chest where I feel our six strands pulse as if they're trying to tell me something.

But how? *How* can I still feel our bond when I'm... dead.

“Kiarra?”

I jump at the sound, not realizing anyone else was in here with me. I sit up and turn to the voice, my heart stuttering to a stop when I see the woman who called me.

This can't be real. *She* can't be real because she died six years ago and no matter how many times I begged, pleaded, and cried, she *never* showed up.

Her dark brown hair is slightly shorter and less soft than I remember, her skin a shade lighter but her green eyes are the exact color and shape as mine.

“M-Mom?” My voice is raw, my throat tight as I stare at a ghost from my past.

My mom smiles but it's not the smile I remember. It's awkward, unsure and the light and warmth that's normally in her eyes is now only a glimmer.

“You need to rest. Even though your mates were able to save you, you're still not fully healed.”

“My mates saved me. I'm alive?” I glance down at my body. My skin is barely covered in a white slip of a gown, the material as soft as silk but I *am* completely healed. There are no cuts, bruises, or wounds from the aftermath of trying to fix the core.

And I feel good. *Rested.*

“The bond between the six of you is no ordinary bond.”

I glance up at my... but she can't be, can she? She just said I was alive, and I know for a fact that my mom is dead. I saw her die years ago. And if by some sliver of a chance she was still alive, she would've come after me. She would never have let King take me...

I shake my head, stopping my thoughts from running wild. “Who are you? I mean, you look like...”

She smiles that strange smile again as a look of pity crosses her face. “No, Kiarra. I'm not Reyna.”

I nod trying to swallow past the hard lump in my throat. I knew it, but if I was honest with myself, there was still that sliver of hope that my mom was actually here with me somehow.

“Who are you? And where am I? Where are my mates?” She said I wasn’t dead, but this room isn’t like anything I’ve seen in the Underworld.

I glance around the weird white room again getting a better look at it now that I’m fully awake and sitting up. Apart from the bed, there’s only a small chair. There’s no window and the only way out is the door behind *her*.

My eyes move back to my mother’s doppelgänger. Could demons create illusions, or was she something else?

“I’m her sister. Her twin, Rielle.” Her expression is stiff as she watches my every move, but I’m frozen after hearing her words.

If she’s my mother’s sister, doesn’t that make her...

“You’re my... *aunt*?”

Rielle smiles, a real one this time. “Yes, Kiarra.”

Elation bubbles up inside me at the thought of having more family. But as soon as the thought crosses my mind, reality swiftly kicks in, reminding me that this woman is still a stranger. And blood means nothing.

This could also all be some fabricated lie, another game, or messed up trick. It wouldn’t be the first time I was fooled so easily.

I narrow my eyes on her. “How do I know you’re telling me the truth?”

Rielle’s smile drops slightly. “You have my word.”

Which means nothing to me. She’s a stranger. One that may look like my mother, but I live in a world where illusions and magic are real. It’s very possible that this is another illusion or spell.

Mom never mentioned her either, and I don't remember *Rielle* ever visiting us. My frown grows the longer I think about it.

If she is my aunt, why does she care now after all this time?

“Mom never mentioned you.”

She forces her smile back in place. “Reyna had no memories of her life before you. It was part of the... *deal* she made.”

Oh, right, I forgot about that. It makes sense that I never heard about her from mom. But what about *Rielle*? *She* still remembered.

“Is that why you never came to see her?” Wouldn't she want to check up on her sister, her twin?

Mom was vulnerable, she was pregnant and alone with no abilities. Couldn't she at least check in on her every now and then?

But maybe I'm giving her too much credit, basing my feelings off my family with the guys instead of the reality of having one.

“I wanted to but I couldn't leave the Underworld.” I give her a look making sure she knows it sounds like a shitty excuse. Family should always come first.

Rielle sighs. “There's a lot you don't know and a lot you don't understand.”

And apparently a lot she's not telling me. I stop myself from rolling my eyes. “Then tell me. I'm never going to understand unless you at least try to explain.”

Rielle nods as an exhausted look settles over her. “The Underworld is imbalanced.”

That's... nothing new. “Soren told us.”

Her eye twitches at the mention of Soren but she continues on as if it never happened. “But it all started when Reyna left.”

I frown thinking over Rielle's words. I thought the imbalance started when King released the demons from the Underworld recently.

But it sounds like the imbalance began when *I* was created.

She gives me a look as if trying to tell me something. But I've already started to piece it together.

I'm the imbalance. I have to be. The timeline adds up. As soon as Mom left the Underworld, that's when she said the imbalance started and even when she died, it never got better. That was because I was still alive in King's Tower.

"So, *I'm* what caused the imbalance?" The thought that my existence alone caused something this big makes my stomach churn.

Rielle gives me a small smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes. "No. Not *you*. The imbalance began when a powerful being escaped the Underworld."

A powerful... She gives me a look and with that one look I know exactly *who* she's talking about.

"*King.*"

Rielle nods, a frown on her face as she starts pacing back and forth. "After King escaped, the Underworld went into a type of lockdown. No Guardians were allowed to leave for fear of being compromised and upsetting the balance further."

"But Mom left..."

She shakes her head. "Reyna was human when she left the Underworld. She would not have upset the balance."

"Then why—"

"*King.* He was once a Guardian."

Everything around me comes to a screeching stop. The blood pumping in my ears like a drum as I stare at Rielle in shock. "What? How? I mean..."

She releases a harsh breath. "Guardians are created from the essence of Gods and powerful warriors, fully born with the knowledge of what we need to do. Among our strengths is the

ability to absorb energy from those corrupted and filter it through the Underworld to protect and maintain the balance. But instead of filtering it back into the Underworld, King kept it for himself. He twisted it into something dark and vile. He fed on souls, both good and bad, tainting everything with his touch. All while growing more powerful, tilting the scales further.”

I hear what Rielle is telling me, but it doesn't process as quickly as I want it to, my mind still stuck on the part that King was once a Guardian... like my mother.

How can someone so vile, so *evil* be created from the same entity?

Rielle continues while I freak out internally. “When we found out about the corruption, the balance was already starting to become unstable, but he was still in the Underworld at this point, so it didn't affect the outside. We immediately placed him in the Prison realm and had hoped to absorb and filter his energy to fix this mess but as you know that never happened. He was somehow able to escape his prison and found you, or your power.”

Which basically verifies King's story from that point onward. My brain feels about ready to explode as it tries to come to terms with this new information.

King was once... good? Or was he?

I shake my head not letting myself go there. It didn't matter what he was or did before. He made his choices in the end and now he must pay for them.

I glance up at Rielle as she watches me, gauging my reaction. “What about the other demons that have escaped into my world? Won't they also add to the imbalance?” We already killed a load when they attacked Manhattan.

Rielle shakes her head. “Most demons born here are not as powerful as Guardians and although they have some sway on the balance, they won't affect it as much as King and what he's taken. He's the only one that *must* be brought back to the Underworld and absorbed.”

One less thing to worry about, I suppose. But maybe I'm just grasping at straws hoping we'll get a break.

A puff of dark smoke appears beside the bed. It quickly gathers into a large mass before the shadow beast walks through as if he decided to take himself for a walk.

Instead of freaking out, Rielle reaches out and pats its head with a smile on her lips.

"I was wondering where you went to."

My eyes move from Rielle to the shadow beast, the familiarity in Rielle's eyes telling me this isn't the first time they've met. "You know this... shadow beast?"

Rielle's lips widen a warm smile as she continues to pet him. "This is Zillah. He was your mother's companion. He's been missing for a while."

Zillah lets her pet him, lapping it up like an actual pet instead of glaring at her the way he does with me.

I narrow my eyes on the traitor.

"He stayed with me for a while but six years ago, he disappeared completely. I thought he followed Reyna to the afterlife, but it would seem he stuck around for another reason." She gives me a look.

She can't be implying that he stuck around for me. There's no way.

"You think he stayed for me?" I give her an incredulous look.

The light in Rielle's eyes glimmers with humor. "I can already see the connection formed. You won't get rid of him now."

"That's because he's stubborn and just does what he wants." The shadow beast narrows his eyes on me, making Rielle laugh.

"Shadow companions are rare. Not many Guardians get one. It's a great honor. They will protect you for life."

"Then why didn't he..." Why didn't he protect Mom?

I don't have to finish my question. As soon as I start, Rielle gives me a small knowing smile. "The connection was severed once Reyna lost her powers. She wouldn't have been able to contain him or his energy. Not as a human, but *you* could. Zillah must have sensed your power, even as a child."

"I'm not a Guardian." I glance back at Zillah just as he rolls his eyes. I look at Rielle wondering if she caught the fucker but she's too busy watching me.

"No, but you have the blood of one."

Rielle's eyes grow soft, reminding me so much of my mother. "He's fiercely independent, incredibly intelligent, and loyal to a fault. Once your connection grows stronger, he'll be someone you can rely on for a very long time."

I glance back at Zillah just as he gives me one of his superior looks. The kind that says, I'm lucky to have him.

And maybe I am, in more ways than one. It's nice to know he was around my mom growing up. In a way, it makes me feel closer to her.

"I guess he can stick around."

He narrows his eyes on me as if to say, *'like you have a choice.'*

I laugh at him when a sharp yank from somewhere deep inside me makes me gasp.

Rielle turns to me with worried eyes. "What is it?"

I rub the spot but narrow my eyes on Zillah as he fucking smirks at me. "Zillah just yanked on our connection. It was *hard* too."

Rielle frowns at Zillah before looking back at me. "He must need to tell you something. Focus on the connection between you two and he'll show you what he needs to."

"That's something we can do?"

Rielle nods while Zillah just looks at me like I'm an idiot.

I reach down inside me and find the link that connects me and Zillah. It's not hard to find after the fucker yanked on it a

moment ago. Once I have it, I pull it closer, letting the connection form around me. As soon as I do, I start seeing flashes of Manhattan. But not of the Manhattan we left.

There's a huge battle going on with thousands of demons of all shapes and sizes. It's like nothing I've seen before. Nothing even close to the first battle in Manhattan or in the Underworld. The supes are holding on, but barely, and the carnage and destruction are something I would only see in my nightmares, covering every surface and plane.

The connection quickly cuts off as Zillah pulls back.

Rielle frowns at me. "What is it? You look pale."

I glance at her, not really seeing her, my mind still on the destruction in Manhattan, before glancing at Zillah.

"Is that real? Is that happening right now?"

Zillah nods, confirming my fears.

Every time I think it can't get any worse, something like this happens.

I look at Rielle and swallow hard. "It's King. He's got an army of demons and is destroying Manhattan and everything there. We need to leave as soon as possible. We need to help them."

Zillah disappears as quickly as he came.

"Where are my mates?"

"Your mates are close by, they're all... anxious to see you but they know you need your rest."

From the look in her eyes, I can tell she's trying to be nice when she says anxious. Stubborn, controlling, or overprotective, sounds more fitting and I doubted any of them agreed to leave my side without some convincing.

I move to get out of bed to go find them. She frowns watching me. She's about to say something when the door opens revealing Soren.

Rielle ignores him, still looking at me, but I catch the twitch in her eye and how her body turns stiff as he enters the

room.

Soren gives me a smile as I move over to him. “I’m glad you’re okay. Your mates have been insufferable since Rielle told them they couldn’t enter the healing room.”

I glance over at Rielle. She’s still in the same spot and as stiff as ever.

“How did you get them to agree to that?” They normally never let me out of their sight, especially after everything that has happened. But maybe this is progress?

Rielle’s lip twitches. “I told them you would heal quicker if no one was in the room.” And that worked? The twinkle in her eyes tells me there’s more to it.

Soren laughs. “You told them if they were in the room, the healing *wouldn’t* work... *at all*.”

I bite my lip from laughing at Rielle’s white lie. I’m still a little shocked they actually went along with her. But maybe her looking like my mom had something to do with it.

Rielle raises a brow at Soren. “She needed her rest. And having possessive, overprotective men hovering over her would do no one any good.”

“What you mean is... *you* wanted Kiarra all to yourself.” Soren nods his head with a mocking smile on his face.

She growls at him before rolling her eyes and murmuring something about idiotic men.

I catch Soren’s soft smile as he stares at her like she’s the only one in the room. He seems to realize that he’s not a moment later. Shaking his head, he glances between us.

“But that little white lie can’t hold them anymore. They’re demanding to see her right now. I’ve got five minutes to bring you to them and if I don’t, they’ve promised to rip through every room in this house and everyone in it until they find her.”

Soren looks right at Rielle, a wicked smirk on his face. “And you don’t want to know what they said they’ll do if she’s hurt.”

I smile to myself. *That sounds more like them.*

CHAPTER 24



RIELLE SIGHS, frowning at Soren before taking my arm and helping me out of the room. I'm basically healed, so I don't know whether this is for me or so she can get away from Soren quicker.

He follows us anyway, so I guess her little plan didn't work.

I walk out into a long hall. The walls are cream and brown, with paintings of stunning scenery along them. The floor is a dark wooden mahogany and the accessories and decor splashed around the place make it feel warm and welcoming.

"Where are we?" I ask.

"My home." Rielle laughs at my expression. "Not what you were expecting?"

"Are we still in Hell? The room we were in..." looked nothing like this. The walls literally sparkled, and it was white. Every square foot of it. Comparing the two is like night and day.

"The walls and floor are specifically designed to aid healing. There are special crystals embedded in them that speed up the process. The rest of the house is normal."

I pass a large statue of a demon and angel, the wings of each slicing through the other, and start to question whether Rielle understands the definition of *normal*.

"But we're still in Hell?" I ask just to be sure. This place looked nothing like the Hell we've been traveling through.

She nods again, laughing. I catch Soren as he smiles at her. He quickly covers it, glancing around as she answers me. “We’re close to the Infernal City. You’ve only seen a small part of it. There’s so much more to it than fiery pits and ashes.”

“That’s because I showed her all my shortcuts.” Soren smirks, giving her a side glance as if waiting on her reaction.

Rielle whips her head to him, a snarl on her face. “Shortcuts that *you* created.”

Soren shrugs, unfazed by her temper. “Why go the long way, when you can get to your destination in half the time?”

Rielle’s grip tightens on me, and she grits her teeth at him. “Because there are rules for a reason. Because if we don’t follow them, then the imbalance will—”

“Again, with your rules...” Soren groans. “Stop worrying so much and loosen up a little. You might enjoy yourself for once.”

Rielle swiftly turns back around and moves us down a wide staircase, ignoring Soren as he chuckles behind us.

But I’m too interested in what they said to drop it so quick. As soon as we’re downstairs, I turn to Soren.

“What shortcuts?”

Rielle sighs as Soren’s smirk grows. He looks at me as he answers. “If you know where to look and what to sense for, it’s like taking a straight walk through the park.”

Yeah, except it’s Hell...

I narrow my eyes on him remembering our first conversation in the cave. “I guess you weren’t lying when you said you were the best to get us through the realms, considering you literally created the path through them.”

Soren smirks. “My skills come in many forms. Just ask Rielle.”

Rielle murmurs something about insufferable men as she tries to ignore him, but all it does is make his smile grow.

“What would have happened if we didn’t have those shortcuts?” I really did feel like we walked right into each realm. The worlds just... shifted around us.

“It would’ve taken you a lot longer to get through each realm and you would’ve run into a lot meaner-looking demons than the ones you met.”

“Sounds like fun.”

I whip around just as Jax comes from the side of the staircase. He rushes forward and pulls me into a tight hug.

“Fuck, I missed you.” Jax breathes me in, holding me tighter as if he never wants to let go.

I grip him just as tight, feeling the same.

“Kiarra!” Luka comes up behind me, wrapping his arms around us both.

Jax pulls back a bit, just as Luka does the same. “Told you I’d find her.”

“Never doubted you for a minute, brother.” Jax and Luka share a smile before looking at me.

“Where are the rest of the guys?”

“Right here.” Axel comes around the staircase, a smile on his face when he sees me. It’s soft, not his usual alphahole smile. He rushes toward me, just as quick as Jax did and twirls me around.

“Hey. Stop hogging our mate. I found her first.” Jax frowns at Axel.

Soren rolls his eyes. “Technically, we were on our way to you.”

Jax gives Soren a bland look. “You still here, old man?”

Soren glances behind him before looking at Jax with a mock confused expression. “I don’t know who you’re talking to. The only *old* person here is Rielle and she’d prefer you call her *mature*. Think of her like a fine wine or... aged cheese depending on the day.” Soren winks at Rielle just as her twitch reappears .

Jax narrows his eyes on him, but his lips tilt up, giving himself away. “You’re just lucky you brought our mate to us.”

“Well, after you threatened to gut me, rip my soul to shreds and feed what’s left of me to the demons, I thought it would be in my best interest to carry out your... *request*.”

Jax nods like it’s an acceptable answer. He opens his mouth to reply when Rion and Kai show up.

“Siren.” Rion pulls me from Axel, earning a glare from him, but he barely notices, his entire focus on me as he pulls me closer.

I glance over Rion’s shoulder to find Kai standing close by with his fists clenched by his side, his entire body stiff. Just as Rion pulls back, Rielle steps up beside me.

“Let’s take this to the lounge. Kiarra should still be resting.” Rielle gives me a worried look, but I feel fine. More than fine. Especially now that all my guys are all safe.

I don’t get a chance to voice my opinion before Kai steps forward and sweeps me off my feet and moves in the direction they came.

“I can walk,” I tell him, attempting a glare, but he cuts me a look. His dark eyes full of pain and anger.

“You died. You don’t get a say in how overprotective we are right now.”

“It’s not like I wanted to die,” I mumble, more to myself than him. But still, I let him have his way. If it was the other way around, I’d be all over him, too.

“No, but it doesn’t change the fact that you did. Just let us take care of you.” I nod, leaning into him and letting his presence soothe every part of me.

We take a couple of sharp turns before we come to a large lounge, the decor of brown and creams similar to the rest of the house. There’s a large fireplace with a brown ornate design of roses in the middle, and a small library to the left.

Kai sits down in the middle of the large cream sofa set with the guys taking the seats around us. I go to move to the

seat beside him when he stops me. I look up at him and he shakes his head.

“Not yet...” Kai’s grip tightens as his voice cracks. “Just... not yet.”

My breath hitches at the look of complete devastation spreading across his face. I nod, leaning into him and try to console him with my warmth.

Silence drags on as they all stare at me as if I’ll disappear any second. Soren and Rielle walk into the room making them swing their gazes to them. But most of their focus is on Rielle.

Jax glances at me before looking back at her, his frown growing the longer he stares. “It’s weird... *right?*”

“You can say that again,” Axel mumbles, staring at her.

Jax opens his mouth, but Axel cuts him a glare. “*Don’t* say it again.”

Jax rolls his eyes at him before glaring at Rielle. “Whatever. No matter who she looks like, we can’t trust her.”

Axel nods, easily agreeing with him. “*She’s* the one who placed us in those trials.”

Everything inside me freezes and stops as I whip my head toward Rielle. “*You’re* the one who created the trials?” The one who put us through misery and *more* suffering.

Like she can see the pain and anger written across my face, she gives me a sad look. One that’s full of pity.

And I fucking hate it.

“The core did most of the work, but yes, I manipulated it to help you all.”

“*Help* us?” I give her an incredulous look. “How does mental torture and fighting off demons *help* us?”

Rielle frowns. “I’m sorry you had to go through that. I’m even sorrier you all had to live through what you did. But it was the best I could do with the time we had. In order to strengthen your bond, you had to let go of your doubts and fears.”

Kai leans forward, a hard-set to his jaw. “There was nothing wrong with our bond to begin with.”

Rielle’s shoulders drop with a sigh, a pained expression in her eyes as she looks at us. “Not in the normal sense no, but as individuals, you were holding a piece of yourselves back because you were unable to move past those doubts and fears. You all went through something traumatic that inflicted a wound so deep it marked each of your souls.”

The room grows silent as Rielle’s words hit us hard. I watch each of the guys as a range of emotions flicker across their faces.

Were we really holding back because of our pasts? I didn’t feel like we were, not after all the progress we’ve made. But we all went through some messed up shit. Maybe it affected us more than we thought.

“Are you... okay?” I glance around at each one of them, catching a couple of wincing and pissed off looks. Mostly thrown in Soren’s and Rielle’s direction.

Jax sighs, scrubbing a hand down his face. “No, I’m not okay.”

Everyone turns to Jax, as if waiting for the snappy comeback or joke but there is none, his face drenched in sadness as he looks at me. “You fucking *died*. You stopped breathing and you wouldn’t heal...”

He shakes his head, sighing. “It was one of my worst fucking nightmares and it came true. I *never* want to live through something like that again.”

I reach out and grab his hand. He holds onto it like a lifeline, squeezing it tight. I watch the guys as they share the same devastated look full of agony.

“None of us do,” Kai whispers, his grip on me tightening as he dips his head and places a kiss on my shoulder.

I open my mouth to apologize but Luka shakes his head stopping me. “We love you, Kiarra. More than anything. And without you, none of us exist. None of us want to. We know

you're strong, powerful, but by taking care of yourself you'll be taking care of us too."

I swallow past the unshed tears threatening to fall at their confessions as they rip my heart open while also mending it anew.

Before I say something cringy or sappy, I nod agreeing with them. "Once you all do the same." I once thought they were all dead and it was worse than hell. I'd never want to put them through that, not if I could stop it.

"Deal." Rion smiles as the others nod in agreement.

A sense of relief fills the air as everyone starts to relax.

Jax slaps Luka on the back. "Also, we're actually triplets now."

I glance between them. "What?"

The guys chuckle, already in on the joke as I frown at them, trying to figure it out. Luka bumps my shoulder. "Let's just say my wolf and I have finally come to terms with how to get along with each other."

I smile as the relief and happiness across his face spreads through my chest. I melt further into Kai's embrace.

"This little reunion will have to be put on hold for now. Zillah came with news for Kiarra. We need to get everyone up to speed before we start moving."

"Who the fuck is Zillah?" Axel growls moving toward Rielle when I give him a look.

"The shadow beast."

"Oh." He sits his ass back down and gives Rielle a look as if to say, *'you can continue.'*

Rielle's right eye twitches, making Soren chuckle. He quickly covers it by clearing his throat.

Rielle sighs. "Although the Underworld is safe. King got what he wanted. The connection tethering him to Kiarra is finally broken, and he is now powerful enough to do what he wants."

Rielle pauses to give the guys a look. “Not anything like your bond.”

Axel gives Rielle a look of disgust. “We fucking know that.”

She nods continuing. “With the core’s energy diminished and King much stronger, the imbalance is too big to go unnoticed now. It will have been felt in every corner of the world and will only get worse. Soon there will be everything from wars to famines. Negativity will have more of an impact on choice with more and more people suffering and getting sick. It will spread like a disease and infect the masses until there’s nothing *but* darkness walking this world and every other.”

“Why can’t someone else fucking do it for a change?” Axel shoots her a venomous look.

Rielle spears him with a glare. “Do you have any idea of how powerful you all are?”

Jax groans, cutting off her little lecture. “Why is it *always* about power? I’m fucking over this shit. I just want to go to a sunny island somewhere with my mate.” He glances around at the guys. “You guys can come too.”

“Gee, thanks.” Luka gives him a deadpan look, making Jax smile.

“Let’s shelve the sunny vacation for when we destroy King,” I tell them, actually looking forward to it.

The guy’s smiles turn savage as they all veer to me.

Jax leans around Luka. “I’ll rub sunscreen on you if you rub my—” Luka pushes him back to his spot, making him chuckle.

Rielle clears her throat, pinning us all with a glare.

Soren moves to lean against the wall, unbothered by our less than innocent conversation, probably well used to us by now. “I’d listen to her if I were you. She has a mean streak, a mile long.”

Rielle whips her head around to him, but he glances down at his fingers, ignoring her completely. I catch the slight tilt to his lips, though, and I'm sure Rielle does too.

As much as I love seeing my guys and how normal this all feels, it's time to get down to business.

I lean forward, unintentionally pressing further into Kai making him groan. I smirk at him before turning to Rielle. "What's the plan?"

Rielle nods, her stiff body relaxing slightly. "We need to fix the imbalance that started nineteen years ago."

Meaning, we need to destroy King as soon as possible.

"I'm sorry, but *you* need to be the one to fix it, Kiarra." Rielle gives me a look full of guilt and sadness, as if she wishes there was another way.

The atmosphere swiftly changes as the guys grow tense once again, aiming their hostility at Rielle. Axel jumps up before I get a chance to explain, clenching his fists by his side. "She's not fucking sacrificing herself for you or anyone."

I go to move to him, the look in his eyes telling me he's close to burning her to nothing but ashes when Kai's grip tightens on me and Luka and Rion move closer to my sides.

Jax moves to the edge of his seat, staring Rielle down as if he's already imagining gutting her.

"You think I give a shit about the world ending? Fuck. That. The only people I care about are the five people in this room. The rest of you can flame up and fucking disappear."

Soren stands straight, frowning at him as if hurt. "Five? I thought we were friends?" He sniffs looking over at the small library. "I guess it was all one-sided."

Jax's mouth twitches as he tries to keep his pissed off look in place.

Rielle gives them all an exhausted look, her patience paper thin by now. "I don't doubt it. But I'm not talking about Kiarra sacrificing herself to fix the imbalance."

The guys freeze.

Kai narrows his eyes on her. “Then who—”

“King.” Rielle looks at me as I glance around at my guys.

“Apparently he was a Guardian.”

“What the fuck?” Axel frowns as the others all wear shocked expressions.

Jax is the first to shake it off, narrowing his eyes on Rielle. “Is that going to be something we need to worry about with you? You come across as the crazy type.”

Rielle looks at him like she wants to smite him, while Soren quickly nods his head behind her looking straight at Jax as his mouth silently words, *‘she is.’*

As if she can see in the back of her head, she whips around to look at him, but he’s already changed his expression and shakes his head at Jax while looking disappointed in him.

I bite my lip to stop the laugh threatening to escape as she turns back to us. But as soon as she does, Soren’s eyes grow wide as he nods his head once more.

Rielle ignores Jax’s question to continue. “King was never supposed to escape the Underworld. He was always meant to be absorbed for his sins. But when you were created, King saw his chance and clung to that power long enough to break free from the Underworld.” I nod, knowing all this from when King revealed it, but the guys still didn’t know, and it was better coming from her than me.

She looks to me, her eyes softening. “Kiarra is... special.” I shift on Kai feeling uncomfortable at the way she looks at me, especially because it’s so similar to the look my mom gave me and she’s the spitting image of her.

Jax looks at her like she’s stupid. “We already know that.”

Rielle shakes her head. “You really don’t. When Erebus created the Underworld to keep a balance between worlds, he sacrificed himself to sustain it. But it’s not just his essence he

left behind. He *is* the Underworld, and his energy, his power *is* the core.”

I frown, looking up at her. “What does that mean?”

She glances at me, searching for something on my face before continuing. “You’re not just born from some essence left behind; you’re born from *him*. You’re more powerful than us all, Kiarra, and you’ve barely tipped the surface of your potential.”

Soren moves beside Rielle. “What she’s trying to tell you is that you might as well have been born from the primordial being himself. There will never be anyone like you.”

I honestly don’t know what to say to that. So much has happened and been revealed that I don’t know whether to be shocked or horrified.

“Well... unless she gets knocked up. Then there’ll be lots of mini-Kiarras running around.” Everyone turns to look at Jax.

“What? It’s the truth.” As always, it breaks the tension in the room. But I’m not ready for that conversation yet.

“I’m not having kids anytime soon,” I tell them, making sure I get to that island and many more before settling down.

Jax shrugs. “Practice makes perfect, and we’ll have plenty of time to practice... Once that fucker is gone.” He winks at me.

Rielle ignores him. “Because of the bond between you all... technically, that makes you *all* the closest thing to Gods that exist.”

Jax chuckles. “So, Soren was right? We are actually Gods?”

Soren narrows his eyes on Jax. “Of course, I was right.”

I give Jax a look. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

“Which head?” Jax smirks before trailing his eyes down my slip of a dress. His eyes darkening the longer he stares.

“Did I mention how fucking beautiful you are right now? If it wasn’t for mom and dad over there, you’d already be laid out on that sofa while I—”

“Can we stay focused, please? As beautiful as your mate is, the world is in danger.”

Jax looks at Rielle like she’s stupid. “And I just told you I couldn’t give a shit. Let it burn.”

Rielle looks at Jax like she doesn’t understand a word he’s saying. “You’re more powerful than most in the Underworld. If you wanted to rule it, you have the power to do so.”

She gives Soren a tired look. “I hear the position is open.”

Oh, yeah, the Lords are dead. But I was definitely not interested in taking over their position.

As if Jax can hear my thoughts, he looks to Rielle with a serious look on his face. “It’s not the type of job I’m looking for. My needs are much better met when I have the undivided attention of my mate. And running the Underworld seems like a lot of effort, so I’ll have to decline, but thanks for the offer.”

He smiles, all innocent, before winking at me. Rielle looks at him like she doesn’t know how to reply.

Soren nudges her. “Yes, they’re always like that. No, don’t try to make any sense of it, especially that one.” He points to Jax. “It’s better to just let it go.”

Lost in his own thoughts for a bit, Luka looks at Rielle. “The demons are destroying the mortal world, but they come from here. Can’t you just... I don’t know... call them back?”

Rielle nods like this is an acceptable question. “We’ve been trying to, but they’re not listening to the summons. We investigated further and found that King has created some concoction that enables him to command the demons that consume it.”

It didn’t surprise me. King created a special vial to slow down my healing ability, all so he could extend his... feeding on me.

I catch Kai and Rion sharing a knowing look. “What is it?”

Kai and Rion look at me, the rest of the guys glancing at us.

“The facilities we found you in after King tried to kill us.” Rion hesitates as if afraid to mention them, while the others tense up.

“What facility?” Rielle frowns, looking to Soren for an answer, but he’s just as confused.

I clear my throat and look at her. “King was doing experiments in them. Experiments on demons to allow him to control them.”

“Experiments on demons...” Her frown deepens as she waits for me to expand. Instead, I smile and shake my head not wanting to go into what happened in that place.

Wait. My eyes widen as I realize this was just another part of his plan. The facilities another measure to help him win this fight.

I look at Kai and he nods, confirming my thoughts while Jax answers them. “*Damn.* Just when I think we have him nailed down, another thing pops up.”

And while he’s three steps ahead of us, we’re all scrambling behind trying to catch up.

“The real question is, how do we end this?” I ask. There has to be a way to catch up and finish this once and for all.

Rielle lets the conversation on the facility drop for now. She gives me a look, telling me she’d like to know more later, before she rolls her shoulders back and clasps her hands looking to each of the guys with mock confidence.

“Kiarra will need to take back the power King stole. And to do that, she’s going to have to pull it into her, just like she did the core.”

The words are only out of her mouth when all hell breaks loose.

CHAPTER 25



AXEL GETS UP SO quick he upends the one-seater beneath him. “No fucking way!”

“That nearly killed her.” Luka’s voice grows deeper as he snarls at Rielle. The others are just as bad as their beasts come to the surface.

Soren gives her a look as if to say, what did you expect? She tries to act patient, giving each of my men an understanding look, but I can see it’s wearing on her. The stakes are too high now to try anything else. “I understand your concerns, but your bond is no ordinary bond. You proved that by healing her.”

Kai pulls me closer to him, as if he can shield me from her words. I elbow him in the stomach, but the fucker just smiles at me, placing a kiss on my shoulder before narrowing his eyes at Rielle. “We got lucky. That doesn’t mean it’s going to happen again.”

Rielle’s eyes soften. “It wasn’t luck. You are all *truly* connected now. One cannot die without the other. Once one of you is still breathing, the rest will be too.”

Wait... Did she just say what I think she said?

The guys pause, glancing at one another, probably wondering the same thing.

Kai looks to Rielle, voicing our question. “You’re saying that if we get hurt, *seriously* hurt to the point where none of us can heal that once one of us is still alive, the rest will be fine?”

Rielle nods. “Exactly. Your bond is that entwined with one another. Add Erebus’s power and you’re unstoppable.”

The air around us shifts as the realization of what this means for us hits us all.

“It’s about fucking time we get a break.” We glance over at Jax as he nods his head.

“What? It is. If it’s not fucking King or demons, it’s something else. At least I know now that once one of us is breathing, Kiarra will be okay.”

He says it like it’s the only thing that matters to him making my heart fucking melt. The guys smile at him before glancing at me, giving me a look that they too feel the same.

I shake my head at the idiots, but the smile doesn’t leave my face. Not even when Jax narrows his eyes on Rielle. “She’s still not going after King, though. So, figure something else out.”

Luka nods. “Agreed.”

I let them voice their concerns, ultimately knowing that this is the only way. But I also couldn’t just blatantly disregard their feelings either. Especially after what just happened with the core.

The deep-rooted fear of losing someone doesn’t go away because we’re invincible. There’s always that worry that this time it might not work. It’s probably one of the reasons they’re always telling me they don’t care if I can heal just in case something happens that’s out of our control.

Some things *are* out of our control but that doesn’t mean I have to take on everything by myself either.

I learned the hard way that I’m no longer alone. Not with the people I care about around me. Not with them by my side.

But if I want to keep those loved ones safe, I’m going to have to fight to protect them. Hopefully with my men by my side.

“Siren?”

“Mm?” I glance over at Rion.

“You’re very quiet. Would you like to add anything?” Rion smirks as I narrow my eyes on him. He knows damn well I’ve already made up my mind.

I guess I should let the others know, too.

“I *need* to go after King, and end this once and for all. There’s no one else that can take the power from him. You all know it. This won’t end until I do.” I glance over at Jax, he opens his mouth to object, but I cut him off.

“And then we’ll never get to that sunny Island.”

Jax shuts his mouth, smirking. “Fine. We destroy King and then we have our fun.”

Axel cuts him a glare. “It’s not just *your* decision to make.”

Jax shrugs, the smirk not leaving his face as his eyes trail down my body once more. “What Kiarra wants, she gets. Even if I have to fight an army from Hell to do it.”

Kai’s grip tightens on me, his body turning stiff, while Luka glances up to Rion, nodding his head before looking back at me with a resigned look on his face.

“Kiarra—” I turn around to Kai. “I’m not doing this alone. We’ll do it together. We’ll watch out for one another.” I glance around at them, showing each of them just how much I mean it.

“I promise.”

Kai’s tense body eases as he sighs, looking straight at me. He searches for something in my eyes and after a moment, he nods. “If *anything* happens to you, know that I’ll never give up searching. Not this time. I’ll rip apart every inch of the afterlife to find you.”

Jax frowns. “The afterlife?”

“There’s no way Kiarra would end up here. Her soul is too fucking beautiful for anything other than paradise.” Kai smirks as he leans in and places a soft kiss on my lips. It’s enough to

make me crave more and he knows it as he pulls back, his smirk growing.

Jax nods. “Makes sense.” He turns to Rielle and Soren. “If I ever end up down here, I’d advise you to send me straight to my mate or the Hell you knew will have been a vacation after I’m finished fucking it up.”

Soren gives him a deadpan look. “Oh, I don’t doubt it. Your presence here alone makes me want to leave.”

Before Jax gets to reply, Kai cuts him off with a look.

“We all agree?” Kai glances around as everyone nods or grunts their agreement before looking at me. “We stick together. No matter what happens.”

I salute him, giving him a cheeky smile. “Yes, *Alpha*.”

Kai narrows his eyes as they darken while the others chuckle around us. I raise a brow, feeling something hard grow beneath me. “That’s all it takes?”

I shift, and his grip tightens. “When it comes to you, yes,” he grits out as if he’s in physical pain.

He slowly leans forward, his gaze dipping to my lips as I wet them. Before he gets any closer, Rielle clears her throat, reminding me we’re not the only people in the room.

I turn around and wince at the uncomfortable look she gives me. I try to slide off onto another chair, but his grip tightens, not letting me.

He chuckles as I give up and try to give my full attention to Rielle while he rubs small circles on my hip with his thumb.

“Once you’ve taken his power, King needs to be brought back here and absorbed at the core to fully restore the balance. Soren will go with you.” She turns to him. “...and if anything happens to her while she’s with you—”

“You’ll send me to Hell? Oh, wait...” Soren clicks his fingers, giving her a wink.

Jax chuckles. “I knew there was a sense of humor in there somewhere.”

Soren rolls his eyes at him, but I catch the slight tilt to his lips as he leaves the room.

Rielle looks at my men. “May I have a moment with Kiarra?”

The guys hesitate.

“*Please.*” It’s the soft plea that makes them move. Reluctantly.

Luka, Rion and Axel follow Soren. I get up and watch Kai do the same, adjusting himself while narrowing his eyes at me, shaking his head.

My smirk grows, dropping quickly when the dick releases some alpha power. He leaves the room, chuckling to himself.

Jax narrows his eyes on Rielle before walking over to me. “We’ll be outside.” He leans in, slamming his lips to mine. Before I even get a taste, he pulls back, groaning and leaving me in a daze. He smirks down at me, taking a step back and making a move for the door.

“Miss you, already.”

Once they’re gone, I turn back to Rielle just as a warm smile spreads across her face. “I thought you might want to meet someone. But we only have a couple of minutes. So, we have to be quick.”

Rielle quickly disappears and reappears beside me with a small pile of clothes in her hands.

“Here, put these on. You’ll be heading straight on to Manhattan after this. I think you’ll be more comfortable in these.”

Thanking her for the clothes, I throw them on while wondering who she wants me to meet from Hell.

“Who do you—” The floor shifts beneath us, similar to when we were moving between realms. The walls and room soon disappear, morphing into a mixture of shades and colors before everything turns dark.

Just before I start to panic, light slowly filters in around me as I step into a vast green field full of colorful flowers. A warm breeze kisses my face as I glance up and find a beautiful blue cloudless sky with the sun shining down on me.

Rielle comes up beside me, a soft smile on her face.

“Where are we?” I glance around to find the field is endless. There’s a warmth inside me that makes me feel like I’m safe and loved. It’s nothing like the familiarity of the Underworld but it still makes me feel like I’m coming home.

I look to Rielle hoping to get some answers but she’s smiling at something behind me. I turn to see what it is when my heart stutters to a stop, before picking up speed. My body is frozen, my eyes wide as I struggle to understand what I’m seeing.

Or *who*.

“*Mom*.” My heart beats like a drum in my ears drowning out the sounds around me. I glance back at Rielle, wondering if this is just another illusion but the smile she’s wearing doesn’t look forced or fake.

But I still don’t believe it. How can I?

Maybe I passed out, and this is all a dream? Or an illusion?

“She’s real.”

Two little words and my world tips on its axis. The knots in my stomach turn to butterflies, hundreds of them as they take flight.

“*How?* ... How is this possible?”

Rielle looks to me. “I called in a few favors. It’s only for a few minutes, but I thought you’d like to see her. You never got the chance to say goodbye.”

I glance back at the one person I’ve wanted to see more than anything in this world. She stands there patiently waiting. A soft smile on her face.

“I can’t see her again after this?”

Rielle shakes her head, a sad smile on her face. “We have rules to keep the balance. But you’ll meet again someday.”

Someday... But someday isn’t today and today, I get to see her... hug her.

I move to take a step forward but stop. What if I wake up just as I reach her? What if this really is a dream? It’s too good to be true.

As if sensing my hesitation, Rielle places her hand on my back and gives me a little push.

“Go. Spend time with your mother. I’m sure she’s missed you just as much as you have her.”

I push myself forward, telling myself that this is real. That *she’s* real. I concentrate on one step in front of the other and before I know it, I’m standing in front of her.

“Kiarra.” She smiles and it’s just as warm as I remember. She takes the last step toward me, enveloping me in a hug.

A sob catches my throat as her scent of fresh roses surrounds me.

“My brave, beautiful girl. I’ve missed you.” She gently pulls back and wipes my tears away.

“I’ve missed you too... So much.” I pull her back into a hug, not wanting to let her go for even a moment.

“I can’t stay long, but I need you to know how sorry I am for leaving you. And the trials you face ahead.”

I shake my head, holding onto her as tight as I can. “It’s not your fault and I’m not alone anymore.”

“Your boys?” She gives me a knowing smile. “I knew you’d all always find your way back to one another, fated mates always do.”

My eyes widen. “You knew we were mates?”

“From the minute you met them.” She shakes her head laughing. The soft tinkle warming something inside my chest making me smile.

“They followed you *everywhere*. One time, they asked me if they could live with you and even went so far as to offer to sleep out in the backyard.”

She raises a brow, a twinkle in her eye. “When you were kids, Jax asked me for your hand in marriage but promised to share you with his brothers.”

A laugh tumbles out of me. Even back then Jax was just as crazy.

My mom’s eyes find mine and I’m too afraid to blink in case she suddenly disappears. “If anyone other than the five of them came even close to you, they’d go crazy. If you were upset, they did everything to make you laugh.”

I nod, smiling to myself. “They’re still like that.”

Her face lights up the more she speaks, that twinkle in her eye full of warmth. “*You* were just as bad. They were *your* guys and no one else’s. No one could even get a look in and you were just as protective over them as they were you.”

I guess, I’m still the same too. They belong to me just as much as I belong to them.

She smiles, but it no longer reaches her eyes. “I have to go now.”

I shake my head, gripping onto her. “No. Please don’t leave. Just one more minute.”

Her smile turns sad as her body slowly starts to fade. She reaches out a hand to cup my cheek. I lean into it imagining its warmth.

“I wish I could, but this moment was more than I could have ever hoped for. I’m so proud of you Kiarra and always will be. Never forget that.”

I try to grab her, panicking when her body goes right through my hands.

“Remember to always love fiercely, to fight as hard as you can, and to never, *ever* give up. No matter how bad it gets. There will always be a light in the dark waiting, no matter how small.”

Her body is nearly completely translucent, but I focus on her smile wanting it to be the last thing I remember.

“We’ll meet again, one day. I promise...” She blows me a kiss just as she disappears, her last words traveling on the breeze around me. “I love you Kiarra... *always.*”

“I love you too,” I whisper as I stare at the spot she disappeared, too frozen to do anything else as the last few moments play on repeat in my head.

I got to see my mom.

She was right there and close enough to touch. I can still smell the light rose scent around me assuring me this wasn’t a dream.

Not many people get to say they get a second chance at seeing their loved ones, one last time. But *I* did.

My last memory of her was when she died. But now I have a new one. A happier one to replace it with. And it’s a memory I’ll cherish forever.

I blink back the tears as I smile to myself, my body slowly starting to relax as the reality of what happened slowly filters in making me feel lighter than I have in a while.

A hand on my shoulder shakes me from my thoughts. I turn to Rielle as she smiles at me.

“I’m here, Kiarra. No matter what happens, I’ll be here.”

A mixture of emotions flitter through me at her words, but I know she means them, especially after what she just gave me.

Getting to see my mother was more than anything I ever expected. And for that alone, I’ll always be grateful to her.

I give her a smile. “Thank you.”

The ground shifts beneath me once more and within seconds I’m with my guys, but instead of in the lounge, we’re back in the cave we used to enter the Underworld.

Jax’s eyes widen as he glances around. “What the—”

“Weren’t we just in the hall?” Axel frowns.

Luka’s the first one to spot me. He walks over to me, a frown on his face as he checks me over. “Kiarra? Are you okay?”

I smile but I’m still lost in my thoughts. “I’m good. Let’s just get back to Manhattan.” I make a move out of the cave, catching the guys share a worried look. But my mind and heart are still back in that endless field of flowers.

I move on autopilot and before I know it I’m halfway through the forest with Kai stepping in front of me, blocking my path.

“Okay, that’s it. Tell me what your so-called aunt did to upset you, because if she said anything to hurt you...”

I shake my head, smiling at him. “It’s nothing like that. I... met my mom.”

The guys freeze, quickly turning quiet as they stare at me with a mixture of shocked expressions.

“She let me see her for a moment. It was...” I swallow hard, not able to pass that damn knot in my throat. “Sorry, I’m still... processing.”

Kai steps forward, enveloping me in a hug. “Are you okay? After seeing her?”

He pulls back as I nod. “Not many people get to say they saw someone they loved one last time. I’m extremely lucky to have had that chance.”

Kai’s eyes soften and he places a kiss on my forehead. “I’m glad you got to see her too. Just... don’t pull away from us. Please.”

“I won’t. I promise. It just doesn’t feel real but in the same sense I *know* it was.”

Kai nods. “I get it. Just know we’re here for you, if or when you want to talk.”

“I know.” I really did. But most of the time their presence alone always made me feel better.

As if he can read my mind, Kai pulls me back into him, comforting me in the best way.

Jax steps up beside us. “Group hug.” He winks at me. “We’ll have the group activities later.”

I laugh as the guys crowd around me, surrounding me in their warmth, quickly snapping me out of my strange mood.

While we’re still huddled together, Jax starts whispering all the things he wants to do to me when this is over. The guys groan as he comes up with the most random, ridiculous things. But it makes me laugh and from the look in his eyes, I can tell it was his plan all along.

Someone clears their throat from behind us. We break apart, only to find Soren standing there with a smile on his face. I completely forgot he was coming with us.

“We should probably move this along.”

Jax narrows his eyes on him. “You ruined our moment.”

Soren exaggerates a bow. “My apologies. I assumed you’d want to save the world before it was too late.”

“You assumed wrong. I already told you I don’t give a shit about it. I’m only helping because it’s something Kiarra wants to do.”

Soren gives him a deadpan look. “And if she wanted you to jump off a cliff?”

“Then you best believe I’m going to have a fucking pep in my step when I take a run and jump straight off it.”

I look at Jax like he’s crazy before shaking my head. “Let’s go.”

A few minutes pass before we make it to the spot where we met Soren. It reminds me of the deal we made.

“You never asked for that favor. What was it?”

Soren rubs the back of his head, looking anywhere but at me. “I knew who you were as soon as Draven told me about you. I also knew it was only time before you met your aunt.”

Soren clears his throat, mumbling something that makes Jax laugh.

But I don't catch it. "What?"

Soren clears his throat again, speaking louder this time. "I wanted you to put in a good word for me... with Rielle."

I bite my lip from the laugh threatening to escape while the guys laugh at Soren's discomfort.

He starts forward without a backward glance. "Let's save the world and you can follow through with your deal."

I smile to myself, glad that Soren was our guide after all. As if he hears my thoughts, he turns and winks at me, earning glares and growls from the guys.

Jax comes over to me, taking my hand. "Stop fucking flirting with our girl."

I roll my eyes at his ridiculous caveman attitude while Soren walks ahead, chuckling to himself.

We make it to the spot where the portal left us. As soon as we get near it, it appears as if it was always there waiting.

"How did it..."

Kai smiles at me. "Sensors. I made sure they created them so that it would only open for one of us. It should bring us straight to our building."

I glance at the portal, wondering what's waiting for us behind it. "Do you think..."

As if Kai can sense where my thoughts have gone, he steps up beside me. "I'm sure Jazmyn and everyone are fine."

Jax squeezes my hand. "If anyone is okay, it's Jazmyn. She probably scared off most of the demons with one look."

I nod, making myself believe them, even if Jax was only half messing. Jazmyn was pretty badass.

Taking a deep breath, I ready myself for whatever comes next.

Sharing a look with the guys, we take a step through the portal... and right into complete carnage and chaos.

CHAPTER 26



SIRENS GO OFF JUST before an explosion hits from somewhere across from us. The guys move fast, forming a shield around me and blocking most of the impact from hitting me.

I quickly make sure none of them are injured. Apart from dirt and dust, covering most of their clothes, they're good.

Once I know none of them are seriously hurt, I narrow my eyes on them and their overprotective asses. They know damn well I can protect myself, but the rest of the destruction and chaos around me draws my attention, stopping me from calling them out on it.

Wasn't the portal supposed to bring us to our building? I glance around and get a better look at what we're working with. The air is thick with a gray fog, blanketing the skies and masking the extent of the full damage. The ground is leveled with no buildings left standing. Flames crawl along the ground with thick black smoke following them.

And the demons... they're everywhere.

They cover every inch of the open expanse, stretching further than the eye can see with those with wings hoarding over the skies.

Old ones larger than a twenty-foot building, small ones like the hordes we met in the Underworld and beasts like those that showed up last time. With many more I've never come across all joining the masses.

My eyes lock on a group of creatures that look like messed up versions of the old werewolves in horror movies, their

sharp fangs curve out of their mouths and over their chins. Their size nearly double that of my men with a black muddy fur covering them from head to toe. They attack without reason, ripping through the supes around them, reminding me of when I first met them in the facility with Malik.

Jax comes up beside me, looking in the same direction. “Aren’t they...”

“From that facility King had me in... yes.” King must have had more hidden facilities we didn’t know about.

My eyes move from creature to demon, from supe to the destruction and chaos. My heart breaking at how much is already lost and further destroyed.

“It’s just like Zillah showed me, but so much worse.” How can we ever come back from something like this?

“I can’t even tell where in Manhattan we are.” There’s nothing left to landmark it and with everything leveled, it all looks the same. We could be anywhere.

“It’s the penthouse... We’re standing on it.”

Everyone freezes as we turn to Luka.

“Are you sure?” I glance around trying to see what he sees but there’s nothing but destruction everywhere.

Luka nods before pointing at a broken picture on the ground, half visible through the burns and cracks. A picture of the six of us.

Rion kneels down and closes his eyes. After a minute, he sighs, standing back up. “He’s right, the energy is still there. It’s our home... or was.”

And now it’s gone. Just like that.

Kai moves to my side. “We’ll get through this and fix it... it’ll be better than before.”

I want to believe him, but the flicker of doubt in his eyes tells me he might not even believe it himself.

But homes can be rebuilt. And my real home is with them, not some building. I turn and focus on the demons around me,

there are so many of them that I don't know where to start. Then it hits me.

"Maybe I can control them?" Like last time and send them back to the Underworld.

I turn around and reach down inside me. I focus on the demons closest to us, and search for the flicker of a connection like last time.

But there's nothing there.

I push my senses further, trying to search for anything and stop when I sense something brush up against my mind. It's so slight that I barely feel it.

I try to grasp onto it or pull it to me, but as soon as I do, it moves further away, becoming shrouded in the darkness once more.

"I can't. There's something blocking me from reaching out to them." My shoulders drop as I scan the area again, the mass of demons gaining more and more ground on us.

Darkness crosses Kai's face as he looks out at them. "It must be King."

I glance at a group of demons as they move across from us, not thirty yards away. They don't look our way, nor do they come within a twenty-foot radius. "Why aren't they attacking us? It's as if—"

"They can't see us?" Soren walks past me, coming to a stop a few feet out.

He reaches a hand out, tilting his head. "It's spelled. There's a barrier of some kind. I don't think they *can* see us. It looks like it acts as a deterrent too, making the demons avoid this space."

Why would someone create a random protected space in the middle of nowhere? I glance around, looking for an answer, when I hear a familiar voice that makes me smile.

"We thought you might need some form of protection once you got back. We also set up sensors that let us know when you arrived." I turn to Jazmyn just as she comes up behind me.

She wraps her arms around me, her body shaking with exhaustion, and her clothes streaked with blood and dirt.

“It’s about damn time you showed up.” She leans on me, out of breath as if it’s the first time she’s let herself relax. I hold her tighter and reach down inside me, pulling the energy up and pushing it toward her. Within seconds, her body stops shaking and grows stronger. I heal any cuts or bruises before she pulls back and looks at me.

“Did you...” Her shocked expression turns to a knowing smile.

I glance behind her to see Kane, Malik, and Draven close behind, all bloodied and exhausted but with fight still in their eyes.

Malik is in his demon form with Kane and Draven holding steel weapons with glowing runes of some kind. Kane has a large gash on his side. Instinctively, I push my energy toward him and heal it.

His eyes widen as he glances down at the spot before whipping up to meet mine. I stay focused and heal any other injuries before doing the same to Malik and Draven.

Before they get a chance to ask what the hell just happened, I look back at Jazmyn. She has more color in her cheeks and looks energized, like she’s ready to head back into the fight.

“You set up a barrier for us?” Even with them trying to hold the fort, they still thought of our safety.

“I knew you’d be back soon but thought you’d prefer us as your welcome party rather than a shitload of pissed-off demons.” She looks around the small clearing, free of demons, with those further down, ignoring it like it doesn’t exist. It’s as if we’re invisible.

“It wasn’t going to last much longer. Most of the witches that created it are dead, with many more injured. I’m hoping you have one hell of a plan.” Her eyes, normally so bright, now hold a deep sadness.

“We do. Have you seen King?”

She nods, releasing a harsh breath. “He showed up just before everything turned to hell. But since then, we haven’t been able to find him.”

He can’t have gone too far. I doubt he’d miss out on seeing all this.

Rion frowns, looking at Kai. “He could be cloaking himself.”

“Like a fucking coward while those around him do his dirty work.” Axel glares at the demons further down from us.

“We haven’t had a chance to look for him either, with everything going on. Once we get our foot in, more demons show up, hammering us.” Kane glances around us, a pissed-off look on his face.

“Your shadow beast has been helping us but at this stage, we’re not going to last much longer without a miracle.”

I reach down and quickly pull on the connection between Zillah and me. I find him on the other side of the city and quickly thank him for looking out for them. A warmth filters through the link, making me smile. I pull back just as he starts ripping through a group of demons.

Jax moves closer to me while narrowing his eyes on Malik. “Is he...”

Malik growls at Jax, taking a step forward but before either can make a move toward the other, Jazmyn steps back and into Malik’s front. He wraps his arms around her while glaring at Jax.

“Once he’s near me, he’s fine. He’s very... *protective*.” She gives me a smirk, letting me know she’s more than happy with it, too.

Good. That’s one less thing to worry about.

I hear a shriek above and look up to find a group of dragons fighting the winged demons. It’s taking a group of them to take down one of the two demons.

“Is that... Rhory?” Axel narrows his eyes on a large dragon with dark green scales.

“Your brother?” Jazmyn looks up where the green dragon is flying.

Axel glares at Jazmyn. “*Half*-brother.”

She rolls her eyes. “Whatever. Yes, it’s him. I called in a favor.”

Axel’s eyes widen in shock. “And he actually came for you?”

She smirks, a wicked glint in her eyes. “Of course. He fucking salivated at the idea of his brother owing him a favor.”

Axel clenches his fists, taking a step toward her. I walk over to him and take his hand. He looks down at me. “We’ll sort it out, whatever it is. The main thing is that they’re here to help.”

Axel’s eye starts twitching as he glances from the demons to Jazmyn. I know from the pissed-off look in his eyes that he’s probably considering throwing her to them.

Jazmyn shrugs, unfazed by his temper. “I didn’t think you’d mind. It’s for the greater good, after all.”

“It’s fine. We’ll sort it out. For now, we need to make a dent in the demons and find King,” I tell her.

Jazmyn looks to her men. “Looks like it’s time to get back to fighting these fuckers.”

Draven frowns at her. “Maybe you should stay—”

She cuts him a glare, and he sighs. “We’re not starting this again.” She twists in Malik’s arms before smiling up at him and taking his hand. They walk over to Kane.

Kane gives me a wave, telling me to be careful before turning and heading back into the fray.

Before Jazmyn follows him, she looks back at me, narrowing her eyes in warning, but there’s a glint of worry there, too. “Don’t do anything stupid like sacrifice yourself.”

I can feel my guys shift around me as they wait on my reply. “I won’t.”

I cut each of them a look before glancing back at her. “I’ll see you soon. Be careful.”

She nods, disappearing with Draven following them.

Jax walks over to me and Axel. The others follow until we’re in a little circle. “So what? We just jump right in?”

Axel rubs his hands, eyeing up the sky. “Sounds fucking good to me. My dragon is itching to get up there.”

Soren steps up beside me. “I’ll stay and help your little mate look for King.”

Axel and Jax narrow their eyes on me while the others smile, shaking their heads.

Jax glares at Soren as he steps closer to me, dipping his head to place a soft kiss on my lips.

“If he annoys you, don’t be afraid to chuck him in with the demons.”

Luka shoves Jax out of the way. “We’ll chuck *you* in there if you keep it up.” Luka takes my hand, looking at me with nothing but love. “Be careful. *Please.*”

I nod as he turns and shifts. We all freeze as we watch Luka’s wolf take over.

Instead of a mix of dark and gray, full bright orange flames wrap around his body. The shift takes half the time with his wolf emerging and heading straight for the nearest horde of demons, his bright flames leaving a trail behind him.

“Brother...” Jax stares after him in awe. He whips his head to me, a wide watery smile on his face before turning and running into a shift, following his brother close behind.

The others are still staring in shock after Luka’s transformation when another loud shriek sounds out around us. I look up and find the group of dragons struggling, as more and more winged demons appear.

“Go, I’ll watch your backs while I search for King.” Without finding King, this is going to get a lot worse before it gets better.

Axel nods, placing a kiss on the side of my head before heading out through the barrier. Flames ignite down both arms, expanding to his chest before his whole body is alight. The flames grow larger and larger until his dragon emerges and heads for the skies.

Rion comes over, placing his hands on the sides of my face. “I love that you’re strong, but please don’t try anything that might put yourself in danger.”

“Same to you.” Rion smiles, nodding before turning and heading in Jax’s and Luka’s direction.

Kai is the last to leave, as he places a soft kiss on my forehead. “Once you find King, let us know in whatever way you can, and we’ll be right there.” He steps back, taking one last glance before turning and running into the chaos.

A few feet in, he transforms into his Cerberus, stomping through them, taking out as many as he can as he heads for the larger demons.

Soren steps closer to me as I pull my powers up and focus on the energy from each of my mates. There are too many smaller demons around Kai, slowing him down from reaching the larger demons.

I push my power out around me and watch as my dark tendrils head straight for the horde around him. Once they touch them, the horde lights up, burning from the inside out before turning to ash.

Kai moves straight for the larger demon closest to him. His three mouths instantly lock onto it, tearing it to pieces before moving on to the next one.

With Kai safe and holding his own, I pull back and follow Rion’s light. I catch it just as it grows, and he transforms into his basilisk. He slithers quickly through the demons, striking and attacking everything he passes.

As I pull back, I pause, noticing a few supes lights are starting to dim. I push my energy toward them. It seeps out of me and moves straight for them. Once it touches them, their

lights grow brighter, and they attack the demons with more vigor than before.

Dark flames fall from the sky, catching my eye. I pull back my power and glance up, watching as winged demons burn and fall.

Axel easily takes out a dozen more before plummeting down and raining flames into the masses of smaller demons. He soars back up, taking out a few more winged demons before descending on the ones below once more. He keeps rotating, until he has cut their numbers in half.

With Rion, Kai and Axel all holding their own and making a dent in the hordes of demons, I check in on my twins.

Reaching out for them, I sense Luka and Jax both working together to take down a group of werewolf beasts. The kind King experimented on and mutated.

But neither has an issue with them as they rip through them easily, both working in tandem with one another.

With all my mates safe, I turn my focus to King. I reach out with my senses, trying to find any energy that's off.

More supes light up in my mind, their light as dim as the others, with some fading completely.

I push my energy toward them. It takes longer this time with them being so far out, but eventually I see their lights brighten.

Pulling back, I sway on my feet, the healing taking a toll on my energy.

Soren grabs my arm, holding me still. "Don't overdo it. You'll need your energy to fight King."

A couple of supes cry out to the left of us. I go to move toward them when Soren stops me.

"Focus on King. I've got this." Soren heads into the fray before disappearing completely.

I push away my worries about him and turn to focus on my task.

Expanding my senses further out, I move past hundreds of more demons before reaching the middle of the expanse. I'm about to move past it when I come across a large area devoid of energy. I sense no demons, no supes, just... nothing.

Maybe Rion is right, and King is shielding himself.

I pull back, ready to move toward it. I make a few feet past the barrier when something large moves to the left of me. Turning, I find a dozen hellhounds strolling through the demons, their focus on the handful of supes holding their own against them.

I pull my energy up, ready to push it toward them when the hellhounds freeze, all glancing up at once, as Kai in his Cerberus form appears. He splits the demon crowd in half, destroying most of them as he makes his way toward them.

They take a step back when Kai's eyes pulse red, making them pause. His hounds tilt their heads, their entire focus on the hellhounds.

As one, the hellhounds bow, lowering their heads to the ground in submission. Kai's hellhounds glance over at me before looking back at them.

Within seconds they're moving as one under Kai's command as they rip through every demon in the vicinity. Kai joins in until there's nothing but pieces of them left.

Pulling my power to the surface, I let it sit under my skin, ready for anything before I make a move toward the middle of the expanse.

The group of hellhounds turn back to me and span out around me before moving forward with me. A shadow casts over me from behind. I turn to find Kai behind me, guarding my back.

I shake my head to myself, smiling.

The closer we move into the fray; the more demons turn to attack us. My power seeps out around me when Kai jumps over me, ripping through them while his new guard dogs protect our sides.

As if by instinct, my power lashes out and attacks a group of demons trying to overwhelm one of the hellhounds. Once it touches them, they burn up and turn to dust.

The hellhound dips its head in a thank you before moving on to the next demon. We make it halfway to the middle when I spot Axel as he swoops back up into the sky.

He stays there while the other dragons gather around him in a type of circular formation, with him in the middle.

A loud rumble echoes throughout the sky before the air shifts and gathers around Axel. Reaching out with my senses, I watch on as they all gather the energy and push it toward Axel.

The rumble grows louder and louder as Axel's dragon stays in the circular formation. Just as the sound begins to turn deafening, Axel pushes the energy toward a group of large demons below.

It hits them instantly, destroying them on impact.

Axel does it again and again, keeping the formation and decimating a huge chunk of the large demons.

I look back at the path in front of me, seeing it clearly. Kai is behind me once more and the hellhounds keep still on lookout, as if waiting for me.

I quicken my pace, getting a few feet away from the strange empty energy, when a huge horde of demons appears from nowhere.

A streak of blue and orange flames shoots past me as Jax and Luka rush through the nearest demons, both shadowing through them, and turning them instantly to ash.

I narrow my eyes on them as they move on to the rest of them. With their backs to me, I watch as their flames swirl together, mixing as one, growing and expanding until there's a huge mass in front of them.

Once they're ready, it bursts forward, destroying every demon within a half-a-mile radius.

Damn. I guess Luka and his wolf finally coming together also came with an upgrade for him and Jax too. Or maybe it

was something they were always supposed to have as twin shadow wolves, but because of what happened with Luka, it never got that far.

Either way, it's one hell of a power. Something I'm sure Jax is enjoying.

As if agreeing with me Jax's wolf rushes over circling me with Luka soon joining. They both nuzzle into me before heading back in to attack more demons.

I glance around the expanse. Most of the demons near me are gone, destroyed by my mates. I start to relax, thinking we've finally got the upper hand.

And then I see them.

Horde upon horde of demons all making their way over to us.

Vibrations shake the ground, distracting me as Rion's basilisk appears a few feet in front of me.

A glint of something shiny on his long body catches my eye. I look closer and watch as his black scales morph into sharp, black razors.

There's no warning before they shoot out at the nearest demons, not missing a single one. They all begin to foam at the mouth, a disgusting thick black froth that burns through their faces before they drop to the ground, seizing up and dying.

Another vibration hits as Rion's scales start to morph again, this time turning translucent, making him disappear completely.

I glance around, but I can't see him anywhere. I start to panic when suddenly an invisible force starts striking through the rest of the horde, decimating them in seconds.

I guess Luka and Jax weren't the only ones with an upgrade as Rion's basilisk continues to destroy the hordes of demons.

I release a harsh breath and focus on the empty spot of energy once more. I search and search, but I can't find

anything out of the ordinary. I'm about to pull back, feeling foolish for wasting my time, chasing an empty lead, when another vibration hits. It shakes the empty spot, slightly moving it to reveal a sliver of energy.

It tries to slither away, but I grasp onto it as hard as I can and move closer. Just before it escapes completely, another vibration shakes the ground, revealing a familiar dark energy.

There you are...

CHAPTER 27



AS IF THE dark energy senses me, it shoots out, slamming into me and throwing me into the air.

Before I hit the ground, my shadows snap out, slowing me down to a stop.

Catching my breath, I step forward just as a horde of demons appear, surrounding me from every angle.

Damn it. Why is it always one step forward and two steps back?

Nowhere near ready to give up, I reach down inside me and draw up everything to the surface. I focus on the demons and let it build and build, gathering more and more power until I can't hold it anymore.

I release it all at once and watch as my dark shadows gather into a mass of black smoke, climbing high into the sky and stretching out around me.

Once the mass reaches a certain point, it explodes throughout the entire area, slamming into every demon that's heading my way, destroying them on impact.

When the darkness finally clears, it reveals a mixed group of demons where the empty spot once was.

With King, right in the middle of it.

He's no longer the same. His build is bigger, reaching at least seven feet and the energy around him is darker, coating the air like thick slime. It slithers out around him into the horde of demons.

He must be able to control them somehow...

As if hearing me, he turns to stare right at me, a creepy smile crawling across his face.

“Kiarra.”

I hear his voice as if I’m right beside him, and an icy chill crawls down my spine.

Four larger demons are standing close by with a group of higher-level demons, all standing in front of him, protecting him.

Though considering the power I can feel from him, I doubt he needs it. But I need to get past them, and fast.

One thought of my men and they appear as if summoned. All surrounding me and protecting me from every angle.

Rion shifts back and heads straight over to me while the others stay in their beast form. His eyes trail over my body, checking for any injuries before glancing over at King. “We’ll take the demons.”

I nod, narrowing my eyes on my target. “And I’ll take King.”

Without warning, the higher demons unsheathe their swords and attack. Rion whips out his blades, blocking two from the front while Jax and Luka rush through the others with their flames.

Two of the four larger demons step forward, moving straight for Kai. But just as Kai moves to attack, a rumble sounds out from above as a mass of energy strikes the first one down. I glance up and find Axel absorbing more energy for the next attack.

Knowing they’re well capable of looking after themselves, especially after seeing it firsthand, I focus on King.

I move swiftly, pushing my shadows toward him. They bellow out of me in long tendrils of black smoke. Just before they reach him, he disappears.

I whip around, searching for him when something slams into me from behind.

“Kiarra!”

Rion moves for me as I’m thrown backward, but I quickly wrap my shadows around me, becoming part of them. Reaching out with my senses, I search for King. Once I find him, I step out of the shadows and right beside him. My dark tendrils lashing out and throwing him backward.

Just like me, he catches himself landing on his feet. His eyes narrow on me before he disappears once more.

Feeling movement from behind, instinctively I duck, narrowly avoiding a shadowed blade to the head. I twist around, avoiding another shadowed weapon when King appears right in front of me, a smirk on his face as he grabs my head.

His fingers turn to claws and slice into my skull just as his shadows coil and tighten around my body. My eyes blur as sharp needles splinter through every nerve, the pain growing more intense with each second that passes.

I clench my jaw shut, not willing to show him a moment of weakness. Instead of crying out, I use that pain. I let it fill me up and burn through me until it’s the only thing I see and feel.

Slowly, my shadows seep out around me releasing me from King’s grip, but I don’t stop. I surrender to them, becoming part of the darkness once more.

But instead of stepping out onto the expanse, I’m in complete darkness. It’s pitch black, but unlike the last time I was here, I can see everything around me, including King as he appears across from me.

He tilts his head as he looks at me, a glint of interest in his eyes, as if he’s seeing me in a new light.

“I underestimated you.”

I give him a wicked smirk. “You always have.”

His grin twists into something cruel. “Don’t worry. It won’t happen again.”

Dark tendrils lash out toward me, but I quickly move into the shadows. Focusing on King, I travel through them until I'm behind him. Just before he gets a chance to react, I wrap my tendrils around him, making them sharper and using them like blades to slash through him.

Once the blade hits his body, he turns to smoke and disappears.

Damn it.

I hear a low chuckle. It grows from somewhere behind me... *no*, in front of me...

It sounds out around me until it's everywhere. I reach out with my senses, trying to find him, but it's like *he's* everywhere now, too. I try again when I feel a pulling sensation from somewhere deep inside me.

The pull quickly grows, drawing upon any energy I have with force. Tendrils of shadows appear, wrapping around my neck and body, dragging me upwards.

I claw at the shadows choking me, but my fingers pass through them. My vision starts to darken just as I hear a low chuckle once more.

King appears below me. "I have to say I'm a little disappointed. I thought you'd at least make it... *interesting*."

There's no way in hell I was giving up yet.

I reach down inside me and drag up my power. I pull up everything that I can and draw it to the surface. But as soon as I do, that pulling sensation comes back with a vengeance, and my energy quickly weakens.

My powers turn from a flame to a flicker in a matter of seconds. I try to pull the energy back, drawing it to me when something inside me snaps and energy floods me all at once.

I gasp, finally able to take a deep breath as the clawed shadows around my neck loosen. I pull harder to draw the energy back to me and King's tendrils loosen from my body. The more I focus, the more my own strength grows stronger.

"How are you..."

I don't know how it's possible, but I think I'm absorbing his powers and making them mine. And I think I just figured out how I need to take the core's power back.

King's eyes widen slightly as I drop to the ground, his shadows around me completely disappearing.

"I thought I'd keep it *interesting*." I give him a smug smirk.

King sneers as he tries to lash out at me again, his shadows long and sharp. I focus on catching one before it touches me and draws it into me.

As soon as it hits my skin, I absorb it making it my own. The energy slams into me making me feel like I just took a double espresso shot.

I shake off the slight disorientated feeling, gathering every piece of energy I have and pushing it straight at King.

It slams into him, throwing him backward. He catches himself, but the calm and collected facade is gone. He narrows his eyes on me before disappearing once more.

I glance around the dark space, but something inside me tells me he's gone back to Manhattan. I quickly focus on my guys and within seconds, I step through the shadows and back into the chaos and destruction.

Rion spots me, his eyes widening on something behind me. I whip around as one of Rion's blades hit a demon square in the eye.

Rion hurries over to me. "Are you okay? Where were you?"

I glance around, looking for King, but apart from the demons and my mates, he's not here. "A story for another time. Did you see King?"

"No. Not since he disappeared with you." Rion gives me a look, letting me know that I'll be sharing what happened as soon as this is over.

A loud thud sounds out, shaking the ground beneath us. It gets louder, growing closer as a rumble follows it.

We look over in the direction of the sound and spot four large demons with hundreds of smaller ones close by. The sky shrieks as more demons show up, all flying toward us.

Without a second thought, Axel shoots forward, meeting them head-on. The other dragons quickly joining him.

I look up as Rion curses and catch the exhaustion on his face. My mates are holding their own, but for how much longer?

Jax and Luka rush forward, meeting the new demons halfway while Kai stays where he is getting rid of the last of the demons here.

“Don’t go too far.” Rion bends down and kisses my head before heading for Kai. I glance back around at my mates, then at the destruction and demons around us, and try to think of something to end this.

It needs to end with King... I need to find him and finish this. *Now.*

I push my senses out around me, searching for him. It takes me a minute, but I finally latch onto his power, and this time I pull him to me.

He appears seconds later in a puff of shadows with a shocked expression on his face. It quickly morphs into rage and disdain as he snarls, slashing out at me.

But I’m ready for it and pull myself into the shadows before appearing right behind him. Before he gets the chance to react, I push my shadows toward him, but he waves them away with the flick of a wrist.

As I’m gathering more energy to attack, the clouds above me turn gray. They overcast the sky in darkness, shifting the day to night in seconds.

King steps forward, a cruel smirk on his lips as a mass of dark shadows whip out and circles me, caging me in.

I try to pull myself into the shadows and out of it, but the black mass holds me hostage, growing closer and closer. I reach down and gather my power, but the circling mass

absorbs it instantly. I start to panic when the spiraling shadows close over me, covering me like the rising wave of a dark ocean.

Darkness surrounds me as the outside sound completely disappears. I try to push against the swirling mass, but as soon as my fingers brush against it, a sharp pain erupts across my entire body.

I try pulling my hand back, but the dark mass grips it tight as it begins to climb up my arm. The sharp pain grows, making me scream out in pain. It quickly spreads, turning my chest tight as it crawls across it.

I start to panic that this is it but stop myself just as quick. I can't do this. I can't let him win. There *must* be a way out.

I try to think of something as the pain continues to slash across my body. I push it away and try to come up with something. *Anything*.

Escaping won't work, neither will using my powers. Every time I try to gather them, the dark mass absorbs it just as quick.

I grab my chest as the darkness crawls down my legs, making my entire body feel broken and bruised.

There has to be another way...

"Your end is coming." King's voice echoes around me as I double over, trying to catch my breath.

My end... this can't be my end. It can't be because I won't let it.

I thought I let the hold King has over me go, and in many ways, I have. But I'm also still trying to escape him. Mentally, he still has control over me and that's something that *I* allowed.

I have a choice. I can choose to accept this and suffer the outcome, or I can fight. I can fight until I have nothing left in me. Until my last breath leaves my lungs and the world fades into darkness.

I'm not as weak as I once thought I was. To go through what I did and still come out fighting makes me stronger than I ever thought I could be.

Stronger than *King* ever was.

I used to think he was invincible, his power too strong to go up against. But everything he has, he stole.

Whereas I was *born* with this power. It's always been somewhere deep inside me, waiting for the right moment to break free. Waiting for this moment to take back everything he stole, and every piece of control he thinks he has over me.

I may have given him that control, that power, but now it's time to take it all back. It's time to show him what it means to be truly powerful.

"No, my end is not coming..." I stand up as my strength slowly builds inside me. As if my heart accepts what my mind has realized, warmth spreads throughout my body, slowly pushing the pain away.

Someone born of darkness does not fear it. They embrace it.

"But *your* end is already here." I smile to myself, embracing the familiar power around me, feeling calm and centered.

Stepping through King's dark mass, an icy sensation washes over me, brushing against my heightened senses and lighting every nerve in my body. Stepping clear of the shadows, I'm met with King's look of horror.

My own shadows pour out of me and swirl around him, encasing him whole, just like he did me.

But unlike me, he won't get the chance to escape.

I start pulling the energy from him and, just like the core, it flows straight into me. I give it an extra yank, hoping it's as painful as when he did it to me.

It takes seconds before I'm brimming with energy. Once it builds enough, I push it out around me, focusing on every demon closest to my mates.

With the extra power surging through me, it shoots out, burning through each one of them and turning them to dust.

I sense my mates as they shift and move closer to me. Just as more and more power flows into me. So much so that it starts to turn painful just like last time.

But this time, I won't let it go too far.

I sense more demons around us. There are still so many of them. It's time they go back to where they came from.

Using the power now seeping out around me, I focus on every sliver of connection from the demons and pull it to me.

"Return to the Underworld and never leave it again." My voice echoes out the command around us, just as their connection slowly disappears from my mind.

"They're all gone..." Luka's awed tone filters through my hazy brain as more power fills me.

I focus back on King and let the power continue to flow into me.

I feel Jax step closer, his woodsy scent grounding me. "Kiarra, baby, that's enough."

But it's not. There's still so much power that King should never get his hands on again. I need to make sure this ends here.

Axel's smokey scent hits me. "*Please, stop.*"

But I don't. I knew when I agreed that I wouldn't be able to stop once it started, but I also didn't come without a backup plan.

"Kiarra!" Kai shouts, the panic in his voice ringing out around us.

"I can't... but you can all help me." They might not be able to take the power from King, but with our bond, they should be able to take some from *me*.

I focus on each of their connections as they move closer to me. I feel Rion's strong presence behind me. "How? Tell us. We'll do anything."

“Connect with me. I’m going to try to filter some of the power between us instead of absorbing it all.” I know they can handle it. I *know* they’re strong enough and I won’t give them too much. Just enough to take the edge off the pain... just enough that I don’t end up dead this time.

“Do it,” Kai demands.

I quickly connect to our bond and push some power between us. It flows effortlessly into each of them, taking the brunt of the pain away.

Even though I still feel full, it also feels like I can now take a deep breath.

“Damn, that feels weird.”

“It’s like I drank ten energy drinks all at once.”

Their voices float around me as I connect to my power and feel King’s life force in the dark mass. It’s as small as an ember now, slowly ebbing away.

Just before it dims completely, I pull back my shadows. They dissolve, revealing his slumped form.

I sense his energy, but there’s barely anything left. He’s less than a human now and that’s how he’ll die.

My body sways, the adrenaline rush leaving me quickly. But I don’t mind, I can rest now that King will soon be gone.

The world tilts and slowly turns dark.

“I’ve got you.” Kai wraps his arms around me as my eyes shut on their own.

“It’s over...” My body grows heavy as sleep settles over me.

I feel Kai’s lips against the side of my head. “It is... now rest.”

And then there’s nothing but peaceful darkness.

* * *

KAI

WE ALL LOOK at Kiarra as she sleeps in my arms, a look of peace on her face.

“She’s okay. She’s just exhausted,” I tell the others, but the worry doesn’t leave their eyes. And until she wakes, it won’t.

King is on the ground, his chest not moving.

Rion kneels down and feels his pulse. “He’s still alive, but barely. I don’t sense any energy from him. He’s basically human now.”

I nod, glancing back at Kiarra. “Good. Let’s take him with us.”

Luka frowns. “Doesn’t he still need to be brought back to the Underworld to be absorbed?”

“And he will, but not until we’re done with him.” A fiery rage burns through my veins, the need for revenge too great as I look at each of my brothers.

Savage smirks stare back at me, each one of them just as ready to make sure he pays for what he’s done.

It’s about time King finds out what happens when you hurt our girl.

CHAPTER 28



I SLOWLY WAKE to the soothing scent of Kai all around me. A warm hand trails down my back before soft lips touch my skin. I turn over and find Kai lying next to me, an exhausted but happy look on his face.

“Morning, beautiful.”

“What time is it?” From the dim light filtering through the blinds behind him, it looks to be nearly morning. Did I really sleep the whole day away?

“It’s still early but you’ve been asleep a while.”

I frown, looking back at the window. A while? “How long have I been out?”

“Three days...” My eyes jump to him.

“Three *very* long days...” Kai wraps a hand around me, pulling me closer until I’m snuggled into his chest. He breathes me in before kissing my forehead.

“I’m sorry.” They must have been worried.

Kai shakes his head, kissing me again. “You’ve nothing to apologize for.”

“Where are we?” I glance around at the large bedroom. It’s similar to Kai’s old one, the color scheme gray and black, including the dark wooden dresser and drawers, but the layout is completely different. The bed is a bit smaller and in a different direction with the window to its left. And there’s a more of bare, modern city feel to it than the cozy one from the penthouse.

“Jersey City. Between the five of us, we have a few apartments here. It’s not as big as the penthouse but it’ll do until we can get back on our feet.”

Kai shifts to look at me, his soft eyes full of warmth. “This floor, the one below it, and the basement are all for our personal use. The other three levels used to be a security firm that worked for us. They shifted to Manhattan a while ago, but they’ll have to work from here until everything gets rebuilt.”

I can’t believe most of Manhattan is gone. Even with the help from supes and other communities, it’s still going to take months before we start to see some progress.

I glance around the room again, I guess this is where we’re staying too. At least for now.

Looking back at Kai, I ask him as much. “Us too?”

Kai smiles. “Us too.”

We lie there for a moment, just lost in the comfortable silence and each other’s warm embrace. I smile to myself, feeling at peace for the first time in a long time. It’s like I can take a full deep breath, letting it go as every muscle in my body relaxes, instead of being in a constant state of fight or flight.

And then there’s the future. Something I never thought I would have. Not only do I have a future now, but I have one surrounded by people I love and care about.

I glance up at Kai. He gazes down at me, that soft look still in his eyes.

“Where is everyone?”

Kai moves my hair behind my ear, brushing the back of his hand against my cheek. “They’re out helping with the aftermath. We have portals all over the city, but they’ve all been in and out checking on you.”

“You didn’t hav—”

“We wanted to. None of us wanted to leave you, but there’s one hell of a clean-up. A lot of the surrounding cities

have taken in most of the supes but we're already working on getting it cleared to rebuild."

"Is Jazmyn—"

"Jazmyn and her men are fine. Draven and his people are helping with everything."

"How bad is it?" The last time I saw it, most of it was completely level ed with fires everywhere.

Kai sighs, his expression turning sad. "A lot of the area has been cleaned up, but we'll need to rebuild everything from scratch."

I know he doesn't really care about the buildings or what will need to be done to get it back to the way it was. He's thinking about the people who lost their lives.

I swallow hard. So many people joined the fight to help us. How many of them made it? "A lot of lives were lost..."

Kai tilts my chin up to him. He waits until I look at him before speaking. "It's not your fault."

"I know, I just... feel like maybe I could've done more or... If I'd been faster..."

Kai shakes his head. "We did everything we could and because of that, many survived. A lot of supes worked together. The demons and witches from Staten Island worked alongside those here, the Colorado dragons, the wolves... So many supes that normally stick to their own kind joined together to help one another and because of that, the damage wasn't as bad as we expected."

Wait... "The wolves joined? As in, Luka and Jax's sperm and egg donors?"

Kai smiles, a glint of humor in his eyes. "Not the entire pack, but some, yes. Luna was there." Was... I sit up, my stomach dropping. "Is she okay?"

Kai's smile softens. "She's fine. She wanted to see you before they went back but—"

“I was taking a long ass nap?” I glance around the room, not focusing on anything but my wayward thoughts. “I don’t suppose Cillian got eaten by a demon or maybe stomped on?”

Kai chuckles, pulling me back to his side. “He didn’t come.”

“Of course, he didn’t.” I give him a wry grin. Cillian was a coward, through and through. “I know Luka has worked out things with his wolf, but Cillian shouldn’t get away with what he did to him.”

Kai gives me an unreadable look. “Don’t worry... he won’t.”

He shakes his head. “After what happened, a lot of supes found their leaders... lacking and unfit for their positions. Some even tried to switch sides.”

I would say I’m surprised, but I’ve met some of the leaders over the years at Club Prestige. Most of them were corrupt and downright vile.

Kai searches for something in my eyes before continuing. “We also found out that the Cardinal Three has been divided back up with new leaders taking over. They have their work cut out for them.”

“What do you mean?” There was a lot of corruption after King took over, but I had a feeling that’s not what Kai meant.

Kai frowns. “King had more demons sent there. It wasn’t as bad as Manhattan, but there was still a lot of damage done. Luckily, they all disappeared when you commanded them. Same with Staten Island.”

I didn’t even think about the Cardinal. I don’t know why I assumed it would be safe. King never cared about anything but power and himself. I’m just glad he’s gone now.

“There’s still so much to do, but that’s not something you need to worry about. Just focus on resting.”

After sleeping for three days, resting was definitely not something I needed.

Kai glances down at me. “How are you feeling?”

I glance down at the oversized tee someone changed me into. It hangs off my body revealing most of my skin. There are no bruises or wounds. Not that I expected there to be any, especially with my healing ability.

“I feel...” Great. More than great, my powers are back to normal levels. No longer painful or feeling like it’s about to explode out of me.

“...back to normal.” I smile and then frown. “Wait... how?”

Kai laughs. “Soren helped us bring you straight to the Underworld. Rielle wasn’t there but once you were near the core, the excess power rushed into it. Same with us.”

“And everyone is okay?”

Kai nods, placing a kiss on my shoulder. “They’re all fine. Just missing their mate.”

“I miss them too.”

Kai smiles. He dips his head, leaning in for a kiss when I remember I’ve been sleeping for three days and probably need a shower, or three.

I wiggle free of him and move to the other side of the bed. He frowns, following me.

“I need to have a shower.” I’m surprised I’m not stinking up the room. I subtly try to smell myself, but I get a whiff of... jasmine and vanilla.

Kai smirks, dragging me closer to him. “Jazmyn’s been in to check on you a few times and thought you wouldn’t appreciate sleeping for three days without a shower. So, she basically gave you a one with some spell.”

Huh. I run my fingers through my hair. It feels soft, and so does my skin.

Kai pushes me down onto the bed, hovering over me with a smirk on his face. “Now where were we?”

“I still want a shower.” Cleaned magically or not, nothing beats hot water.

Kai's smirk turns wicked. "And *I* want a kiss from my mate."

I smile, getting lost in his dark eyes. "Fine, one kiss..."

His smirk grows. "One will *never* be enough when it comes to you." He dips down, teasing my lips apart before sliding his tongue in and taking control of the kiss. One brush, one taste is all it takes to crave everything and more.

I deepen the kiss, reaching around him and trailing my hand down his back. He leans into me, his body weight pressing me further into the bed with every hard inch of him pressed against me.

Heat unfurls inside me as his lips trail down my chin and along my jaw.

He groans. "Kiarra? I can smell your arousal, but I need to hear you say it. Tell me you want this?"

I moan, as he kisses down my neck. "I want this... I want you." I run my hand down his stomach and grab the hem of his top. He pulls back and yanks it off throwing it to the side, his possessive gaze trailing over every inch of me as he removes his jeans.

I bite my lip and he smirks down at me before leaning down and kissing me. His hard cock pushing against my stomach.

"I'm going to make you come so many fucking times, you won't be able to walk."

Fuck, yes.

He drags a hand down my chest, over my stomach and to my thighs. Grabbing the end of the top, he pushes it up to my waist before sliding a hand down to my hip and rips my underwear off. His finger slides along my slick folds making me moan.

"Fuck," he groans. "Always so ready for us." The husky sound of his voice slides down my back making me shiver.

I gasp as he slides a finger inside, while running his tongue up my neck to my ear.

“Imagine it’s my cock, beautiful.” He releases some alpha power and within seconds I’m dripping, panting, and moaning his name.

I arch into him, absorbing the feel of him when he adds another finger, making me moan. He slams his lips to mine, thrusting his tongue in my mouth as he fucks me with his fingers. My hips move on their own, meeting each of his thrusts.

I’m so close that when he curls his fingers, it’s all it takes to push me over that edge. I come seeing stars, my whole body shuddering in pleasure.

Before I have a chance to come down from my high, he surges into me.

I cry out as he fills me, stretching me to the hilt. He leans over me, his ragged breath sliding across my ear and neck. “When I’m inside you, nothing else matters. Nothing but you, me, and this moment. And I *never* want it to fucking end.”

He groans as he pulls back and starts moving, dragging out each thrust until it’s agonizingly slow making my legs shake from how intense the slow build is.

“You’re my paradise, Kiarra. Everything begins and ends with you.” He releases more of his alpha power but this time it seeps out, slowly gathering around me until it brushes against every inch of my body, drenching me in its hold.

I wrap my legs around him and try to slide up against him, quickening the pace but the fucker chuckles holding us both still until I stop.

He starts up his slow dragging pace, my entire body shuddering as it continues to build again when he releases more of his power.

I moan as it saturates the air around me, making my body throb with desire but it’s still not close enough to push me over.

I open my eyes and glance at him as his smirk grows. The fucker’s not going to give up until I’m so close, I’m begging for it as he takes control of my body.

But he's not the only alpha here.

I narrow my eyes on him before reaching down and pulling up my powers. Kai freezes as my dark tendril slips out and brushes up against him.

Kai licks his bottom lip as they trail around his arms. "Kiarra?"

I smirk before letting them whip out, wrapping around his wrists and torso, pulling his body up so until he's on his knees, his by his sides.

I slide out of him, giving him a wicked smirk as his eyes narrow on me.

"Kiarra..."

There's a warning in his voice, but it's a contradiction to how his body is reacting. His pupils are blown wide with lust, his breathing ragged.

He *likes* that I'm taking control. And I have every intention of following through with it.

"What are you—"

I lean up, wrapping my arms around his neck and cutting off his question with my lips. He moans, thrusting his tongue with mine and sending my body into overdrive.

He yanks at his binds as I pull back and give him a wicked smile. Before he gets the chance to demand anything, I use my shadows to flip him until we've changed places and he's on his back with me on top of him.

Not even close to finishing my fun yet, I let my tendrils slide up his body, around his wrists and anchor him to the bed.

He tries pulling against them, but they don't budge. He looks back to me with a raised brow and a slow, easy smirk. But it's his dark eyes that reveal what's really going on in that beautiful mind of his.

I can see he's loving it, but he also wants to take control. He's an alpha, the alpha among alphas... but he's not the only one.

I trail my hands down his chest and watch as his muscles contract under my touch. “You’re not the only Alpha...”

His low chuckle sends warm shivers down my spine. “You think you’re the one in control here?”

I grind down on him and smirk when he groans, cursing as he pulls against my binds. I raise a brow. “Sure looks like it.”

His eyes narrow on me as he releases some of his alpha power. It shoots straight to my core, making me gasp. He chuckles, doing it again and again, making my stomach clench as that sizzling heat builds once more.

“Then ride me, beautiful. Take everything and more, because when you’re finished, I’m going to make that body *mine*.”

Shivers slide across my body at the dark promise in his voice. I rear up and slide down onto him, taking him to the hilt and moaning as I absorb the feel of his thick cock inside me.

Shock waves of pleasure sear through me as I adjust to the size of him, while our ragged breaths blend as one.

And then I’m moving, grinding into him, and using my hands as leverage against his chest to rear up and slide back down on him.

Once I get my pace, I let go and lose myself in the feel of him. Closing my eyes, I tilt my head back and ride him with wild recklessness.

He groans, low and deep and I feel it inside me, it only adds to the pleasure making me crave the intense release that continues to build.

When I look back down at him, I nearly come from the look of savage need on his face alone. His eyes are nearly completely black as they roll to the back of his head in pleasure.

“Kiarra,” he growls, sounding more beast than man. The raw hunger and desperation in it slowly strip away at my control, my tendrils faltering.

I pull them back when Kai's eyes pulse a deep red as he growls again, his alpha power seeping out around us, making the air thick with lust.

Each of my ragged breaths fills with his power, pushing me straight into that sweet release. Riding the sweet side of pleasure and pain I come apart, screaming his name as I splinter into a million pieces, my body floating away in a haze of pleasure.

He pushes more power out and I become lost in the sensation until it's consuming every inch of my body.

I feel the hold on my powers slip. Just before I get the chance to rein them back in, Kai swiftly moves, flipping us over until I'm face first on the bed and he's behind me.

He leans over me, licking and biting my ear. "My turn."

Pinning me down by my wrists, he pulls my hips up, widens my legs and slams into me. The heat coils in my lower stomach, slowly spreading out as he drives into me over and over. I can't move, my body bent and curled up beneath him, but it only adds to the pleasure building once again.

He continues to work my body, taking control of every inch of it as he surges into me, his punishing pace relentless.

A delicious feeling uncurls inside me at the brutal strength of his passion.

Every nerve in my body is stretched taut, that one final deep thrust makes me shatter as spasms sear through me, spreading out to every limb. My body lights in flames as I come apart, screaming his name, the pleasure consuming my entire body.

He drives into me one last time, groaning as he spills into me. Both of us collapse onto the bed, spent and breathing heavy.

He rolls to the side, taking me with him and moving me until I'm by his side. Once we catch our breaths, he looks down at me, his eyes filled with so much love I can feel the warmth as it seeps into my soul and fills me up until I'm brimming with it.

He traces a finger along my jaw. “That was—”

“Hot?” I smirk at him as he chuckles.

“Very...” He glances down at my body, his eyes growing dark once more as his cock hardens against my stomach.

“Now... how about that shower?”

* * *

KAI

I DRAG myself away from my mate as she sleeps soundlessly. I don't want to leave her, but something important has been brought to my attention that needs to be dealt with immediately.

Throwing on some clothes, I glance back at her before making my way down to the basement.

In the early hours of the morning, our men came across a supe trying to leave Manhattan with a couple of young witches in the back of his truck. They'd recently lost their parents, and this fucker thought he could just grab them and leave.

Our men brought him to us and when we found out who it was... Let's just say, our luck must have changed with this little gift being handed to us.

Kidnapping is something we don't just give a slap on the wrist for. Especially after what happened with Kiarra. And because it happened in Manhattan, *our* city, we get to enact the punishment.

I smile to myself, feeling lighter than I have in a long while. This day has been a long time coming.

Pulling back the bolt, I open the basement door and walk in. I sense my brothers nearby. Not one of them wants to miss this.

The basement is a wide-open space with four smaller rooms, two on each side. All are soundproof for when our interrogating gets a bit too loud.

Weapons and instruments of every kind line the walls. There are no windows in here, with the only way out, the door I came in.

It's perfect for dealing with those who have no regard for the law and its rules, and sometimes doing it ourselves is the better option.

I see Rion first. He's by a small table of blades, eyeing up two that curve into talons.

I walk over beside him. "How are the girls?"

His eyes flicker to me before he picks up the talon blade, inspecting it. "A bit shaken up, but both are fine. One of the covens from Staten Island is looking after them."

"Good." I glance around the room. "Where's Luka?"

"He's in there."

I freeze. "In *where*?"

Rion raises a brow. "Where do you think?"

"And you *let* him?"

Rion continues to inspect another blade, as if the news he just gave me isn't a fucking shock to the system.

"He deserves to handle this the way he wants."

That's true, but I want the piece of shit in there with him to fucking *suffer*. Many times, over. It's what he deserves.

I try to calm my hounds down as they rise up, wanting to cause damage to the fucker. But if anyone gets to take the lead on this, it's Luka. After all, he's the one that was tortured by that sick fuck.

Cillian.

The idiot thought he could sneak into our city while hell was raining down and walk out with two of our people.

Someone up there was looking out for us, because after today the sick fuck would no longer terrorize Luka's nightmares, or anyone else's, for that matter. Even if I have to rip his black heart out with my bare hands.

I move over to the small room and try to listen out for anything but there's no window and the damn thing is fucking soundproof. Something I'm regretting right about now.

Jax and Axel are right beside it, doing the same thing. Worry slashed across both their faces.

Jax starts pacing before he shakes his head, heading straight for the door. "Fuck it, I can't wait any longer."

Axel blocks him, standing in front of it. "Give him another minute." But Jax has reached his limit, he snarls at him getting up in Axel's face. "He's had enough fucking time."

"Calm down." I pull him back from Axel and release some of my alpha power.

Axel remains patient with him, not taking it personally. He understands how on edge Jax is right now. We all do.

Axel crosses his arm, leaning back against the door. "He's tied and chained to a fucking chair. That *thing* is going nowhere."

Jax glares at him, picking up his pacing once again. "That doesn't mean he can't escape. He could get inside Luka's head. He's done it before."

Rion walks over. "We won't let him."

"I just want to check on him." Jax frowns, the tone in his voice pleading.

I share a look with Rion before nodding to Jax. Axel steps aside as Jax reaches for the handle.

But the door opens and Luka steps out, splatters of blood on his hands, knuckles, and top. One sniff and I know none of it is his.

I look into his eyes and realize it's not Luka but his wolf in charge. I glance behind him, finding Cillian's slumped form. He's out cold, his face barely visible from the beating Luka gave him and it makes me fucking proud, even if it was Luka's wolf who did it.

They're both working together now, so that means Luka was also in on this.

Luka takes back over but instead of fear or pain in his eyes, all I see is... *relief*. He smirks at us. "The fucker is still alive..."

The tightness in my chest eases at the lightness on his face.

Rion glances over his shoulder, a savage smile on his face. "Barely..."

"Good." Jax chuckles in twisted delight as he goes to his brother and pulls him into a hug.

Axel turns and narrows his eyes on Cillian's slumped form. "I say we all get a shot at him."

I'm not against the idea, but Cillian deserves something a little... *more*.

"I might have a better idea." I share a look with Rion.

A couple of portals were already back up and running in the Underworld, with one specially designed for us. Thanks to our involvement in saving it, we could come and go as we please. We all just had to stay the fuck away from the core.

Which I was more than happy to do.

Jax narrows his eyes. "We're listening."

"Do you remember what Soren said when we were in the Prison realm? There are some demons that cannot be destroyed for fear of upsetting the balance. But they still need to be fed..." I glance over at Cillian's limp form, a slow smirk sliding across my face. "...and being fed on by a demon will make sure they're never reborn again."

Meaning we'll never have to see or hear about this vile piece of shit ever again.

Axel chuckles in delight as the fucker behind us starts to wake, a moan on his lips. Before I get a chance to blink, Jax rushes forward and slams his fists into Cillian's face a few times before pulling back and slamming his foot into the end of the chair, toppling it over with Cillian in it.

Cillian flies backward, smacking his head into the ground, knocking him out once more. Jax turns and saunters back to us, a smile on his face.

“Now you can take him.”

I chuckle as Rion hauls Cillian’s body over his shoulder.

“I’ll keep an eye on the other one.” Axel walks over to the next room beside us, picking up a long blade on his way.

Jax follows him, narrowing his eyes on the room. “*We’ll* keep an eye on the other one. I’ve still got a shitload of energy to work out.”

“Same.” Luka’s eyes flash as he joins them. I turn to leave when Axel calls out.

“Kai?”

I turn back to Axel just as he narrows his eyes. “Make sure they make it slow.”

I give him a savage smirk. “Wouldn’t have it any other way.”

CHAPTER 29



“DRAVEN ANNOUNCED to everyone that if he’s to stay on as leader, he’s going to put his mate and family first from now on.”

I nearly choke on my coffee as I glance at Jazmyn. Her eyes sparkle with laughter at my shocked expression.

“What? When did he say this?” Draven seemed more focused on duty than anything else and went to extremes to make sure he upheld the rules in place. Even if they were old as hell and made no sense.

“Before everything went to shit.” She shakes her head. “The fucker announced it in his big speech right before we went out to fight.”

“To everyone?” As in the entire supe community.

She nods.

That was ballsy, but it’s about damn time he finally started fighting for her.

“Is that something you want?”

Jazmyn rolls her eyes. “I don’t know. In a perfect world we’d all be together, but the truth is he fucking hurt me when he picked his *duties* over his family. I can’t just forget that. If he wants this... *really* wants it. Then I’m going to make him work for it.”

I laugh at the mischievous look on her face. “Good. He deserves to work hard for it. How’s Kane and Malik?”

She smiles, her whole face lighting up at the mention of them. “Both are fine. Malik still has his episodes but they’re getting better. I made something for him that’s helping and Kane’s just happy to have his family around him. That’s all he ever wanted.”

Kane never gave up when Malik went missing. He’s always been there for Jazmyn and even me. I’m glad he got his family in the end.

Jazmyn gives me an unreadable look before she glances out at the city. “It’s crazy that it took the world ending for everyone to realize how fucking stupid they all are.”

I laugh at her thoughtful expression. “Want to elaborate on that?”

She smiles, shaking her head. “This whole divide among the supes, especially the demons and witches. I know not everyone thinks that way, but it took the end of the world for them to realize that the only way we can get through shit is together. Now most don’t want to go back to the way it was. They want change.”

Apart from getting King off our backs. If there was anything good to come from all this, it would be that.

“Change is good. It can be scary at first, especially for those that are not used to it, but it’s the only way we can truly grow. And the only way any of us will be able to move forward after everything.”

I doubt it’s all going to happen overnight, but it’s a start and that’s what we all need right now. A fresh start unhindered by useless rules made in the past.

Jazmyn takes a sip of her tea. “What about you? Now that King’s gone, what’s the plan?”

I lean back in the chair, a small smile on my lips. “I don’t know.” I glance out at the clear blue skies and the bustling city below. Such a contrast to Manhattan, where it’s desolate from the aftermath.

“I’ve lived most of my life in a cage and most of it has been about trying to escape... to be free. But I don’t think I

ever really thought about what it would mean, because now that I have it, I don't know what to do."

Or I have too many things I want to do that I can't just choose one.

I want to experience all the little moments I missed growing up. I want to go to a park and have a picnic with the guys. I want to walk through different cities and explore all they have to offer. I want to travel. I want to see the world. I want to make as many memories as possible with my mates. I want to carve out a spot in the world that I can call my own.

And I want to find *me* but with my mates by my side.

She reaches out and squeezes my hand, a soft look in her eyes. "Start off small and work your way up. And I'll be here whenever you need me."

Wait... "You're staying?"

Jazmyn laughs at my excitement. "For now, yes. But even when I go, I won't be far, and I'll only ever be a portal away."

"True." I laugh, realizing my stupidity. Sometimes I forget just how powerful we all are and all the crazy things we can do.

A rush of unfamiliar energy enters the room making my smile drop. I and Jazmyn jump up just as a large portal appears. I pull my powers to the surface just as Rielle steps through, the portal closing quickly behind her.

I sigh in relief, as my racing heart starts to slow. Rielle opens her mouth to speak when she notices Jazmyn.

"Can we have a moment? It's important."

Jazmyn hesitates, looking at me. I give her a smile. "It's fine."

Jazmyn sighs, narrowing her eyes on Rielle before glancing back at me. "If you need anything, just call."

She heads out just as Rielle walks over to me, a frustrated look on her face.

"What's up?"

She starts pacing back and forth, as if she can't sit still, before she turns back to me with a frown.

“Why hasn't King been brought back to the Underworld to be absorbed? I thought I made it clear how important it was for the balance to be fully restored.”

Everything around me slows down and stops.

This can't be happening. He's dead. I know it. I was there... But I passed out before I saw him take his last breath.

But still... my mates, they would've said something. I just assumed...

My heart gives a heavy thump at the thought of King escaping once more.

He's weak. If we find him soon, we can— The guys storm into the room, all wearing angry faces as if they're ready for a fight.

They ignore Rielle and come straight over to me.

Kai pulls me to him. “What's wrong?”

“Rielle said King's not in the Underworld.” I pull back to look into his eyes. “Did he escape?”

Rielle sighs. “No, because he was never brought there.”

I frown looking at her. How is that possible? “What are you talking about?”

She gives my mates a pointed look. “Your mates never brought him there. I was in a different realm in the Underworld when you and your mates went to the core. I thought he was also absorbed when you released the energy back into it. But the balance is still off and that can only mean one thing... King is still alive.”

But the guys were there when he was dying, they would have... I glance over at them, and the blank looks they all wear. Most of them shuffling or glancing elsewhere.

It takes me a minute, but I finally catch it, the guilt. It cloaks the air around them, becoming stifling.

I pull away from Kai, glancing around at them all. “What did you do?”

Jax pastes a smirk on his face, and saunters over. “Don’t know what you’re talking about. How about we go do something... *fun*?” He wiggles his brows as his smirk grows wicked.

I narrow my eyes on the idiot. “How about... *no*. Tell me what you did?”

My question is met with silence. Rion and Luka avoid looking at me completely. Kai just stands there, looking pissed as hell, all aimed at Rielle. Jax tries to distract me by trailing his hungry dark eyes down my body. While Axel smirks between us like he’s ready to join him.

But I am not in the mood for their games especially when King is missing. I know they’re keeping something from me. But before I get the chance to pull them on it, Soren appears.

He frowns looking between us all. “Why wasn’t I invited to this little party?”

Rielle glares as she takes a step closer to him. “Where’s King?”

Soren glances over at the guys. “They still don’t know?”

I freeze and Jax steps back wincing at the look on my face, before glaring over at Soren.

“Don’t know what?” I try to get it out of Jax but he’s avoiding my eyes now, more interested in the fucking wall.

Soren sighs at Jax, shaking his head before looking to me. “Your mates decided it was best to pass their own punishment of sorts.”

Passing their... I glare around at them. “What does that mean?”

Rielle clenches her fists by her side. I feel a slight shift of energy in the room as she snarls at Soren. “And you allowed this?”

Soren chokes on a laugh, not one bit deterred by her temper. “I’m not about to piss off five of the most powerful supernatural beings for protecting their mate.”

Jax nods. “And that’s why we like you the most.”

“As you should.” Soren nods agreeing with his little assessment.

I share a look with Rielle before glancing around at each of my mates. “What are you talking about, *protecting* me? King was dead... or dying.”

At least he was the last time I saw him. “Where is he?” If I have to kill him myself here and now to be done with this, I will.

The guys frown, wincing at the look I give them but it’s Luka who relents.

“In the basement.”

I blink as if his words are hard to comprehend. “In the... *Why?*”

The guys grow quiet.

“Someone better fucking answer me or—”

Soren sighs, loudly, gaining everyone’s attention. “They’ve been torturing King... *slowly* each day. Bringing him to the brink of death before getting a healer in to heal him just enough to do it all again. They’ve also got the room spelled so time is immeasurable making his torture feel endless.”

My brain shuts off for a minute. When it finally clicks, I have so many mixed emotions bubbling up inside me that I don’t know where to start.

Until I decide violence is an option.

I cut each of my mates a hard look. “So instead of just being done with this once and for all, you what? Decide to go all alpha and create your own punishment?”

They all look at me like *I’m* the crazy one here. Jax’s eyes bug off his head just before they narrow, a glint of rage in them. “He fucking *tortured* you for most of your life. He stole

years from you and us. It's about time he got to feel that pain... but *infinitely*."

Kai steps closer. "You didn't think we'd let him get away with what he did to you, did you?"

I shake my head at them. "He's basically human. And he's going to Hell to be absorbed."

Axel crosses his arms like a stubborn child. "Not fucking good enough."

Rion raises a brow. "Not even close."

Jax nods agreeing with them. "Hell was a walk in the park. He deserves to fucking *suffer*."

Rielle sighs, rubbing her temple. "As touching as this all is, King really does need to be absorbed by the Underworld in order to fix the balance, or we could be in the same position all over again."

Kai narrows his eyes on her. "With the core's power returned, the balance is holding, is it not?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then the bastard can die a hundred different more ways before we let you have him." Jax shrugs, giving her a crazy look.

I look at them, *really* look at them and notice the hurt and pain in each of their eyes. King hurt them too. He broke up our family and because of that, *they* suffered.

I release a sigh as the fight drains from me. They deserve to take their revenge but not if it's for me.

Even though I can understand where they're coming from, I want to move on from this... from *him*. I don't want anything holding us back from the future we deserve.

I'm tired of always fighting for peace. I thought he was gone but as soon as Rielle showed up, my body and mind have been in a constant state of fight or flight, waiting for the worst to happen. I don't want to live my life like this. Not anymore.

Not now that I have a future with my men.

“I don’t want to do this...”

The guys freeze at the raw vulnerability in my tone. They all look to me.

“I want him *gone*... for good. As much as I love you all for getting revenge for what happened, I don’t need it. I just need you all by my side and the peace that comes along with knowing King is gone from our lives for good.”

The guys quickly deflate, releasing the tense energy in the room. They all come closer, surrounding me, wearing guilty, resigned looks.

Kai takes my hand. “As much as I want to spend the next few years ripping him apart piece by piece. I don’t want it, if it’s going to hurt you in any way.” He glances around at the others. “None of us do.”

The energy shifts in the room as a new portal opens. We glance over as Rielle narrows her eyes on the guys.

“Make sure you bring him down to the core as soon as possible.” She gives me a soft smile before glaring at the guys once more. Jax rolls his eyes at her just as she leaves with Soren following close behind.

Axel walks over to me, wrapping his arms around me from behind.

Jax narrows his eyes on him before looking at me with a somber expression. “We were going to bring King to the Underworld... *eventually*.”

I give him a smile letting him know I’m no longer angry. “I know, but let’s just move on. I want a fresh start. One without all this hanging over our heads.”

Kai steps forward, placing a kiss on my head. “We’ll get rid of him tonight.”

CHAPTER 30



KAI

THE PORTAL DROPS US off in the middle of the Prison realm. Or at least, I think it's the middle. Every time we come here something changes.

Axel eyes the portal as it closes behind us. "That would've been handy when we came here the first time."

Jax smirks at him. "But you can't deny we had fun destroying those demons on the way."

"If you need an outlet for your rage, all you have to do is ask." We turn to find Soren walking toward us. "Back so soon?"

Jax smirks at him. "What can I say, we missed your ugly face."

Soren gives him a deadpan look. "Stop, you're making me blush."

I cut Jax off before the two of them start again. "Did you get it sorted?"

"Straight to business." I give him a look that tells him now is not the time to mess around. I want to do this right, but I also want to get back to my mate. The look she gave us when she found out King was still alive nearly fucking broke me. I don't regret what we've been doing the last couple of days, but we should've handled it better and told her.

Soren's eyes widen. "With the little time you gave me?"

I raise a brow and he rolls his eyes. The fucker has been around Jax too long. “Of course, I got it sorted, it’s *me* we’re talking about.”

Jax chuckles, walking over to him and slapping him on the back like they’re old buddies. “Good man.”

Great, now there are two of them.

“Lead the way.” I glance over at Rion and on his shoulder where King is bagged and tagged with just enough air to keep him alive before turning back to Soren and giving him a look to hurry the fuck up.

We turn and head through the jagged rocks. Each time we come here it’s changed, the entire landscape flipped, shifting shapes or sizes. The only consistent thing is the dark sky above as it snuffs out most of the light.

We continue past dozens of prisons when a couple of Ivor’s men walk past us, bowing on their way.

Axel frowns as they scurry away, avoiding eye contact. “That’s still so fucking weird.”

He’s right. Ever since we came back with Kiarra to drain the extra power, all higher-level demons have been treating us like we’re their superiors, bowing in respect and making sure anything we need is on hand.

Soren smirks at Axel. “The Lords haven’t been replaced yet. Even though Rielle has taken over most of their duties, it’s only a quick fix. The five of you and your mate are the most powerful beings we know of. The Underworld would thrive under that kind of power.”

I open my mouth to straight out decline his offer when it hits me. Having the Underworld at our disposal could be useful.

I never want something like King’s war to happen again but should another foolish being decided to push his or her luck, I’d want a plan in place well before it.

But taking over full-time is not something I’d agree to. None of us ever want something like that to take over our

lives, when family should be the priority.

I give the boys a look, and from that one look they know what I want to know. If they will trust me with this.

They nod without question, giving me my answer.

I look back to Soren. “We’re not taking over as your Lords, but we’ll help out where we can.” Once we have an in, that’s all we really need.

Soren smirks at me like it was his plan all along but I know exactly what I’m doing. I’m protecting my family in the best way I know how and making sure they never have to go through something like this again.

“I’ll let Rielle know.”

I nod as we move past the jagged rock prisons. More and more of them appear surrounding us like a maze.

Jax’s eyes widen. “What the—”

“Keep moving and try to avoid touching the prisons. Some of these prisoners are extremely temperamental.” The jagged rocks shift and move making us react quickly to avoid them. Soren easily avoids every one of them as if he knows the exact path to follow.

I narrow my eyes on him, about to call him out on it when darkness quickly descends around us. Pushing my hounds to the surface, I watch the darkness crawl outward making everything disappear. Everything but us and the ground is gone. Just a vast darkness that looks like it spans out infinitely.

“What the fuck?” Axel grunts walking into the back of Luka.

Jax shakes a hand in front of himself. “Not again. I feel fucking blind.”

Rion nods over at me, his basilisk eyes glowing back at me.

“Let’s keep moving.” The rest call their beasts to the surface until nothing but glowing eyes surround me.

We move forward, following Soren through the vast darkness. A few minutes pass before we come across two large black walls made from the same black jagged rock similar to the prison's cells. They spread out on each side of us creating a long pathway.

As we move through them, the walls start to climb upward and over us, forming an arch.

We move through the long pathway only stopping when we reach a black door. Soren stops and turns around to us wearing a smile.

I ignore his happy mood and tilt my head toward the door. "This is it?"

He nods. "I've worked with the most powerful demons to make sure your *very specific* conditions have been met. Similar to the room in your basement, once it's activated, time will move much slower. It took some tinkering but one hour outside the room will give you the specific time requested inside it."

"Good." The room will act similar to the way the core trapped us inside our minds. But instead of just mental suffering, we've adapted the energy to make sure it manifests physically, making sure King feels everything too. Every slash of pain. Every sear of flames as they blaze through his body, ripping it apart until there's nothing but fragments of his essence left behind.

Just like our rooms in the basement, time will move slower but this time one hour outside will match six years inside.

Six years to match what he gave Kiarra with ten times the pain and suffering he put her through.

It's not enough. It'll never be enough for what he did to her or what took from us, but Kiarra is right, we all need to move on, and King's death is the best fucking beginning we could ask for.

Besides, we've also made sure he can't die until the six years are up. Knowing that he'll suffer greatly in those years gives me a sliver of peace.

Soren turns to the door, doing some weird movements with his hands and whispering a strange language I've never heard.

As soon as he's finished, the door lights up, opening before he turns to us.

"There you go."

I glance inside thanking him. Apart from having another personality similar to Jax, Soren had knowledge and connections that came in use. Without him, it would've taken longer to set this up. And more time away from my mate was not something any of us wanted.

Soren salutes, making Jax chuckle. "Anything for the new bosses."

I narrow my eyes on him. "We're not your new bosses. We're just going to help out."

"Sure thing... *boss*." He smirks at me before stepping out of the way.

I shake my head to myself. The fucker really has been spending too much time with Jax and it shows. I ignore his smirk and move into the room with the guys following me.

As soon as I cross the threshold, I feel the energy as it coats my skin. It's dark and twisted, seeping out around us into every crevice of the room.

Jax shudders frowning at the small space. "It's fucking creepy."

"That's the point." Axel frowns at him, but glances around looking just as disturbed.

There's a single rusty chair over by the left wall. Rion heads straight for it and throws King on it without his usual finesse.

Once King hits the chair, long thin black straps slither out from it coiling around every part of his body before seeping into his skin.

He gasps awake, his eyes widening before he quickly passes out again.

Jax sighs, looking in King's direction. "I was hoping I'd get another few hits in."

Axel frowns. "Same."

Luka raises a brow at them both. "You both already beat the shit out of him, ripped him apart, and broke nearly every bone in his body."

Jax and Axel shrug. "It's still not enough." They say in tandem.

Soren smirks at them. "Vicious. I like it."

"Now what?" Jax gives him a sullen look.

Soren glances over at King's slumped form. "Now we leave him to suffer."

Axel looks at him like he's crazy. "That's it?"

Soren gives him a savage smirk. "Oh, don't worry, his form of punishment is something that will definitely hurt. In more ways than one."

Exactly the way I planned it.

We all head outside. Just before the door closes, we catch his blood-curdling scream as it starts. Hearing it alone eases something in my chest.

Even if the next six years of torture is not by my hands, King will suffer and that's all I really need to know.

The door shuts with a loud thump and then there's nothing but silence as we wait.

Soren turns to the door and mumbles that strange language again making it light up.

"It's done. One hour from now, the door will open, and he'll be gone. Only his essence left behind." He sighs, stepping away. An exhausted look coming over him.

Rielle only agreed to this, if we made sure his essence was then absorbed by the core. Hence why we're going to wait outside until the hour is up and then hand-deliver the last piece of him to the core, where he'll be gone forever.

Soren moves further out until he disappears completely from view. I know he'll be back once it's done, so I pay no mind to his whereabouts.

The rest of us move around finding a place to wait out the hour. Axel leans against the wall, glaring out at nothing. Jax and Luka pick up pacing back and forth. While Rion moves to stand beside me as I stay by the door, guarding it to make sure everything goes to plan, and the fucker is gone for good.

I glance over at Axel as he continues to glare at everything. His mood a little off, even for what we're doing. But he went to see Rhory today and I never got the chance to ask how it went.

“What did Rhory want in the end?”

Axel chuckles but there's no humor in it. “He wants our backing.”

“What?” Jax's head whips so fast, the fucker probably got whiplash.

Axel nods. “The dick saw what we were capable of in Manhattan and wants a pact to ensure the safety of the Dragons. Should anyone try to come after him or his dragons, he wants our backing.”

Jax's eyes widen. “I hope you fucking told him no.”

Axel rolls his eyes at him. “Of course, I fucking did. Right before I sent him packing with one less appendage.”

Jax's dark chuckle echoes around us as I glance over at Axel with a raised brow. He smirks back at me. “It'll grow back... *eventually*.”

I shake my head, smiling to myself. The fucker was crazy, but I wouldn't have him any other way.

Jax starts grilling Axel on every little detail, bringing him out of his strange mood and the hour passes by quicker than we thought. Soon enough, Soren appears out of nowhere and walks straight over to us.

He does his thing, and the door lights up. Once it's open, he walks straight in and pulls something from his pocket,

placing it in the middle of the floor.

I look around the room but there's no one here. King long gone along with the creepy vine chair.

I glance over at Soren to the small red container he placed down. It starts to glow making the energy around the room, swirl and gather together. Once it's formed into a small mass, it rushes straight into the container, shaking slightly before going still.

After a moment, the light dims and Soren bends down to pick it up. He hands it straight to me with a smirk. "That's what's left of him."

I glance at the small red container in my hands as it starts to pulse and glow. "Let's take it to the core and finish this."

In silence, we quickly move back through the vast darkness, passing the jagged rocky prisons, moving along the long random halls that curl and shift, before finally coming to the core.

Once we're in the room, I chuck the red container straight at the center of it. Before it hits it, the core's energy snaps out, swallowing it whole.

Seconds later a rumble of power pulses out, swiftly changing the air around us and making something in my chest feel lighter than it was a moment ago.

I glance over at the guys and see them all look just as relieved.

Soren rubs his hands together, a smile on his face. "I can already feel the difference. The balance is complete now."

Soren waves, turning to go. But before he disappears, Jax calls out to him. "Where are you rushing off to?"

Soren turns around with a smirk. "Let's just say your little mate was good on her deal and helped me organize something, so unless there's anything else... I'm off to reap the benefit of it." He winks and disappears.

I look at my brothers, all looking content and happy. "It's done. Let's go home."

We quickly organize a portal that leads us straight to the smaller apartment in Jersey City. We head straight for our mate, sensing her in the lounge.

She turns around the minute we walk in, a hesitant smile on her face. “It’s done?”

I walk over to her and pull her into my arms. “It’s done. He’ll never hurt you or anyone ever again.”

Her whole body relaxes as she smiles up at me. And that one look eases every tense muscle in my body. It seeps into my soul, wrapping it in warmth.

She looks around at us with nothing but love in her eyes. “Thank you.”

Rion steps forward and hands her the piece of paper from his suit. I release her from my hold as she takes it frowning, though there’s a glint of a smile and warmth still in her eyes.

“What’s this?”

I smile at her. “Open it.”

She playfully narrows her eyes on us before slowly opening it, her eyes widening when she reads what it says. Her eyes jump from mine to the rest of the guys.

“Is this real?”

I laugh at her shocked expression. “Yes, it’s real.”

Her smile grows as she glances around each one of us as if to make sure this isn’t a joke. “So, we’re actually going to travel the world... for the next six months.”

I nod. “It will take that long to get everything up and running again. We’ve organized everything so our men can get a start on it while we’re traveling. And we’re only a portal away if they need anything.”

Jax narrows his eyes at no one in particular. “But the fuckers aren’t allowed to call us for anything other than an emergency and by that time, they’d want to be fucking dying.”

She does the cutest little fucking excited dance, making us chuckle. “When do we leave?”

I take her free hand and bring it to my lips. “As soon as you want. The portals are at our disposal.”

Her eyes soften. “This is amazing. I never thought...” She shakes her head, glancing back down at the piece of paper. “I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but I always wanted to travel. To go anywhere and everywhere and just experience everything I’ve missed. And getting to do it with you all is better than anything I could have hoped for.” She looks up at us smiling, her eyes glassy before tears start to fall.

I know they’re happy tears, but I already want to pull her to me and kiss every one of them away. And by the looks on each of the guy’s faces, I can tell they want to do the same.

Instead, we form a circle around her, all of us smiling like big happy idiots as we stare down at the woman who owns us, mind, body, and soul. The woman who never gave up when everything around her turned to hell. When she had to fight to survive each moment of every day and still found hope in the darkness.

She deserves every good thing the world has to offer and I’m going to make sure she gets it.

She looks around at us smiling with nothing but love in her eyes. “I love you. I love you all.”

Jax’s eyes soften. “We love you too.”

Luka smiles. “...more than anything.”

“And then some.” Axel smirks, making Jax roll his eyes at him.

“And *that* will never change.” Rion gives her a knowing look.

Each of my brothers pulls her into a hug, kissing her and twirling her around. Her laughter rings out around me as I stand back content to watch my family, all happy and together. All loved and safe.

Finally.

Once they’ve all had their moment, I pull her closer, wrapping my arms around her.

“We’re going to show you the world, Kiarra. Every beautiful, magical place we can find and travel to. We’re going to give you so many good memories that the old ones no longer exist.”

There’s a long happy future in front of us. One I’ll make damn sure will happen. No matter who or what gets in our way.

“I love you, Kiarra. We all do.” I lean down and brush my lips against hers.

“Endlessly. Infinitely. And always and forever.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

And that's a wrap! The series of Kiarra and her men is finally complete, and I'm so unbelievably happy that I got to bring you all along on their journey.

This was my first debut series and I can't thank you enough for all the support, kindness, and patience you've shown me along the way.

I have to admit, this one was a hard one to finish. I originally planned to have this out months ago, but life kicked me sideways while throwing everything at me. But it's done now and I can't be happier about how it all came together.

I hope you all enjoyed the Blood and Ruin series and I can't wait to show you what I have planned next.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rumer Hale is an emerging author of Paranormal/Fantasy Romance. She enjoys reading and creating worlds filled with magic and romance.

Keep up to date with future releases and teasers by joining her Facebook Group, *Rumer Hale's Reader Group*, or find her on TikTok and Instagram: @rumerhaleauthor

