

KATIE MAY



# BLOOD



# BLOOD

PRODIGIUM ACADEMY

BOOK FIVE



KATIE MAY

EXPRESSO PUBLISHING, LLC

Copyright © 2023 by Katie May

All rights reserved.

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

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book was written using AI, nor does the author give anyone permission to use this book in any AI database.

Cover Design by Logan Keys

Edited by Autumn Reed

*To those who are tired of the same old, same old. Who needs a Prince Charming when you can have a harem of monsters at your beck and call?*

# CONTENTS

Foreword

RECAP

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Epilogue Two](#)

[Epilogue Three](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Katie May](#)



## FOREWORD

This is a paranormal academy reverse harem romance and is not suitable for anyone under the age of 18. There is strong language throughout the book, as well as sexual situations and graphic violence. This series also contains MM themes. Put this book down if such material offends you. Or if you're related to me. You have been warned...

# RECAP

Previously on Prodigium Academy...

Violet Dracula and her men compete to win the Roaring, a series of dangerous games that put monsters in life or death situations. During the second game, Violet is transported to a room with her father, Vladimir Dracula, and Dimitri Gray. She is told that she is actually the daughter of Lucifer Morningstar and Hera, but Hera begged Dracula to look after Violet when she was born in order to hide her from Lucifer, who believes her to be dead. The room explodes, Dracula is stabbed in the heart, and Medusa, Mason's mother, kidnaps Violet.

Medusa brings Violet to Mount Olympus where she tells her about two prophecies. One states that a woman named Violet will rise from the ashes and claim her rightful throne. Another states that Dracula's daughter will murder Mason. While in Mount Olympus, Violet also meets the eccentric king of the gods, Zeus.

After returning to the academy, Violet discovers that Hux and Jack's body has been taken over by a murderous monster named Balor. Violet can't figure out Balor's purpose, but he seems to hold a violent grudge against vampires.

Violet and her mates win the Roaring and they are taken to meet Lucifer, who requested to meet the winners. During the

meeting, the group is attacked by vampire hunters and Violet is taken captive.

Violet is tortured by Stefan Van Helsing, Vin's father, and some of his followers. Cheryl Ness attempts to free Violet, but she's killed in the process. Violet, struck by grief and rage, loses control of her powers. When she returns to herself, everyone in the room has been brutally murdered.

The professors of Prodigium Academy, including Dimitri Gray, arrive and sentence Violet to detention for the next one thousand years, where she'll be forced to pay for her crimes.

However, when Violet is in detention, she is saved by a monster named Memphis who brings her to Hell where she meets her biological father Lucifer. Lucifer tells her that he believed her to be dead all of these years and wishes to have a relationship with her.

Violet becomes separated from her mates and teams up with Dracula. While with him, she discovers that a bunch of monsters—including her best friend Vanessa Van Helsing—have been spelled by Zeus to attack anyone associated with Dracula or Violet.

At the end of book four, Violet discovers that Zeus was the one who tried to murder her as a baby, spelling both Lucifer and Hera to believe the other was involved in order to drive a wedge between them. Zeus has been digesting souls for years now, stealing their power. He believes that Violet is a threat to his throne. Zeus also reveals that Diedre is still alive and has been impersonating Medusa. Diedre stabs Mason with a god-blessed blade, fulfilling the prophecy that he'll be murdered by the daughter of Dracula. The rest of Violet's mates become controlled by an all-powerful Zeus, forcing a distressed Violet to leave with Alex. Meanwhile, Hera, Dracula, and Lucifer

band together through their shared love for Violet in an attempt to fight off Zeus so Violet has time to escape.

Violet vows to destroy Zeus for killing her mate. She plans to recruit an army that includes the monster council and the Fomorians—a species of monsters that Lucifer imprisoned hundreds of years ago.

### **Characters:**

**Violet Dracula** - Dracula's clumsy, eccentric daughter. She is revealed to be the mate of Frankie, Mason, Vin, Cal, Hux, Jack, Barret, and Dimitri. At the end of book two, you discover she's actually the biological daughter of Hera and Lucifer. She is arrested for murder and taken to detention, though she is broken free by Memphis and Lucifer. After Mason is murdered and her mates are taken hostage by Zeus, Violet vows revenge.

**Vin** - a Van Helsing, sworn to protect humanity from monsters (particularly vampires) at all costs. He's originally rude and an asshole to Violet before he repents. His twin sister is Vanessa. He's one of Violet's mates.

**Mason** - the son of Medusa and a Fairy Blossom addict. He becomes Violet's first friend at the academy. A prophecy states that Dracula's daughter will eventually kill him. That prophecy comes true when Diedre, pretending to be Medusa, kills him. He's one of Violet's mates.

**Frankie** - a cold man who is only passionate about his work...until he meets Violet. He is one of Frankenstein's experiments and also one of Violet's mates.

**Hux** - the alter-ego of Jack. He's slightly psychotic and already desperately in love with Violet. At the end of book

three, it's revealed that there is a third soul living inside of their body, Balor. Hux is one of Violet's mates.

**Jack** - the kinder alter-ego of Hux. He is more level-headed than his brother and refuses to use swear words or resort to violence. At the end of book three, it's revealed that there is a third soul living inside of their body, Balor. Jack is one of Violet's mates.

**Dimitri Gray** - once a professor but now the headmaster of Prodigium Academy. He's a stone-cold assassin who has been looking after Violet since she first arrived at the academy. He knows the truth about her lineage. Despite his surly attitude, he appears to have genuine feelings for her, and she for him. However, they're both too stubborn to admit the truth.

**Cal** - otherwise known as Cupid. He's half-fairy and half-incubus. After helping supernaturals find their fated mates, the monster council forced him into detention, where he developed a relationship with Barret. He's revealed to be one of Violet's fated mates in book three.

**Barret** - otherwise known as the Boogeyman. He's forced to remain in the upper levels of the school for a crime he committed. He's currently in a relationship with Cal and is close friends with Violet. He confesses to being in love with Violet in book three. He's revealed to be one of Violet's fated mates in book four.

**Cheryl** - Vin's ex-girlfriend, who's desperate to win him back. She cheated on him with Mason, which broke off their relationship. She is the daughter of the Loch Ness Monster and also Violet's sworn enemy. She's killed at the end of book three trying to protect Violet.

**Vanessa** - Vin's twin sister and a fellow hunter. She's Violet's best friend. She is spelled by Zeus to attack Violet in

book four.

**Cynthia** - Violet's old roommate who found her fated mate, Pete the Pumpkin. She's a banshee and the Woman in White.

**Dracula** - Violet's father and the leader of all vampires. He is the most hated and feared monster in the entire world. He sacrifices himself, along with Hera and Lucifer, at the end of book four to ensure Violet gets away with Alex.

**Alex** - a transfer to the school and a necromancer. He hates vampires with a passion and seeks to make Violet's life a living hell. However, he begins to develop feelings for her. At the end of book four, he saves Violet when Zeus tries to digest her soul.

**Stefan Van Helsing** - Vin's father and a feared monster hunter who targets vampires. Violet kills him, along with a handful of other vampire hunters, at the end of book three.

**Balor** - a Fomorian who has taken up residence in Hux and Jack's head. He receives a body of his own with the help of a reluctant Frankie. He is one of the men that Zeus takes hostage at the end of book four.

**Diedre Stevens** - a vampire teacher at the school who committed murders in order to frame Violet. She revealed herself to be Violet's "sister" and Dracula's biological daughter. She is murdered by Violet at the end of book one. However, she's revealed to still be alive in book four and impersonating Medusa. She stabs Mason with a god-blessed dagger, killing him. Vin, in his rage, murders her before Zeus regains control of him.

# CHAPTER 1



VIOLET

**T**o kill or not to kill?

That is the question—one that all the great scholars have pondered at some point in their lives.

The answer? Kill.

Always. Kill.

*Mason is dead.*

That thought tumbles around in my head like a tennis shoe in the washing machine, rattling and clanking and ricocheting off the sides of my skull.

*Mason. Is. Dead.*

*Mason is dead.*

I thought those words would gain new meaning after the one-hundredth time thinking them, but they remain as obsolete as every dead language.

Dead language.

Dead.

Mason.

*Mason is dead.*

The pain in my chest is like nothing I've ever experienced. I'm sure it would be significantly less painful to saw off my own arm and then whack myself in the face with it than dealing with this gnawing, all-consuming, indescribable grief.

Mason, a facet of my soul, my charming gorgon, my sunshine mate . . . is dead.



Murdered.

Yes, “murdered” is a better word.

“Dead” implies that he merely drifted off into an endless slumber. That he didn’t feel any pain or fear before he left this world for the next.

But “murdered” has much more sinister connotations.

Because Mason *did* feel pain when his own mother—well, the monster he believed to be his mother but was revealed to actually be my sort-of sister—stabbed him in the chest with a god-blessed dagger. He felt fear when he stared into the eyes of the one person who was supposed to love him unconditionally . . . and watched her face change and distort until she was entirely unrecognizable.

Dead.

Dead.

Dead.

I keep thinking that word’s definition will change, but it doesn’t. It’s like I’m trying to understand a foreign language I only studied once before. I know how to say “hello,” “goodbye,” and “fuck,” but that’s the extent of my knowledge. If anyone were to ask me my favorite color, I would have to answer with “fuck hello.”

Dead.

Dead.

Dead.

I don’t understand what that one elusive word means now. What it implies.

Dead.

Dead.

Dead.

I stare out the window of the moving train as if in a daze. Everything whirling by me—the grassy fields, the rippling hills, the small bodies of water glistening in the setting sun, like they're constructed entirely out of diamonds—is indistinct. I can see them, yes, but I can't process their meaning in this world characterized by dissonance and chaos.

Mason. Is. Dead.

And he may not be the only one.

The fissure in my chest expands until I fear one half of my heart will take a nosedive straight into my stomach while the other plummets to the floor at my feet.

If Mason's death is the elephant in the room, then the knowledge that Zeus himself has imprisoned my other mates is the guillotine blade dangling directly above my neck, just waiting to fall and cut flesh.

Anger—white-hot and blistering—cascades through me when I think about what Zeus did to the men I love. He . . . controlled them. Forced them to stand back and watch as one of their own was murdered in cold blood. I'm assuming Zeus and my conniving sister—or is it stepsister?—took them back to Mount Olympus, but are they okay? Have they been hurt? I know, mentally, that they may never recover from Mason's death, the same as me. Mason was Vin's best friend. I can't even imagine what he's going through right now.

Actually, I can.

It's probably similar to the pain reverberating through me at this exact moment, siphoning the breath from my lungs. Breathing is impossible. Thinking is impossible.

I'm pretty sure living is going to be impossible too.

I crave my mates with an intensity that terrifies me. I would give all my earthly possessions to be wrapped in Vin's strong, protective arms, knowing that no harm will come to me while I'm with him. I would sell my soul to see Jack's timid smile quickly transform into Hux's surly, intimidating scowl. I would cut out my own heart to listen to Frankie ramble on about his latest experiment, the excited glint in his eyes belying his monotone voice. I would remove all my limbs to be nestled between Cal and Barret as they promise everything will be okay. I would stab both my eyes out to hear Dimitri snap at me and call me a ridiculous female or whatever insult is percolating in that wicked mind of his.

And I would give up my own life if it meant Mason gained his back.

Tears fester in my eyes, but I refuse to let them fall. Even neck-deep in my grief, I'm a stubborn bitch. It's been ingrained within me since a young age by Dracula himself that crying is a weakness, and the second you bare your throat to a predator, they'll swoop in for the kill.

Unbidden, my gaze slides to Alex, sitting across from me on the train.

I'm unsurprised to find his russet-black gaze firmly on me.

Has he even looked away since he whisked me out of that hell house a day ago?

I try to be subtle in my perusal of him, but I'm pretty sure I fail. Epicly. Still, he doesn't call me out on my blatant staring as I take in his disheveled state.

He's styled his hair into a faux hawk, with a wayward strand caressing his forehead. The piercings in his ears,

eyebrow, and lower lip glint in the waning sunlight, commandeering my attention. Like always, he's wearing a leather jacket and black pants, and the dark red shirt underneath nearly matches the red hue of his eyes. He shifts slightly, and my gaze snags on the skull tattoo etched across the top of his hand. More dark lines crawl up his arm before disappearing into his shirtsleeve.

Alex . . .

I don't even know what to think of the necromancer.

When I first met him, he hated me. He blamed me for the death of his brother, and he was right to. I *did* murder his brother, but only after he tried to rape me. Since then, our relationship has been tenuous at best, a flimsy cord that can be severed at a moment's notice. Sometimes, I swear he stares at me with heat in his eyes; other times, he regards me with nothing but haughty disdain and a healthy dose of loathing.

I can't quite read the expression on his face now.

Sympathy?

Pity?

I would prefer the blind hatred.

He clears his throat multiple times, pulling me out of my thoughts. Those piercing, red-black eyes ensnare my own as he absently licks at his lip ring.

"We need a plan for tonight," he tells me gruffly. Normally, his imperious tone would have me wanting to slap him senseless. Now, I just feel tired.

Tired, weak, and battle worn.

"Planning is overrated," I murmur, already turning back toward the window of the train. Tiny cottages dot the

landscape, their mushroom roofs dwarfed by the tall trees on either side of them. I wonder how much farther we need to go before we arrive at our destination—a destination, I might add, that has been warded against magical travel. Hence, why we're on a train to begin with. I much prefer Alex's "wham, bam, thank you, ma'am" method for travel, a.k.a. traveling through dead bodies from one place to the next.

"Death is overrated too," he snaps, his tone laced with sarcasm and something else. Something more pronounced and unexpected from him.

And then he winces, the color draining from his face, when he realizes what he just said.

I ignore him and press my face flush against the window, no doubt leaving smudges on the glass.

Death.

Mason.

Dead.

*Mason is dead.*

Alex growls something and tugs at my shoulder, forcing me to face him. Those eerie, russet eyes are as hard as granite.

"I'm not just going to allow you to stare morosely into the distance when we're about to do something immensely dangerous and possibly deadly."

I push my lips out into a pout. "I'm not staring morosely into the distance," I protest . . . as I turn to stare morosely out into the distance. Dammit.

Alex's pierced brow arches as he gives me a knowing look. "The monster council is not your biggest fan," he tells me, as

if I need the reminder. “They’ll kill you in a second if they think it’ll benefit them.”

I wave a hand in the air dismissively. “I’ll be fine.”

Probably.

Well, I’m like . . . twenty-two percent sure I’ll be fine. It’ll move up to a solid twenty-seven if I choose to wear a cape.

Facts, my friends.

Pure facts.

Something dark paves its way across Alex’s face. Before I can comment on it, he lunges forward and captures my wrist in his tattooed hand. He leans forward until he’s hovering over me, his eyes intent on my face and radiating an emotion I can’t quite articulate.

“Do you think Mason wants this for you?” he hisses. “For you to be suicidal? Do you think your other mates want you to die in your quest to save them?”

“What—?” I try to pull my wrist away from him, but he only tightens his grip.

“They’ll be lost without you, Violet.” His eyes beseech me to understand . . . something. What that something is eludes me. “It’d be better at that point for you to stab them in the chest yourself.”

I gasp. “Don’t say shit like that.”

“It’s the truth.” He releases me, as if my skin has burned him, and collapses back into his seat opposite me. Folding his arms over his chest, he scowls. “Now, can you stop being a selfish little bitch and get your head in the game?”

I know the reaction he probably hopes to elicit from me—anger.

And while I do feel an insurmountable amount of rage, it's eclipsed by my all-encompassing determination to succeed. To fight and live and learn to love without one piece of my soul. Will it be hard? Yes. But is it impossible? No.

I know Alex is right. If I die on my quest for vengeance, then I'm sentencing my other mates to death as well. I'm not being vain when I state that they won't be able to live without me. It's just the way things are.

I need to survive . . . for them.

For myself.

Alex must see that fire returning in my eyes, because his own lips curl upward a fraction of an inch. If I hadn't been studying him so intently, I might not have noticed it.

"Are you ready to get an army, Violet baby?" Alex asks darkly, leaning forward in his seat so his face consumes the entirety of my vision.

I barely even register the nickname he gave me. All I can focus on is that one word.

Army.

I need an army if I'm going to defeat Zeus, avenge Mason, and save my other mates. The monster council may be our first stop . . . but it's not our last.

The smile curling up my lips is probably as bloodthirsty as his. Not that I'm surprised. I am a vampire-who-isn't-truly-a-vampire, after all. Blood is in my non-DNA.

"How much longer until we reach Chicago?" I ask wickedly.

Because . . . oh, yeah . . . fun fact. One of the monster council's bases of operations is in good old Chicago, USA.

You'll probably think twice before you walk those streets again, huh?



## CHAPTER 2



## VIOLET

**I**t's not long before the forests and hills transition into industrial jungle gyms with metal walls, concaving roofs, and graffiti-covered sidewalks. In the far distance, skyscrapers dot the horizon, appearing almost like glimmering pinpricks in the sun.

I clear my throat to garner Alex's attention and lean forward so our words won't be overheard—not that I imagine anyone is paying us any attention.

“Tell me what I need to know,” I tell him firmly. Now that I've committed to the whole “get an army and not die” thing, I know I need to be prepared. Anti-vampire rhetoric has been getting worse over the months, led by none other than good old Zeus himself.

Fuck him.

Seriously . . . fuck him.

Alex scratches absently at his chin as he studies me. Even when I hated him, his eyes always fascinated me. Those large, obsidian orbs are superimposed over chips of red. I half wonder if his eye color is unique to necromancers or if it's something distinctly Alex.

“Well, you probably already know that the monster council has strongholds all over the world. Romania, California, Israel, Canada—”

“Canada?” I interrupt, blinking waspishly.

Canadians have always seemed so . . . nice. The exact opposite of monstrous.

Alex waves a hand in the air dismissively. “They’re usually disguised as hockey fans.”

“Ah.” I nod seriously. Canadians definitely take their hockey seriously.

“Anyway . . .” He gives me a pointed look, as if asking whether I mean to interrupt a second time. In answer to his unspoken question, I pantomime zipping my lips shut and throwing away the key. “What a lot of people don’t know is that the council is able to travel from one location to the next through the use of portals. Actually, Prodigium is built on one of the largest magical portals in the world—hence the name Prodigium. In Latin, it translates roughly to portal.”

So, Prodigium Academy is built on a portal? Did I know that? I feel as if it’s something I’ve been taught or told, but then again . . . I’ve learned to zone out a lot of the teachings at that school.

I focus on Alex once more and nod for him to continue.

“The council moves constantly, so as to not be found by monster hunters and other humans,” he explains.

A throbbing pain explodes in my chest.

Monster hunters . . .

Vin.

Vin is an esteemed Van Helsing—you know, from the Van Helsing line. And while the Van Helsing may hunt vampires, they seem to be relatively friendly with the other monsters roaming this earth, which explains their continuous admittance to Prodigium Academy.

If you really think about it, the entire system is complete horseshit. Vampires aren’t nearly as scary as some of the other

creatures that go bump in the night. Sure, we drink blood . . . and have enhanced senses . . . and can live forever . . . and are faster and stronger than most monsters and humans . . . and can tear people apart with our bare teeth . . .

Where am I going with this?

Oh, right.

We're not as horrible as some of the other monsters out there.

Alex continues, oblivious to the direction my thoughts just headed. Or, perhaps, he's just so used to me flying straight into la-la land that he chooses to ignore the dazed look in my eyes.

"Members are voted onto the council every twenty years," Alex continues, reciting facts I already know. Still, there's a difference between knowing and *knowing*, if you know what I mean. You know?

Like, I can learn how to dismember a body in class, but when I actually apply the teachings to real life, it's an entirely different experience. Suddenly, all the immaculate notes I've made fly out the window, and I'm stuck staring at a severed limb like a deer in headlights. What do I use my bonesaw for? How do I burn away skin? Where can I bury the remains?

I'm sure every student deals with these profound questions at least once in their life.

The few times I've learned about the monster council, I dismissed the teachings the way a high schooler would a biology lesson on cellular regeneration. Why would I ever need to know this? Now, I suddenly wish I had paid more attention during class and the numerous times Dad talked to me about the elusive council and the monsters who reside on it.

“The most important monster on the council is the White Stag,” Alex tells me gravely, steeping his hands together beneath his chin.

“The White Stag?” I parrot, trying to recall what I learned of that particular myth. “Isn’t it a . . . deer?”

Alex has his hand over my mouth before I can even finish speaking—the word *deer* sounds like “duhreer.”

“Do not, under any circumstances, refer to the White Stag as a deer,” he warns me ominously, not removing his hand from my mouth.

Is it *not* . . . a deer? Is it a buck? What’s the difference?

A moose? Are stags mooses?

I make a mental note to research stags as soon as I’m at a computer.

When Alex doesn’t seem inclined to move his hand, I open my mouth instinctively. My tongue brushes along his palm, causing him to curse and pull away. His eyes widen in disbelief.

“Did you just lick me?” he asks incredulously, blinking repeatedly.

I ignore his “licking” comment.

Licking . . .

Caressing with my tongue . . .

Is there really a difference?

I have to bite down the smile that threatens to erupt as I think about what Mason would say to this. He would, no doubt, agree with my assessment of licking and say something

like, “It’s not licking. It’s touching with a body part that isn’t a hand or foot.”

Fuck, I miss him.

Grief threatens to erode the walls I’ve attempted to erect around my heart. Acid splashes against the hardened surface, and huge holes materialize throughout.

Mason . . .

I clear my throat and try to focus on the matter at hand.

*I’m doing this for you, Mase.*

*I’m surviving for you.*

“So, the White Stag? Why is this bitch so scary?”

“It’s a he, actually,” Alex corrects, but I merely shrug.

Men can be bitches too. It’s sexist to believe only females are.

“And why is he a bitch?”

“White Stags, in general, represent purity,” he explains, his fingers moving to tap against his crossed leg. I notice, somewhat belatedly, that his fingernails are painted black, though the color is beginning to chip, as if he hasn’t reapplied polish in some time. “It’s why the White Stag was voted onto the council to begin with . . . hundreds of years ago.”

“But I thought new council members were voted on every twenty years?” I ask.

A wry smile grazes the edges of his lips, as if he’s pleased I’ve been paying attention to his impromptu lesson. “Yes. And that just shows how influential the White Stag has been in the monster community. He’s been reelected every single time.”

“So, he’s pure and fair and all that jazz.” I squint at him. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

Or maybe it’s a bad thing? Fuck if I understand monster culture. I may be one myself, but I prefer living in my own little bubble. Bubble A La Violet.

“It is . . .” Alex seems as if he wants to say more. He absently begins to bite at his lip ring.

“I’m going to need more than that, Alex,” I tell him sternly, and he heaves out a heavy breath.

“While there are thousands of white stags in existence, there’s only one *White Stag*. *The White Stag*.” He distractedly scratches at the nape of his neck, his tattoos a stark contrast to his pale skin. “It’s said that he has . . . special abilities.”

A heavy rock settles in my stomach, sluicing the contents around.

Yup.

Don’t like that.

“And those abilities are?”

Another prolonged sigh escapes him. “It’s rumored that, in his attempt to be just and pure, he’ll . . .”

“He’ll what?”

I really, really don’t like the sound of this.

He says the next words in a rush. “It’s said that he’ll peer into a person’s soul and judge them. If they’re found pure, they’re allowed to live. And if they’re found impure . . .”

“They’ll be bought a cake?” I ask tentatively.

Alex snorts. “A cake laced with poison, maybe.”

I fidget on the seat as fear slides into my heart like a surgical blade.

Is that what the White Stag is going to do to me?

Look into my heart?

Judge me?

What will he see?

I can't imagine he'll be overly impressed with all I have accomplished. I've murdered, lied, stolen . . .

Is this how my story's going to end?

Trampled to death under a damn deer's hooves?

Do deer even *have* hooves?

"You're going to be okay, Violet," Alex whispers, drawing my eyes back to him. I can't help but focus on the frown etched into his forehead, tugging at his brows. "I won't let anyone hurt you."

His words feel like a . . . declaration of sorts.

Why do I feel as if he's saying more than what I hear?

Instinctively, I lean forward until I can cup his cheek. I honestly don't know why. I'm not sure I've ever touched Alex like this before. I can't help but revel in the rough stubble grating against my fingertips like sandpaper. When did he last shave?

"I'm sure it will be fine," I promise him, trying to infuse my voice with optimism that I don't truly feel. "I'm the purest chick that has ever purified this pure world."

Alex gives me a strange look but chooses not to comment. Instead, he simply stays there, his cheek cupped in the palm of



my hand, his eyes intent on my face, the trench between his eyebrows deepening.

It's me who pulls away first, my heart rioting in my chest and my stomach somersaulting.

"You know, if Hux was here and discovered what I was up to, he'd shit a brick, beat the fuck out of you and the entire monster council, and then shit out an even bigger brick." I try for a smile, but it wobbles slightly when the enormity of what I'm about to do crashes over me.

"Maybe I shouldn't bring you here," Alex admits. "But I'm not going to put you in bubble wrap, Violet. You're a big girl who can make your own choices."

"I'm apparently a fucking queen," I correct, purposely making my tone sound haughty and imperious.

God, Mason would have a field day if he could see me now . . .

My chest constricts at the thought of him. Before I can even think about what I'm doing, I'm leaning forward once more and asking, "Why isn't he here? Mason, I mean. Why isn't his spirit here?" Desperation courses through me like wildfire. I would give anything just to see him again, to hear his voice, to watch him fiddle with the gray beanie he always wears. "I mean, we know Zeus is eating the souls that have been sent to Mount Olympus, so Mason wouldn't choose to go there if he had a choice. And he's too . . . amazing to ever be sent to Hell. So, where is he?"

Worry eats at my chest like locusts.

Why isn't he here?

Has Zeus done something to his soul?

The mere thought has intense anger eating into my flesh like acid. I'll murder him again and again and again if I discover he's done something to Mason's soul. It's the last piece I have of him.

Tears hold me at gunpoint as I meet Alex's helpless gaze.

"I told you before, Violet baby, that I don't know. Souls are . . . tricky things."

"What do you mean?" A culmination of pain, grief, and anger swirls in my chest like a whirlpool. I know I shouldn't take out my ire on Alex, yet my voice comes out sharper than I intend it to. I work to modulate my volume and settle my rampant heartbeat.

"I mean that there are three stages to every soul that chooses not to cross into the afterlife," he begins. "There's stage one. This occurs shortly after a person—or monster—passes away. The soul usually doesn't have any memory of who they were when they were alive. And if they do, the memories are indistinct at best, almost as if they're trying to recall a dream. During this stage, the soul is invisible to everyone, including necromancers. As the soul begins to gain their memories, they also gain more powers. This is when they transition into stage two. During this time, the soul is able to appear intermittently to necromancers, but only for short periods of time. They can learn to talk, communicate, and even touch objects. And that's when they reach the final stage—stage three. If a soul is strong enough, they'll be able to appear to anyone at any time. They can touch objects and people and can communicate with relative ease. But a soul has to be immensely powerful to reach this particular stage . . . or have a strong tether to keep them planted in the real world."

“So, you believe Mason is in stage one?” The knowledge stings with the keenness of a wasp. Is he here now? Floating aimlessly around, unable to remember who he is and where he came from? Unable to remember who I am? Pain trickles deep into the root of my soul.

Once again, Alex hesitates, and I have a feeling there’s something he’s not telling me. I swear my fucking eye begins to twitch so hard, it’s in danger of falling out.

“Alex . . .” I warn.

“Violet . . .” He purses his lips before relenting. His shoulders seem to sag downward, and he collapses farther into the seat. “I said it before, but I don’t think you understood. A soul doesn’t remember who they are when they first enter this plane of existence. And the call to enter the afterlife is so compelling . . .”

Darkness pervades my soul at the implication. It’s suddenly hard to breathe, as if instead of oxygen, the air is made of tiny razor blades.

“So, Mason could’ve chosen to cross over?” I whisper.

And if he chose to cross over . . .

Then Zeus would’ve eaten him.

My heart’s nothing but a bloody slump of meat in my chest. Fear simmers just beneath the surface. Fear and anger. So much anger, it’s in danger of bursting out of me like wildfire.

“How do we make sure that doesn’t happen?” I ask desperately, hating Zeus. Hating this world. Hating myself.

“It’s what I said before,” Alex begins softly. “If a soul has a strong tether, then it’ll make it easier for them to stay on the

material plane. They might not know why they're here, but they'll be less hesitant to fade away or pass on to the next life. They'll want to stay, even if they don't remember the reasons for it."

"Do you think Mason . . .?" I clear my throat, trying to hide the tears that have begun to well in my eyes. "Do you think that I . . .?"

"I think that Mason loves you more than anything in the universe," Alex tells me curtly. "If anyone has reason to remain tethered to this world, it's him. Trust your bond. Trust him. Mason will never, ever leave you. Not if he has anything to say about it."

# CHAPTER 3



## BEANIE DUDE

I float.

Aimless.

Adrift.

Lost.

Who am I?

Where am I?

There's something I need to remember . . .

Someone.

Now and then, images bombard me. I try to grasp on to them with all my might, but they slip through my fingers before I can get a firm hold on them. I see a woman with golden hair falling in gentle curls around her heart-shaped, cherubic face. Her blue eyes sparkle with wicked amusement. And don't get me started on those sinful, pouty lips . . .

I want to taste them, taste *her*.

And I don't even know who she is.

Darkness surrounds me. It's all I can see, all I'm aware of, all that defines me. Is that what I am? Am I a being of this endless darkness? Did I somehow climb out of the abyss? But no . . . that doesn't seem right.

Who am I?

I catch a glimpse of a gray beanie. Is that what I'm wearing? Am I just a nameless, faceless, beanie-wearing guy?

A goddamn beanie dude?

Voices call to me, urging me to leave this darkness and enter the world beyond. I imagine that world is bright and cheerful—though I suspect everything is bright and cheerful when compared to this cloying blackness.

But if I go to that strange world, I'd need to leave her.

Her.

The golden-haired girl.

What is her name?

It's on the tip of my tongue . . .

So I float in the nothingness, in the space between the stars, in the one place that the light doesn't manage to penetrate. I float, and I wait, and I think.

Who am I?

Who is she?

And how can I get to her?

# CHAPTER 4





FRANKIE

I don't know if we're prisoners or groomsmen in a bachelor party.

The prison we're in isn't like anything I've ever seen before. Hell, I'm not even sure if you can call it a prison—unless jail cells in Mount Olympus mean something completely different than they do back on Earth.

Leather couches dominate the spacious room and surround an entertainment center, complete with a flat-screen TV, video game consoles, and surround-sound speakers. A counter lines the far wall, and on it rests a variety of snacks—popcorn, chips, pretzels, and even a freezer with tubs of ice cream. The black coloring of the furniture contrasts greatly with the monochromatic gray walls and white carpeting.

Is this . . . a man cave?

*Zeus's man cave?*

Despite the opulence of the room, no one dares to touch anything. None of us have even sat on the couches, as if we all fear that the squeaky leather will burn our asses. Not that it would. I already studied it for any foreign chemicals.

The television has stayed off, the gaming consoles are unplugged, and the food table has remained ignored. Instead, the group of us sit in various positions around the room, not talking, not even looking at each other.

We're no longer directly controlled by Zeus, but we're still very much under his thrall, the rune etched onto our skin all too evident of that.

He used us to hurt Violet.

Now, she's missing—who the fuck knows where Alex took her.

And Mason is . . .

I refuse to think that word, choosing to look at it from an analytical perspective.

In the monster world, death doesn't always mean what you think it does. It can have a lot of connotations and meanings, and not all of them are crystal clear. What does "death" mean for Mason?

I think of my most recent experiment—separating Balor's soul from Jack and Hux's body, then placing said soul inside a new body.

Can I do that for Mason?

It will be difficult if I don't have a tangible soul to see and touch . . . but not impossible. Perhaps I can find a way to pluck it out of the veil and—

"We need to stop sitting around like goddamn humans and come up with a plan." The strident proclamation, unsurprisingly, comes from Dimitri, who only woke up a few hours ago. He's still slightly pale, his white hair wildly disheveled, but the coherence and ice in his blue eyes are impossible to miss. He may be recovering from his kidnapping and consequent escape, but he's not down for the count.

Not even close.

Palpable, raw energy radiates directly underneath his skin. The feel of it has the hairs on my arms standing on end. Dimitri has a way of spearing you with one eloquent look and demanding your complete and irrevocable compliance. He doesn't merely request your attention—he commands it.

The headmaster slides a hand over his button-down white shirt, smoothing out the wrinkles.

“What do you suppose we do?” Vin’s voice is hoarse and rife with some unnamed emotion.

Grief, I think, but I’m not sure if I’ve ever truly experienced that sensation myself. I miss Mason—I know I do—but is what I’m feeling grief? Or is it merely sadness?

Is there even a difference?

“We need to find a way to my precious treasure!” Hux interrupts, jumping to his feet and balling his hands into fists. The scar slicing through his cheek looks particularly menacing today. Perhaps it’s because his lips are twisted into a terrible scowl.

Dimitri gives Hux a cold look.

“Obviously,” he drawls, his tone dripping with sarcasm. “But we need to devise a plan on how to do that.”

“The room is warded,” Barret murmurs softly from where he’s sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with Cal against the far wall. Green magic dances around his dark skin as he closes his eyes. “Yes, I definitely feel the magic. It’s everywhere.” His eyes snap open. “We won’t be able to leave by any traditional means.”

“So, the room is warded against us using any magic.” Cal straightens imperceptibly, his red wings ruffling. The dark veins interwoven throughout remind me of smudged ink blots. They seem to have become thicker in the time we’ve been apart from Violet. His pink hair, normally meticulously groomed, is in complete disarray, the strands poking in all directions. “But can we use brute force?”

“Maybe if we can get one of the guards to open the door, we’ll be able to fight him off,” Barret muses, scratching at the stubble along his jaw. It’s beginning to turn into a full-on beard.

“Are you an idiot?”

All of us, even Vin, turn to stare at Balor, where he leans against the front door of the room. Sometimes, it’s hard to reconcile him with the monster who once lived inside Jack and Hux’s head. His new body is almost angelic in appearance, with soft blond hair and guileless features. But his eyes are the same, no matter the face he wears—hard, unyielding, and brimming with primitive savagery.

Balor glances at each of us, as if confirming he has our attention, before reclosing his eyes and plopping his head against the door.

“If we try to escape, Zeus will merely use us against Violet again. She’s safer with us in here than out there.”

An insidious sensation slithers through me at his words. It reminds me eerily of dark tar seeping through my pores and contaminating my bloodstream.

The truth in his words . . . they ring out like a death toll.

Vin’s red-rimmed eyes swivel until they’re homed in on Balor’s impassive face. Splotches erupt on his cheeks as he curls his hand into a tight fist. “Why the fuck do you even care? You hate Violet!”

A wry, humorless smirk touches the corners of Balor’s lips. “That may be true,” he admits, finally snapping his eyes open. “But I think she may be the only one who can save us all.”

“Do you mean the Fomorian?” Hux asks scathingly, his upper lip curled away from his teeth.

The Fomorians are an ancient race of monsters that have been locked away in Hell for many years. Balor has been trying to free them and seems to think Violet is the key. Originally, he blackmailed Lucifer into releasing his people, but now that Lucifer is somewhere in Mount Olympus as Zeus’s prisoner . . .

I have no idea what Balor thinks Violet will do, but unease skates down my spine like an ice cube.

I don’t like his interest in my mate.

Not at all.

I can understand, objectively, his fascination with Violet’s powers. I suppose that, if the situations were reversed, I’d be the same as him. I would want to study Violet and discover what she could offer me. What types of powers does she possess, being the daughter of Hera and Lucifer? What can she do? How would she be able to free the Fomorians from their prison?

But that was the old me—the Frankie consumed by knowledge and science and experiments.

This new one has a different obsession, one with blonde hair, a penchant for pink and black, and a smile capable of cutting through my defenses like a serrated blade.

Violet Dracula.

“Believe it or not, brother,” Balor tells Hux coolly, pulling me out of my thoughts, “we have the same goals.”

Hux bares his teeth at the other male. “I’ll rip you apart limb from limb and weave your innards into a necklace if you

hurt my precious treasure. So help me—”

Balor waves a hand in the air, as if he’s capable of physically swatting Hux’s words away. “Don’t be daft, brother. Why would I want Violet dead?” The smile on his face sends a jolt of fear through me. “After all, she is the world’s savior.”

# CHAPTER 5



VIOLET

**W**hy am I not surprised that the most feared and revered monsters in all of creation have a stronghold in a motherfucking museum?

Using my hand as a makeshift visor, I peer up at the ginormous Field Museum in Chicago, currently teeming with tourists, school groups, and security guards.

Honestly, it makes sense for the monsters to have one of their council buildings here. Who in their right mind would willingly go to a museum?

I can't help but admire the building's Greek architecture and painted embellishments. It looks like something you would see in Mount Olympus. The four white pillars guarding the entrance become even bigger the closer we venture. I swear those damn things give me an inferiority complex.

I wonder if that bastard Zeus had a part to play in the Field Museum's creation . . .

I follow Alex up the steep staircase, bypassing a few tourists who are attempting to take a picture in front of the entrance. I resist the urge to photobomb the pictures with my middle finger, because I'm a mature, elegant lady about to go into battle.

Not because I have to practically run to keep up with Alex, causing me to pant erratically and stop every other second to fan my reddening face.

Nope. Not because of that. At all.

"Slow. Down," I wheeze when we reach the front entrance of the museum, hidden behind those damn pillars. I place my



hands on my knees and attempt to get much needed air back into my lungs. Staircases and I don't go well together. We're like . . . water and fire. Donuts and a diet. Exercise and binge-watching Netflix.

Some things are not meant to be associated.

“We need to hurry.” Alex grips my elbow and all but drags me into the museum. “They're in session currently, according to their secretary. I want to make sure we meet with them before they disperse.”

Tension rocks my body. And as always, I do what I do best in a stressful situation—babble complete and utter gibberish.

“Disperse. That's a pretty smart-sounding word. Disperse. I don't know why I think of diapers whenever I hear that word. Is it just me? Yes? No? Do you think of diapers, Alex?” I'm belatedly aware that Alex is dragging me forward, his black-painted nails digging into the flesh of my wrist. As we move through the crowd, I force myself to focus on the matter at hand. “So, how do we find this monster council? Is there a secret word we need to give security? Is it pineapple? I swear it's always pineapple.”

Alex doesn't even blink as he surveys the crowd. “You just need to talk about the orgy,” he murmurs distractedly. He pauses abruptly, and a frown touches his lips. “Stay here.” Before I can protest, he releases me and disappears into the flow of pedestrian traffic entering and exiting the museum.

“Stay here?” I croak out to no one in particular, my tone incredulous. “Stay here?! In the middle of enemy territory? After my mate just died? FUCK YOU, ASSHOLE!” An old man wobbling beside me on his walking cane recoils at my outburst. One of his bushy white brows quirks, but I simply hold his stare without flinching.

I meant what I said.

His wife mutters something to her husband, and both of them give me strange looks, as if *I'm* the one insane here. I mean, they're the losers visiting a museum in the middle of the day by themselves. Such nerds.

I give them a flinty-eyed glare until the woman pulls the man away.

“Yeah, you run from me, bitch,” I mumble, glaring after their stooped-over forms. “Be scared. Be very scared.”

The crowd seems to move as one entity toward the security checkpoint, and like a swimmer in the ocean, I'm unable to resist the current and find myself swept along. I furtively glance over my shoulder, searching for Alex, but when I don't see his shock of dark hair and leather jacket, I allow myself to move with the crowd.

Where the fuck is he?

Did he leave me?

I remember what he said I needed to do in order to secure a meeting with the council.

Determination fills me and bolsters my resolve.

Pushing my shoulders back, I saunter toward the security guard with a renewed sense of purpose.

Her brown hair is streaked with gray and white, and wrinkles bracket her steel-gray eyes. Her no-nonsense stare doesn't falter, not even when I move in front of her—shoving away the five-year-old bitch who tried to cut in front of me—and flash a winning smile.

“Hello.” I glance in both directions, trying to remain inconspicuous. The last thing we need to do is alert any

humans to our illicit activities. “I’m here to inquire about the . . . cream puff.”

She blinks at me.

“The . . . what?”

“The jizz and the wizz. The sausage taker and log maker. The moose and the caboose.” I wink exaggeratedly, but she continues to regard me with a stunned, disbelieving expression.

How is she not understanding?

Can I make myself any clearer?

“The hot dog choker. Boarding the beef bus. Fruit in a banana salad. Batter dipping the corn dog. Filling the cream donut. Bushwhacking. Dipping the wick. Cleaning cobwebs in the womb tomb. Using a telescope to explore the black hole.”

She stares at me.

I stare at her.

She stares at me harder.

With a groan, I throw my hands up in the air. “Orgy! Where the fuck is the museum orgy?”

Silence descends almost instantaneously, and I find myself the sole focus of over one hundred penetrating stares. One woman even goes so far as to place her hands over her child’s ears.

The security guard slowly reaches for the Taser in her belt.

“Ma’am,” she begins slowly, “I’m afraid I’m gonna have to ask you to leave.”

“So, no peepee friction pleasure?” I say softly.

She opens her mouth to respond, but before she can get a word out, a rough hand ensnares my upper arm and yanks me backward.

I just barely have time to squeal before a second hand moves to my mouth. Practically going cross-eyed, I peer at the tattooed hand holding me hostage.

Alex.

“What in the ever-loving fuck are you doing?” he hisses in my ear, his hot breath eliciting a round of fresh goose pimples. He releases my mouth only when we’re far enough away not to be overheard.

“Ummm . . . asking about an orgy to find the super-secret monster council?” I can’t help it when my voice rises in pitch, turning the words into a question.

I can practically hear Alex praying for patience.

Through gritted teeth, he hisses out, “I was being *sarcastic*.”

“Oh.” Abruptly, fury fills me, inflating me like a balloon. I ram my fist into Alex’s shoulder with a growl. “You asshole! Are you telling me I just asked a random woman about an orgy when I didn’t even need to?!”

Alex ignores my outburst and continues leading me toward an elevator marked “employees only.” He swipes an employee badge he must’ve stolen and then pushes the down button repeatedly as his gaze flicks from side to side. A few of the security guards are whispering amongst themselves and pointing.

Honestly, it says a lot about my maturity level that I don’t wink and then pantomime putting my finger through a hole.

The elevator doors open with a happy beep, and Alex hauls me inside. A few of the guards make a beeline toward us, but the metal doors slide shut before they can take more than a few steps. Surprisingly chipper elevator music blares from the speakers as we begin to descend.

“So . . . where exactly are we going?” I ask, though I already know the answer.

Alex’s smile is grim when he answers. “I hope you prepared a speech, Violet baby. Because we’re about to have a meeting with some of the most feared monsters in all of existence and beg them to join our side in the war to come.”

# CHAPTER 6



## VIOLET

One of the most feared monsters in all of existence is a goat.

An actual, honest-to-fuck goat.

Well, his face is that of a goat, as is his chest, but his lower body is all . . . man. As in, he has a *thing*. A hard thing. A hard, erect thing. A hard, erect, swaying thing. A hard, erect, swaying, pierced thing. A hard, erect, swaying, pierced, tattooed thing.

I can't look away.

"Stop staring," Alex whispers tersely under his breath, elbowing me in the stomach.

I blink at the goat-man-creature, noting the coarse fur that covers the entirety of his upper body and the . . . ahem . . . appendage dangling—

"Violet!" Alex gives me a look.

"I thought satyrs were supposed to have the upper body of a man and the lower body of a goat," I whisper back. Why can't I stop staring? Have I been cock-notized?

The necromancer scoffs. "That's just a myth. Those stupid *Narnia* movies and books didn't help matters. And don't get me started on the Greeks . . ."

The satyr, who goes by the name of Pan, isn't the only monster in the room.

As soon as we exited the elevator a half hour earlier, we were led through a twining hallway of storage rooms and labs. We eventually stopped at one labeled "Egyptian." My

confusion only grew when the guide—who introduced himself as Furry Hairball, with rainbow-colored horns, bright red fur, and cloven feet—opened a huge sarcophagus that was lying in the center of the room.

“Umm . . .” I turned toward Alex with an arched eyebrow. “If you’re planning on murdering me and hiding my body here, let me tell you that I’ll be a horrible victim. I claw. And I bite.”

Alex rolled his russet-black eyes, stepped into the sarcophagus, and abruptly disappeared.

Apparently, the sarcophagus has a magical stairwell that leads monsters deep into the ground below the museum.

It’s there we now stand, facing off with the feared and revered monster council that has only ever been a thing of legends for me.

At the very end of the long, slightly curved table is Pan, the goat with the huge schlong. Sitting next to him is a woman with black hair, interwoven with spiderwebs, and bedecked in a gossamer dress that does very little to hide her curves. In the center of the table is the creature that can only be the White Stag—a large, majestic deer-like creature (no offense) with a pure white coat and intelligent eyes. Two other monsters sit beside him. One I recognize as Dorian Gray, Dimitri’s father, while the other is Frankenstein himself.

“What is the meaning of this interruption?” the spider woman demands with a sneer. As she speaks, a spider crawls out of her mouth and settles on her bottom lip. I try very, very hard not to grimace in revulsion. The last thing I want to do is offend her by confessing I’m deathly afraid of spiders and all other creepy crawlies.



“Hello, council,” Alex begins diplomatically, bowing his head. When I just remain standing there, gaping, he once again elbows me in the stomach, shooting me a pointed look out of the corner of his eye.

I catch on quickly and lower into a curtsy.

“Good afternoon, your excellencies,” I say in a posh British accent. No idea why. I blame my nerves. And the fact that, you know, the council wants to murder me.

The satyr, Pan, snorts.

“I like her,” he muses.

The spider woman scoffs yet again. “You like anyone and everyone who wears a skirt. Even a wanted criminal like Violet Dracula.”

I clear my throat uncomfortably. “It’s actually a dress—”

“Stop. Talking,” Alex murmurs out of the corner of his mouth.

I press my lips together tightly.

Where, oh where, are staples when you need them? I swear my mouth only serves to get me into trouble. Or even more trouble, as the case may be. I would pay good money to be able to staple my mouth together whenever the need arises without receiving any permanent damage.

“I suppose it’s a nice change to see one of Dracula’s bastard children bowing before this world’s true royalty,” the spider lady continues with another haughty sniff. I may be completely off base here, but I get the impression that she doesn’t like me very much.

This time, I’m rather proud of myself when I don’t immediately correct her about my parentage. I’m not sure I’m

quite ready for the world to know the truth about me—that I'm the offspring of Lucifer, the King of Hell, and Hera, the Goddess of Mount Olympus.

Alex may believe we need the monster council's help in the battle to come, but I can't forget about all the sins they committed. They murdered Cal's entire family after it was revealed that Cal could reinforce flimsy mate bonds. Then they threw my sweet cupid into detention until the end of time.

The question is . . . why?

Belatedly, I know that this happened over one hundred years ago. The monsters sitting before me may not even be the same monsters involved in what happened to Cal. But that doesn't negate the incessant voice in the back of my head screaming at me to be cautious.

Not only that, but they put a kill order out on me for a crime I didn't even commit. Legally, they could kill me here and now, and no one would even bat an eye.

I'm putting a lot of faith into a group of monsters who would no sooner see me ripped into pieces and tossed into the Pacific Ocean than they would willingly offer their assistance.

So, no. I'm not telling them the truth about my birth parents. I have a feeling that would only add fuel to the fire of their hatred, blossoming the tiny ember into a raging inferno.

"We request the council's help," Alex continues, keeping his head lowered and his voice level. I notice that he doesn't make eye contact with any of the monsters before us, so I follow his example and very purposely look anywhere but at them.

The room is dark and barren, exactly what you would expect from a bunch of terrifying monsters. Aside from the

long table directly opposite us and a desk that belongs to Furry Hairball—I believe he’s the receptionist—there isn’t another piece of furniture. The only light is from the ornate brass sconces lining the wall and the staircase leading back up to the sarcophagus.

“Is that so?” Pan tilts his head to the side curiously. It’s honestly strange as fuck to see. How can such a human voice come from those . . . lips? Snout? What the fuck am I even looking at?

*Most certainly not the largest penis I’ve ever seen in my life.*

“This is tiresome,” Dorian drawls, dabbing at a bead of perspiration on his forehead. While the man himself is traditionally attractive—white-blond hair cut short, piercing blue eyes, and a strong, muscular physique—I can’t help but think he doesn’t hold a candle to Dimitri. I wonder what Dorian would do if he discovered he wasn’t the handsomest man in existence? “Can’t we just vote and move on?”

“Ummm . . .” I find myself speaking before my brain can catch up. “We haven’t even explained the problem. What would you be voting on?”

Mouth—one.

Brain—negative two hundred and forty-six.

Alex elbows me yet again. I have a feeling my stomach is going to be bruised by the time I leave here today.

“Do you really need to ask?” Spider lady sneers down at me. Yeah, I really, *really* don’t think she likes me. Of course, I could be reading the room wrong, but I get the impression she’s visualizing stabbing a fork up my anus like a miner digging for gold. “You’re a wanted criminal. We should toss

you into Revenant and throw away the key, so you'll never see the light of day again." A cold, calculating grin tugs up the corners of her onyx-colored lips. "Or we could just eat you."

"No eating," Pan retorts lazily. "We talked about this. Don't forget your diet, my friend."

The terrifying woman scoffs. "It's a cheat day. One little itty-bitty vampire won't kill me."

Wait . . .

Are they talking about . . . ?

Eating me?!

*Excusez-moi.* I'll have you know, I'm a terrible dinner choice. I've been told by more than one person that my meat is bitter and can bring about indigestion. These monsters will be shitting out bats for weeks. Now, if they're serious about chomping down on me, there are ways to make me delicious. You just need to add a bit of seasoning to the meat before you cook it—some salt and pepper will do nicely—and then you can slow roast it over a fire.

Honestly, between Alex and me, I think Alex would taste better. I have a little more cushion than the necromancer, but that only means my chunk of meat would be fatty. Alex, on the other hand, is lean and muscular. I'm sure with a little bit of butter and—

*What the fuck am I thinking?! Bad, Violet! Bad!*

"Mr. Gray, sir," Alex implores earnestly, thankfully unaware of my internal cooking show, "I think this situation will impact you more than most." Alex's tongue fiddles with his lip ring, the nearly imperceptible move belying his unease. "It involves your son."

One of Dorian's blond brows begins to twitch.

"My son? Don't you mean my *brother*?" he asks with a rather pointed stare, releasing a semi-hysterical laugh. "Surely, you don't think I look old enough to have a son, right?" He volleys his gaze from side to side, his startling blue eyes turning more frantic when no one jumps to his immediate defense. One of his hands inches upward to smooth out a nonexistent wrinkle on his pale face. "Right?! Right?" The last word is a strange combination of a growl and a sob.

"Oh, please," Spider lady says with a wave of her hand. "You're not fooling anyone, Dorian."

"Perhaps I can make an elixir to make someone young forever . . ." Frankenstein muses, absently scratching at his chin. I almost startle at hearing his raspy voice. Is it wrong if I admit that I forgot he was even here? He has a way of blending into his surroundings. Everything about him, from his small stature to his graying hair, is utterly insignificant. Add to that his indolent expression and glazed-over eyes, and I half believe even *he* forgot he was in the room with us.

"Frankenstein, sir," I begin, ignoring Alex's rapid head shaking, indicating for me to be quiet. Tried that, bought the T-shirt, and now I want to return that too-small fucker. "Your brilliance. Your esteemed excellency."

Dorian's frown deepens. "Why does he get 'your esteemed excellency' and I get 'father'?"

"Um . . ."

God, this is not going how I thought it would.

Granted, I didn't really have an idea of how this would work out, considering there's an order out to capture me dead

or alive. But it definitely wasn't as shit-tastic as this is proving to be.

I decide to cut to the chase.

"Frankenstein, are you aware that Zeus has kidnapped Frankie and is holding him hostage?" I ask tersely, not bothering with pleasantries or bullshit.

Frankenstein blinks at me, frowns, then blinks again.

"Which one is Frankie again?" he asks, causing my heart to sink into the deepest depths of the ocean, becoming lost in the turbulent abyss. "Is he the one with the green skin?"

"I think he's the one with the mustache," Pan pipes in rather unhelpfully.

Frankenstein's frown intensifies. "It's so hard to keep track of all of my experiments." To me, he asks, "Does Frankie have red hair? Oh, wait! He's the bald monster, isn't he? With the scar?"

Anger rushes through me in a torrent, almost painful in its intensity. I can feel my wrath fizzing, boiling, seconds from exploding. A bulbous, hovering storm. A volcano of emotion threatening to bubble over. A ticking time bomb in an underground bunker. I. See. Red.

Alex turns to stare at me helplessly, his eyes pleading, but Frankenstein's words only serve to push me over the edge.

My heart pounds like a distant army thundering down a mountain. The pain I felt from losing Mason lingers, spreading like a malignant tumor and threatening to ravage my mind, body, and soul. All these feelings compound into one inevitable explosion.

“Are you fucking kidding me?!?” I screech, unable to keep my outburst in. My stomach ties itself into a pretzel as I begin to pace in front of the table. “That is your *son*! Frankie is your motherfucking son! How can you not care even a little bit?” I whirl until I’m facing Dorian Gray, who honest-to-God cowers under the force of my glare. “And you. Don’t even get me started. You’re not a twenty-year-old any longer, you asshole. And you certainly don’t look like one! Take responsibility for your actions—and that includes forgetting to wrap your package. Dimitiri’s your son, and he’s in danger.” I ball my hands into fists and continue pacing. My shoes click against the dark stone flooring, the sound ominously loud. “Did you guys even know that there are no more souls left in Mount Olympus? Yeah, your homeboy, Zeus? He’s digesting the souls, and now that he has Lucifer in his grasp, he plans to do the same to the souls in Hell. There’s a stark imbalance in the afterlife, and if you think that won’t affect you, you’re wrong. So, so wrong. Do you think Zeus will be satisfied once he’s done eating all those souls? Fuck, no. Men like him always want more. More, more, and more. It won’t be long until he starts going after the most powerful monsters. Say . . . the monster council. If you don’t want to help me to save the world, then maybe you can consider helping me for selfish purposes. You guys are total asslicking fuck faces!”

I’m panting heavily by the time I finish my spiel, heat clamoring up my cheeks and sweat beading on my forehead. Somewhat absently, I realize that everyone is gaping at me, varying expressions of disbelief etched across their faces.

Alex looks horrified, as if he half expects the monster council to smite me dead at a moment’s notice.

Spider chick and Pan both look angry, Dorian appears confused, Frankenstein is as impassive as always, and the

White Stag . . . well . . . Dare I say that he looks impressed?

His booming voice sounds through the cavernous room. It's the first time I've heard it since I arrived down here, and it has the fine hairs on my arm turning to keen spikes. That voice of his has a way of innately demanding my complete and undivided attention. I can't look away from the majestic creature glancing down at me with surprisingly kind eyes.

"That's a heartfelt speech, Violet Dracula . . . though I suppose that name doesn't really fit you now, does it?" I can't tell for sure, given the fact he's a stag, but I swear he's smiling.

"My name is Violet Dracula. That won't change. Dracula is my father just as much as—" I cut myself off abruptly before I can reveal the truth about my parentage. Somehow, the White Stag seems to know about my birth parents, though it appears as if the other council members remain oblivious.

"We should kill the insolent girl!" the spider lady screeches. "How dare she—?"

"Enough, Spidey," the White Stag booms.

I have to hold in my snicker.

Spidey?

Really?

The strange woman—Spidey, apparently—purses her lips, the movement causing the spider from before to scuttle up her cheek and disappear into the web interwoven with her locks of dark hair.

"Is what you said true?" Dorian asks, fidgeting nervously. "Is Zeus really consuming the souls in the afterlife?"



“He is,” Alex answers diplomatically, taking a step forward and moving to inconspicuously stand in front of me. Is he . . . attempting to protect me? Something warm and foreign—at least, in relation to the necromancer—unfurls inside of me. “And he’s also taken some of the most powerful monsters hostage, including Dracula—”

“Good riddance,” Spidey grumbles.

“Lucifer and Hera,” Alex finishes.

Silence settles across the chamber, startlingly pronounced. My lips are suddenly dry, as if I just swallowed something acerbic and bitter. It scorches my throat and has me shifting from foot to foot.

“He also took my mates,” I continue, swallowing obsessively.

After he killed one of them.

But I don’t say that out loud.

I can’t.

It’s too painful to even think about, let alone articulate.

The White Stag cants his head to the side, regarding me with wise, curious eyes. “You love your mates very much, don’t you?”

“More than anything,” I blurt, attempting to step out from behind Alex.

“You’ll die for them, won’t you?” the White Stag continues. His voice is a deep baritone more befitting that of a voice-over actor or an audiobook narrator than a monster.

“Of course.” I don’t even need to think about it. I would slice my own neck if it means keeping them safe. Only a few

months earlier, that realization would've sent shock rattling through me, accompanied by a cloying odor that bit into my esophagus, closing my airways.

But that's the old Violet. The selfish one.

I may be a monster, but for my mates, I'd don a cape and tights to protect them. I can wear a halo just as good as devil horns, thank you very much.

"And they'd die for you," he continues, and his gaze briefly flicks to Alex, who still stands slightly in front of me, his stance defensive. "One of them already has, hasn't he?"

I can't speak. Not with the gaping wound in my chest where my heart should be. It hurts to breathe or even think. Pain barrages me from every direction—razor blades that slide across my skin, knives that embed themselves beneath my nails, swords that slash at my back, ripping apart flesh.

"Would you sacrifice the world to get your mate back?" the White Stag continues. "Would you sacrifice your mates to save the world?"

"I . . ." I don't know how to respond to that question.

Would I be willing to let my guys go for the good of the world?

Would I let the world burn if it meant keeping my men safe?

Fear trickles deep into the roots of my soul, burning through me like candle wax.

"I . . . I don't . . ."

"Don't answer that, Violet," Alex snaps harshly. "It's a trick question. I told you. The White Stag gauges your purity. He's luring you into a trap."

The world is as quiet as a held breath. The only noise in the room is the pounding of my own heart, an anvil slamming against my rib cage.

“Come here, child,” the White Stag says, lifting a hoof and gesturing for me to come forward.

“Violet, no . . .” Alex warns.

“If you want the council’s help in the battle to come, you need to obey.” The White Stag’s booming voice leaves no room for interpretation or denial.

*You need to obey.*

Cold, eruptive wrath boils inside me at his words.

Who is he to say what’s pure and impure?

Who is he to play judge, jury, and executioner?

A volcano of emotion threatens to bubble up like lava, but I don’t let it show on my face.

“It’ll be okay, Alex,” I say, but my tone holds no true conviction.

“Violet!” Alex pleads, reaching for me.

But I’m a vampire and I’m faster than him.

Before he can grab on to my arm, I’m across the room and standing in front of the table.

The White Stag stares back at me with wide, intelligent eyes. His horns glimmer in the flickering candlelight in a way that’s almost ominous.

I could be making a horrible decision, but I hope not.

Taking a deep breath, and trying to quell the rampant racing of my heart, I lean forward and place my hand on the

White Stag's outstretched hoof.

# CHAPTER 7



ALEX

I watch with bated breath as Violet reaches for the White Stag.

I'm not a praying man—especially after learning about all the atrocities Zeus has committed—but I can't help but plead to every higher power out there that Violet survives this.

Please.

Please, God.

Please.

I'm staring so intently at Violet's back that, at first, I don't realize something is amiss. All I can focus on is that mane of untamed blonde curls, the color reminding me of sunlight and moonlight woven together.

But it's because I'm staring at her so keenly that I realize . . . she's not moving.

No one in the room is moving.

Spidey has her arms crossed over her chest and her mouth open, as if she's prepared to yell something, yet not a single sound leaves her cracked lips. Even the spider on her tongue seems to be frozen in place.

Beside her, Pan has his head thrown back in laughter—though I have no idea what he finds so funny. His wide, unseeing eyes twinkle with unbridled mirth.

Are they all . . . frozen?

Panic overtakes me almost immediately.

What the fuck happened?

Is this some kind of trick?

Is Zeus involved?

I swivel on my heel, desperately trying to take in the entire room.

If Zeus is here, I'll kill him for what he did to Violet and her mates. I'll cut off his ungodly head and place it on a spike. I'll—

“Necromancer,” a low, raspy voice booms. It startles me so much that I jump about a foot in the air.

Slowly, almost tentatively, I turn toward the council table.

The White Stag watches me with beady, intelligent eyes, the only creature in the room besides me that seems to be cognizant.

“W-what the fuck is going on?” I demand. My heart feels like it's being squeezed through a spiked straw. I can't help but flick my gaze toward Violet, still frozen with her hand extended, yet again.

The White Stag slowly moves out from behind the table.

I know I told Violet not to call him a deer, but that's what he is—a large, majestic buck with snow-white fur and antlers that seem to glimmer, as if they hold all the stars within the bones. Magic shimmers around his body as he walks closer, those penetrating eyes of his never leaving my face.

“I am here to judge your purity, young necromancer,” the White Stag announces.

My heartbeat jumps to the level of light aerobics.

“What?” I ask in disbelief.

My purity?

What the fuck?

Almost absently, the White Stag turns his large head in Violet's direction.

"I've already seen inside that young demoness's mind," he begins in his booming voice. "I've never met a creature as selfless as your Violet."

I ignore the way the words "your Violet" have my heart catapulting into motion.

"I don't . . ." I begin, forking my fingers through my dark hair.

"She loves her mates fiercely," the White Stag continues. "She'll be willing to die for them . . . and for the world." He continues to move closer until he's a hairbreadth away from me, until all I can see is his dark eyes that seem to swirl with the stars of the universe, a fathomless abyss of nothing and everything all at once. "Tell me, necromancer . . . would you be willing to give your life for Violet Dracula?"

It feels as if an elephant is sitting on my chest and compressing my breath. All I can do is beg for oxygen to fill my glass-coated lungs.

"I don't . . . I can't . . ." Ash settles on my tongue, bitter and chalky.

"I can see into your soul, young necromancer," the White Stag resumes. "Don't hide from me. And don't hide from yourself."

The truth of the matter is, I know the answer to the White Stag's question. I don't even have to think about it, and that knowledge alone terrifies me.



I would die for Violet Dracula—I'll offer up my heart on a silver platter, as damaged and rotten as it is. I shouldn't, I know that. She's my enemy. I tormented her. She tormented me. We're fire and gasoline, and so long as we're near each other, the world will eternally burn.

But fuck, do I want to be consumed by her flames and bask in her heat.

"I'm supposed to hate her," I whisper. "I've always hated her."

But saying the word "hate" in regards to Violet has revulsion slithering through my veins like a thick sludge weighing me down. Hating her is like hating sunlight. I've lived in the darkness for so damn long that I've forgotten how good it feels to step out into the light.

The White Stag's expression doesn't change, but I swear his eyes warm, burning with a banked fire.

"Feelings can change, as can perceptions. Tell me, young necromancer, everything that you've discovered."

So . . . I do. My mouth seems to have a life of its own as I regale him with what I've learned—that Zeus has been stealing souls to grow in power, that he placed a spell on the other monsters to make them hate vampires, that he had his mistress kill Violet's mate.

The White Stag listens to me ramble without interrupting, though I do see a calculating gleam enter his eyes.

"The rune you speak of . . . The ones marking Vanessa Van Helsing and Violet's mates . . ." He pauses, though I'm not quite sure if the resulting silence is intentional or not. He doesn't seem like the type of monster to draw out suspense, and yet . . .

He doesn't fucking continue.

Those beady eyes of his remain locked on my face as he waits for me to . . . I don't fucking know. Understand his unspoken sentence?

Fucking stags.

After a solid minute of unbearable silence, the White Stag heaves out a heavy breath—the noise laced with agitation, as if I'm the stupidest being known to man—and says, “From what you described, that rune hasn't been used in thousands of years. An ancient species of monsters once used it to control the dead and convince unruly souls to go to their final resting place.”

“The Fomorians,” I breathe, thinking of that asshole Balor.

The White Stag doesn't even blink as he takes another step closer. “They are one of the few species that have control over both the living and the dead. For the longest time, they were the only ones.”

“Until Zeus,” I supply bitterly, but the White Stag is already shaking his massive head.

“No, not Zeus. At least, not naturally. What he's doing is a blatant defiling of the natural order of things.” He pauses yet again, but before the silence can become too long, he continues. “I'm speaking of another monster—one who was born of Hell and Heaven, of the goddess of fertility and the king of the dead and damned. A creature of both life and death.”

I swallow around the razor blade that has become lodged in my throat. “You mean Violet? You think she'll be able to . . . remove the runes? Break them?”

The White Stag's voice gentles considerably. "If anyone can, it's her. I've never seen such a stubborn soul before. Once she figures out how to break the spell, I believe she'll have more monsters on her side than she initially expected, including me."

I swallow, scarcely able to believe what I'm hearing.

"So, you're helping us?" I demand.

"I've seen into your soul, Alex, and your heart is pure. Your love for Violet Dracula has made it so."

I begin to choke on nothing but air. "Love?" I ask in disbelief, panic jangling my nerves. "I don't love Violet. I tolerate her, at best." I don't know why I'm arguing with the damn deer. Maybe I have a death wish?

But the White Stag only dips his huge head, his canyon-like eyes—fathomless and cloying—twinkling.

"Whatever you say, young necromancer."

His words spin around and around in my head.

Love?

Violet?

A force that seems imprinted on every corner of my soul flares to life. The sheer rightness of that one word flows through my veins like lava.

No.

I can't love Violet.

No. No. No.

"But be careful." The White Stag's voice turns grave. "Not everyone will be willing to join your side. There are some who believe that what Zeus is doing will benefit them." Briefly, his

gaze flicks to the council members behind him. I have no idea which ones he's referring to, but I make a mental note to be wary of them all.

Which reminds me . . .

I know I should accept the win and let things be, but something niggles at the edges of my consciousness. A question that I know Violet is desperate for an answer to.

"Excuse me, sir?" I venture tentatively. The White Stag pauses his retreat and swivels his massive, horned head around to face me. "I have to inquire about a . . . um . . . a cupid. Cal. He was put into detention—"

"For fortifying mate bonds years ago. Yes, I remember." His voice is as grim as I've ever heard it. Those enigmatic black eyes of his reflect a lifetime of memories and horrors.

"You and the other council members are the only ones who know why," I continue, purposely leaving my words vague.

But I needn't bother.

The White Stags dips his head in acknowledgment. "Hundreds of years ago, mating bonds were prominent in our society. Fate worked in our favor, often putting us in the direct pathway of the one meant for us. But it was quickly revealed that, when a mated soul passed from this world and into the afterlife, they would . . . linger." He pauses, allowing his words to sink in, though I feel as if I am missing a vital piece of this puzzle.

"And I take it Zeus didn't like that?" I already know the answer to my question. If souls chose to roam this earth instead of traveling to the next life—Mount Olympus or Hell—then Zeus wouldn't have any souls to consume. And without the Fomorians to guide the souls to the next life,

they'd be stuck on Earth, pestering necromancers and haunting a world they should've long since abandoned.

“I didn't put the pieces together until now.” The White Stag's voice is thunderous—the first thread of anger I've heard in his normally apathetic tone—weaving together a story of injustice and regret. “When it was revealed that cupids were the species creating mate bonds, monsters began killing them off. I believe those runes adorning your friends' necks were in play back then too, only all that hatred was aimed at the cupids and incubi, instead of vampires, the way they are now. With no cupids to help manifest the mating bonds, they became more and more scarce, until they eventually became obsolete. I imagine that your friend Cal—one of the first cupids born in years—terrified Zeus. However, Zeus isn't stupid. If he outright killed him, it would've been suspicious. So, he orchestrated a bogus crime and bribed some of the council members to imprison Cal. He probably planned to drain Cal of his power at a later time, when the cupid had long since been forgotten about by those who loved him.”

My brain struggles to process this onslaught of information.

So, Cal's family was killed . . . just because of his species? Because Zeus feared the restoration of the mating bonds? Because mated souls were more likely to linger on Earth?

Anger burns through me, white-hot and temperamental, and I know that this is only another tally on the list for why Zeus deserves to die.

“Why didn't you stop this?” I hiss out through gritted teeth. “Why didn't you do something?”

“I'm afraid I was just as blinded by my power as some of the other monsters here,” the White Stag says. “I didn't see

what Zeus was doing until it was too late—until two children brought it to my attention.”

I bristle at being referred to as a child, but I don’t get the chance to respond as the White Stag returns to the table.

All at once, the room explodes into motion, like someone pressing play on a movie that has been paused for hours.

Violet stares at the White Stag curiously.

“Is that it?” she asks, confused. “Is that all?” Her blue eyes flick to me over her shoulder, and I work to keep my features impassive, to not let her see the way my heart pounds and heat suffuses my entire body.

“I have seen what I needed to see,” the White Stag announces. “We will help you.”

Spidey whips her head in the stag’s direction. “We will?” Her voice is incredulous. I notice she exchanges a somewhat anxious glance with first Pan and then Dorian. I make a mental note of it.

Was Spidey on the council when Cal was imprisoned? Is she one of the monsters Zeus bribed to lock him away?

“We will.” The White Stag nods sagely. “We will come when you call, young Dracula.”

“Oh . . . um . . .” Violet once again turns toward me helplessly.

“How will we get a hold of you?” I interject, thinking of my mythology classes. Is there a magic word we’ll need to say? A spell we’ll need to perform?

But the White Stag simply says, “I’ll give you my phone number.”

“You have a phone?” Violet asks, shocked.

The White Stag ignores her. “Go. Create your army. Trust me when I say that there are more monsters on your side than you know. Start with the Van Helsing girl. She’ll make a strong and fierce ally.”

Violet shakes her head sadly. “She’s under the influence of Zeus’s spell. I don’t think—”

“Trust me, young Dracula.” The White Stag’s cavernous black eyes glue to Violet’s face. “If anyone can find a way to break the power of Zeus’s rune, it’s you.”

Abruptly, Violet’s face drains of all color, turning stark white beneath her mass of amber curls. She turns toward me with wide, horrified eyes.

“Oh my god,” she whispers.

I’m instantly on alert, scanning the room for any threats.

“What?” I bark.

“Vanessa.” Violet swallows heavily. “She’s still tied up in the safe house . . . Has been for days! I’m the worst designated best friend ever.”

# CHAPTER 8





## BEANIE DUDE

I don't know her name, but something about her calls to me.

I can't look away.

I don't want to.

So . . . I float, aimless and adrift, a sailor with no anchor to keep him tethered, a boat rocking on the turbulent seas of death and despair. Because that's what I am, after all.

Dead.

I'm . . . dead.

The realization sits like a heavy rock in my gut—an impenetrable boulder that refuses to shift even a fraction of an inch to provide me relief.

How come I can remember that detail but not the name of the enticing woman with sunlit blonde hair and brilliant blue eyes? How can I so keenly feel the sting of a blade as it pierces my flesh but not the softness of this goddess's skin beneath my fingertips? I must have touched her before. There's no way I would've been able to resist. She's temptation in the cruelest of forms—an angelic entity that somehow found herself trapped on Earth, haunting this plane for all of eternity. Or maybe she's just here to haunt me.

Ironic, considering I'm the nameless, faceless ghost following her around.

The pink and black dress she wears clings to her generous curves, emphasizing the swell of her breasts. She most certainly seems to like the color pink.

Pinkie.

I'll call her Pinkie.

There's a certain . . . rightness in the depths of my soul at hearing that name. It soothes something dark and temperamental inside of me, a demon on the warpath, roaming with no explicit destination in mind. How can a single female tame the beast inside of me?

So, I watch.

I wait.

And I plan.

A force tries to drag me away from her, on to the next life, but I resist through sheer force of will. I can't leave her. Not yet. Not ever.

*Pinkie, whoever you are, whoever I am . . . I'm coming for you.*

# CHAPTER 9



CAL

I try to remain inconspicuous as I watch the stone-faced guard enter our room, carrying five pizza boxes. He all but dumps them onto the nearest table, the scent of gooey cheese and tomato sauce permeating the room.

Barret, leaning against the wall opposite me, nods slightly, indicating for me to begin.

It was Balor, of all monsters, who realized that we weren't completely cut off from our magic and powers. Whenever a guard enters the room, the enchantments that keep our abilities at bay waver, but only as long as it takes the guards to deliver our food and leave—no doubt to protect themselves in case we try to attack. It's so imperceptible, I wouldn't have noticed it if Balor hadn't pointed it out.

But now, I feel my familiar magic—that of an incubus and dark fae, creating one of the first cupids in years—rippling directly underneath my skin. It nearly overwhelms me at first. Glimmering mate bonds, all of them expanding from our chests and leading in the same direction toward wherever Violet is, briefly capture my attention. I want so desperately to follow that bond back to my mate, but I hold back.

It's not safe for her.

Not with this damn rune etched on my skin.

On first glance, it appears insignificant, almost like a pretty tattoo, though the skin it rests on is raised and red. Two lines sit horizontally of one another with a slash cutting through both. A crescent moon shape dangles over top, curving steeply

downward until it punctures the bottom of the design in a sharp angle.

How can one seemingly innocent design cause such havoc and heartbreak?

At least I'm still handsome. Even something as grotesque as this can't deter from my naturally good looks.

I force my attention away from the hideous rune keeping me from my mate and instead focus on the guard. We decided that I would do this part of the plan.

If we can keep the guard in the room, we will have access to our powers.

I ignore the throbbing mate bonds—all of them brimming with pain and loss and love and lust—and push my energy into the steely-eyed guard. He has just finished opening a box of cheesy breadsticks when I bombard him with my powers.

Almost instantly, his eyes glaze over and his jaw unhinges.

He slowly turns toward me with heated eyes, his cock already half-hard in his pants.

Yuck.

I'm at least a ten, and he's probably a two on his best day. His receding hairline emphasizes his sweat-coated bald spot, and his paunch practically engulfs the waistband of his jeans. Even if I wasn't happily mated and in love with Violet Dracula, I still wouldn't entertain fucking this man.

I close my eyes and focus on the first thing I can think of—the chair Dimitri Gray is now sitting on.

Fuck.

The guard—who I think is named Royce—peels his attention off me almost instantly and focuses his hooded gaze on a still weary and tired Dimitri.

Our headmaster sits up almost instantly, his ice-blue eyes sharpening into icicles, his hands balling into fists.

“Cal . . .” he warns, slowly rising to his feet and backing away from the prowling guard.

Normally, I’d be the first to admit that Dimitri Gray is a fuckable monster. How could he not be, with all that snow-white hair, penetrating blue eyes, and chiseled features? If Violet ever wanted to have a foursome with me, Barret, and Dimitri, I wouldn’t complain. However, the last few days have taken its toll on our normally impassive headmaster. His white hair hangs limply around his shoulders, in desperate need of a wash, and his cheeks are sunken and hollow. I don’t know if his disheveled appearance is a product of being tortured by Zeus for weeks . . . or of being away from Violet.

Knowing the headmaster, it’s probably the latter, though the stubborn asshole would never admit it.

“Relax,” I say with a dismissive wave of my hand. “You may be a walking sex god—even when you look like shit—but I won’t have my good pal Royce over there start humping you.”

“Then what—”

Dimitri’s question is answered when Royce saunters toward the chair Dimitri abandoned, a sultry look in his eyes.

“I’ve heard you’ve been a bad girl,” Royce purrs at the chair. He reaches forward to caress the wooden backing before sliding his hand down to the cushioned seat in a gentle caress.

“Does someone need a spanking?” The sound of flesh hitting wood reverberates through the room.

“What the fuck am I even seeing?” Vin asks, aghast.

“I can’t look away.” That has to be Jack. I don’t think Hux has ever sounded so timid or scared in his life.

“Are you going to take my cock like a good little slut?” Royce asks, once again spanking the chair. “God, you’re such a sexy chair. I could just lick you all over.”

And . . . he does just that, his tongue roaming across each of the armrests as he moves one of his hands underneath the chair and begins to stroke the bottom.

“My god,” Frankie breathes. “I never thought I would witness a chair getting molested. It’s . . . quite fascinating, if I’m being completely honest. Just how does he expect to receive pleasure from it?”

“*That’s* what you’re worried about?” Balor turns to give Frankie a disgusted look, but my scientist friend remains oblivious.

“We don’t have much time,” I call, a tiny bit of sweat beading on my forehead from exerting so much power after days of having it contained. “Barret?”

Barret continues to stare wide-eyed at the guard, who is now slowly unbuttoning his shirt. Gray, grizzled hair appears as his huge belly practically spills over the front of his pants.

“Barret!” I snap.

“I’m . . . transfixed,” my lover murmurs, sounding a strange mixture of awed and horrified all at once. “I want to vomit, but I can’t look away.”

Royce begins to twirl two long strands of chest hair around and around in his fingers as he sways his hips seductively in front of the chair.

“You dirty girl. When have you last been wiped for dust? I bet it’s been an entire year since you’ve been cleaned. God, you’re so dirty. So fucking dirty.”

The sound of a zipper lowering snaps most of the guys’ attention away from the chair and back to me. I try to ignore the second droplet of sweat that cascades down my cheek. God, if Violet could see me now, coated in sweat that’s not from sex . . .

How could she ever doubt my love for her?

I’m perfection personified. And perfection doesn’t motherfucking sweat.

“Barret,” I hiss out.

“Um . . . yes . . . Vin.” Barret reluctantly tears his eyes away from Royce, who has his tiny dick in his hand as he strokes it, occasionally rubbing it against the armrest of the chair.

It was decided that while I distracted the guard—and while, consequently, our magic was momentarily unleashed—Barret would transport himself and one other into the dreamworld. The guys all fought over who would go, before they unanimously decided on Vin. The Van Helsing . . . he isn’t doing too well. His skin is unnaturally pale, almost chalky, and dark circles encompass both of his eyes.

“You wanna take my cock like a good little chair, don’t you? Yeah you do. Such a good slut.”

I shouldn’t look, I know that, but I can’t help but flick my gaze in the direction of Royce and his new, ahem, lover.



Royce has kicked over the chair and has his cock pressed into a tiny hole where the cushion has ripped apart over time. He begins to pound into the chair faster as he pants and moans.

“God, yes. Yes, you little bitch. You like my cock, don’t you? You nasty, dirty girl. There’s probably so much dust in your crevices. Do you need me to lick them clean for you? Let me swallow all your dust bunnies, you little slut.”

And . . . I’m officially scarred for life.

I’ll just file that away in the folder “topics for future therapy appointments.” It’s beginning to become quite hefty.

A subdued green glow drags my attention off Royce and back to Barret. His eyes have shut, long lashes feathering against his cheeks, and his familiar emerald-colored magic mists over his skin like gossamer curtains. Vin twitches as Barret’s intrusive magic pokes and prods at him before he, too, falls still.

And then the two of them slump over, lost in the dreamworld where, hopefully, they’ll find our mate and ensure she’s okay.

Meanwhile, I get the incredible pleasure of listening to Royce, the fat, sweaty guard, rut into a chair as he spanks her cushioned ass.

Fuck. My. Life.

# CHAPTER 10



## VIOLET

Cynthia picks up on the first ring.

“Hey, girl, I love you and all, but I literally have my pussy in a certain pumpkin’s mouth right now,” my old roommate, and friend, says, her voice breathless and airy. “Like, I disconnected that fucker from my body, and he’s nibbling on it like a piece of corn. I’m actually not near him right now. So, what’s up?”

Cynthia used to live with me back at Prodigium Academy. As the Woman in White, she has the ability to, um, remove her limbs the way you would a Mr. Potato Head. More than once, I helped her frantically search for her correct pair of breasts.

Friends who look for tits together, stay together.

We’ve had our differences, but when Cynthia found her true mate, she completely transformed. She no longer held on to any bitterness or heartache over losing Mason to me.

Mason . . .

The thought of my gorgon mate has tears prickling the backs of my eyes—hot iron brands that scald my sensitive lids.

I sniff and attempt to turn my body, so Alex can’t see the glassy sheen in my eyes.

We stand just outside the Field Museum—a respectable twenty feet away, as dictated by security when they found and banned us from the premises. The sun has officially crested the skyscrapers dotting the horizon, a metal jungle of huge buildings and construction machinery. Between the honking of horns, the rattling of trams, and the giggling of pedestrians, I

can barely hear myself think, let alone have a conversation with Cynthia.

I move slightly, so I'm hidden from view, leaning my back against the mottled bricks.

“God, Cynthia, there's so much I need to tell you.”

“You got that right, bitch,” she says. “And you can't see me right now, but I totally ripped off my lips and turned them upside down. I'm pissed at you.”

“I know—”

“How the fuck did you turn into a wanted criminal in the brief time I've been away? And you won the motherfucking Roaring? I mean . . . what?! How did this happen?” Cynthia continues to ramble on and on about all the shit I've been up to while she's been gone, but I can't help but zone her out.

My thoughts, as always, stray to Mason.

He was the main reason why we began fighting in the first place. Cynthia always had an unreciprocated crush on my mate and was devastated when he didn't return her affections. I know she no longer holds the same affection for him as she once did, but I wonder . . .

How will she react to the news that he's dead?

Will her heart shatter into thousands of miniscule pieces, so tiny that the slightest breeze can send them scattering away like ash?

Will she cry for hours on end, praying for a death that will never come, asking any God in the heavens to be merciful and give him back to her?

Will she think of all the things she could've done to save his life?

Or maybe . . .

Maybe that's just me.

Maybe all the guilt and pain have compounded into one acerbic, toxic emotion that makes breathing impossible.

Mason died to break me.

And it very nearly did.

Hell, it still might.

There's a pain in my chest that can't quite abate, no matter what I do. The gaping chasm continually grows and grows, turning into an endless abyss that sucks me in and refuses to spit me back out. I'm drowning in my sorrows, and my demons are all too happy to feast on my broken, tarnished soul.

"Hello? Violet? Are you there?" Cynthia's shrill voice breaks me out of my melancholic trance and catapults me back into reality. "Did you get distracted by something shiny? Violet, I told you before. If you see a penny in the middle of the road, don't try to run for it. Cars are fast. You may not die, but it'll still hurt like a bitch when you get run over."

"What? No . . . no pennies." I shake my head, hoping to disperse some of the cotton balls that have formed there. "I actually called to ask you for a favor."

Cynthia's so silent that I believe she hung up on me. I actually check the phone twice to make sure I didn't lose connection.

"Cynthia?"

"I'm still here." Her tone is sharp.

"I know you're on your mating-moon—"

“Violet, what part of ‘my pussy’s in a pumpkin’s mouth right now’ did you not understand?” she asks with an exasperated sigh. “Was it the word pussy? Pumpkin? Mouth?”

“You’re not even connected to the pussy!” I hiss back. The words are just loud enough to garner Alex’s attention. He turns toward me, one of his eyebrows quirked, but I simply wave away the unspoken question I can see brewing in his eyes.

“You’re not connected to your brain,” Cynthia huffs back.

“Real mature.”

“Ugh. Sorry. I promise it’s not you. It’s just . . .” Cynthia lowers her voice into a whisper, as if she fears being overheard by her mate. “Do you ever get tired of all the deep fucking? Don’t get me wrong—I love my mate. But there’s only so many times I can have his head between my thighs before I get . . . I don’t know . . . bored? I swear I’ve been picking out pumpkin seeds for days now.”

“Um . . .”

“And don’t get me started on all of the sex.” She blows out a raspberry. “If I’m tired, he’ll literally just remove my tits and pussy and begin to fuck them beside me. I swear the man is insatiable! Do you have to deal with this?”

“I can promise you that I never get tired of having sex with my mates,” I assure her, deadpan.

Alex, once again, whips his head in my direction. Our eyes meet and clash, his russet-black ones hooded. But the connection lasts for only a second before he turns away with that customary scowl of his stamped firmly on his face.

“Honestly, if this favor gets me away from my mate’s dick for even a second, I’ll take it. What do you need?”

“Well . . .” I nibble anxiously on my lower lip. “You remember Vanessa Van Helsing, right?”

“Yes?” Her voice quivers, turning the answer into a tentative question. “You’re not mated to her, are you?”

“No!” I rush to say. “But it’s just, um, well . . . I may have tied her up in a safe house and left her there for days. And she may be under a spell that makes her a vampire-hating lunatic.” My words begin to rush together toward the end, making them nearly indecipherable.

But I can tell Cynthia understands them when silence settles between us. All I can hear is her breathing on the phone, the only indication she hasn’t hung up on me.

Finally, she drawls out, “Let me guess? You want me to go to this safe house, rescue Vanessa, and then come meet you?”

“That would be awesome,” I agree readily. “And maybe feed her? Clean her up a little bit? Allow her to go to the bathroom?”

“Jesus, Violet,” Alex murmurs, proving that he’s been listening in on my entire conversation, despite the distance between us. “She’s a person, not a pet.”

“I think I know my designated best friend’s needs better than you do,” I snap, instinctively sticking my tongue out at him.

Like before, Alex’s eyes turn molten, burning like volcanic rocks. They home in on my tongue like two heat-seeking missiles.

“Keep sticking your tongue out at me, Violet baby, and I’ll find you something to use it on,” he all but growls.

Liquid heat surges through my veins, lighting a fire in my lower belly.

“Who the fuck is that?” Cynthia’s voice yet again pulls me back to the topic at hand. “I don’t recognize him. Is that a new harem member?”

“I don’t have a harem!” I protest automatically.

“I think the definition is one female and three-plus partners,” Cynthia singsongs. “How many scrumptious men do you have in your bed now?”

“Ohhh, I have to go. My, um, butt is calling me.” As soon as the words leave my mouth, I facepalm myself. My butt is calling me? *Really?*

But Cynthia takes it in stride. “Do you have a retractable ass too? Dude, I swear my booty has a life of its own sometimes. I once dropped it onto the bed, and then it butt dialed me for hours afterward.”

“Um, yes, that’s what happened. Definitely.” I begin to nod excessively, remember she can’t see me, and attempt nonchalance. But nonchalance is like a preteen boy trying to be cool after seeing a pair of tits for the first time—that shit just ain’t happening.

Where are sunglasses when you need them? Cool people wear sunglasses.

And cowboy hats.

Definitely cowboy hats.

*Siri, add to shopping list—sunglasses and a cowboy hat.*

“And don’t worry about Vanessa,” Cynthia continues. “Just text me the address, and I’ll get her out. Where do you want to meet?”



I glance warily at Alex, who's once again glaring at his feet, as if they personally offended him.

"I'll let you know when we come to a decision, but probably Hell. Long story. I'll message you where to go," I tell her. "And Cynthia? Thank you."

"No, thank *you*, my little vampiress. You saved me from getting my tit bitten off by a horny pumpkin. I'll text you when the package is secure."

And with those parting words, Cynthia hangs up.

I, however, don't immediately lower the phone from my ear. Talking with Cynthia reminded me of a time that has long since passed. A simpler time, as cliché as that sounds. I miss how easy life was when I was just a stupid vampire roaming the halls of Prodigium Academy. Now, I'm fangs-deep in a war I'm not sure I'll win, grieving a mate, and unsure of what the fuck I need to do next. I wish . . .

I wish I could talk to my dad about all of this.

Dracula may be an asshole, but he's *my* asshole, and he's always loved me unconditionally.

Who knows if he's even still alive? Zeus's wrath is infamous, and when I left the safe house, my parents were fighting for their lives. No, not their lives.

My life.

Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula were fighting for . . . me.

A rock settles in my stomach, sluicing the meager contents I managed to eat for lunch around.

"Violet?" Alex ventures tentatively, taking a step toward me.

I try for a smile, but it's weak and flimsy, a caricature of a real one.

"Can we just go ho—" I cut myself off before I say that final word.

Home.

I don't have a home.

What I have is a shitty hotel room with bug-infested beds and a rusty shower that dispels putrid-smelling, brown water.

And god, I can't help but think of Barret when I see those little beetles scuttling about. I miss him. I miss all of them.

I don't protest as Alex walks with me down the bustling street and toward a hotel on the edge of Chicago, in a section of the city that has seen better days. Dogs bark outside, a gunshot echoes through the darkness, and someone laughs hysterically from across the street.

But all of that is background noise. It barely processes in my tired, cotton-ball-filled brain.

Unconsciousness snags me with both hands as soon as my head hits the pillow.

And . . . I dream.

# CHAPTER 11



## VIOLET

I know immediately that this isn't an ordinary dream.

For one, I remain completely cognizant of my surroundings, keenly aware of the unnaturally soft grass beneath my feet and the silkiness of the nearest flower petal as I rub my fingers over it.

For two, the air is that perfect temperature you never feel in real life. Not too hot and not too cold. The breeze wafting across my face has goose bumps peppering along my skin, but the coolness is tempered by the blazing sun above.

In the distance, a tranquil river of water trickles into a large pond, causing waves to ripple against the shoreline.

Perfect.

Serene.

And unlike anything my mind would conjure up—not when my thoughts are a thunderous storm cloud threatening to unleash a torrent of rainfall and zigzagging lightning at any damn second.

“Barret?” I don't even dare to hope. How is it possible? Has he somehow freed himself from the rune Zeus placed on him? Is he nearby?

I spin in a circle so quickly I almost become dizzy. My heart gallops like a runaway racehorse in my chest. Where is he? Is he here? Am I wrong and this is truly just a dream, nothing more?

And then I see them, and the world stops spinning, becoming perpetually frozen in time, trapped in a snow globe

crafted specifically for my viewing pleasure.

Barret and Vin.

They stand shoulder to shoulder opposite me in the clearing, two imposing forces that never fail to make my heart play leapfrog in my chest. For so long, my brain has been nothing but a forest of overgrown weeds and crumbling ruins, but one glance at my mates takes a machete to all that overgrowth. I can finally *breathe*.

My gaze snags on Barret first, just because he stands to the left of Vin. His huge, mammoth form never fails to make me feel tiny and petite. However, despite the way he dwarfs me, I know that he'll never hurt me or raise a hand to me. There's so much tenderness splayed across his face that it would be impossible to believe otherwise.

His dark skin emits a green glow—one of the few indicators he's using his magic. His emerald-tipped hair sways in the breeze as he takes a single step toward me.

“Cheese curd,” he breathes reverently.

“Barret? Vin?” I glance at my monster hunter mate, and all the air I just gained back whooshes out of me in a gaping exhale.

If I needed to physically manifest the way I feel on the inside, Vin would be it.

His olive skin has taken on an ashen complexion, making the circles under his eyes even more pronounced. Vin's dark, spiked hair is in complete disarray as well. I know Vin to habitually run his hands through the strands whenever he's anxious or agitated. What does it say about him that it looks as if he took a lawn mower to the onyx locks?

I'm across the field before either of them can respond to me, reaching upward to sling one arm around Barret's neck and the other around Vin's. They both hold me between them, though not a single word is spoken between the three of us.

Honestly, I don't know what there is to say.

Our shared grief is a tangible entity hovering over us like a guillotine. Any second now, that blade will drop and blood will splatter.

When I feel as if I'm going to go insane, I whisper, "I've been so worried about you guys."

"You've been worried?" Vin snorts, the noise semi-hysterical. "Violet, you disappeared with a necromancer who wants to murder you. The only thing we knew was that you were alive. But even then—" He cuts himself off abruptly and begins to nuzzle my neck.

"I'm safe," I rush to reassure them. "I promise. I'm with Alex—"

"The necromancer who wants to murder you?" Barret interjects, sounding alarmed.

"Depends on the day." I attempt to wave dismissively, but since I'm still clinging to my guys, I only serve to swat at the back of Vin's head. "But there's so much I need to tell you."

"There's not much for us to tell you." Vin pulls away somewhat reluctantly, so he can stare at my face. Barret keeps his arms around me, tugging me flush to his chest. "But first, you need to know that we're all okay, even that fucker Dimitri. We haven't seen Hera, Lucifer, or Dracula since we've been separated, but we heard from some guards that they're still alive. Basically, we're kept in some fucking man cave in Zeus's palace. We only have access to our magic when a guard

enters to deliver us food—hence, why it took so long to come here. Cal’s keeping the guard, um, occupied so we can speak with you.”

“We don’t dare leave to get to you,” Barret pipes up. I tilt my head back to meet his eyes, and he flashes me a soft smile. “We might murder you if we did.”

The fact that he says that while smiling . . .

He’s just so dang cute sometimes.

Vin runs a hand down his face with an audible sigh. “I’d like to believe that we won’t kill our mate and true love if we were to get free.”

“But we probably would,” Barret points out with another helpful grin.

I hurry to interrupt before this can turn into an argument over whether they’ll brutally murder me. “Well, Alex and I went to visit the monster council—”

Vin’s frown deepens. “The same one that wants to kill you?”

“Let bygones be bygones. They *didn’t* kill me, so I call that a win. Anyway . . .” As I speak, I fiddle with Barret’s huge hand, reveling in the connection between us, in the way heat migrates to my lower belly from where we touched. “They agreed to help us in our war against Zeus, though I’m not sure if we can trust them. The White Stag seems to believe that some of the council members are on Zeus’s payroll.” I don’t mention what Alex told me about Cal’s family. I need to talk to my cupid about that first and foremost before sharing it with the others.

“No surprise.” Vin snorts. “They would have to be either idiots or corrupted idiots to not see what was happening right

under their noses.”

“I agree,” I say simply. “But if they’re willing to give me an army to save their own asses, then I’m all for that. The White Stag also told Alex a little bit about the rune Zeus placed on you guys.” Instinctively, my eyes dip to their skin, but in the dreamworld, it remains smooth and unblemished. Still, Vin’s hand comes to rub at the spot where his rune once sat, as if he can feel its malevolent presence even an entire realm away. “He seems to believe I’ll be able to break it because I’m a child of life and death and all that fun stuff.” I smile at them eagerly.

“That’s good and all, but what about us? How do you expect to get close to us to break it—”

I cut Vin off, still smiling like a lunatic. “He mentioned that this rune was initially used by our good friends, the Fomorians. Apparently, the rune is used to control minds—obviously. So, when a soul was being unruly, the Fomorians would apply the rune to it to get them to move on. Or something. Honestly, this is all secondhand knowledge from Alex, who heard it from the White Stag, who may or may not be working with Zeus.”

The first glint of life I’ve seen in Vin’s eyes since we arrived here makes an appearance. Barret’s grip on me tightens almost imperceptibly.

“You think Balor will be able to remove the rune?” Vin asks.

“Maybe.” I shrug. “He may not even know about it or remember it. It *has* been hundreds of years since he had to use it . . . if he even did at all.”



Or Balor is a butt-munching asshole who is purposely holding the information above our heads. It's hard to tell with him.

But truth be told, we know next to nothing about the Fomorians—a race of literal giants who once roamed Earth, helping souls crossover and delivering them to their final resting place.

“We're going to get to you, Violet. I fucking promise.” Vin moves abruptly, so he's standing in front of me, and clamps his hands down on my shoulders. His eyes are wild, full of desperate despair, roaming across my face as if he fears he'll never be able to see it again. “And when we do, we'll kill Zeus for what he did to Mas—” He breaks off with a choked sob, and my own heart cracks even farther, the fissure widening until I fear it'll never be able to reconnect.

Barret moves from behind me, his features drawn and tight, and gives a barely perceptible nod.

*Vin needs you.*

*Be with him.*

*Love him.*

He doesn't need to say it out loud for me to understand.

I gather Vin to me desperately, rocking him as he sobs, and my own tears join his own. It's a merging of souls—two monsters implicitly drawn together through their grief and shared love of one gorgon. His agony calls to me like a blazing beacon, a lighthouse amidst the fiercest of storms, and I'm helpless to resist the call. My agony pours out of me in a torrent. My lungs burn with a scream I refuse to unleash. A thousand teeth rip me apart from the inside out.

The anguish over losing Mason threatens to send me spiraling straight into oblivion, but I know I need to regain my head, if not for me, then for Vin. He needs me. All my mates do.

So, I hold Vin as we both fall apart and attempt to stitch ourselves back together. We're broken and jagged, each a thread of a tapestry that is uniquely us. There'll always be a gaping hole where Mason once resided, but maybe, with time, the pain will dull. Instead of a mottled red burn, it'll merely be a scab. If you pick at it too often, it'll flake and begin to bleed anew, but it'll no longer be in danger of killing you.

Vin's hands travel down my spine and caress the swell of my ass. I'm so shocked that I stagger farther into him, my forehead pressing against his shoulder. Need emanates from every pore of his body.

"Please," Vin begs, a note of pleading in his voice I've never heard before. "I just . . . I need to forget. Take control, Violet. Let me forget."

I hesitate, searching his face carefully, feeling my own grief create a gaping chasm that connects us together instead of ripping us apart.

And this is what we need, I realize with startling clarity. A way to lose ourselves in each other, for just a moment. A way to express our grief without the sadness and tears. Mason lived a jovial, full life—he would want the same for us.

I love my mates. All of them. And even though I want nothing more than to succumb to the pain roaring inside of me, I know I can't.

"I have an idea," I whisper, cupping Vin's cheeks and feeling his five o'clock shadow slice at my skin like

sandpaper. “Do you trust me?”

“With my life,” he replies immediately, already lowering his gaze to the ground.

It’s what he needs to get through this—to give up a smidgen of the ironclad control he’s been holding on to for too damn long.

And it’s what I need—to gain back some of the control I lost when Mason died.

I take a deep breath, close my eyes, and then visualize what I want. I know it works when Vin releases a sharp intake of breath. His eyes are fixed on the strap-on in my right hand.

“Violet . . .” He sounds stunned.

“We don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.” I continue to caress his face with my free hand as I speak, closing my eyes yet again so a couch pops into existence behind us. I step forward at the same time Vin moves backward, until he’s landing on the couch cushion with a thump.

“I-I want to,” he whispers, his gaze flicking to Barret, who has conjured an armchair of his own. He sits in it, his eyes volleying between the two of us, as if this is the most interesting tennis match he’s ever had the pleasure of viewing. When he notes Vin’s gaze, he lowers his head.

“I can leave if you want me to.”

“No, stay.” The protest, surprisingly, doesn’t just come from me, but Vin as well. I know Vin will never be sexually attracted to Barret the way Cal is, but I also know they’ve developed a bond in the last few weeks—because of me.

Because of their love for me.

They’re all brothers in the truest sense of the word.

Barret swallows and nods once, reclining back into the seat.

Right now, this is about Vin—about healing his demons, so he's no longer drowning in his grief.

My love for Barret only grows at the knowledge he isn't upset or jealous. He understands why I'm showing Vin attention at the moment.

“Take your clothes off,” I instruct Vin on a breathy whisper as I tug my dress over my head, leaving my panties and bra on. Both of them are black with pink bats on them. Kind of ironic I'd wear vampire underwear, when I'm not even technically a vampire. I suppose some things will never change.

“Cheese curd,” Barret rasps from where he still sits on the armchair in the middle of the clearing. He begins to palm his huge dick through the material of his jeans. “You're so gorgeous.”

“Keep your clothes on,” I warn him, loving the way his eyes dilate with unbridled lust. “I have plans for you.” I turn toward Vin. “And you . . .”

I greedily devour the perfection that is a now naked Vin Van Helsing—his chiseled stomach, toned thighs, and the hard cock already glistening with precum. I notice I'm not the only one admiring my mate. Barret also gives Vin an appreciatory once-over as he continues to rub at his cock.

Vin keeps his head down, but his dick twitches when I run my fingers over his tawny shoulders.

“Lie down on the couch,” I breathe in his ear, peppering a kiss just to the underside of it. “Put your legs over the armrest.”

“Yes, mistress.” He doesn’t even hesitate to do what I instruct. So trusting. So perfect.

So . . . mine.

I move to pull the strap-on over my underwear, unsurprised when it fits me like a glove. This is a dreamworld, after all. We don’t have to worry about condoms or straps or . . .

Lube.

I smile as Vin releases a sharp intake of breath as his asshole becomes lubed up all on its own.

Thank fuck for dreamworlds.

“Let me know if you need me to stop or slow down, okay?” I lean forward to scratch my fingernails over his nipples, down his toned stomach, and then across his inner thighs. The strap-on between my legs remains mere inches from his tight hole.

“Fuck me, Violet Dracula,” Vin growls fiercely. “Remind the world that I’m yours.”

Lust heats low in my belly at his words. It flows through my veins like molten lava until I feel as if I’m seconds from falling to ruins for this man. My mate.

Placing one hand around his thigh to hold it up, I use my other to line up my cock with his tight asshole. I wish I could feel him pulsating around me, but this isn’t about me. It’s about him.

Maybe, in the future, I could conjure up a real penis . . .

“Oh fuck. Oh fuck, fuck, fuck!” He begins to moan even louder as I breach his tight ring of muscles.

I don't immediately move as I wait for him to get used to the sensation of the fake cock inside of him.

"Does that feel good?" I ask, rocking my hips once.

"God, yes." His long lashes feather against his cheekbones as he exhales noisily. "I need you to move, Violet. I need you to fucking move."

Seeing him like this . . .

Dripping in sweat . . .

Desperate for me . . .

I rock my hips into his tight ass as I lean down to rub his cock. I can't help but marvel at the silkiness of his skin contrasting with the hard steel beneath it. He's so long, so thick, so perfect.

I stroke his cock as I continue to pound his ass, listening to every moan and incoherent phrase that leaves his parted lips.

"I need . . . to see . . . you," he pants, his hands reaching up for my breasts before immediately dropping back to his sides.

"Do you, now?" I can't help but smirk mischievously as I unhook my bra and toss it to the side—smiling wider when it whacks Barret across the face.

Vin's eyes home in on my tits as I reach up to pluck at my hard, aching nipples.

"Yes, mistress, yes," he groans as I keep one hand on my tit and use the other to wrap around his cock in a corkscrew motion. I begin to fuck him even faster, the movement causing my tits to bounce.

But I want more.

*I need more.*

My grief is still there—an omnipresent shadow hovering over us all—but it no longer threatens to strangle me. Being with my mates, loving them like this . . . I know it's what Mason would've wanted. Hell, he probably would've begged to join in if he was here.

The thought brings a smile to my face. I swear I feel closer to Mason than ever before, like he's directly behind me, watching me fuck his best friend.

Abruptly, I pull out of Vin, ignoring his cry of protest.

“Put your legs on the ground and your arms on the armrest,” I instruct, sauntering my way around the couch and very purposefully giving Barret an unobstructed view of my ass.

Vin does as instructed—the new position having him bent forward with his ass facing both me and Barret.

“Fuck . . .” Barret groans, but I don't look away from Vin to see my boogeyman mate. Instead, I reach forward to fondle Vin's balls as I line myself up with him once more.

“I have to ask,” I muse conversationally as I once again push into him. “Is this your first time being fucked in the ass?”

Some of Vin's usual snark and bossiness returns when he snaps out, “What the hell do you think? I'm only attracted to women, and I've never trusted anyone enough to give up control.”

“So . . . I'm your first.” Inexplicable feminine pride unfurls inside of me.

“You're my everything,” Vin counters immediately, and my golly. If I don't just melt into a puddle of lust and love right then and there.

I begin to fuck Vin from behind, pounding into his asshole brutally, savagely, possessively. Every slap of my hips against his skin is a reminder that he's mine, I'm his, and the world may try to cut us down, but we'll emerge stronger than ever before.

But it's not just him I need.

"Barret," I gasp out.

"Yes, cheese curd?" I hear the hesitancy in that one question.

"Come fuck me."

Vin moans low in his throat, but Barret is uncharacteristically silent.

"Are you sure?" he finally asks, his voice quiet and soft.

"Get your ass over here, Barret, and come fuck our girl before I do it for you," Vin snaps out. And then his anger turns into another low moan as I continue to pound into his ass.

Barret doesn't need to be told twice, apparently. Or maybe all he needed was confirmation that this was okay, that he was wanted. I know he struggles with his self-image and being seen only as a "package deal" with Cal, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

He's . . . Barret.

Sweet, innocent Barret, who'll protect me with his life.

Who will turn into a raging monster just to get to me.

Who will create a magical dreamworld just so I can be sure my mates are okay.

I feel the length of his hard body behind mine a second before his huge, *huge* dick slides into my pussy.



“Oh my god!” I scream as the feeling of being too full barrages me. I’m not exaggerating when I say Barret has the biggest cock I’ve ever seen. Well, second biggest. I’m pretty sure Big Foot has a slightly bigger wiener than my sweet mate.

I swear I feel him *everywhere*. It’s too much—I’m going to fucking self-combust.

Barret moves his hips slowly, almost uncertainly, from behind, but I don’t need tentativeness. I need him to fuck me.

“God, Barret, move!” I growl as I thrust my hips yet again, eliciting a moan from Vin.

Barret pauses, his mammoth dick halfway in my pussy, and then says, “You know I love and respect you more than any other person on this planet, right?”

The timid question has me spinning my head around to stare at him over my shoulder. His green eyes gleam like gemstones in the artificial sun, reflecting my own face back at me.

“Yes?”

“Good.” The growl that leaves his throat is unlike anything I’ve ever heard before. It’s more monster than man, and it has my nipples pebbling, begging for attention. “Because I’m about to fuck you like I don’t.”

And then he does just that.

He moves at a fierce, ruthless pace, pounding into me from behind as I fuck Vin. His dark hands reach between us to cup my breasts and twist my nipples.

“Oh my god!” I cry out, sobbing, my soul seconds from leaving my body and joining the afterlife with Mason. The thought pulls a tentative smile from my lips.

Death by orgasm.

Mason would be so proud.

I can feel myself spiraling, tumbling, cartwheeling, falling to pieces. But I don't want to come alone.

I reach below me to grab Vin's cock, tugging it in time with my thrusts into his ass. He grips the armrest of the couch even tighter as he rocks back into me.

And for a moment, we live in a world where pain and grief don't exist. Where we aren't separated by thousands of miles and a rune that will see us all killed. Where hate and greed can't touch us.

It's just me, Vin, and Barret, locked in an embrace capable of melting glaciers.

When we come, we come together, Barret exploding into my pussy as I tighten around him, milking his cock for all its worth. Vin's dick twitches in my hand before he explodes as well, his seed hitting my hand, his stomach, and the couch below us.

It's not reality, but for a brief second . . . it's absolute paradise.

# CHAPTER 12



## VIOLET

The sunlight streaming through the threadbare curtains of the hotel isn't what wakes me.

Nor is it the blaring alarm of a nearby car, followed by the shrill scream of sirens.

No, what jerks me upright in bed is the pillow whacking me across the face so hard my head twists to the side.

“Mothertrucker!” I burst upright in bed and flick my gaze toward where Alex stands beside my queen-size bed. His expression is devoid of any emotion—an impenetrable mask of absolute *assery*.

Get it? Ass-ery?

I crack myself up sometimes.

I glare at him and attempt to run my fingers through my snarled hair. I didn't shower before I collapsed into bed, so I probably resemble a Barbie doll that's been tossed off a cliff, run over by two consecutive semitrucks, lit on fire, and then thrown into a meat grinder.

“Why the fuck did you hit me with a pillow?” I demand when it's apparent Alex isn't going to say anything. I can't help but note he wears a skin-tight black T-shirt that clings to his muscular physique and accentuates the tattoos on his arms. He's still dressed in his sleep shorts, so the final result is a sexy, rumped, sleepy Alex that definitely shouldn't make my heart race as fast as it does.

No, siree.

A scowl twists Alex's lips as he continues to glare down at me. "You were *moaning*. Rather obscenely, if you ask me."

Heat floods my body almost instantaneously.

Barret . . .

Vin . . .

My pussy instinctively clenches around nothing but air. I swear I can feel Barret pistoning in and out of me as I rubbed Vin's hard, long cock . . .

I clear my throat and, once again, attempt to tame the disheveled mess that is my hair. I'm desperate to do something besides sit here and gawk.

"I was having a nightmare," I lie smoothly.

"You were screaming, 'Barret, oh Barret, fuck me harder, Barret. I love your huge dick inside my pussy!'" Alex raises his voice in a piss poor impersonation of my own.

I think back to the dream and definitely *don't* remember screaming those explicit words.

"Maybe you heard me wrong. Maybe I said . . . 'Tarot, oh Tarot, show me my future, Tarot. I love your huge mick because you're a wussy.'"

Nailed it.

Alex folds his arms over his chest and scowls.

"And then you said, 'I love the way your asshole clenches around my cock, Vin. I wish I could actually feel it.'"

I wince imperceptibly, even as my pussy begins to spasm. Because . . . yup. I'm horny as hell right now.

"Maybe you were dreaming of me?" I suggest with a sheepish shrug.

Honestly, I don't remember saying any of those words, but there's a chance that dream Violet behaved differently from real Violet.

Talk about awkward.

Alex dips his chin to my chest, and I follow the direction of his gaze with a curse. How did I not feel the breeze against my bare tit?

"Where did you come from, little guy?" I murmur to my boob in surprise.

"You started plucking your nipples and screaming your release," Alex deadpans.

"Oh."

I shift uncomfortably on the bed as I attempt to wrangle my breast back into my shirt and bra. It's only as I'm straightening my clothing that I realize . . . Alex didn't wake me until just now.

If what he said is true, then I was a writhing, moaning mess on the bed. Instead of immediately shaking me awake, Alex watched long enough to witness me scream my mates' names and play with my tit. Only after I orgasmed in my dream and in real life did he deem it necessary to whack me awake.

I drop my eyes to his shorts, noticing something that evaded me during my first perusal of him.

He's hard as hell.

I can see the distinct outline of his cock tenting the front of his basketball shorts.

"Interesting," I murmur dazedly.

Alex mutters something I can't quite hear and attempts to turn his hips to the side. "Stop fucking looking!" he barks.

I can't help but tease him. "So, how long did you watch my little show before you decided to wake me up?"

"Violet . . ." His voice holds a note of warning, but it doesn't scare me the way it once would've. If anything, my body turns radioactive, fire rushing through my veins and lighting an inferno in my belly.

"Alexander . . ." I mimic his serious tone, loving the way his cheeks pinken with anger.

"Don't call me that."

"Don't call me that," I mock.

"Violet, seriously."

"Violet, seriously."

Alex cocks a pierced eyebrow. "Really? You're copying everything I say now? Real mature."

I also attempt to lift an eyebrow, but since I'm still half asleep, I sort of end up making a scrunched-up face at the necromancer instead. "Real mature."

Alex rolls his eyes and opens his mouth to retort—

Before abruptly snapping his lips together and whirling toward the window of the motel. Tension ripples down his spine, made all the more evident by the sudden stiffening of his shoulders. His abrupt change in demeanor has me crawling out of bed and attempting to smooth down my ruffled dress.

"What is it?" I ask softly.

"Shhh." Alex keeps his attention fixated on the door. He slowly inches toward one of the god-blessed daggers we've

kept on hand in case of an emergency. “I think there’s someone here.”

I give him an incredulous look. “Why do you say that? I have superior hearing and vision and don’t—”

As if the universe itself is giving me the middle finger and a smug F-U, a brick is tossed through the motel window, shattering glass in every direction.

On it are the words “DIE VAMPIRE WHORE.”

Well, then.

I stand corrected.

Alex gives me a look that so eloquently says, “I told you so,” before reaching for my hand.

“We need to go through the window in the bathroom. I think—” Alex breaks off with a curse when two monsters barrel roll through the now open window.

The first is a hydra—though it’s not like anything you’ll read about in the classroom. It’s the size of a large dog and has the body of a dragon, with bioluminescent red scales that shimmer in the artificial lighting. Each of its three heads also resembles that of a dragon, though the one on the right wears a top hat and bow tie, the middle head has a pink ribbon between its reptilian ears, and the final one wears a baseball cap backward and sunglasses.

The second creature is a . . . well, I don’t fucking know what it is. It has the head of a crocodile, the frontal body of a majestic yellow lion, and the rear of a hippopotamus.

But one thing that’s the same for both monsters? The distinct rune etched onto their necks.



Zeus isn't even trying to be discreet anymore. What's the point of hiding his insidious marks if we all already know the truth?

"Shit." Alex grabs my hand and begins to race toward the bathroom just as all three heads of the hydra begin to roar. Correction—kind of roar.

The top hat head gurgles, the pink ribbon one giggles and then gives a flirtatious roar, and the third simply says, "I don't feel like doing this shit. Can't we go to the mall?"

Okay, then.

Apparently, we're dealing with constipated head, flirty head, and preteen boy head.

Noted.

The croc-lion-otamus takes a menacing step forward, completely ignoring the bickering erupting from her partner. His partner? It's impossible to tell for sure, and I'm not in the mood to get on my hands and knees to look for a jingle bell, if you catch my drift.

"Violet Dracula," a distinctly feminine voice purrs from the crocodile's gaping maw. "How lovely to see you."

"You don't sound overly happy to see me," I counter, knowing I should remain silent but unable to shut my trap.

As I speak, I venture another step back, keeping my shoulder flush with Alex's. My legs hit the bathroom door, and I fumble behind me for the knob.

"Vampire scum like you don't deserve to live," the croc-lion-otamus says with what I swear is a sneer. It's sort of hard to tell, considering the fact she has hundreds of razor-sharp, serrated teeth that appear too large for her mouth.

“Funny you should say that, considering I’m not actually a vampire.” I shrug innocently.

“What’s she talking about?” Top hat head asks in a posh British accent.

Baseball cap head intones, “Bitches be crazy.”

And the ribbon head simply giggles.

“Foolish vampire!” The croc-lion-otamus charges at me, and I squeal, opening the bathroom door completely and falling backward. Alex swipes at the monster with the god-blessed dagger, eliciting a hiss of pain from the creature, before he slams the door shut in their faces.

“Window!” Alex hisses, pointing to the tiny rectangular window above the toilet. I quickly unlock it and push it up, wincing when a resounding screech echoes through the room. Fortunately—or unfortunately, depending on how you want to look at it—the noise is drowned out by the screams and roars of the two monsters as they attempt to break down the door.

“Violet! Hurry!” Alex snaps, attempting to press his weight against the wood to hold the beasts back. I’m not sure how much good it will do, but I appreciate the effort.

“You go first!” I direct him, stepping down from the toilet and backing away.

Alex gives me an incredulous look. “Are you insane? They’re after you!”

“Which means they won’t kill me if they capture me, unlike you.” The door shakes behind Alex’s broad back, and claws rake diagonally down the door. All I can see is a beady red eye glaring at me with an almost incandescent fury through the gap.

Fuck.

It won't be long now until Ugly One and Ugly Two completely tear down this door and kill us dead.

So, so dead.

"I'm not fucking leaving first!" Alex hisses as he puts more weight against the door in an attempt to hold off our attackers.

I fold my arms over my chest and glare at him. "Then I guess we're both going to die here, because I'm not leaving until you do."

I saw one mate die before my eyes already. I refuse to lose another one.

Not that Alex is my mate or anything . . .

Nope.

Not him.

Not. At all.

Stop laughing.

Oh, shut up.

Denial is my best friend.

Panic flares to life in Alex's russet-black orbs before he curses loudly and pushes past me.

"You better come right behind me, Violet baby, or I swear I'll turn that peachy ass of yours bright red," he growls as he heaves himself up and attempts to wiggle through the window. It's a tight fit, considering he's over two hundred pounds of solid muscle, but he manages to twist back and forth like a worm to get through.

I really, really shouldn't take the time to admire his sculpted ass—because, hello, we're going to die and everything—but my eyes drift to those chiseled globes unbidden.

Daymmmmnnn.

I'm so ass-notized that I don't even notice the door has been ripped off its hinges until the ugly bitch grabs a fistful of my hair in her paw and yanks it back.

“Seriously, fuck off! I really don't want to hurt you, because I know you're under a spell and all—”

“All vampire whores must die!” she screeches in her shrill, abnormally high-pitched voice.

“That's extremely rude!” I hiss. And admittedly, I don't feel as much pity as I should when I reach for the paw entangled in my hair and snap it in two. “That's for calling me a whore. We women need to stick together in this patriarchal society.”

“You bitch!” she rages.

I snap another bone in her arm.

“And that's for calling me bitch!”

While she's distracted, I dive out of the window, landing in an undignified heap in the bushes lining the perimeter of the motel.

Panic jangles my nerves when I don't immediately see Alex. And that panic turns to horror when I finally see his shock of dark hair . . . surrounded by three distinct dragon heads.

The hydra, which has now grown to the size of a small horse. I just pray there are no humans paying attention. I can't

imagine what they'll think.

A drug-induced hallucination? Probably.

"You made the wrong choice backing the vampire slut," the posh, accented voice of the top hat head says.

"She's, like, soooo fugly. That's fucking ugly, if you don't know," the second head says with a lilting giggle. This voice reminds me of a stereotypical valley girl, instantly raising my hackles.

"I don't even want to be here," the third, masculine voice drawls with a sigh. "They forced me."

"Because we hate vampires," the first head decrees.

"Whatever, man."

God, what am I going to do? There's three of them and two of us. Well, if you want to be technical about it, one of them and two of us. I don't know if each head is a separate monster or if they're one and the same. They seem to each have their own unique personality, so does that mean they're sentient? And . . . why am I focusing on this? Alex could be eaten, for fuck's sake.

I weigh my options.

Alex has the god-blessed dagger, and the rest of our supplies are still in the room with my, ahem, friend. But I don't need a physical weapon to be dangerous.

Briefly, I think about the time I was attacked and tortured by vampire hunters. Lost to my pain and rage, I transformed into . . . something. And whatever that *something* was absolutely destroyed the hunters.

I search for that power now, for the flare of heat inside of me that will bring about the change. Yet, nothing happens.

Perhaps I don't feel threatened enough?

I curse inwardly and debate my next step.

Okay, so maybe I don't have super murderous powers, but I do have the strength and speed of a vampire. Yes, I may have run into a few poles in my time, but I'm certain I can use my gifts to save Alex.

Rolling my shoulders back, I take a deep breath and prepare to fight with everything I have. I'll kick, punch, scream, and fucking bite. I'm a damn good biter, vampire or not.

But before I can do more than take a step forward, a black mist permeates the air, obscuring Alex and the hydra from view.

What the fuckity fuck?

"Alex?!" My voice turns shrill with fear.

"Violet?" he asks.

"Alex, are you okay? Where are you?"

I take another step forward just as the dark mist recedes.

The hydra lies on the ground, snoring softly, its three heads almost appearing peaceful in slumber.

And standing above the creature . . .

Memphis, Lucifer's right-hand man and Barret's distant cousin, smiles toothily, that centipede-like smile stretching at the corners in a macabre display.

"Hello, Violet." His crab claws click as he walks forward.  
"I think it's time we talked."

# CHAPTER 13



DIMITRI

I'm surrounded by a bunch of raging imbeciles—the whole lot of them.

Honestly, I can't help but wonder how my life turned into this. I was the strongest professor at Prodigium Academy, and when I became headmaster, I became the youngest monster to ever hold that position.

Now, I'm imprisoned in Mount Olympus with a bunch of idiotic monsters I wouldn't have been caught dead with only a few years ago. My entire existence has been altered in the blink of an eye—the speed of which still alarms me to this day.

Because of her.

Because of Violet motherfucking Dracula.

She saw the beast inside of me and didn't shy away like others might have. Instead, she reveled in the demons lurking directly underneath my flesh. I wasn't the only one to fall in love with her—all of my demons did too.

It's a strange concept to love someone so much you'd willingly put up with the incessant chatter of a bunch of dimwitted monsters. When did this even happen? I can't quite articulate when my feelings for the infuriating female changed from loathing to annoyance to respect to . . . love.

My broken queen, whose numerous shards somehow complement my own. We're a dissonant mess—a case study in opposites—but somehow, she completes me.

I hate that she has this power over me.

But I also . . . love it.



It's quite a conundrum.

"Don't fucking lie to me!" Vin roars now, drawing my attention back to the matter at hand. The vampire hunter stands over Balor, his cheeks flushed with rage and his hands curled into fists. "Violet told me your people know about the rune."

Balor adopts a perfectly bored expression as he reclines against the wall with his arms folded over his chest. His golden hair falls forward into his eyes, but he doesn't lift a hand to push it away.

"I told you," he drawls indolently. "I've never seen that rune before in my life."

"You're lying!" Vin snaps.

Hux moves to stand directly in front of the Fomorian, shoving Vin away in the process. The terrifying monster kneels, so he's at eye level with the other man, and a slow, sardonic grin curls up his lips.

"You've been in my head for centuries, haven't you?" Hux begins in a slow, deadly voice. The air practically seems to vibrate with the full force of his fury. It's unparalleled—a distinct reminder to all of us that we may not be the most terrifying monster in the room. There's something about Hux's savagery that scares even me, though I don't allow such fear to show on my face. It's beneath me. "You know exactly the lengths I'll go to get to my precious treasure."

"I don't know anything—"

"Maybe you've just forgotten over time," Hux continues, ignoring Balor's indignant outburst. "That's perfectly understandable. However, I can assure you that I'll find ways to help you remember. You see, I was talking to Frankie about plucking brains out of monsters to access their memories."

Hux momentarily slides his gaze toward Frankie, who stands with an utterly impassive expression on his face. “We’ll keep you alive, of course, as we slice off little chunks of your brain like it’s an apple peel. I imagine that part won’t hurt too bad.” He chuckles drolly, his eyes sparking with malicious intent. “No, what I imagine would hurt the most is scalping you alive. Would you scream for us, Balor? Would you scream for your dead mommy?”

“You son of a—”

“I’ll make you cry out in agony until you’re begging to help us. But I’ll be too mad to allow you to die. So, I’ll just keep slicing at your brain . . . until, of course, I get bored with that organ and move to one a little more intimate.” Very purposefully, Hux’s gaze drops down to Balor’s crotch. “Have you ever seen an inverted penis? Do you know what one looks like without any skin?” Abruptly, Hux leans forward, placing his hands on either side of Balor’s head. “No one keeps me from my precious treasure. No one!”

I resist the urge to give Hux a slow, sardonic clap. I suppose I now see why Violet chooses to keep him around. He’s fierce when he’s protecting those he loves.

Just like Violet.

The memory of my girl stings with the keenness of a wasp.

According to Vin and Barret, she’s okay and concocting a plan to stop Zeus, but I know firsthand how vapid and unbearable the monster council can be. They’re more likely to stab her in the back than gift her a sword in the battle to come. Violet Dracula is too trusting, too naïve, too innocent.

But that’s okay.

I’ll be her pessimism, if that’s what it takes.

God, how could I have fallen in love with someone so intrinsically different from me? She's fire—burning with life and unbridled joy—and I'm a statue of ice. Our stories have been written in the stars since long before either of us stepped foot on this earth. On paper, we would be destined to clash, constantly colliding and fighting until one of us was destroyed. Either I would freeze her, or she would burn me with her flames.

But if my death is supposed to end in a blazing inferno, then so be it. I can think of worse ways to go.

I shake my head yet again to clear my thoughts and catch the tail end of Balor's nonchalant statement.

“. . . I truly don't know anything.”

An idea occurs to me then, and I nearly grin at the ingenuity of it. Outwardly, I keep my expression blank, a carefully neutral mask.

Stepping forward until I garner the room's attention, I nod toward Balor.

“Let him go,” I instruct Vin and Hux in a bored tone. “It's apparent he won't be able to help us.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Vin snaps.

“Do you want to murder him yourself?” Hux questions quizzically, tilting his head to the side.

“You heard what Violet told Barret and Vin,” Cal insists, pushing away from the wall and stepping closer to us. “This fuck face knows—”

“Knew,” I correct, a small grin slanting up my lips. It's a cold, malevolent smile, one I wore whenever I handed my students an F-graded paper. Or when I tortured one of my

many victims in the basement of my house. “He *knew* the rune. But it’s been hundreds of years since he was a Fomorian. I doubt he remembers any of their traditions or even has the capabilities anymore to do their magic.”

Rage bursts to life in Balor’s normally inexpressive eyes, but I keep my attention off him.

“I don’t like this,” Barret cuts in tentatively from where he stands beside Cal. “Cheese Curd told us—”

“Balor is barely a Fomorian anymore.” I wave a hand toward the man in question, noting the way red splotches erupt on his cheeks. “He hasn’t been one in centuries.”

“You fucking shit—” Balor begins, taking a threatening step forward.

I cut him off. “It’s the truth. So, stop wasting our time and allow us to think of a solution.”

Balor’s hands curl into fists. I can see his fingernails digging into the fleshy portion of his palms. “Let me try. I’ll see if I can use my powers to remove the damn rune.”

I scoff. “You don’t know how.”

“I can figure it out!” he rages angrily. He grabs Hux by the shoulder and all but tosses him into the nearest seat. Fortunately, it’s not the one that our guard friend got intimately familiar with.

Those two are currently cuddled together in the closet behind Cal, unconscious and buck-ass naked.

Hux scowls, the movement tugging at the scar slicing through his cheek.

“If this doesn’t work—”

“You’ll kill me. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I’ve heard that one a thousand times before.”

Hux’s brows furrow. “I do not believe I said it one thousand times. According to Jack, I said it exactly two hundred and thirty-six times.” A dark thunderstorm lowers over Hux’s expression. “But I swear to all of the gods and goddesses that, if you don’t help me get to my precious treasure, I will fuck you so hard.”

Balor freezes, one of his hands centimeters from the mark tattooed on Hux’s skin.

“Don’t you mean *fuck you up*?” Cal interjects helpfully.

Hux frowns. “No. I believe the saying is *fuck you so hard*.” He pauses and then adds, “And if you’re really mad, you say ‘fuck you so hard until you’re screaming my name.’”

Vin pinches the bridge of his nose. “Who told you that?”

“Mason.”

An uncomfortable silence descends around the room. I’ll be the last to admit that my own heart feels heavy in my chest, a lead weight that threatens to collapse into my stomach at a moment’s notice. Grief settles on my shoulders like a winter coat, and I half want to shuffle from foot to foot uncomfortably.

But I don’t.

There’s nothing I can do to raise the dead. What I can do, however, is protect the living and the world.

And since Violet is *my* world, then that means I need to protect her and the rest of her good-for-nothing mates.

“Are you going to do this or not?” Vin snaps. Animosity simmers directly beneath his veneer, made all the more evident

by the subtle clenching of his jaw.

“Of course.” Balor sniffs haughtily and places his hand on Hux’s wrist. “I’m going to try to sense the powers of the rune and, hopefully, untangle them from its host.”

“What the fuck does that even mean?” Cal asks.

“Think of the rune like . . . a weed. It’s currently sprouting throughout the body as we speak. The longer we wait to remove it, the more it’s going to grow. What I’m going to try to do is untangle these weeds from your bodies and kill them with my magic.”

“Is that going to work?” Barret asks hesitantly.

“No idea.” Balor shrugs, feigning calm. “I’m not even sure you guys will survive the procedure.”

“But we need to try,” I interrupt. “For Violet. And for Mason.”

The guys shift around me as the air, yet again, blankets in sadness, a thread of rage waiting to be pulled from it. We all want revenge for what Zeus did to us—to our . . . family. Yes, our family. I suppose I can admit that in the sanctuary of my own head.

There’s nothing I wouldn’t do to see Zeus’s head on a silver platter.

A breath I didn’t realize I was holding releases like a rope around my neck.

If this works, then we’ll be free of Zeus’s control.

We’ll be able to rescue Hera, Lucifer, and Dracula.

We’ll be able to help Violet on her quest to eliminate Zeus once and for all.

My girl was born to be a queen, and though I didn't see this future for myself, I'm beginning to believe I was fated to be her knight in shining armor.

Me . . . a knight.

Who would've thought?

But if my mate needs me to get my hands bloody so hers can remain clean, then so be it. I'll paint this world red if it means getting Violet what she deserves—a throne, a crown, and a harem of monsters at her beck and call.

# CHAPTER 14





VIOLET

**M**emphis is an ugly son of a gun.

I don't consider myself a mean person by any means, and I'm always one to praise the underdog and look for the inner beauty in each and every creature, but Memphis . . .

I think he'd look more attractive if he placed a plastic bag over his head. And suffocated himself.

A pink centipede is pasted on his face, exactly where his lips should be. As I watch, horrified, the numerous legs skitter a fraction of an inch in what might be a smile. Maybe. Possibly. He has no nose that I can see, but his startling red eyes take up most of his pinball-sized face.

And his body . . .

Picture a normal man with crab claws. That . . . That is Memphis.

We stand in the living room of Lucifer's apartment in Hell. Well, I stand—pace—while Alex reclines in one of the armchairs and Memphis pours us two scotches at the bar. When the hideous monster catches me staring at him, he winks.

"I would quit staring if I were you, luv. Your boyfriend might get jealous."

"He's not my boyfriend," I protest at the same time Alex drawls, "Yeah, I don't think we have to worry about me getting jealous."

A frown tugs at Memphis's lips. At least, I'm ninety-nine percent sure it's a frown. His centipede-like lips could just be

getting restless.

“I know I’m an attractive monster, but it’s rude to stare,” he tells me seriously as he attempts to pick up one of the glass tumblers with his red pinchers. I’m honestly surprised when he doesn’t completely destroy the cup in the process. That takes some serious skill.

“Um . . .”

“Girls always fantasize about what it’ll feel like to have my claws up their pussies,” Memphis continues with a prolonged sigh, as if this entire conversation is cumbersome to him. “But it’s rude to proposition someone.”

“I’m not—”

“But if you really want to know what it feels like . . .” Memphis snaps his pinchers mere inches from my face, and I stumble back, practically landing in Alex’s lap. His arms band around me, impenetrable iron vises, and I find that I don’t want to escape him as badly as I should. The heat emitting from his body is almost palpable. It’s like roasting in a warm, toasty furnace.

Not that I think roasting alive would be super pleasurable . . .

“What the fuck are we doing here, Memphis?” Alex asks with a familiarity that reminds me that the two of them once worked together. With Lucifer.

Just another betrayal to add to my betrayal board.

*Note to future Violet—make a betrayal board.*

Memphis moves to claim the couch, and I take the opportunity to study my surroundings once more.

Not much has changed since I've last been here. Everything that was broken has been painstakingly fixed—courtesy, I'm sure, of the grotesque monster sitting opposite us.

Everything is decorated in shades of white and black, the juxtaposition startling enough to make my head spin. In one direction, I see nothing but piercing white, while the other is a sea of obsidian. White tiles. Black leather couch. Black, granite-like coffee table. White walls. The living room bleeds into the kitchen, where an obsidian stone countertop takes up the majority of the space.

I honestly shouldn't find this place as homey as I do.

Does it say something about my mental health that I enjoy the ambiance of my kidnaper-slash-bio dad's home? Is it Stockholm syndrome?

*Note number two for future Violet—look up the symptoms of Stockholm syndrome. And then add your own face to the betrayal board, because you betrayed yourself by feeling a sense of innate peace in Lucifer's residence.*

“I thought the reason you're here is obvious.” Memphis claps his hands together. Correction—he attempts to clap his hands together. Since his “hands” are actually claws, he simply bangs his pinchers together repeatedly until the clacking sound reverberates through the spacious room.

“Explain,” Alex says, his arms tightening around my waist. I shift slightly against him in an attempt to get more comfortable, only stopping when I feel something hard press against my ass.

Unless he has a remote control in his pocket . . .

“You’re here to free the Fomorians, aren’t you?” Memphis says bluntly, and it feels as if an atomic bomb has just been dropped in my lap. My world shatters with that one, nonchalant sentence. It’s suddenly hard to breathe, as if all the oxygen in the air has been replaced with razor blades.

“How did you . . .?”

Memphis’s strange lips twist into something that might resemble a smile. Again, it’s hard to tell with him.

“I’m a seer, dear child,” he confesses, his raspy voice seeming to echo around me. “And not just any seer—but *the* seer. That’s why Lucifer kept me around as long as he did.”

He waits for me to put the pieces together, to come to some inevitable conclusion that remains just out of my reach. But I can’t think beyond the words “seer.”

Just what has Memphis seen? Did he know about Mason? About this upcoming battle?

Alex catches on before I do. He stills beneath me, and I feel rather than see him suck in a ragged gasp, his chest curling in and then expanding.

“You had the vision about Violet ruling, didn’t you? The one about her reclaiming her throne? About Mason . . .?” He doesn’t finish his sentence, but he doesn’t need to. It hangs unspoken in the air between us, permeating it like a poisonous gas cloud.

“You knew Mason was going to die.” The words are nothing but a breathy whisper, nearly inaudible over the sudden racing of my heart, the repetitive boom boom boom that sounds like giants stomping down a hill.

Fierce anger ripples through me, transforming from a mere wave to a tsunami that threatens to swallow me whole.

“Fate can change at the drop of a hat,” Memphis says simply, seemingly uncaring or oblivious to the tension saturating the air. My bet is on the former. He’d have to be an idiot not to feel the daggers I’m hurling at him with my eyes. “Mason could’ve lived or died as easily as you could’ve. All I do is recite what I see and hear in my visions.”

“But if you knew about Mason—” I begin, tears holding me at gunpoint. I wiggle in Alex’s lap, suddenly desperate to go to Memphis and tear off his head, but Alex’s grip only tightens.

“And you’ve seen Violet freeing the Fomorians from their prison in Hell?” he asks. His hands inch under my shirt, and I feel the gentle caress of his fingers against my hipbone, rubbing circles into the skin there. I allow myself to relax against him, though my anger still balances on a precipice, one small shove from being flipped on its head.

“With Lucifer indisposed, Violet is the Queen of Hell,” Memphis replies simply.

And that . . .

That is what makes me begin to laugh hysterically.

I don’t know why.

Out of everything I’ve dealt with in the last few days, I don’t understand why this is the thing that breaks me. My emotions run rampant through me, and try as I might, I can’t articulate a single one of them. Anger, perhaps. Fear. Hilarity. Pain. Grief. They all culminate in this strange burst of sound that half resembles a laugh and half reminds me of a sob. Dread fills me like cement as I continue to laugh and laugh and laugh. Do I understand why I’m laughing? No. Not at all. But it’s like a maelstrom of violence and pain has been

unleashed within me. All my indecipherable emotions burst out of me like a raging fire.

“Is she okay?” Memphis mock whispers to Alex.

“You. Are. S-so. U-ugly,” I gasp around my laughter. No idea why I said that. Apparently, hysterical Violet doesn’t think coherently.

But all I can focus on is that damn centipede smile of his. On that leathery skin hanging loose on an emaciated body. On those pinprick red eyes that seem to penetrate my defenses and see into my soul.

“Violet,” Alex chastises into my ear.

“She’s losing her mind, obviously,” Memphis draws. “And probably her vision as well. Should we get a doctor?”

“M-me? Queen?” I hiccup and then begin to laugh again. Each burst of laughter pours another bottle of acid into my stomach. Is the room spinning, or is it just me? Why do I feel as if I’m going to vomit?

“Just let her get it out,” Alex tells Memphis.

Me . . . a queen.

Of Hell.

I knew what the prophecy stated, but I honestly never expected it to come true. Yes, I know this position is only temporary, but surely, there is someone better suited for the job than me. What if I accidentally free all the demons held captive in Hell’s prisons? What if I overbook Hell’s resort? How the fuck do I calculate Hell’s taxes? Is there an accountant for that shit?

Slowly, the hysteria begins to subside, replaced by a daunting sense of dread and despair. My heart feels sluggish

and sticky.

I'm the queen.

Of Hell.

Fuck. Fuck.

Fuckity fuck.

“Are you done now?” Memphis tilts his strange-shaped head to the side and eyes me curiously.

I do a mental inventory, making sure I'm one-hundred-percent done with my internal freakout. Only when I'm positive I can have a coherent conversation without bursting into laughter or tears do I nod once.

“Yes. I think I am.”

“As I was saying,” Memphis gives me a pointed, irritated look, “as the Queen of Hell, you're able to free anyone from their prison—including the Fomorians. Only *you* are capable of doing such a task.”

“Because I'm the queen?” I tentatively ask.

“Because you have Lucifer's blood running through your veins,” Memphis explains. “But I'd be remiss if I didn't warn you that the process is . . . risky. Lucifer ensured it would be that way, so no one would get any ideas about trying to free the Fomorians themselves using a vial of his blood.”

“How risky?” Alex barks, suddenly alert. His hot breath wafts against my sensitive earlobe, and shivers dance across my skin.

Memphis's voice is unexpectedly grave. “There's a seventy-five percent chance that Violet will die attempting it.”

I suddenly can't breathe. Not because I'm having an existential crisis again—but because Alex is hugging me so tightly that my breath is being siphoned from my lungs.

“No fucking way. You're not doing it,” Alex snaps at me.

“Didn't you hear him? There's a twenty-five percent chance that I'll succeed!”

“You're kidding me, right?” Alex shakes his head, something I feel more than see as his nose brushes against my hair. “Your mates will kill me if I allow you to do this. And I . . . I can't . . .” He breaks off with a growl. “You're not doing this.”

“It's not your choice, Alex.” I try to keep my tone gentle, because I know Alex is simply afraid for me, though I doubt the stubborn bastard will admit it. “It's mine.”

“Who even knows if the Fomorians will help you?” Alex demands. “They're probably furious at Lucifer for locking them away. And you're his damn daughter! They'll kill you!”

“They won't,” Memphis supplies. “I've seen what would happen if the spell works correctly. The Fomorians will help Violet on her quest to reclaim her throne.”

“Not helping,” Alex seethes. I can practically feel the force of his glare thrown at the ugly monster.

“But I've also seen hundreds and hundreds of futures where Violet dies attempting the spell. And if that happens, then the world will descend into chaos.”

Damned if you do; damned if you don't.

“Is there a way for me to win without the Fomorians?” I query timidly. I'm not an idiot, despite what everyone wants to believe, and I don't have a death wish. If there's a way for me



to win this battle without risking my life and the lives of my mates, then I'll do so in a heartbeat. I don't want to die. Not now. I want to grow and love and *live*. I've been trapped in a bubble of fear and inadequacies for far too long; I've only just learned what it means to spread my wings and fly.

I'm sure there's a bat joke in there somewhere, but I don't feel like winging it right now. You can just write this failed joke straight into my *obituary*.

"The chances of you winning without the Fomorians' help is . . ." Memphis's eerie red eyes glaze over, and those strange lips of his scuttle into what appears to be a frown. "Point zero zero three four percent."

"And with the Fomorians?"

"Seventeen percent."

I really, really don't like any of those odds.

"Violet, please." Alex's voice takes on a desperate plea I've never heard before. I feel his face nuzzle against the side of my neck. His lips glide over the smooth skin there, and I can't help but shiver at the feel of him. "Please don't do this. Please."

Instinctively, I lower my hands to his arms still around my waist and rub at the skin there. I can't help but study the intricate tattoos coloring his porcelain flesh. What do they all mean, if anything? I find that I want to take the time to study each and every one and discern their meanings.

When the fuck did that happen?

How did I go from wanting to bite his head off to daydreaming about touching his tattoos . . . with my tongue?

“I have to, Alex.” My voice is a mere whisper. “I need to do this to stop Zeus.”

“But, Violet—”

“We don’t have a choice. Either we attempt this spell and free the Fomorians . . . or we’ll all die under Zeus’s reign.”

# CHAPTER 15



HUX

I don't consider myself a masochist, but I love pain, especially when it means getting to my precious treasure.

So as Balor works his magic on me, his slimy power infiltrating my defenses and seeping through my veins like a poison, I don't allow a single shred of my discomfort to show on my face.

*What do you think she's doing right now?* Jack's timid voice draws my attention to where he rests inside of me, overlooking the scene but not currently interfering. My brother knows me too damn well—I'll never sit idly by while my precious treasure is away from me. *Is she safe?*

*She better be safe,* I growl internally as another javelin of pain pierces my chest. I bite down on my lower lip to keep from crying out. *Or I'll fuck the necromancer so damn hard.*

Jack sighs heavily. *I really wish you would stop saying that.*

*I don't understand what's wrong with it!* I mentally throw my hands up in exasperation. *Do you not want me to fuck Alex? Because I swear to all that is holy, I'll fuck him right up the ass if he allows Violet to be hurt.*

There's a beat of silence, and then, *Do you really not hear yourself right now?*

*Whatever do you mean?*

*I . . . errr . . . nothing.* A comfortable silence settles between the two of us. Conversing with my brother like this allows me to forget the pain rampaging through me, if only for

a moment. My nerve endings are no longer alight and in danger of bursting into flames.

*Is that what Balor's doing? Killing us?* Jack questions.

*For my precious treasure, I'll go willingly into the abyss.*

It's a visceral kind of pain to love someone so fiercely, yet fear you'll never see her again. I'm desperate to set eyes upon the woman who claimed my heart, body, and soul. All it took was one chocolate bar.

*Do you still have the chocolate bar?* Jack muses, obviously picking up on my wayward thoughts.

I scoff. *Of course. I keep it in my most sacred of tombs in a vault that no one knows the combination to.*

*Is the combination one, two, three, four?* Jack questions.

I hesitate. *No.*

*Hux . . .*

*Magician! How did you uncover it? Did I not shield my thoughts well enough?*

I'd been so careful not to choose a combination that had any meaning to me. I wanted to use Violet's birthday before realizing that would be the first thing people guessed. No one with half a brain would believe I would use the combination one, two, three, four. What meaning do those numbers hold for me? None.

Jack must be a wizard.

Another stab of pain has me jerking back in the chair. In the real world, I can see Balor bent in front of me, his fingers hovering over the strange rune on my skin.

My raw, unbridled hatred for Zeus threatens to strangle me like a noose. How dare he brand my flesh with a rune designed to hurt my mate?! If I'm ever going to have permanent markings on my skin, then it'll be Violet's name on the bottom of my back, directly above my ass crack.

*A tramp stamp?* Jack asks, incredulous.

*It's a declaration of love to have your lover's name there, I protest immediately. Mason told me.*

*Of course, he did.*

Another silence descends between us, but this one is heavy and forlorn. I can practically taste Jack's grief intermingling with my own. It settles on my tongue like burnt embers and flaky ash.

*Zeus needs to pay for what he took from us,* Jack growls. The sudden ferocity in his tone takes me by surprise. Of the two of us, my brother is the more mild-mannered one. He prefers using his words over his fists and coming to a resolution that doesn't involve any violence or blood.

Me? I have the mentality that, if bitches aren't bleeding, then they're not paying.

Maybe I'll get that motto tattooed on my rib cage.

*I can't imagine the pain Violet's going through. She lost her mate, Hux. If I ever lost Violet . . .* Jack trails off, unable to articulate the ending of that sentence.

Pain like I can't even articulate rushes through me just at the thought. A world without Violet Dracula is a dark, dreary place and one that I don't want to live in. If she died, I have no doubt that the last shred of my humanity would perish with her. I'll kill everyone in this room, the rest of the world, and then myself.

*If I lost her or you . . . I can't finish that thought. I love you, brother.*

Is this the first time I've said those words out loud?

For hundreds of years, there's been a divide between the two of us. Jack saw me only as a murderous entity who claimed control of his body, and I knew him as the jailer who kept me hostage. Our communication had been scarce as well.

All of that changed when we enrolled in Prodigium Academy.

Jack was the one who chose to attend. I think he finally got sick of my presence in his body after all these years and chose to eradicate me. So, he convinced our father—the ingenious Dr. Jekyll—to enroll us as new students, so he could seek help from the professors. Now, I wonder if fate was tugging us toward Violet all along, knowing instinctively that our futures rest with her.

*I did want to get rid of you*, Jack admits, his voice a hushed murmur in my head. *But now . . .*

*Frankie believes there's a way to separate us, like he did with Balor.* The words rush together, turning into a jumble of syllables and vowels. *Do you still want that?*

Jack takes a moment to answer. But when he does, the noose around my neck loosens incrementally. *I don't know.*

*I don't know either*, I confess.

Not being able to hear every one of Jack's thoughts . . .

Not being able to know he's safe with me . . .

Not being able to sense his emotions . . .

I don't know if I want to be separated from my brother.

*Violet will love us either way*, Jack points out, and I wonder if he's thinking the same thing as me.

Or maybe that's just hopeful thinking.

Why would he want to share his body with an out-of-touch, murderous psychopath like me?

*Of course, she would*, I huff out irritably. *She's perfect.*

*She truly is.*

I don't get a chance to respond.

Suddenly, my brain explodes with a searing pain like a thousand needles are being simultaneously jammed into my skull. I can't keep the scream locked away. It escapes me in a torrent, the sound echoing off the cavernous walls of the man cave.

"What the fuck are you doing?" That voice . . . I recognize it. It's one of Violet's mates. The stabby one—though I suppose that doesn't narrow it down much. They're all stabby.

*Vin*, Jack supplies weakly, but he sounds just as dazed as I am. It's hard to remember where I am, what my purpose is, and what I need to do next. All I'm aware of is the piercing, incandescent pain that turns my brain into a bonfire.

"I'm tugging the magic out of the rune, making it ineffective," a somewhat familiar voice says, sounding strained. I know that voice, but I can't put my finger on where I've heard it.

"You better hurry the fuck up, Balor. If you kill them—"

"Shut up and let me concentrate!"

Pain.

So much pain.



It's everywhere. Consuming me. Biting at me. Raking its  
poison-tipped claws down my spine.

*Violet . . .* Jack says weakly.

*My precious treasure!*

And then I'm aware of nothing but darkness.

# CHAPTER 16



## VIOLET

**H**ell's prison has a waiting room.

It's surprisingly cozy, with plush white couches that line the far wall and a few cushioned chairs opposite it. A demon mans the receptionist desk, her long fingernails clacking obnoxiously as she types on a computer.

The demons in Hell are . . . interesting, to say the least.

I've only seen a few during my time here, but they all look relatively similar. Lucifer sure does believe in conformity down below.

The receptionist, for example, is what you'd get if you took a woman and skinned her alive. Her red, patchy flesh looks particularly brutal under the fluorescent lights. Two horns erupt from the top of her head, curling slightly like a ram's. They're black as pitch and quite literally refract any and all light. Her face is just as grotesque—two nostrils where a nose should be, lips stitched into a perpetual smile, and bulging eyes that remind me distinctly of a frog. She has long fingernails as well, though it appears as if she painted them. I see pink and purple stripes adorning each of her five-inch nails.

Memphis arrives from a back room, dips his chin respectfully at the receptionist, and then turns toward me.

“We're ready.”

Restless anticipation skitters across my flesh like an army of beetles. My hands are suddenly slick with sweat, yet none of that moisture can find its way into my mouth. It's as dry as a motherfucking desert.

Alex glares at Memphis but doesn't protest as I amble to my feet and walk toward the door.

*This is it, I mentally tell myself. You can do this. You're a strong, independent woman and the mother-effing Queen of Hell.*

Even as I think that, fear threatens to strangle me. It's a type of terror so visceral that it cuts me to the bone.

I don't want to die.

I'm not ready to.

And yet . . .

"Violet, you don't have to do this," Alex begs for the one millionth time in the last hour. "We can find another way."

"You can't," Memphis singsongs.

"Not fucking helping!"

"Alex . . ." I pause and turn to face the brooding necromancer. In the bright, artificial lighting of the prison's hallway, Alex's face appears even paler than usual. His cheeks are sunken, and dark circles mar the skin beneath both of his eyes. It looks as if he's aged ten years in a span of ten minutes, and my heart cracks down the middle. "I'll be okay."

"How can you be sure?" He doesn't yell the question. It's a broken whimper from a broken man who doesn't know quite what to do with the emotions percolating inside of him.

That fissure down the center of my heart expands and grows.

"Because I'm Violet motherfucking Dracula," I say determinedly, refusing to allow him to see my own fear. "And I refuse to fade away."

Alex snorts. “Even if you die, you’ll never fade away. You’re too damn stubborn for that.”

“Is that a compliment?”

“No.”

“I think it is.” I smile dorkily up at him. “Just admit it, Alex. You liiiiikeee me.”

“Shut up.”

“You liiikeee meee sooo much.” I begin to dance on the tips of my toes, that stupid smile never leaving my face. “You want to kiiiiissss me—”

And he does.

His lips meld to mine with such intensity that my teasing retort is quite literally swallowed by him. I dissolve into his body like raindrops pattering into a puddle. He’s all I can focus on. All I can feel. The hard planes of his body mold to my soft curves, and I swear it’s like he pressed a switch to jumpstart my core. It throbs for him, for this broken man, for this enemy-turned-lover that I can’t help but desire. My skin becomes alive with activity. I swear I feel him everywhere. My brain short-circuits because there’s too much electricity coursing through my veins.

Alex’s tongue piercing gently presses against the seam of my lips, demanding more from me. There’s an unspoken question in that tentative kiss, one that I don’t have an answer to.

But I open for him, allowing his tongue to tangle with my own, for his hands to slide down my spine and cup the curve of my ass—

“Ahem.” A throat clears from behind us. “Are you guys forgetting about the end of the world?”

It’s like someone dumped a bucket of ice water on my head.

I jump away from Alex, as if I’ve been burned, and hastily scrub at my lips. I don’t know why. The last thing I want to do is remove the evidence of our heated kiss, especially when his eyes look the way they do—molten and swimming with desire.

“Yes, of course. End of the world. Fun times,” I say, half out of my mind with lust.

I blame Alex.

Stupid, irritating, sexy-as-hell Alex.

I suddenly can’t look at him, though I feel the full power of his gaze like a physical caress. Did he suddenly develop X-ray vision? Why does it feel as if he can see through me?

Stupid Alex.

Stupid, sexy, beautiful, broken, annoying Alex.

Ugh.

“Violet, please—” Alex begins, and his fingertips graze my wrist.

But I still don’t turn to meet his probing gaze. I know if I do, that’ll be it. I’ll fall apart for this man the way I’ve done for all my other mates. Anything he asks of me, I’ll do.

That’s dangerous.

Extremely dangerous.

The fate of the world depends on me completing this damn spell and freeing the Fomorians. I can’t allow anything to get

in the way, not even my mates.

Mates . . .

Because I know with unwavering certainty, just from our kiss, that Alex falls into that category. I think a part of me always suspected as much. Even when we hated each other, we found ways to collide and clash. I'm the sun and he's the moon, and we're constantly chasing each other through the heavens. But there's a brief, brief moment when the sun and moon can exist in relative harmony, both lighting up the sky.

Mate.

The truth of that one word settles into the marrow of my bones. It's a part of me—a facet of my genetic makeup.

Alex is my mate.

Mine.

That kiss only cemented what we've both been dancing around for months now.

Does he know?

Did he feel our connection flaring to life with that one simple kiss?

Simple.

I scoff.

There was absolutely nothing simple about it.

He possessed me with each swipe of his tongue against my own. There was no doubt in that moment who I belonged to.

Alex is my motherfucking mate.

Which makes what I have to do so much harder.

“Alex, please.”

“You felt it, right?” His voice grows desperate. “The connection between us? You’re mine, Violet Dracula. Mine.”

“And you’re mine.” A single tear trickles down my cheek and catches on the edge of my lips. “Which is why I need to do this.” I take another step toward where Memphis stands at the end of the hallway. “But if you can’t be here to witness it —”

“No way in hell am I letting you go alone!” Alex barks, practically shouldering me out of the way in his rush to get into the room.

I don’t immediately follow him, though. Not with my emotions so raw and profound.

I have another mate.

Alex.

Why would the universe do this to me? Why would it make me accept my feelings for him and then threaten to tear me away? Fate’s nothing but a spinning coin just waiting to fall. Heads or tails, it doesn’t matter. Either option will end in bloodshed.

*Pull on your big girl panties, Violet, I chastise myself firmly. You need to do this. For Alex. For Vin. For Dimitri. For Hux. For Jack. For Frankie. For Barret. For Cal.*

*For Mason.*

My heartbeat steadily slows to a thrumming tune as I take a deep breath.

In and out.

In and out.

In and out.



Only when I'm sure I'm not going to fall apart do I step inside the room Memphis indicates.

“Welcome to the Fomorians’ prison!” Memphis swoops his claw out in a ta-da motion as I gape.

This . . .

*This* is what I expected a prison of Hell to look like.

Everything in this room is dark, drab, and dreary—the three Ds of despair. The brimstone walls seem to be leaking lava, the red and orange of the flames providing the only lighting. Directly in front of us is a huge doorway that almost appears to be nothing but a rock. Just . . . a rock. However, there are strange markings carved into the gray stone that seem to thrum with power.

I take a step closer just as the door swings shut behind me with an ominous thump.

“What do I need to do?” I don’t speak above a whisper. I can’t. There’s something about the quietness of the room that seems almost . . . tranquil. Peaceful? No, those words don’t sound right. It’s the type of silence you’d experience when you enter a bear’s den. You don’t even know you’re dead until a huge, furry paw connects with your face and slashes you to ribbons.

Memphis turns toward the floor, where there’s a shallow hole in the shape of a body. Trenches branch off from it, all of them leading to the stone door.

“Your blood,” Memphis says as he reaches into his cloak pocket and produces a god-blessed dagger. “When we cut you open, the blood will flow through these grooves and activate the runes Lucifer placed on the stone. Only then will the door be unlocked and the Fomorians freed.”

“No.” Alex shakes his head adamantly. “No way in hell. Violet, you’re not doing this.”

“I need to, Alex.” How many times are we going to have this conversation?

“I’ll do it!”

“Do you have Lucifer’s blood in your veins?” Memphis questions dryly.

Alex’s lips compress together. “There has to be another way,” he insists.

“I’ll be fine.” I take a timid step toward the hole in the ground and slowly lower myself into it. It almost seems to conform to my body. I can feel the hard edges of the brimstone brushing against my arms and legs, ice-cold when compared to my overheated flesh. “Memphis, do whatever you need to do.”

Memphis nods stoutly and takes a step toward me, the blade extended.

With a roar, Alex lunges for us, his russet-black eyes wild with rage . . . before he abruptly falls to the ground, snoring.

Holy shit.

“I’m related to the boogeyman, after all,” Memphis says when he notes my shocked stare. Then his expression turns grave. “When you do this, Violet, your soul will drain, along with your blood. You’ll need to hold on for the full duration of the spell. Do you understand?”

My heart thunders like a war drum in my ears. And maybe that’s an accurate simile. It feels as if I’m charging headfirst into battle, after all.

“I can do it.” There’s very little conviction in my voice.

*Think of your mates, Violet.*

*They need you.*

*If you die, Zeus will kill them.*

It's that thought alone that bolsters my resolve. I can tell the Grim Reaper to fuck all the way off if it means keeping my men safe, right?

“Then let's begin.” Memphis takes a deep breath, his strange mouth curving downward, and then he begins to slice at my flesh.

# CHAPTER 17



JACK

**M**aybe you should let me take control of the body, I suggest, inwardly wincing as more blood splashes across our face. *At least for a little while.*

Hux ignores my request as he bends down and begins painstakingly cutting off the dead guard's finger.

"They need to pay for keeping me from my precious treasure," Hux retorts firmly as he finally rips the finger free.

I watch, physically unable to look away, as Hux uses his knife to carve a hole through the bottom of the finger. He then adds the finger to the string of other fingers he's collected—a necklace for Violet.

A necklace . . . of fingers.

Gah.

Hux hums noncommittally as he straightens from his crouched position and wipes at the blood on his cheek.

Almost as soon as Balor finished the spell—and the Fomorian confirmed that the rune will no longer impact us—Hux raced out of our prison, much to the other guys' dismay. My brother was determined to get to Violet, and he wasn't going to wait for anyone or anything.

But then he stumbled upon one of Zeus's guards.

Apparently, he doesn't feel comfortable seeing Violet without a present expressing his deepest apologies for trying to kill her. I tried to tell him that it isn't necessary, that Violet loves us, that she knows we weren't in control, but Hux was insistent.

That was twenty-three bodies ago.

Twenty-three *fingers* ago.

Hux studies his masterpiece with a slightly cocked head.

“Do you think my precious treasure will like her present? I heard jewelry is the way to win a woman’s heart.”

I debate my next words very, very carefully.

*Usually, that jewelry doesn’t involve body parts.*

*But they’re the body parts of her enemies,* Hux insists. This time, his voice reverberates through our shared head. *Violet will love her gift.*

*I’m sure she will,* I agree, somewhat hesitantly.

Do I think Violet will enjoy her necklace of fingers? Of course. My girl is as bloodthirsty as they come.

Do I want to remain here, killing guards, when we could be traveling to our mate right about now? Not at all.

I’m desperate to see her, to hold her, to assure myself she’s okay. Losing Mason destroyed her—I could see that clear as day in her expressive eyes, the twinkling blue appearing like the roiling waves of an ocean in the middle of the night. I’ve never seen such darkness in her gaze before, such heartbreak. It cleaved off a piece of my own heart.

Hux has obviously been listening to my internal monologue. He heaves out an irritated breath and shoves his necklace of fingers into his pocket. However, the darn thing is too big to fit properly, so a few fingers end up hanging out, saluting the world in a bouquet of middle fingers.

“Precious Treasure is waiting for us,” Hux agrees. “We need to go to her.”

*Yes, I agree readily. Perhaps we should wait for the others. Or rescue Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula—*

*No time, Hux interrupts firmly. I need to get to my precious treasure. Now.*

*So, you have time to murder a couple dozen guards but not rescue Violet's parents and other mates?*

*Exactly.* Hux nods his head decisively. If I had control of our body, I would be rolling my eyes so hard right now. I love my brother, I truly do, but when it comes to our mate, his morality is severely skewed.

Ignoring the bodies littering the ground, Hux walks toward the huge door at the end of the now red-painted hall. A frown tugs at the corners of his lips when he notes the fingerprint scanner on the wall beside it—a startling contrast to the ancient architecture of the rest of Mount Olympus.

“What the ever-bloody fuck is this?” Hux roars as he begins to jab at the scanner repeatedly.

A mechanical voice intones from the speakers above, “Authorization denied.”

Hux whirls around. “Who’s there? Come out, you witch!”

He jabs the scanner again.

“Authorization denied.”

“Are you hiding in the ceiling? Come out and face me like a monster!” Hux roars, spinning in a circle.

*Hux, it's just the machine.* I try to keep my voice calm, so as to not startle him further.

“The machine’s trying to keep me from my precious treasure!” he bellows, his hands curling into fists as he

prepares to fight some invisible threat.

*Let me . . .* I whisper, and this time, Hux doesn't fight me as I claim control of our body, wiggling my way into the driver's seat. Hux is still growling and murmuring incoherently as he settles in beside me, content to watch through my eyes.

With a prolonged sigh of my own, I reach into my pocket and pull out the necklace of fingers. I press the first one flush against the scanner and wait.

“Authorization denied.”

*THE WITCH IS BACK*, Hux hollers in my mind. Images barrage me of Hux repeatedly stabbing a faceless, nameless monster in the heart.

I grab a second finger and press it to the scanner.

“Authorization denied.”

*I won't let you keep me from my precious treasure!* Hux roars.

I do the same with the third, fourth, and fifth fingers, ignoring Hux's incessant bellowing in my head. By the time I reach the sixth finger on the keychain of limbs, the light above the door flashes green, and the doors slide open.

*The witch knew better than to mess with me*, Hux growls. *She knows to fear me.*

*Yes*, I respond dryly. *She's quivering in her shoes.*

*As she should be.*

I've just taken my first step outside—where the ground resembles that of a fluffy cloud, and a pearlescent bridge spreads as far as the eye can see—when pain cuts through me.



Unspeakable, unexplainable, indescribable pain.

I gasp and clutch at my chest. It feels as if my soul is being funneled out of my body, as if my heart is being tossed into a meat grinder, as if my limbs are being tugged in every direction. A startled cry catches in my throat as I attempt to inhale around the daggers in my throat.

Pain.

So much pain.

Violet.

My connection to her—that silver cord that always shines brightly, no matter where we are or what we’re doing—begins to fade. I watch in dawning horror as it flickers once, twice, three times before turning to a dull, monotone shade of gray.

“No,” I breathe as my lungs constrict and fear like I’ve never felt before captures me in a chokehold.

*Violet!* Hux roars, battling against me, attempting to regain control.

*What the fuck is going on?* I demand. It’s not often I swear, but I can’t focus on anything but the fear and agony coursing through me.

Where’s Violet?

Is she okay?

“We need to go to her. Now.”

Surprisingly, that dogmatic, succinct voice doesn’t come from my brother. I turn, my body abnormally cold, to see Dimitri Gray stalking toward us like an avenging angel hell-bent on death and destruction. Sweat drips down his cheeks, and his blond hair hangs in ragged clumps around his face. I

eye the rune still etched into his skin, but it no longer seems as vibrant as before. Obviously, Balor did to Dimitri whatever he did to me and Hux to rid us of the rune's power, despite its continuous presence on our flesh.

"You felt that too?" I whisper, my voice barely audible over the sluicing of blood in my ears.

Dimitri doesn't bother to dignify my question with a response. Instead, he turns toward the nearest window and places his hand to the surface. I watch in numb shock as the glass becomes intangible and begins to swirl in a vortex of color—vibrant red, aspen yellow, and burnt orange.

Our headmaster doesn't even wait for us to follow as he steps through the portal, disappearing from view.

*Go! Go! Go!* Hux screams at me, but I don't need him to tell me twice. If this portal has even a snowball's chance in heck to bring me to Violet, then I'll step through it willingly. I don't even care if I have to travel through the nine layers of Hell or fight off a thousand angry, snarling beasts. I'll do anything—absolutely anything—to return to my mate.

My world.

Almost as soon as I step into the portal, a cloying odor bites into my esophagus. It takes me a solid two seconds to pinpoint that smell—sulfur.

Is Violet in Hell?

My heart feels like it's being squeezed through a glass straw as I force myself to move through the swirl of bright colors, needing to get to her, to see her, to hold her.

The portal spits me out, and I tumble across the ground, pain reverberating through my body as it hits every rock and stick along the way.

“Ugh,” I groan, already pushing to my feet as I take in the large room we’ve found ourselves in.

The first thing I note is the huge stone directly in front of me. Tiny trenches have been carved into the rock, and as I watch, transfixed, a red substance slides upward, defying the law of gravity itself.

Is that . . . blood?

My tired, abused body latches on to that one fact as I twist my head. Surprise lances through me when I see Alex, of all people, passed out on the floor beside me. He seems relatively unharmed—there’s not a scratch on him that I can see—so it doesn’t make sense why he would be unconscious.

And then Dimitri’s roar of pure, unbridled rage pierces through my remaining numbness.

I scramble around completely and hurry toward the sound, my heart playing leapfrog in my chest, becoming stuck somewhere in the general vicinity of my throat.

No. No. No.

Hux’s voice is a low, melancholic cry as he screams, *Precious Treasure!*

Lying in a human-shaped trench in the ground is none other than Violet Dracula.

Numerous cuts and slashes line her perfect body, blood flowing freely. All of that blood enters one of the various trenches surrounding her and travels straight to the stone door, where it climbs upward, filling every crack and recess carved into it.

My mate’s body is still, her face ashen, her pulse low and thready.

“No!” I fall to my knees beside her and reach for her. I’m belatedly aware of Dimitri saying, “Don’t touch her!” but I can’t stop myself.

The second my hand would’ve made contact with her pale cheek, it ricochets off an invisible barrier. Electricity thrums through my body.

“What the fuck?” I bellow. Or maybe Hux bellows. It’s hard to tell who has control of the body at this moment. We’re both aligned for the first time in forever. Our souls, our hearts, our minds . . . They’re not our own. They belong to the pale, still woman lying inside the ground.

“You can’t touch her until the spell is complete,” a droll voice announces from the opposite side of the room. I turn, moderately surprised to see Memphis standing there, his beady red eyes fixated on Violet’s prone form. “Her blood is needed to open the doors holding the Fomorians.”

“Stop this!” Dimitri rages, his icy blue eyes alight with fury. He looks every inch the ruthless, savage assassin that stalks the streets of the monster world. I can see his fingers palm the hilt of his dagger.

“I can’t.” Memphis shrugs nonchalantly. “No one can. Only when the spell’s completed and the Fomorians are free will you be able to touch your Violet.”

“She’s dying,” I whisper brokenly.

“She knew that when she began the spell.”

Dimitri whirls toward Violet, his eyes frantic with madness and pain. He drops to his knees beside her and hovers his hands over her frozen form.

“You stupid, irritating woman. How could you do this to me? To us? If you die, we’re just going to have to follow you

to the next life. You know that, don't you? There's no point in being here without you." Dimitri's voice takes on a pleading edge I've never heard from him before. "You need to remain alive, Violet Dracula, so I can tell you that I love you. I love you, and I hate you for it, but that doesn't change the fact that you are my entire world. I'll kill anyone who dares try to take you from me—even if it's yourself. Please, Violet. Please."

I feel as if my heart is cracking down the middle.

A world without Violet in it?

It's not one I want to live in.

I move to kneel opposite Dimitri in the strange, cavernous room. Almost belatedly, I take in the dark brimstone, the molten lava, the fire scorching the walls like grasping claws. This . . . this is what I always expected Hell to be like.

And it's the one place Violet Dracula should never, ever be.

She's too pure, too innocent, too full of light to find herself down here.

If she were able to talk, she would make a quip about how she always knew she was fated to end up in Hell.

*She's going to live!* Hux bellows, the noise causing my brain to rattle. It's almost as if he believes the louder he screams, the more likely she is to hear us and listen.

*She needs to,* I agree.

So, I remain there, kneeling beside the woman I love, watching her life drain away and helpless to do anything to stop it. Hux rages inside of my head, a volatile beast waiting to be unleashed, and Dimitri has gone perfectly still. I imagine the others are just as frantic at the moment. I can't even

imagine the carnage and bloodshed that will occur when they arrive.

*Violet, my love . . .*

*You need to wake up.*

*Because if you don't, it's not just Zeus the world will have to worry about.*

*It's all of us.*

# CHAPTER 18



MASON

**T**he second she takes a step toward me, the sunlight glistening across her golden hair and her blue eyes wide and guileless, I remember everything.

Who I am.

Who she is.

What happened.

And I know, with unwavering certainty, that she's not supposed to be here.

As I take her in, a strange mixture of despair and happiness swirls inside of me like a whirlpool. She hasn't noticed me yet, so I allow myself to study her unobstructed.

She's exactly as I remember her—an angel sent from Hell to destroy me, sew me back together, and somehow make me whole. She's both my greatest sin and most wonderful salvation. She saved me when I didn't even realize I needed saving, reforming a broken man into one worthy of her love.

A tiny tendril of electricity curls through my chest as her head swivels in my direction. I doubt she recognizes me—I'm on the opposite side of the clearing, crouching behind a row of bushes—but I allow myself to believe that she does.

“Where am I?” A tiny trickle of fear edges itself into her normally unflappable voice. It breaks my heart to hear.

But I can't let her see me, no matter how selfish I want to be.

She needs to go back.



This isn't her time.

God, I want nothing more than to run to her, pull her into my arms, and kiss her senseless. But I'm afraid if I do that, I'll never allow her to leave again. Maybe the old Mason would've taken what he wanted, regardless of the consequences, but the new one loves his pinkie more than life itself.

Violet.

My mate.

My love.

Confusion and disbelief warring with betrayal clouds her brilliant blue eyes as she studies the clearing—the place between life and death that all souls travel to before crossing over.

I'd been watching her for days now, completely unaware of who this striking woman was to me. All I knew was that I needed to protect her however I could. And then I saw her fade away, her spirit drifting from her body as her blood and power were used to free the Fomorians.

Fear started to edge in over the shock as I watched her life trickle away.

No. Not yet.

It's too soon.

But now, she's here, set loose from my greatest nightmare and come to rip me from the reality I've come to accept.

Fuck Zeus.

Fuck him to the deepest pits of Hell, where he belongs.

The need for his death is a rampant desire that blocks out all else. My death? I could handle that, even when I didn't know who I was or my purpose in the afterlife. But Violet's?

Steel bands encircle my chest as I watch my mate, and that familiar tendril of dread nestles into my stomach. She looks . . . frightened. Confused. Terrified.

Would it be bad if I revealed myself to her?

Am I selfless enough to let her go again?

As if she's attuned to my thoughts—hell, maybe she is—Violet's eyes track to mine, even with the clearing separating us. Goose bumps pop up all over my skin, even as the anvil in my chest makes it hard to breathe.

*Not your time.*

*Go away.*

*Come here.*

*Don't leave me.*

The conflicting voices riot within me as I take a step away from the bush I was hiding behind.

“Mason?” Violet's voice is a hushed gasp, rife with pain. The muted sunlight dappling across her skin makes her look even more ethereal than ever.

Guilt burrows deep as I venture another step toward her.

“You shouldn't be here.” That's what I mean to say, but that's not what comes out. Instead, I say, “I've missed you so much.”

All I know is that I've been floating aimlessly for a while now, unaware of who I was and why I was stuck here. And then, suddenly, all my missing memories hit me like a strike of

lightning, the strength of them so palpable they were like a living force.

Violet Dracula.

Pinkie.

My mate.

My greatest love.

My only love.

And now she's here, in front of me, her eyes lasered on my face . . .

I crumble.

The world around me changes and distorts—one of the very few benefits of being dead—and I find myself back in my house at Prodigium Academy. Of course, it's not actually the house, but it looks real enough that both Violet and I gasp in shock.

Behind Violet, a door glimmers with bright, luminescent light, and I know that the second she steps through that door, she'll leave me and go back to where she belongs.

But fuck, she's here.

In front of me.

A smile breaks out on her face like sunshine through the clouds. How can someone look so sweet and innocent, yet house such a wild creature within?

Raindrops patter in my gut as I finally give in to the urge to push a strand of blonde hair behind her ear. My voice trembles with the enormity of my emotions for her when I say, "You shouldn't be here."

But I don't push her away.

I don't tell her to go through that door and reenter the land of the living while she still has the chance.

*Selfish bastard!*

"Mason." Her lower lip begins to tremble as she stares up at me. "You're here. I've missed you so much."

I swallow. "I've missed you too, Pinkie. I can't even tell you how much. But I can't allow you to stay with me, no matter how selfish I want to be."

Her brows furrow as confusion paves its way across her face. "What do you mean? Where am I, exactly?"

A thread of despair unfurls in my stomach, curling around the knot of grief already there.

Does she not know that she's dying?

That she's far enough gone to enter the veil between life and death?

"Violet . . . Pinkie . . . you're dying."

"I'm what?" She gapes up at me.

"I've been keeping an eye on you—" even when I had no idea who you were— "and the spell you're performing to free the Fomorians is killing you." Tears burn my eyes as I spin her toward the glimmering doorway, slightly smaller than it was only a few seconds ago. "You need to go back. Before the door is gone forever."

"What?" She spins back around to face me, her eyes frantic. "What about you?"

I offer her a sad smile. "I can't go with you, Pinkie."

"I'm not leaving you!"

I grasp her hands between mine as I beseech her with my eyes to listen. “You don’t have a choice, Pinkie. You’re needed back on Earth. Your mates need you. Hell, the world needs you. I’ll be here—”

“No.” Tears cascade down her cheeks as she shakes her head in denial. “I’m not leaving you.”

God, her agony hurts me more than my own death did. It feels as if slivers of ice have lodged themselves under my ribs and are currently digging into my heart.

“I want to be selfish and keep you with me forever,” I whisper, allowing myself to memorize her the way I hadn’t in death. That waterfall of golden hair. Her sharp collarbones sticking out like the wings of a bird. The full lower lip that always makes her appear as if she’s pouting.

Beautiful.

I once wondered why others spoke of love in terms of “fire” and “burning” and “heat.” It seemed like such a strange metaphor. Now, I understand why authors would use those terms in regards to that foreign emotion. The heat flowing through my veins as I stare at her is a testament to that.

“I’m not leaving you.” She shakes her head stubbornly. “Come with me.”

“Violet—”

“Mason . . .” She pushes up onto her tiptoes before I can protest and presses her lips to mine.

I should push her away, push her toward that ever-shrinking door, but I can’t. Not with her mouth moving against mine like she might die if she doesn’t get to kiss me. Correction—might die *again*.

Heat spreads through the pit of my stomach as I tangle my fingers into her lambent gold hair and increase the pressure. I want her taste imprinted on my tongue, so when she travels back to the world of the living, I can always have her with me. The trepidation I felt before melts into heat, traversing my veins like liquid fire.

Why did I want her to leave?

I can't remember.

All I know is that each press of her lips against my own is kindling an unimaginable blaze.

Our movements are desperate as she reaches for the belt on my jeans. She tugs at the denim until my hard cock springs free, already dripping with precum. She rubs at my length as she continues to kiss and kiss and kiss me. I lose myself in her, in the feel of her lips, in the dance of our tongues against one another.

"I missed you. I missed you so damn much," she murmurs as she strokes me. I tilt her chin up to get access to her neck, peppering kisses across the skin there. Desire beats through my blood like a pulse.

I know there's something I need to do, something I need to remember, but one touch from Violet Dracula tugs at me like a siren, dragging me under, drowning me in bliss.

I desperately work to remove her panties, though I leave her skirt on. There's something insanely erotic about both of us being mostly dressed.

"I love you, Pinkie. More than I ever thought possible." I heft her up, and she wraps both of her legs around my waist. I move us backward until she's flush against the wall, my arms under her ass.

I stare intently into her eyes, noting that they're everything she is—tender and witty, kind and empathetic, sassy and sarcastic.

The back of my eyes prickle as I allow myself to be swept away in my feelings for her. The love and adoration. The respect and yearning.

“Violet . . .”

“Fuck me, Mason.” She recaptures my lips as I easily slide into her. Her pussy clenches around my length in a way that has me seeing stars. Light reflects on her blue eyes like a sunset on the water. I can't look away.

“I love you. I love you so damn much.” It's all I can think to say as I fuck her tight, little pussy, losing myself in her body. She feels like perfection around my cock. How could I have possibly forgotten about this? About her?

I fuck her up against the wall as she rakes her finger down my shoulders before inching them toward the edge of my beanie.

“Violet—” I don't get a chance to finish my sentence before she tugs the gray hat away, unveiling my snakes. They hiss and writhe, but they don't shy away from her the way they would with strangers. They know innately who she is to me, to us.

Pinkie runs her fingers through the nest of green and yellow snakes, and my eyelids flutter shut at the sensation.

“Fuck, that feels good,” I confess.

“Your cock feels good,” she quips with a teasing grin.

I match her smile with one of my own. “Of course, it does. It's the best cock that ever cocked.”

“The best dick that ever dicked.”

“The best penis that ever penised.”

She wrinkles her nose adorably. “That one sounded weird.”

My laughter catches in my throat as her pussy spasms around my length. “Fuck, Pinkie, I don’t know how much longer I’m going to last.”

The smile fades from her face as she reaches up to cup my cheeks. I turn boneless in her arms, lost in my feelings for her, in the foreign emotions she evokes from my broken soul.

Helplessly, I turn sideways to kiss the inside of her wrist.

“Come for me, Mason,” she breathes. “Come inside of me.”

My hips stutter, and my balls feel impossibly heavy. When she squeezes my cock yet again, I’m helpless to resist. I desperately tug down her shirt so her tits spring free and lean down to bite at her pink, perfect nipple. I graze the beaded nub with my teeth as I fall apart inside of her.

“Oh, fuck.” She tugs at the snakes on my head as I suck even more of her breast into my mouth. I lap at her sensitive peak with the tip of my tongue as she spasms around me, losing herself in the most beautiful form of oblivion.

Our mating was quick and messy and completely unromantic. I took her against the damn wall like a caveman. Hell, we still have almost all our clothes on.

But I wouldn’t have it any other way.

A heavy weight settles on my shoulders when I realize our time has come to an end. I can’t be a selfish bastard. Not with her.



She must see the grim acceptance in my eyes. Her own expression shutters, and tears create tracks down her cheeks.

“Mason,” she sobs, emotion crackling and burning in her voice like a fire raging out of control.

“I know, Pinkie.” I desperately try to wipe away her tears as they come. “I’m here. I love you. Don’t forget that.”

Don’t forget me.

But I don’t say those words aloud. They remain trapped in my head, my dirtiest secret, my worst fear.

It suddenly hurts to breathe past the tightness in my throat. I don’t want to say goodbye.

What if I just . . . kept her here? Fuck the world and everyone in it. We could remain as ghosts, haunting Earth and refusing to cross over. Zeus won’t be able to digest our souls, and we can be together.

I dismiss that idea in a tidal wave of fury.

I won’t be selfish when it comes to Violet. I can’t.

“You need to go.” My voice is a cold, brittle sound, like cracking icicles.

A rough gasp escapes Violet’s throat.

Reluctantly, I pull out of Violet and drop her feet to the ground. She stands before me like a marble statue made flesh—her panties around her ankles and her breasts bare, her pink nipples wet with my saliva. The sight has my cock twitching yet again, and I suddenly wish I took my time with her. That, instead of just fucking, we made love. I want to memorize every crook and crevice of her body. I want to taste her pussy on my tongue and have those pink lips of her wrap around my

throbbing dick at least one more time. I want her fangs to pierce my flesh as she bites and claims me.

Loving her has been its own profound kind of purity. For once in my life, I wasn't driven by my own selfish desires and wants. Maybe this is how our story is meant to end for now. I'll watch over her from the afterlife as she continues *living*. Surviving. Thriving.

Didn't I hear somewhere that all the best happily ever afters are paved in agony?

I'll wait for her.

Soon, she'll join me in the afterlife, but not now. She's needed on Earth with her other mates.

Pain takes root in my bones, and I feel my eyes well with tears at the knowledge of all I'll be missing.

I won't be able to marry her.

I won't be able to see her rounded with our children, if that's what she wants.

I won't be able to see her rule the world the way I always knew she could.

No . . . that's a lie.

I *will* be able to see all of that. I just won't be able to participate. She'll grieve me, sure, but it won't be long until she moves on with her other mates. She'll relish in her love for them and theirs for her, while I remain this disembodied entity on the outskirts of her life, a dream that, one day, she'll wake up from and forget about.

Pain spears my chest, but I try not to let her see it.

“It’s time for you to go.” I rearrange her shirt, so she’s covered, but she doesn’t bother to pull up her panties. She merely kicks them aside with a ferocious growl.

“How many times do I need to say this? I’m. Not. Leaving. You.” She jabs a finger at my face with each word, her face turning red with fury.

I smirk at her as I tuck my cock back into my pants and zip myself up.

“Pinkie, for once in my life, I’m going to be selfless. Remember that. I love you.” I punctuate the words with a quick kiss to her lips.

“What—?” Before she can mount a protest, I throw her over my shoulder and beeline toward the glowing door at the edge of the room. It’s barely a slit of light now, but I know it’ll be enough.

“Mason!” Violet screams, pounding at my back. “Don’t! Please!” The words are a desperate sob that claws at my insides.

“I love you, Pinkie. Don’t . . . don’t forget me, okay? I’m not sure if you’ll remember this moment, but . . . Fuck! Just don’t forget me.”

“Mason!”

Her voice continues to reverberate through my head as I toss her through the doorway, watching her disappear from view. Instantly, I try to follow, but it’s like trying to move against a brick wall.

“No. No. No. No.” I pound at the invisible barrier keeping me from my mate.

And then, the doorway flashes bright before dissipating from view, the veil between the living and dead shutting once more.

Leaving me alone.

Violet Dracula didn't just take my breath away. She stole my fucking heart and ran away with it.

When I first realized I was dead, I was confused and a little frightened. Then I was angry.

Now? I'm a husk of a man, fated to roam this earth as an intangible being, watching the woman I love forget about me. How long until the afterlife claims my memories yet again? How long until I'm a broken vessel drifting through the abyss?

For the first time since I died, I sink to the floor and cry for the life I'll never get to live.

# CHAPTER 19



VIOLET

**F**ire.

My veins are on fire.

The flames scorch wherever they touch, but it's a blissful kind of agony.

Because in the flames . . . I see *him*.

Mason.

I try to reach for him, try to tug him to me, but he evades my reach. Memories barrage me then, but I'm not sure if any of them are true—his arms underneath my ass as he pushes me against the wall and pounds into me. His lips devouring my own. And then his tear-filled eyes as he shoves me through a strange, flickering doorway of light.

But no . . . that wasn't real, was it?

Fire.

I'm on fire.

My soul screams for a man that should be in paradise, lounging on a beach in some type of heaven. However, his paradise has been brutally ripped away from him by the same man who stole his life to begin with.

Zeus killed my love, and now he prohibited him from traveling to the next life.

I feel broken, each little, jagged piece of me still desperately trying to get to Mason. I've been carved apart by this unnerving type of love I can't articulate or even begin to understand.

Why does it have to hurt so much?

And then I hear voices. Muted, indistinct voices that somehow break through the web my brain has been spinning.

Low. Masculine. Desperate.

“Wake the fuck up, Violet! Now!”

My blood stirs, and I begin to feel restless.

Where am I?

Am I asleep?

Why can't I wake up?

Fire.

I'm on fire.

“Precious Treasure. Please.”

I know that voice. It calls to something deep inside of me—a primitive piece of my being that prowls just beneath the surface.

A boulder drops through the hollow remains of my chest as I strain my ears to listen.

Why can't I wake up?

And why is my body burning?

Fire.

I'm on fire.

“Why the fuck isn't she waking up?” a strong voice demands.

“Vin, calm down,” another one says.

Familiar.

So, so familiar.

Something about these two men sends butterflies into flight in my stomach. With them, I can sleep. They'll protect me.

“Oh no, you don't, Ms. Dracula. You are not leaving us.” That smoky voice skates over my skin in a physical caress. For some reason, I envision a man with shoulder-length white-blond hair and icy blue eyes. Beautiful. Predatory. Deadly.

Mine.

Mason.

Where is he?

Why isn't he here with me?

Why can't I hear him?

Those familiar tides of fire continue to sweep across my skin. I want to cry out and writhe in agony, but something keeps me immobilized. Why can't I move?

Why can't I wake up?

“Please, Violet. Please.”

“Wake the fuck up.”

“Wake up.”

And my eyes snap open, the warmth fading from me like the sea drawing back from land. In its place is an icy breeze that chills me to the bone.

My fangs elongate in my mouth as something inside of me shifts. It's as if a crucial piece of my mind chips away, rendering me incapable of coherent thought. I'm a beast, a monster, a predator . . . and I'm ready to hunt my prey.

Blood.



The world will be paved in blood.

The last things I see are the concerned faces of my perfect mates—sinister, nightmarish, and lurid all at once—before my eyes roll into the back of my head and I slump back to the ground.

# CHAPTER 20



VIN

**M**y mate . . .

She's magnificent.

There are no words capable of describing the immense terror and all-consuming grief that ripped through my being when I felt my bond to Violet begin to diminish. Balor had just finished removing the rune's power from all of us when it felt as if my chest was being cracked open.

And I knew, in no uncertain terms, that Violet was dying.

Cal's wings turned entirely black as he took to the sky, his eyes enraged, his lips curled away from his teeth in a snarl.

Barret grew three times his normal size. The air around him practically crackles with the unfettered energy radiating off of him. With a roar, he raced from the room, not bothering to even glance back.

Then I was left with just Frankie and a sweat-soaked Balor. The latter's eyes gleamed with an indecipherable emotion, one that had the muscles in my stomach tightening as another javelin of fear cut through my heart.

"She did it," he breathed. "She actually did it."

To my horror and confusion, the body housing Balor fell to the ground, limp and decaying. A brilliant ball of pure energy bobbed directly above the corpse like a buoy on the sea, rippling across the ferocious waves. The ball of light that was Balor zipped through the open doorway.

That left just me and Frankie, the human and the experiment. We exchanged an uneasy look and then took off at

a run.

That was three hours ago.

When we arrived in Hell's prison—after having a heated debate with the angry receptionist who threatened to claw the shit out of my ass with her talons if I didn't leave the premises—it was to see the love of our lives lying in a shallow trench on the ground, the rest of her mates gathered around her.

We begged, we pleaded, we cried.

And then . . .

Her eyes snapped open, her fangs extended, and a look of unbridled fury paved its way across her beautiful face.

“You're awake,” Frankie breathes now, reaching for her. Before his fingers can come into contact with her skin, he pulls away, hesitating.

I can understand the wariness distorting his features.

Violet looks . . . enraged. Red splotches have exploded on her normally pale cheeks, and her eyes burn with the fires of Hell itself. It's both a beautiful and terrifying sight to behold.

My mate turns away from all of us, focusing on something over my shoulder. I turn to follow her gaze, my brows arching in confusion and more than a little trepidation. I instantly jump to my feet and reach for the sword I always keep strapped across my back—before remembering Zeus confiscated it when he captured us.

I desperately glance around the barren room, searching for a weapon. It almost reminds me of a large cave, with stalagmite dangling from the ceiling. Every surface appears to be carved out of brimstone. A huge gray boulder, covered in

glowing red runes, sits opposite us, serving as some sort of makeshift tomb.

“What the fuck?” I ball my hands into fists. I may not have a weapon, but that doesn’t mean I’m useless. I’ll fight tooth and nail to protect Violet and my family.

Barret roars and moves to stand beside me, so tall that his green hair brushes against the ceiling of the cave. Cal moves to my other side, his teeth bared, with Hux beside him. I only know it’s Hux and not Jack, because he’s muttering repeatedly about fucking some monsters in the asshole.

“The Fomorians,” Frankie breathes, remaining beside Violet behind me. “They’re free.”

A blinding white light coerces me to shut my eyes and turn my head away. It seems to radiate off the huge boulder.

I force myself to turn back toward the threat, only to see that the boulder has disappeared, leaving behind a cave-like entrance.

“What the fuck?” Violet screeches suddenly.

I turn, just barely ducking in time to avoid the ball of light hurling toward the prison’s entrance. I recognize that light . . .

Balor.

He disappears into the inky expanse, the darkness swallowing him whole.

Silence reigns. I can’t even hear my own breath. It takes me a moment too long to realize I’m holding it.

I’m not one to fear things easily. I’m a monster hunter, for fuck’s sake. I’ve spent my life slaying creatures that would give even the strongest men nightmares. But something about this pitch-black hole in the wall unsettles me.

Maybe because I know it houses a species of monsters who have been held captive for way too long, for reasons way too stupid to even articulate.

And lo and behold, what do we have here? Oh, just the daughter of the man who imprisoned them.

I take an automatic step backward to place myself in front of Violet, keenly aware that the others have moved as well to create a circular shield around the woman we've all grown to love. Violet, surprisingly, doesn't argue. I don't know if she's merely in shock or if she's still grappling with the fury I saw splayed across her face when she first woke up.

Movement in the darkness captures my attention. I hold myself at the ready, already thinking through my plan of action, should these monsters attack.

Cal and Barret are some of our strongest fighters when they're in their . . . angry forms, so to speak. Barret can tear the head off any creature without breaking a sweat, and there's something about the elemental fury emanating from Cal's normally warm eyes that's enough to make a grown man piss himself. Dimitri is the stealthiest, by far. There's a reason he's both revered and feared by monsters and humans alike. However, he's our best chance of getting Violet to safety instead of remaining here to fight. He'll be able to incapacitate any threats along the way, as well as curb our girl's bratty behavior when she, no doubt, tries to argue. Frankie would go with them, of course. He's not a fighter, but he will be beneficial in healing injuries after the battle. Hux and Jack? They're a wildcard. If Hux is in control, he'll either follow Violet or murder anyone and everyone who poses a threat to his "precious treasure." Jack will be more level-headed than his volatile twin, but he's also braver than a lot of us give him

credit for. And painfully selfless. He'll throw himself into the fray, if it means protecting Violet, but he'll also leave with her if he believes it's best for her well-being.

*Okay, you have a battle plan, Vin. As best as you can, given the lot you're with. Now, you just need to—*

A figure steps out of the darkness, and all of us tense, instantly going on alert.

“We will not attack. We come in peace.” A melodic voice precedes the giant that ventures out of the cave, bending forward at the waist, so as not to hit her head on the ceiling.

She's nearly twice the size of Barret, which is saying something, considering he's a beast of a man when he's in this form. Black, inky hair hangs all the way down to her ankles in surprisingly smooth waves. She wears a white dress and similarly colored slippers.

A warm smile stretches across her face as she begins to shrink, shrink, shrink, shrink . . .

Before I know it, I'm staring at a normal-sized woman, instead of the giant from before.

On closer inspection, she appears to be in her late-twenties or early-thirties, and though she's beautiful, I can't help but think she emits an unapproachability that makes me wary and maybe even a little afraid.

Despite her serene smile, I don't relax my defensive stance.

She turns her metallic gray eyes onto Violet. “You're the girl who is going to change the world,” she muses in a lyrical, singsong voice.

“And you’re a Fomorian,” Violet supplies, shouldering me out of the way to meet the woman face-to-face. I want to argue and push her back behind me, but I made a vow to myself that I won’t wrap her in bubble wrap. She’s a queen, a warrior, a monster . . . and it’s about time I remember it. My duty as her mate and lover is to stand beside her, not in front or behind her. “The . . . queen?”

The woman releases a lilting laugh, one that sounds eerily like wind chimes. “I suppose you could say that, though we don’t use those titles officially. I am, however, the leader of the Fomorians and their designated spokesperson, so to speak. My name is Athena.”

Athena . . .

Didn’t Balor once mention that the Fomorians posed as gods and goddesses before they were cast away? Is this Athena . . . *the* Athena? As in, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom Athena?

I don’t get a chance to voice my theory, because Athena is already continuing.

“I’ve been watching you for a while, sweet child.” Athena lifts her hand, as if she means to cup Violet’s cheek, and all of us tense. Dimitri steps forward with the grace and stealth of a mountain lion and glares at Athena, his hand holding up a blade I hadn’t even realized he had.

“Um . . .” Violet takes a tiny step backward, putting her back flush to Barret’s front. The boogeyman immediately wraps a protective arm around her and bares his teeth at the strange Fomorian. “That’s . . . nice?”

“Creepy,” Frankie supplies dryly.

“Stalkerish,” Cal agrees.



“How is that even possible?” Violet demands. “You were trapped in that prison—”

“We were gifted a viewing screen that allowed us to see into the world itself. We watched you, Violet Dracula, because we knew you were going to be our savior.” Athena holds up her chin imperiously, looking every inch the goddess she once claimed to be. Her intelligent gray eyes hold no reproach for her apparent stalkerish tendencies.

“How often did you watch me?” Violet absently scratches at the inside of her wrist. “Because I can assure you, I don’t sing ‘Push It’ by Salt-N-Pepa every time I poop. That was a onetime thing.”

Oh god. She’s babbling.

It takes all my ironclad self-control not to slap my palm over her mouth before she can say something she’ll regret. Though I may already be too late.

Amusement shows on Athena’s face, but she doesn’t respond to Violet’s question.

“I saw you with my son.” Abruptly, Athena’s face turns thunderous, that perfect moment when the sun lowers beneath the boughs of trees and darkness descends, blanketing the world in gray. It’s both a beautiful and terrifying sight to see. “I’m ashamed of the way he treated you and the others.” She turns to address Hux-slash-Jack. “Especially you two.”

“Your son . . .?” I don’t know why Violet even bothers to ask. We all already know the answer to that question.

No less than two seconds later, our shared theory is confirmed when a belligerent, accented voice drawls, “Mother, can you not embarrass me for once in your life?”

# CHAPTER 21



## VIOLET

**T**he Fomorian known as Balor stops directly beside Athena.

Brown, slightly curly hair frames a face that isn't as sharp or defined as I would've expected. If anything, his slightly rounded features make him appear sweet and innocent—which is fucking hilarious. I once read that Fomorians represent the wild and destructive nature of life and death, that they're the personification of chaos, blight, and destruction. I never believed those rumors, especially with the knowledge I have now, but Balor's icy temperament is enough to make me second-guess all I know about the elusive race.

His body is toned and well-defined, despite being imprisoned without a soul for a few hundred years. It's apparent that his . . . mother? Yes, his mother . . . It's apparent that she took care of his body while Balor was trapped on Earth as a wayward soul.

Balor's gray eyes, the exact shade as his mother's, land on me. His lips twist into a rictus, sardonic grin.

"Hello, luv," he purrs in his thick Irish brogue. It somehow sounds even more pronounced now that he's not using Hux and Jack's vocal box.

I simply wrinkle my nose at the little fucker and give him the finger.

That only causes his smile to widen.

But that grin of his abruptly disappears from his face when Athena whacks him across the head.

“Show some respect, my boy!” she chides in a disapproving voice. I swear Balor seems to wilt like a stepped-on dandelion under his mother’s ire.

“Sorry,” he murmurs.

Athena huffs and folds her arms across her rather generous bust. “It’s not me you should be apologizing to.”

When Balor doesn’t immediately respond, scowling at the ground, Athena jerks her chin in my direction with a pointed stare.

The first genuine smile I’ve felt since I woke up flutters at the corners of my lips. It doesn’t fully form, but it’s there, teasing and fleeting.

“Balor . . .” Athena’s voice holds a note of warning.

“Fine.” Balor huffs exaggeratedly and finally lifts his head to meet my eyes. “I’m sorry, Violet Dracula, for being mean to you.”

“And?” One of Athena’s dark brows arches delicately.

Balor grits his teeth and turns to face Jack and Hux. “I’m sorry for possessing your body and killing a bunch of monsters and humans using it.”

“Um, thanks?” Jack says softly. I have no idea when he gained control back from Hux. He shuffles forward until he’s able to stand beside me and places his hand in mine, seemingly unconcerned that Barret’s arms are still banded around my waist.

I offer Jack a tentative smile in return, and for a moment, I swear I see Hux staring out at me—that primitive, radioactive fury and possessiveness I’ve come to associate with that facet

of his personality. But then Hux retreats and my sweet, timid mate returns.

Jack squeezes my hand in reassurance, and I take comfort in his touch, allowing it to bolster my resolve and do what I have to do.

Taking a deep, calming breath, I focus on Athena and Balor. “So, if you’ve been watching me for a while, then you must know who I am.”

Athena’s pale lips pinch, as if she just ate a sour lemon. “I do.”

“And you don’t want to . . . I don’t know . . . go stabby stab stab on my ass?” My hand reflexively tightens around Jack’s. I’m still too raw after everything that just happened. After my . . . death, or whatever that was. Sometimes, when I blink, I can see Mason’s face staring back at me, rife with anguish and desperation. I can feel his touch, as if he’s physically beside me, running his fingers through my hair and skating his lips across my cheek.

Was that real or just my imagination?

I desperately try to banish the cobwebs spinning in my head before they can collect flies.

“Violet.” Athena’s gentle voice pulls my attention back to her. “I can’t blame a child for the actions of a parent.”

“Um, forgive me, Mrs. Athena, ma’am.” I anxiously lick my upper lip. “But you seem almost . . . how do I put this delicately? Too nice. Yes, you seem almost too nice to be legitimate. How do I know you aren’t planning on killing me and my parents, then taking over the world?”

Athena’s jaw actually drops at my audacity, and Balor has to hide his laughter with the back of his hand. Only Memphis

seems unperturbed by my super innocent question. He merely pushes himself off the back wall he's been perched against and says, "I told you, Violet. I *saw* that they'll help you."

I wave away his words. "You're not exactly the most trustworthy monster. You did stab me repeatedly, after all."

"Hurtful," Memphis mumbles under his breath.

"I can understand why you'd be wary of me, Violet." Athena seems to be choosing her words carefully. Her beautiful face is grim. "Especially after everything my son put you through."

"He tried to blow me up—"

"Us," Cal corrects. "He tried to blow *us* up."

I nod decisively. "And he murdered a bunch of people. And he tried to frame me for the murders. And he tried to kill me—"

Balor rolls his gray eyes. "Can we let the past remain in the past? My god. I helped your mates, didn't I?" He gestures toward the runes I can still see on my mate's skin, a dark stain that I'm not sure will ever go away, no matter how much time passes. "Those runes hold no power over them. And I can teach you how to do it yourself, so you can save your friends and all the monsters who'll try to kill you in the future. Doesn't that make us even?"

"No," all of my mates chorus at once.

Athena just clicks her tongue and sends Balor a look rife with disapproval. "I'm ashamed of how you handled things in my absence, son."

"Mother—"

“Don’t *mother* me.” She wags a finger in front of his face like he’s a disobedient dog who stole a treat when his owner wasn’t looking.

Mama Athena reprimanding her asshole son? Yeah. I can definitely get behind that. This might be the happiest I’ve felt in months.

Balor bares his teeth at her. “I’ve been alone for hundreds of years. This entire time, I was trying to get revenge for you and the others—”

“By hurting innocent people!” Athena throws her hands into the air in exasperation. It’s an oddly modern gesture, considering that she’s been locked away. Then again, this entire conversation proves that Athena and the rest of the Fomorians aren’t as unaware as I initially expected them to be. It’s apparent they used their time in Hell’s prison to keep an eye on Earth and all of its new customs.

“You and Dad—”

“You better hope your father doesn’t find you!” Athena scolds. “He’ll take a paddle to that ass for your behavior.”

Cal snorts a laugh, though he quickly tries to hide it as a cough when Balor tosses a penetrating glare his way.

Barret isn’t as subtle. He throws his head back and guffaws, the movement causing my body to vibrate where it’s still flushed against his.

“Balor’s going to get spanked,” he singsongs.

“Fuck off!” Balor hisses.

“Language,” Athena chides.

This time, not even Dimitri can keep his apathetic mask in place. I swear—I fucking swear—that his lips twitch a

centimeter upward in the barest hint of a smile.

Or maybe he's just farting and trying to be subtle about it.

With Dimitri, it's hard to know for certain.

Hoping to steer the conversation back on track, I clear my throat. Honestly, it's shocking even to me that *I'm* the one trying to be responsible. When did I become an adult, and how can I go back in time and change it?

“So, if you know what's happening with Zeus, then are you willing to help us?” I can barely breathe around the sudden tightness in my throat. It feels as if I swallowed a dozen tacks, and all of them are poking at my stomach lining in unison.

We need the Fomorian's help if we have any hope of winning this battle. I know that. They know that. The world knows that.

But would they be willing?

Memphis claimed he saw them on our side in the battle to come, but everyone knows Memphis has a few screws loose. I don't trust the ugly monster any farther than I can throw him—and considering the fact he probably weighs over three hundred pounds, I can't throw him very far. Okay, I can't throw him at all. Semantics.

Athena studies me with those wise, calculating gray eyes that, no doubt, gave her the title as a goddess of wisdom back in her prime. Everything about her radiates a confidence and elegance I could only attempt to emulate.

“You want my people to help yours?” Athena surmises.

“It won't be without rewards,” Dimitri interrupts, stalking forward with all the cockiness of a king preparing to address



his lowly subjects. How can a man covered in sweat, grime, and blood still look so effortlessly put together and immaculate? Ugh. I sometimes hate him just as much as I love him.

Athena turns toward Dimitri, suddenly intrigued. “I’m listening . . .”

“With Violet as ruler, you’ll, of course, be reinstated in your original position of guiding souls to the afterlife. She won’t fight you like the others did.” Dimitri lazily wipes at his sleeve, not bothering to look up and meet Athena’s inquisitive eyes. Still, the Fomorian hangs on to every word he says.

I half want to berate Dimitri for speaking on my behalf without my permission, but what he says is the truth. I have no intention of locking the Fomorians away again—as long as they don’t pose a threat to me or mine. And if they want to help souls pass on to the afterlife? More power to them. Hopefully that will reduce the number of ghosts haunting this earth.

Mason . . .

A lump the size of Big Foot’s balls materializes in my throat.

When will thinking his name not bring me such immense, unimaginable pain? When will it no longer feel as if I’m being stabbed repeatedly by a serrated blade? When will the wound stop bleeding and begin to scab over?

*Never*, a soft voice whispers inside of my head.

It will never stop hurting.

Fuck, I miss him.

I swear I can feel his fingers caressing my skin . . .

“Of course, there are some conditions to that,” Dimitri continues, oblivious to the morose direction of my thoughts. “For one, you will not be allowed to harm Violet or her mates.” He pauses, only continuing when Athena doesn’t raise a word of protest. “And you won’t be allowed to get revenge on Lucifer for imprisoning you in the first place.”

“Absolutely not!” Balor rages, anger coloring his face in deep shades of red. “That bastard locked my family and friends away and—”

Athena holds up a hand to silence her son, and no one is more surprised than me when Balor instantly clamps his lips together. Is that stubborn, murderous asshole secretly a mommy’s boy? Ohhh. Blackmail material.

“What Lucifer did to us was abhorrent,” Athena begins gravely.

“I one-hundred-percent agree,” I interject. “There’s no denying that. He locked you away because he wanted more power, and that’s despicable. But I believe he’s changed. At least, I hope he has.” I take a step forward and stare Athena directly in the eye, allowing her to see the sincerity in my next words. “If Lucifer tries to lock you away again, I’ll stop him. You have my word. I just ask that you give him a chance to prove himself, just like I’m giving you a chance.”

For a long moment, Athena doesn’t speak, and I worry I offended the ethereal woman.

Then a beguiling smile unfurls on her lips, and she dips her chin respectfully.

“Of course, young Violet. It’s the least we can do. You risked your own life to free us, and for that, we owe you the world. At the very least, we owe you our forces, so you’re

capable of saving it. All we want is to get back to the way things were. There may be some of us who harbor anger and resentment, but I promise you, I'll squash any and all resistance on my end if you do the same on yours." Athena extends a pale, slender hand to me. "Do we have a deal, Violet?"

Why does it feel as if I'm making an agreement with the devil himself, as ironic as that sounds?

Still, I don't hesitate as I take her hand in mine and give it a shake.

"Let's kick Zeus's evil ass."

## CHAPTER 22



## VIOLET

**I**t's decided that Athena and the rest of the Fomorians will remain in Hell, in order to keep their release a secret from Zeus. I thought Athena, or at least Balor, would put up a stink at being forced back into their cages, but Athena only smiled pleasantly, her gray eyes sparkling with warmth.

“Whatever you need, Violet Dracula.”

Yeah . . . not at all sus.

Apparently, Daddy Dearest spelled the Fomorians' prison to adapt with every new technological advancement. Athena mentioned that every room comes with a flat-screen television, a state-of-the-art gaming device, and a wet bar. The cafeteria serves cuisines from every corner of the world, and Lucifer even hired some of his demons to perform as masseuses.

It seems as if this so-called “prison” is actually a five-star resort. No wonder Athena doesn't seem too upset with me.

Though, when she offers to give me a tour, I hastily decline. The last thing I want is to become accidentally trapped in Hell's most notorious prison, even if it's better than any hotel I've ever stayed at.

We agree to meet with Athena and her highest officials in a few days' time to finalize our attack plan. Hopefully by then, we'll be able to gather forces from the monster council.

The battle is coming.

Soon, the streets will be painted red with blood.

The safest place for me and my mates is Lucifer's apartment here in Hell, so it's there we travel to next. The guys

are already discussing strategy, but I excuse myself to take a shower. I need a moment—just a single moment—to myself.

As the water rushes over me in a torrent, scalding my skin and turning it red, I allow my mind to wander.

I died.

That realization sits like a boulder in my stomach.

At least, I got close enough to taste the afterlife on my tongue, a surprising acerbic flavor. When I close my eyes, I swear I can see Mason's face tattooed across the inside of my eyelids, his eyes anguished, his lips parted, his hands reaching for me. His voice is indelibly stamped on my soul, weaving itself into my very genetic makeup.

Did I . . . *see* him? When I died or whatever the hell happened to me?

Like before, I swear I can feel the phantom caress of his fingers skating down my spine, the touch reminiscent of an ice cube. I shiver, even with the steaming water pouring down on me.

The numerous cuts lining my body have already begun to heal, since Memphis didn't use a god-blessed dagger. Still, I find that I can't scrub myself clean enough. Every time I glide the sponge over my skin, I'm back in that moment, feeling the slash of a dagger slicing across my arms and legs. . .

I scrub even harder, my skin turning red and blotchy.

I can't even rejoice in the fact that my mates have returned to me. My mind is a whirlpool of foreign emotions and sensations I don't dare look at too closely.

Where are my parents? I don't blame my guys for not trying to free them, but that doesn't negate the worry slithering

through my brain like a poisonous snake, intent on corrupting everything it coils around.

Are they alive? What is Zeus doing to them? I doubt he left them in the same building as my mates. For some reason, Zeus's rune didn't work on Dracula, Lucifer, and Hera. I imagine it's because their power level is equal to Zeus's, if not higher. Zeus wouldn't risk placing them somewhere they could potentially break free from.

Unbidden, my brain conjures images of a stone prison deep underground, where my parents hang shackled from the ceiling, their emaciated bodies nothing but skin and bones.

I ignore the tug in my gut, the craving to surrender to Zeus and allow this entire battle to be over with, and turn off the shower. I quickly change into a white tank top and a pair of panties before heading back to the room Lucifer claimed was mine.

Dimitri Gray is waiting for me when I arrive.

I locate him immediately, unerringly, even though he's seated on a chair in the corner, hidden in the shadows of the room.

He must've showered at the same time I did because his shoulder-length hair is damp. Even though it's nearing the middle of the night—at least, I assume it is. It's hard to tell time in Hell—he wears his customary suit. How does he always manage to look so immaculate while I appear as if a steamroller ran me over and then a dog came along and shat on my head?

Maybe it's all of those icicles rammed up his asshole. He's probably so cold that he has to wear suits all the time or risk getting frostbite.

I snort inwardly at my own joke and move toward my bed.

“Mr. Gray,” I say nonchalantly as I toss my towel on the ground and grab a container of cheese puffs off the nightstand. I had Memphis, ahem, procure these for me.

What? Don’t judge. A girl needs her comfort food every once in a while.

And, honestly, I didn’t expect Mr. Tall, Dark, and Angry to make an unscheduled appearance in my room.

Dimitri steeples his long, slender fingers together and leans forward to study me. It’s always unnerving to be the prey trapped in his predatory gaze—those blue orbs rip at my soul and see every broken, tarnished piece of me that I wish to keep hidden.

“Where are the others?” I press when it’s apparent Dimitri isn’t going to speak.

I settle against the headboard and grab a single cheese puff out of the plastic jar. I then toss it up in the air and tilt my head all the way back so I can catch it in my mouth.

Correction—sort of catch it in my mouth.

Correction—sort of catch it on my face.

The cheesy ball of heaven bounces off my cheekbone, and I quickly squint my eyes to capture it in one of my eye crinkles. My tongue snakes out and aims for it as I wiggle my head from side to side. Finally, the cheese puff lands on the tip of my tongue, and I happily swallow it.

Nailed it.

“The others are making themselves presentable,” Dimitri answers at last, reminding me I asked the stoic headmaster a question. He just continues to regard me with those cold,



unruffled blue eyes of his. “And discussing strategy for the battle to come.”

“Good. No offense, but you guys were beginning to stink.” I wrinkle my nose as I toss another cheese puff up in the air. This one doesn’t even make it close to my mouth. “EEEEP! I have cheese in my eye!” I desperately brush at my poor, watering eye with my hand as pain barrages me.

Who knew cheese puffs could be so dangerous?

With my one good eye, I see Dimitri’s face go carefully blank, like a slate wiped free of chalk. His lips purse together, causing lines to deepen on the corners of his mouth.

“How can you be so . . . nonchalant?” Dimitri asks in a deceptively calm voice.

“Excuse me?”

I blink repeatedly, grateful when the stinging sensation in my eye begins to subside. Good. I was beginning to worry that the cheese had done permanent damage.

Wouldn’t that be fucking embarrassing?

“You nearly died today.” Dimitri sounds as if he’s speaking through clenched teeth. “When I arrived, it was to see your still, motionless, unconscious body lying in a sacrificial hole in the ground.”

“I was totally still conscious,” I lie, trying to dispel the tension I can see in his shoulders. He looks one lit fuse away from exploding. “I heard everything you told me.”

His eyebrows arch. “Did you, now?”

“Obviously.” I shove a handful of cheese puffs into my mouth, chew, and then swallow. “I totally heard you confess your undying love for me.”

Yup. I'm totally bullshitting.

But isn't that what always happens in movies and books? The girl is near death, and the hero admits that he loves her, has always loved her, and will always love her? I'm just assuming the same thing happened with my guys.

Or they called me a selfish shit for daring to die on them.

Ehhh.

Who knows?

Sidebar—if my life ever gets made into a movie, I demand that Jack Black plays me. No one knows how to play a perky, blonde teenager better than him.

The tight set of Dimitri's shoulders relaxes just a bit. "You seem awfully nonplussed by everything that transpired today." He pauses, and a furrow manifests between his brows. "Do you want to . . . talk about it?"

Dimitri wants to talk about *feelings*? Has the world ended already? I glance out the window, but . . . nope. No pigs are falling from the sky.

"Nah." I toss another cheese ball into the air and watch as it lands a solid foot away from me. I really need to get better at my throws. How is it so hard to throw something vertically?

"Violet . . ." The light reflects on his silvery blue eyes like the sunrise on water.

I heave out a breath and throw my arms out in either direction, incidentally, raining down cheese puffs in the process. "What do you want me to say, Dimitri? That I think I died? That it hurt like hell to be sliced repeatedly by a blade? That I was fucking terrified the entire time? That I can't stop thinking of Mason and my parents? That I should be happy

you guys are here with me, but I'm too damn worried about what's to come to really muster any excitement? Is that what you want to hear?"

Despair thrums headily through my veins. I hadn't even realized I felt any of that until I articulated my thoughts out loud. Huh. Maybe *that's* why people see shrinks. It actually feels good to get all of that off my chest.

Dimitri's eyes don't waver from my face as he slowly rises from the seat in the corner. My skin tingles with the intensity of his gaze, though I don't allow it to show on my face. Instead, I do the only thing I can do when I'm nervous.

Toss a cheese ball directly at his face.

"Catch!" I holler . . . a solid second *after* the cheese puff already bounced off his forehead and landed on the broad slope of his shoulders.

Dimitri slowly moves his eyes to the tiny ball of cheese marring his otherwise perfect attire. Slowly, almost languorously, he brushes the cheese puff onto the ground.

"That, Violet Dracula, was rude," he says simply as he prowls toward me.

"You need to lighten up a little more," I babble as I eye the arresting man now leaning over me on the bed. My heart beats so loud I can barely hear my own thoughts over the tumultuous pounding. "You're still alive, but you're not truly living. How can you be, when you never allow yourself to open up? That must be a sad, lonely existence."

Ohmygawd.

*Shut the fuck up, Violet.*

I wish I could take a net to the words, capture them all, and then lock them away, so they'll never see the light of day again. Sometimes, I really don't know when to stop talking. It's a curse. And a gift.

Depends on the day.

When I slide my gaze to Dimitri's face, I expect to see anger, maybe even disapproval.

Instead, I see nothing but liquid heat that shoots fire straight to my core.

"You're right," Dimitri murmurs, surprising the shit out of me.

"I'm . . . what?"

A wry smirk dances at the edges of Dimitri's lips. "I know you don't hear those two words together very often, but you're right." His finger comes up to trace the seam of my lips, soft enough it could almost be the wind that rattles the leaves on tree branches. "I've been thinking a lot about my own mortality. And when I thought you were dead . . ." Shadows explode in Dimitri's normally impassive eyes, darkening the blue until those orbs almost appear black. "I don't want to push you away anymore, Violet Dracula. I love you. I love you with every inch of my dark, fucked-up heart. It's a lump of coal, but it's yours . . . if you want it. I love you when you babble. I love you when you say asinine things that make most people shake their heads in disgust. I love you when you're covered in cheese dust and staring up at me with wide, terrified eyes. I love you, and I'd be remiss if I spent another day not telling you the truth. I pushed you away because I was terrified of how you make me feel. I shoved you to your knees in a futile attempt to make you feel small and insignificant.

But, Violet, my love, my heart . . . You were never born to bow. You were born to rule.”

Desire beats through my blood as I stare into the eyes of a man who pushed me away, made me feel small, and then, somehow, found a way to give me wings to soar. Mingled shock and desire root me to the spot.

I knew that Dimitri loved me, but this? This heartfelt declaration? It’s almost too much for my poor, puny vampire-but-not-a-vampire brain to handle.

My heart feels like a restless bird in my chest that has smashed repeatedly into a window. I’m pretty sure the organ’s broken. Is that a thing? Can you break a heart like you can a bone or ankle?

An earthquake rolls through the center of my being.

“Dimitri . . .” I reach for the front of his shirt desperately, crinkling the meticulously ironed material, and tug him toward me. He comes without complaint or argument, molding his lips to mine. I feel like an addict standing in front of a lit cigar, just waiting for the plumes to blow into my face. I need more of Dimitri Gray.

I need everything.

My hands are feverish as they roam across his broad shoulders, his back, and then cup his ass through those black trousers. He pants against me as he kisses me senseless, losing himself in me just as I am with him. I reach up to push off his suit coat, and he allows me to, not even protesting when his hair becomes disheveled in the process. His wide, famished eyes are locked on mine as he pushes me back onto the bed, my blonde hair splaying across the pillow.

“Violet,” he growls into my ear, nipping my earlobe hard enough to sting. His tone makes the small hairs on both of my arms stand on end and sets my pulse to racing.

With skilled proficiency, he grabs both of my wrists in one of his hands and lifts them above my head. I instinctively grab at the headboard there, and his lips curl into a cocky, satisfied smirk.

“No matter what happens, you are not allowed to move your hands from the headboard.” He bites down on my neck hard enough to elicit a gasp from me. “Do I make myself clear? If you move, I will stop.”

Goose bumps flutter across my skin, even as a surge of defiance rushes through me. “I thought you said I was a queen,” I pant, hoping he doesn’t hear the hitch in my breath, hinting at my arousal.

Dimitri’s smile could almost be described as . . . lecherous. It’s a look I’ve never seen on him before, but it causes my stomach to do cartwheels.

“You may be the queen, Violet, and I may be nothing but a humble servant when it comes to you . . .” He sucks a patch of my skin into his hot, wet mouth. “But in the bedroom, I’m in charge.”

The darkness in those words has my heart slamming against my ribs and my breath coming out in choppy pants.

Dimitri keeps his eyes on me as he removes a dagger from the waistband of his pants. How the fuck didn’t I feel that when I was groping him?

He slices down the middle of my tank top and tosses the fabric aside.

“There,” he murmurs, expertly spinning the blade around in his hand. “Now I can see and play with those pretty pink nipples of yours.”

He lowers the dagger to my right breast and traces my areola with it, providing just enough pressure to leave behind tiny white lines.

A rod of electricity spirals through my body at the pure eroticism of this moment.

At any second, he could push down too hard and cut at my flesh. But I trust him enough to know that he’ll never hurt me.

Never.

The tip of the dagger caresses the very tip of my aching nipple, and the bud hardens under the careful ministrations. Fuck, I’m truly damaged to be getting off on something like this.

Dimitri watches my reactions carefully, his eyes scouring my face as if it’s the most fascinating thing he’s ever had the pleasure of seeing.

Slowly, with the same careful consideration Dimitri uses for everything in his life, he lowers his lips to my neglected breast and licks a careful circle around my nipple, never touching me where I so desperately need him to. His other hand continues to move the dagger back and forth, continually flicking the blade over my sensitive nub. It says a lot about his skill and self-control that he can do that without paying any attention. I should be scared.

But I’m not.

Not of him.

Restless energy skitters across my skin like static electricity, and it takes all of my self-control not to release the headboard and dig my fingers into his white-blond hair. I want to muss those perfect strands and make him appear just as desperate for me as I am for him. He's fully dressed—sans his suit coat—and I'm in nothing but a pair of lacy panties.

How the fuck is that fair?

But then all thoughts of fairness and equality go out the window when Dimitri's tongue flicks my nipple.

I jerk instinctively, my hands tightening around the headboard. "Fuck, Dimitri . . ."

"I figured you've been a good girl and deserved a reward," he murmurs huskily as he begins to lap at my breast.

I feel the dagger leave my other nipple, but I don't pay any attention to the blade until something sharp pierces my stomach, just below my belly button. I gasp, but Dimitri simply lowers the dagger until it's directly above the waistband of my panties.

In one sure swipe, Dimitri cuts the material in half.

I whimper low in my throat, and Dimitri finally pulls his attention off my aching breast to kiss me. His eyes—as fathomless as a cloudless sky—ensnare my own as he kisses me hungrily, desperately, possessively. There's a warning in his gaze not to look away, to maintain eye contact, no matter how badly I want to flutter my lashes.

When Dimitri finally pulls away from my swollen lips, I'm practically crying, and a deviant grin teases the corners of his lips.

He's beautiful all of the time, but when he smiles . . .



When he smiles, he completely transforms, turning into something otherworldly and ethereal. Love for him blooms in my chest like a rose covered in thorns—so incredibly beautiful, yet capable of cutting me to pieces. He could destroy me as easily as he could sew my broken pieces back together.

“Dimitri,” I whisper, my fingers tightening around the headboard almost imperceptibly. “I love you.”

The smile slowly fades from his face. For a long moment, he simply stares at me, stunned.

“You . . . what . . . huh?” I don’t think I’ve ever seen Dimitri Gray flustered before. And I’ve certainly never known him to struggle with his words.

Months of suppressed want and desire and affection roar through me. “I love you, Dimitri Gray.” I can’t help but laugh. “Surely, you know that. You’re one of the smartest men alive. You couldn’t have been oblivious—”

Our lips collide like two pieces of flint rubbing together. Flames explode between the two of us. Burning. I’m burning for this man. At the same time, one of his fingers enters my tight channel.

I pull my lips away from his to gasp his name, and his smile turns positively lurid.

“You, Violet Dracula, are going to be the death of me,” he murmurs as he begins to kiss down my body, stopping to give each of my breasts attention. His tongue swirls inside my belly button, causing me to actually laugh out loud, before he arrives at his final destination between my legs. He reaches underneath both of my thighs and heaves them over his broad shoulders. This new position makes me feel almost vulnerable,

but there's so much worshipful devotion and reverence in his eyes that any self-consciousness I might've felt dissipates.

"I want to taste you, Violet. And I'm going to make you come so many times that you forget your own name. And then I'm going to fuck you over and over again until you're apologizing repeatedly for daring to leave me." His fingers tighten on my skin, desperation and fear written into every line of his wicked and beautiful visage. "You will never leave me."

"Never," I agree, but I don't really know what I'm agreeing to. I'll do anything to get his mouth on my pussy.

God, what this man can do with his lips between my thighs . . .

I look down between my breasts as Dimitri's lips and tongue move over my labia, stroking, prodding, bringing me to that precipice of pleasure. He's normally so strong and collected. Never in a million years did I expect him to kneel for me. To worship me the way he is.

My nipples feel unbelievably tight, but I don't remove my hands from the headboard to pluck at them. I'm not stupid enough to believe that Dimitri's declaration of love and devotion makes him any less of an asshole. The second I disobey his rules, he'll stop, and I'll be devoid of a mind-blowing orgasm.

I press harder against his mouth while crying to the heavens and moving my hips to the rhythm of his tongue between my slick folds. I'm sure the other guys can hear us, but no one storms in and demands that we stop or asks if they can join.

Though I'm not sure I'm completely against an orgy . . .

I'm flying over the edge before I'm even aware I arrived. I cry out and arch my back as wave after wave of pleasure pours through me.

Still, Dimitri doesn't let up, doesn't relent, doesn't slow down as he adds a finger to my slick pussy. His lips find my clit and begin to suck at the tender flesh.

Is this man determined to wring every ounce of pleasure from my body?

"Oh my god. Fuck." Mindless with pleasure, I'm barely aware that I've released the headboard to run my fingers through his straight blond hair. It's only when he pulls away from my core that I realize my mistake.

His palm slams down on my pussy, and the sting reverberates through my entire body. I gasp at the unfamiliar sensation—this strange combination of pleasure and pain weaving together.

"This is your one and only warning," Dimitri growls, staring up at me from where he rests between my thighs, his lips glimmering with the evidence of my arousal. "If you do it again . . ."

"I'll be good," I all but cry as I quickly grab the bedpost once more.

Dimitri watches me carefully, as if ensuring I'll keep my promise, before he nods decisively and lowers his head once more.

I'm so close to the edge that all it takes is one swipe of his tongue to send me soaring over it. I release a ragged cry as I'm torn into a thousand pieces, scattered in the wind, and then reformed into something new and exhilarating. Stars dance

across my vision, and my body clamps down on his fingers where they're still pistoning in and out of my tight pussy.

“Dimitri, I need you,” I beg.

I think Dimitri is just as far gone as I am, lost in his desire and lust for me. With an almost blistering speed, he removes the remainder of his clothes and moves to stand in front of me, naked and proud of it.

As he should be.

Every inch of Dimitri Gray is chiseled perfection. His body is toned and muscular, but not in the same way as Barret or even Vin. There's a subtlety to his physique that has my mouth watering. His long, hard cock strains in his hand, the tip already wet with precum.

“I've wanted to fuck you since the very first moment I saw you,” he growls as he presses his hard cock between my slick folds, not quite entering me yet. “This irritating, insolent student who thought she knew it all.” The tip of his hard cock brushes against my clit, and lightning shoots through my veins. “I envisioned fucking you across my desk thousands of times—both as your professor and as your headmaster.” His hips move forward shallowly, just enough to supply friction against my pussy but not to enter me just yet.

“Dimitri,” I whine.

“You're so fucking wet for me, Violet. Tell me . . . Did you imagine me fucking you as often as I did?” He moves his hips a second time, his dick brushing against my most sensitive areas.

But he still doesn't enter me.

“Dimitri!” I all but beg.

“Answer the question, Violet,” he hisses.

“Yes! I dreamed of fucking you. Of having you on your knees as you ate out my pussy. Of being on my own knees as I took your cock in my throat. I’ve always wanted you, even when I knew I shouldn’t. Even when—”

Dimitri drives into me in one, hard thrust. I cry out at the unexpected intrusion as both pleasure and pain race through my nerve endings.

“Fuck, Dimitri!”

The breath leaves my lungs as Dimitri fucks me like the fate of the world depends on it. All I can hear is my own erratic breathing and the slapping of skin against skin. My tits bounce with every forceful thrust of Dimitri’s hips, and he lowers himself, so his chest brushes against my aching nipples.

“You’re mine, Violet Dracula,” he growls fiercely as he claims my lips in a possessive kiss. “And you won’t fucking leave me.”

“I won’t leave you,” I agree breathlessly.

Dimitri reaches for my hands still clasped around the bedpost and releases them. That’s all the permission I need.

I run my fingers across the smooth slope of his shoulders, across his cheeks, through his messy hair, down his chest. Anywhere I can reach, I touch.

I cry out as wave after wave of pleasure tear through me with the force of a tornado. It rips away everything I was and leaves behind someone I don’t entirely recognize—someone who belongs to Dimitri motherfucking Gray.

My fingernails dig into his back as his body stiffens against mine. A low growl vibrates through his chest, and my

body instinctively clenches around him.

He comes with a roar that I feel to the marrow of my bones before he collapses on top of me, sweaty and sated.

“Holy crap,” I murmur, desperately trying to regain the breath that left me somewhere between orgasm number one and orgasm number two. I run my fingers through Dimitri’s sweaty hair as he curls his arm around me and shifts our position. I find myself nestled against his chest as he coils around me like a koala. I never pegged—no pun intended—Dimitri as a cuddler. Then again, I doubt Dimitri has ever allowed himself to be this vulnerable with anyone else.

A tiny thrill shoots through me at the fact that I may be the first person Dimitri Gray ever cuddled with.

“I don’t know what the future holds for us, but I’m yours, Violet Dracula, as long as you want me,” Dimitri whispers against the crown of my head.

“And I’m yours too, Dimitri Gray. This goes both ways.” I shift slightly on his chest so I can see his face clearly. “We’re a team. All of us. You were just too stubborn and pigheaded to ever join it.”

A smirk plays at the edges of his lips. “I’m beginning to see that.” He presses his lips to my forehead. “Sleep, Violet, my heart. No harm will come to you while you’re in my arms. I’ll stab anyone who tries to take you from me.”

I feel groggy and languid and so unbelievably happy.

Dimitri . . . is mine. Fully and truly mine, just as I am his. I can die a happy vampire-but-not-a-vampire knowing that.

Snuggled against a man I once thought hated me, I allow sleep to carry me away on a blissful tidal wave of oblivion.

# CHAPTER 23



VIOLET

“**T**his is ridiculous!” Ra—one of the Fomorians on Athena’s war council—bangs his fist against the table.

And when I say Ra, I mean *the* Ra. You know, the Egyptian deity of the sun.

According to Athena, he doesn’t actually hold any sunlight powers or whatever. However, when he used to roam Earth, he was one of the vainest Fomorians and sought to have temples created in his honor. He used his powers over the dead to steal the souls out of his enemies and transform them into luminescent balls of light—which he claimed to be miniature suns. Thus, Ra’s title and prestige came to be.

If you ask me, he’s a steaming sack of shit with an inflated head incapable of fitting in a normal-sized room.

Ra waits until he has all our attention, his chin hefted upward imperiously, before continuing. “We cannot attack Zeus at Mount Olympus. We need to find a place where we’ll have an advantage.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Ares folds his arms over his chest with a scowl aimed the other man’s way. “Zeus won’t be stupid enough to leave his kingdom. There’s no way we can get him to go to our turf.”

Thor’s brilliant green eyes slide to me from where he sits beside Balor at the table. “We do have something Zeus desperately wishes to acquire . . .”

And here we go again.

I just barely rein in my eye roll as my guys jump from their seats and begin to argue profusely. Power crackles through the



air, raising every hair on my arm.

This meeting is getting us absolutely nowhere, as I knew it would. We're all too different to agree on anything. I understand why a war council is necessary, of course, but it doesn't negate the fact that our morals are immensely different.

I thunk my head against the wooden table in Hell's conference room as I listen to Vin threaten bodily harm. Hux cuts in, his rumbly, accented voice shooting spurts of heat through my body, and then Barret roars something nearly unintelligible.

Is this what my life will be like if I'm the so-called queen? Ugh.

There are a thousand things I'd rather do than be here.

Unwittingly, I lift my head and shift my gaze to Dimitri, who sits farther down the table from me, his features carefully impassive and his white hair brushed away from his face.

Yes, a thousand different things . . .

Heat flares in my body as I think about our time together last night. There were other things I should've been doing, should've been worrying about, but all of them dissipated into a cloud of vapor when Dimitri placed his hands on me and confessed his undying love. And then, after he showed me just how thoroughly he owned my heart, body, and soul, we had a repeat performance. And another one. And another one. And another one.

Technically, the second encore only happened because I insisted Dimitri play a game with me. I thought it would be fun to see how many cheese puffs he could balance on his erect penis before they toppled off. A girl needs to know her

mate's cock control. Dimitri simply growled something inarticulate, shoved my poor cheese puffs onto the floor, and then promised to show me just how much "control" he has over his cock.

I think I prefer his method over mine.

Now, we're all here, in a conference room directly underneath Lucifer's apartment, and we can't seem to decide on our next course of action. Ares wants me to invite the monster council to our next meeting to determine how many numbers we have all together, but I don't necessarily trust the monster council. Not after what I heard from Alex in regards to Cal. Refusing to invite the monster council, of course, led to another argument, with names being hurled in every direction and threats being made.

And then, there's the issue of my parents. I seem to be the only one who wants to focus on a rescue operation. Athena's people seem to believe it's a waste of resources and that I'm being selfish. I insist that we need Lucifer's, Hera's, and Dracula's powers if we have any hope of defeating Zeus. Then stupid Alex had to be the voice of reason and remind me that we didn't have a location for the three of them.

So, the arguments continued.

I've had enough.

"Can everyone just shut the hell up?" I crack my neck from side to side as, all around me, conversations silence like a flame being snuffed out. I cast my gaze toward my mates first, who all appear on edge and one poke from exploding, then to Memphis, and finally to the Fomorians.

Athena, Balor, Ra, Ares, Thor, Iris, and Freya.

There are at least one hundred, if not more, Fomorians still in their prison-slash-exclusive resort, but these are the ones Athena trusts the most.

Once I'm sure I've garnered everyone's attention, I blow out a breath, stirring the blonde curls that have somehow come loose of my braid, and work to modulate my breathing.

"It's obvious that we're going to get nowhere today." I don't snap the words, despite the unfettered irritation thrumming through me. I'm ashamed to admit that my voice sounds weary and exhausted. "Why don't we regroup tomorrow morning?"

Ares bares his teeth at me. "Who are you to tell us what to do, you insolent child—?"

"Ares." Athena places a delicate hand on his bicep. "Enough."

Alex leans forward until he's able to capture my gaze. "We need to come up with a plan, Violet," he growls.

"We're getting nowhere with all of this bickering."

"Zeus could be devouring souls right the fuck now—"

"Alex, enough!" I bark.

Athena sighs dreamily and volleys her gaze between the two of us. "You two truly bicker like a brother and sister. Did you know that?"

Alex immediately rips his penetrating glare off of me to focus on Athena, his features scrunching together in disgust. "What?" he asks, horrified.

"Yeah, didn't you hear?" Barret smiles giddily. "Alex joined the 'Violet mate' club."

“You know that?” I blink at my guys in surprise. I had every intention of telling them what I discovered about Alex, but it’s never been the right time. Until I could have that conversation with them, I hadn’t allowed Alex to even hold my hand.

Vin rolls his golden-brown eyes. “We’re not dumb, Violet. We see the way he looks at you.”

One of Alex’s eyebrows quirks. “The way I look at her? Not the way she looks at me?”

“She looks as if she wants to stab you,” Barret pipes in helpfully, continuing to smile enigmatically when Alex tosses him a frosty glare.

“She never looks like she wants to stab me.” Cal brushes a hand through his ruffled, pink hair with a sigh. “I’m too pretty to be stabbed.”

“And too modest,” Dimitri mutters under his breath.

Cal waggles his finger in the headmaster’s face. “Don’t give me that shit. We all heard what you got up to with Violet last night.” A shit-eating grin unfurls on the cupid’s face. “I had no idea you made her call you ‘headmaster’ in bed.”

Flames enter my cheeks. “That was one time!”

“Why were you listening?” Dimitri barks. Unlike me, he seems utterly unconcerned with what the other guys may or may not have heard. Then again, I’m pretty sure nothing is capable of flustering the perpetually unruffled assassin.

“The walls are thin,” Frankie retorts dryly.

“And most of us were horny,” Barret once again pipes in, completely unashamedly.

“Can we not talk about this here?” I grit my teeth as a strange combination of embarrassment and—God help me—lust cascades through my bloodstream.

But it’s apparent at least one person sitting here refuses to let the conversation go.

Alex places his arms on the table and leans forward even farther until he’s able to lock gazes with Athena. “As you can see, Violet is most definitely *not* my sister,” he growls out.

“There’s nothing wrong with fucking your sibling, Alex,” Athena says kindly. “We do it all the time.”

And that . . .

That makes me choke on my own spit. I quite literally have to be punched in the back by Frankie to keep from dying.

I do recall learning about all the various gods and goddesses from the olden times. Didn’t the majority of them have, ahem, *relations* with other members of their families?

Unbidden, my eyes slip to Balor, who has his arms crossed over his chest and a scowl on his face. His gaze is already on mine, as if he just knew where my thoughts would head at this revelation.

“Don’t even,” he warns.

“Balor.” I lower my voice to a conspiratorial whisper, though I’m pretty sure everyone at the table can hear me. “Are you a product of an incestuous relationship?”

“Violet, I swear to god—” A growl reverberates through Balor’s chest as he continues to glare at me.

“There’s nothing to be ashamed about, my dear.” Athena pats her son’s hand with a soft grin on her face. She then turns to me. “But to answer your questions, yes. Balor is the son of

me and Ares . . . my brother.” She jerks her chin toward the huge, towering figure sitting opposite her with shoulder-length black hair, hard eyes, and a huge body hewn from granite.

I try really, really hard to keep from laughing, especially when Balor’s face tints red.

“Mom!”

“What?” Athena asks innocently.

“That’s interesting, Balor.” I smile sweetly up at the man who had made my life a living hell for far too long. “Very, very interesting . . .”

As Balor continues to glare at me, possibly too angry to speak, a soft, feminine voice echoes over the speakers Lucifer must’ve installed in the ceiling.

“Ms. Dracula?” the receptionist asks. “I have a Ms. Cynthia and Ms. Vanessa here to see you. I’ve sent them to Room 666.”

I lean forward to press a red button on the center of the long, rectangular table. “Thank you, Misty. I’ll be up shortly.”

Vin’s already out of his seat, hurrying toward the exit. I know he’s eager to see his sister—but probably not as eager as Ares is to see his own.

Snort.

I make myself laugh.

“Why don’t we table this discussion for later?” Athena claps her hands together and stands gracefully. Her long, floor-length dress glimmers around her curvy body like starlight woven together. She really is a beautiful woman.

How did Balor turn out so damn ugly, then?

Must be all that inbreeding . . .

As if he can sense the direction of my thoughts, Balor gives me the middle finger and then storms out of the room without a backward glance. The rest of Athena's trusted advisors follow after him, leaving us alone with the goddess of wisdom herself. Those sagacious, gray eyes latch on to my face and stick there.

"You may believe this is a hopeless endeavor, Violet, but give it time. You were always meant to rule. We will listen to you, even if it may not seem like it."

"Um . . . thank you?" I cant my head to the side as I study her quizzically.

Come the fuck on. Does she honestly expect me to believe her "nice" act? There's no way in hell she'll escape imprisonment and immediately agree to follow the orders of her archenemy's daughter. She must have an angle, but until I can determine what that angle is, I'll need to keep her close.

Besides, if she's willing to help me eliminate Zeus, then I'll do anything she asks. My soul burns with the desperate need for vengeance, and only Zeus's head on a silver platter will dampen the blistering flames.

Athena nods cordially and then sweeps away, her long, silver gown cascading behind her like a waterfall of silk. I warily watch her go until she disappears around the corner.

"I don't trust her," I say immediately, turning back to my mates. "And she's too powerful for me to compel. I have no idea if she's deep fucking me or if she's being truthful."

"I don't trust her either." Frankie tiredly runs his hands through his dark hair. It's beginning to become longer at the top, emphasizing the tight curls I love to run my fingers

through. A contemplative expression paves its way across his face as he tilts his head to the side. “Perhaps I could put together a truth potion to determine her sincerity. I’m not sure if it’ll be strong enough to work, but it wouldn’t hurt to try. It’ll certainly be stronger than your coercion.”

“You can do that?” I gape at him.

“I’ll need to gather some ingredients from my lab at Prodigium, but yes.” Frankie nods decisively. “I believe I can.”

Hope unfurls in my chest at the prospect of finally getting answers.

“Yes.” I nod eagerly. “We can send a team to gather what you need. Make a list as soon as you’re able to.” I shift my gaze to Memphis, who still sits at the table with his claws tapping against one another.

The monster meets my gaze unflinchingly. “I can assemble a team of trusted demons for you, Your Highness. Shall I put a note in your calendar?”

“Thank you, Memphis.”

I don’t know how it happened, but somewhere along the way, Memphis turned into my . . . unofficial secretary? Yes, I don’t understand it either.

But I have to say, the grotesque creature is surprisingly good at keeping meticulous, written notes of our meetings and knows all of Hell’s latest gossip.

Memphis awkwardly attempts to type on his computer with his huge crab claws. A second later, my phone pings, and I pull it out of my pocket. A new event has been added to my calendar.



SHFDI)SIODJFDKL DS DS

Okay, maybe there's one thing Memphis isn't good at. He really shouldn't be in charge of my schedule.

"So, we have a list of things we need to do." I press my hands to my temples to fight off the encroaching headache. Dear lord, I'm going to need to attach a bottle of aspirin to my hip if I'm going to continue being a "leader" and "queen." This shit is exhausting. "I'll need to enlist Balor's help in teaching me how to remove the rune from Vanessa. Afterward, a small team will travel to Frankie's lab to gather what he needs for this truth serum."

Frankie lifts his hand. "Perhaps I should go with the team to ensure they grab the correct—"

"No." I shake my head vigorously. "It's too risky. I don't want any of you guys leaving Hell while Zeus is running rampant. Especially when he has an army of runed assholes at his beck and call."

Cal blows out a breath and shifts in his seat. "Damn. Is it just me, or is it hot when Violet goes all queenly on our asses?"

"Not just you," Barret murmurs as butterflies erupt in my stomach.

Frankie pinches his lips together, looking as though he wants to protest, but I cut in before he can mount an argument.

"I can't lose you, Frankie. I can't lose any of you." Hot tears brand the backs of my eyes like burning pokers. "It'll break me."

Frankie's face softens imperceptibly before he offers me a tiny nod of acquiescence. He may not be happy with my decision, but he'll accept it.

“I can use my resources to try to find the location of your parents,” Dimitri cuts in, his voice that carefully apathetic rumble I’ve grown to love. He turns his frosty blue eyes toward me. “And before you protest, I’ll be careful. I’ve made a career of listening to the shadows. No one will even know I’m there.”

“But—” Fear coils tightly in my stomach at the thought of any of these men going off on their own. I know Dimitri is a badass assassin and spy, but...

“I’ll be safe,” Dimitri says expressionlessly. And then, in a soft voice meant just for me, he adds, “I won’t leave you, Violet. Not now; not ever.”

There’s no denying the sincerity in that one vow. Prickles of heat run up and down my skin, bringing a rosy flush to my cheeks. It’s still hard to wrap my head around the fact that Dimitri Gray—the unattainable, grumpy, cantankerous Dimitri Gray—loves me.

And though the last thing I want is for him to leave my sight, I have to put my trust in him, the same way he put his trust in me.

“Okay.” I nod repeatedly, as if I’m afraid that if I stop, I’ll change my mind and tie him to me. “But be careful.” I flick my gaze to Frankie next. “And if you feel it’s necessary for you to accompany the team, I trust your judgment. However, if something happens to you, to either of you—”

“Death and pain?” Alex drawls in an indolent voice, reclining back in his chair.

“Torture?” Cal queries.

“Ohh! I know this one!” Barret bounces up and down in his seat, like an over-excited puppy. “Castration!”

“All of the above.” I glare at both of my mates, allowing them to see the threat brimming in my eyes. I won’t hesitate to cut off their perfect dicks and feed them to a pig farm if they decide to die on me. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Crystal.” Dimitri absently picks at his nail with his blade.

“I’ll see if I’m even needed,” Frankie adds.

“We should also consider adding a training regimen for you, Violet,” Memphis interrupts.

“For me?” Gunfire rips through my chest at his words.

“You’re not a vampire, so all the training Dracula put you through is obsolete,” Memphis points out. “You need to learn how to embrace your goddess and demon side. You should be able to compel the Fomorians easily. The fact that you’re incapable of it shows how far behind in your training you truly are.” Memphis once again begins to “type” something into his laptop, his huge claws banging against the keys as he works. “Your father—your biological father—created some videos that should, hopefully, help train you to utilize your demon side.” His beady, red eyes swivel to me momentarily. “I’ve heard that your inner monster came out to play when those vampire hunters attacked and captured you?”

Worry for the future, now compounded by fear of the unknown beast roiling within me, beats through my bloodstream. My hands are suddenly slick with sweat.

“I don’t know what happened. One second, I was fine, and the next—”

Memphis nods and continues pounding away. “That’s, more than likely, your demoness side. You have no control over it, which is why you need to train.”

“He’s right, Violet,” Jack says gently, fiddling with the strands of black hair that have fallen across his cheek, hiding his scar from view. “You need to learn how to control that part of yourself. Hopefully, when we free Hera and Lucifer, they can teach you more, but until then . . .”

“You need to do what you can,” Alex finishes with a scowl. I honestly don’t even know who that ire is directed at. I half wonder if his face is just stuck that way.

My sexy, scowly, angry mate.

I don’t dare look too closely at the gamut of emotions swirling inside of me. The guys and Memphis are right. I need to learn how to control my powers. They came when I least expected them to and refused to make an appearance when I desperately needed them to. Managing my gifts could be the difference between life and death for me and my mates. It could just be the weight that tips the scale in our favor.

“You guys are right.” Terror fizzles through my blood like poison, but I don’t allow that fear to show on my face. “I’ll do what I can to figure out how to use these . . . gifts of mine, or whatever they are.” I begin to laugh, the noise slightly hysterical. “I mean, what’s the worst that can happen? I blow up Hell or something?” My laughter turns louder.

Famous last words, Violet.

Famous. Last. Words.

# CHAPTER 24



## VIOLET

I don't blow up all of Hell.

I do, however, blow up a teeny, tiny portion of it. Honestly, I'm not sure Lucifer will even notice it's gone. Who needs a stream of lost souls and despair? It doesn't add anything to the decor of Lucifer's back garden.

Sweat drips down my face as I focus on the video of my father yet again as he attempts to walk me through how to summon Hellfire. It's supposed to be a skill I possess, and he's right. I can *conjure* Hellfire.

I just can't control it.

"This is the easiest thing a demon can do," the Lucifer on the screen says. "So, of course, my baby girl is an expert at it. I wouldn't expect anything less from the future queen." Pride brims in his eyes. "I probably don't need to even teach you this, do I? You're so amazing. I'm proud—"

With a snarl, I press pause on the video.

I glower at the now-dried-up stream and then throw myself onto the ground with a huff. "That's it. I quit. I'm officially going to retire from queen-ly-ness and become an alcoholic," I lament.

"Don't be so dramatic." Vanessa Van Helsing doesn't even bother to look up from her cards. She sits at the outside table with Cynthia and Memphis, playing a game of poker. My designated best friend looks amazing, considering the fact she was spelled to try to kill me, tied up for days, and then forced to undergo hours of excruciating torture as Balor walked me through how to eliminate the magic in the rune. Her light

brown hair, the same shade as Vin's, is pulled back in a tight French braid that accentuates her sharp cheekbones and full lips. My bestie is an absolute knockout, and any guy or girl she decides to date will be damn lucky to have her. Of course, they're going to have to go through me first . . .

"You're doing great," Cynthia agrees as she drops her cards onto the table with a satisfied yelp. "Full house! Read it and weep, losers."

If Vanessa looks amazing following her imprisonment, Cynthia Clit appears . . . well . . . At least she's happy?

Long, lanky black hair cascades around an abnormally pale face, the skin tugged tight over the bones. Her white gown, embedded in jewels, is stained with both dirt and blood. When she twists to smile triumphantly at Memphis, I detect a yellow tint to her skin that makes her appear sickly.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that . . ." I can't see Memphis's expression with his back toward me, but his tone is decidedly devious. When he throws down his cards, Cynthia's mouth pops open, unveiling her serrated yellow teeth.

"Four of a kind? What the fuck?" she squeals, quite literally ripping her lips off her face and turning them upside down, so they resemble a frown. "You cheated!"

"Did not," Memphis scoffs as he grabs the handful of cookies they've been bartering with. "Suck my crab dick."

Cynthia *humphs* and folds her arms over her rather generous bust—she must've put on her D boobs today.

The four of us are currently in a garden behind Lucifer's apartment complex in Hell. Though, perhaps, garden is too kind a term . . .

The grass is black and decayed, rough to the touch and feels like sandpaper against my poor, abused body. The sky is dark as well, interspersed here and there with what appears to be rivulets of fire, providing some of the only illumination in the dreary landscape. In the distance, I can see huge, dark mountains erupting from the ground, lava spurting from the top. There used to be a river bisecting this particular stretch of land, but . . . errr . . .

Let's just say, that river is no more.

And the souls inside the river?

Also no more.

Oops?

Vanessa heaves out a breath and finally pulls her attention off her cards. Her face is sympathetic as she watches me.

It's been two weeks since we removed the magic in her rune. Two weeks since that horrible war council meeting, where everything went to shit. One week since Dimitri left to discover what he can about my missing parents. Two days since Frankie left with the hopes of sneaking into Prodigium Academy, stealing what he needs, and returning to Hell.

To say I'm a mess is the understatement of the century.

“Look, I know you're worried about your mates, but they're tough. Dimitri is the scariest motherfucker I've ever had the displeasure of meeting. And Frankie is the smartest monster alive. You don't need to worry about them.”

“It's not just them I'm worried about,” I confess, moving my head to stare at her. “It's this whole battle. We still can't agree with the Fomorians on an attack strategy. They're being stubborn shits.”



Vanessa snorts. “So what? You’re Violet fucking Dracula. You don’t need their permission. Just tell them what to do, and I guarantee you they’ll do it.”

“It’s not that easy.” I drag my hand down my face. “I’m not even sure if we’re ready. I still haven’t gotten a grip on these so-called powers I’m supposed to have as Lucifer’s daughter. And I don’t even know what I can do as Hera’s child. Then there’s the fear that my parents will be killed and —” My words cut off abruptly as something whacks me across the face. I sit up, startled, to see a dismembered hand lying on the brittle black grass beside me.

Cynthia folds her arms across her chest, the right one now sans hand. “Don’t start with this damn pity party, Violet. You have a plethora of monsters who believe in you. You just need to start believing in yourself. I gave up my mating-moon to be here with you. If that doesn’t scream loyalty, then I don’t know what does. And your mates will walk through Heaven and Hell for you. Don’t let them down by being a little wuss baby.”

Her words strike a chord of determination in me.

Because she’s right.

I have a ton of monsters putting their faith in me; I just need to start putting faith in myself.

If Memphis is to be believed, I’m destined to become a motherfucking queen. And queens don’t wallow. They grip fate by the balls and make it their little bitch.

“Yeah, that’s my girl!” Vanessa hoots as I amble to my feet and hurl daggers with my eyes at the depleted river.

I need to keep training, keep trying, keep fighting. The second I give up, the world will be lost to us. Zeus will win.

Mason's death will be in vain.

"Let's do this thing," I growl.

And then I begin to train.



HOURS LATER, MY MUSCLES ACHE, AND PAIN PERMEATES MY entire body. Not even my hour-long shower is capable of quelling the tension riding my shoulders. I still don't have full mastery of Hellfire, but I was able to hold it in the palm of my hand for a solid two seconds. I call that a win.

Surprisingly, Jack is in the kitchen when I step out of my bedroom. Over the last two weeks, all the guys have taken to staying with me in Lucifer's apartment, though they alternate who sleeps in my bed with me and who takes the couch, floor, and chairs. None of us feel comfortable entering Lucifer's room.

At all times, two of my mates are on guard, watching for threats. I try to tell them that we're safe down here, that Zeus would have to be an absolute idiot to attack us in Hell . . . but then Vin reminds me that Zeus once spent a solid hour trying to figure out how to work a television remote.

He's evil, but he ain't smart.

"Where is everyone?" I question, running a towel through my wet hair and taking a seat at the counter.

"They're meeting with Athena to try to get more information about her warriors. She's been rather cagey about how many Fomorians will be willing to fight," Jack explains, not looking up from his task as he stirs what appears to be a red sauce with a wooden spoon while simultaneously pouring

pasta into another pan of boiling water. “So, it’s just us for a few hours.”

I smile softly and drop my towel onto the stool beside me. “And does that make you flustered, Jack?” I ask softly, trying to decipher the expression tainting his handsome features.

At my words, his cheeks pinken, and he lowers his head even farther, his shiny black hair sliding forward to obscure more of his face from view. “I feel like it’s been forever since I’ve had alone time with you,” he confesses. “I’m not as . . . boisterous as some of your other mates. And I’m certainly not as needy as Hux.” He pauses, no doubt hearing his brother in his head, and winces. “Not that Hux is needy . . .”

“I get what you mean.” I bite down on my lower lip and peer at him through my fringe of lashes. “And I missed you too. Both of you. When Balor had you trapped away, I thought my heart would obliterate with how much I missed you.”

Jack peeks up at me through his long hair, and the vulnerability in his eyes breaks my heart. “You mean it?” he asks softly.

“Jack, I must be doing something wrong as your mate if you don’t know how ridiculously in love with you I am.” I smile timidly and immediately lower my eyes. How can I be so confident with some of my mates but feel like a blushing, insecure schoolgirl when I’m with Jack? There’s just something about my shy, sweet mate that makes me feel young and inexperienced.

A wide smile spreads across Jack’s face then, somehow changing him from merely handsome to breathtakingly gorgeous. His eyes sparkle behind his thin glasses.

“And I love you, Violet. More than I thought possible.” Red paints his cheeks as he ducks his head once again and turns back to his pan of sauce. “Which is why I’m taking you on a proper date.”

“A . . . date?” My heart batters my rib cage as a strange, fluttery sensation unfurls in my chest. I honestly can’t remember the last time I went on an actual date. Monsters don’t really do that. We simply look at the person we want, declare “MINE,” and then lick them.

“Hux and I decided we’ll split your time evenly tonight. I have you the first hour and a half, and Hux has you the last hour and a half.” His smile wavers at the edges before fading abruptly, replaced by panic. “If that’s okay with you, of course. If you’d prefer to only have a date with Hux, I completely understand. I just want—”

“Jack!” I laugh as I jump off the barstool and move toward him. I wrap my arms around him from behind, and he sags into me, wilting like a drooping dandelion. “Of course, I want to go on a date with you, silly.”

“I know it’s not the best time, what with everything going on—” he continues to ramble, but I grab his head and twist it to the side to capture his lips with mine.

“This is a perfect time,” I whisper, his stubble rubbing deliciously against my cheeks, having grown out over the past few days. “But I don’t really have anything to wear . . .” I glance down in dismay at my sweatpants and sweatshirt combo. That seems to be my usual style since I entered Hell. With all the training I’ve been doing—and all the meetings that have turned into screaming matches—I haven’t bothered with my usual attire of skirts and blouses.

“You look beautiful.” Jack immediately turns crimson. “You always look beautiful.” He clears his throat and quickly moves toward his boiling-over spaghetti, untangling himself from my arms in the process. “Shall we have dinner?”

Giddiness bubbles inside of me like a soda can that’s been shaken and then opened.

A date.

With Jack and then Hux.

Love for both of them threatens to consume me, and tears prick my eyes. I’ve needed this—needed them—after the few days I’ve had. Somehow, they seemed to know that.

With a wide smile, I say, “Let’s get this date started.”

# CHAPTER 25



DIMITRI

I hate it when they scream.

I don't know what they expect to happen—for me to suddenly grow a conscience and set them free? For someone to hear their desperate cries and release them? The probability of either of those things happening is a solid zero.

Honestly, if this man doesn't shut the fuck up, I might need to consider removing his tongue, which will be a damn shame, since I need him to talk. I just can't stand the sound of his terrified screams as they reverberate off the walls of my torture chamber—a meticulously clean room with pure white walls and a drain in the center of the floor. The only entrance into my box of horrors is a mirror on the far wall.

And considering I'm one of the only monsters in existence who can use mirrors for portal travel . . .

“No one's coming for you,” I singsong as I twirl my favorite dagger around and around in my hand. This hasn't always been a beloved weapon of mine, but everything changed that night a week ago, when I made love to Violet Dracula.

When I told her I'm hers, just as thoroughly as she's mine.

I lower my gaze to the copper handle and then to the keen blade, which has traced almost every inch of my mate's perfect flesh.

I'm not a sentimental man, but if I were to have a favorite weapon, it would be this one.

Which is why it's cosmic justice for me to use it to torture her enemies.

“Please! Let me go!” The pathetic excuse for a monster begins to sob, his chin dropping forward and his sweaty gray hair falling in front of his face.

I haven’t even started cutting his flesh yet. I can’t imagine the annoying sobs that’ll escape him when I do.

This creature is supposed to be one of Zeus’s top officials?

The prospect is almost comical.

It took me far too long to uncover this bastard’s name and find his location. I tortured and killed over twenty of Zeus’s loyal men in my quest to find him.

Redcap—the only creature of its type in existence.

A malevolent, murderous, wicked goblin with talons that resemble that of an eagle, large eyes the color of fire, and grisly gray hair that streams down his back. And, of course, his signature cap, which perches on the top of his head. According to legend, he gained his name by dipping the cap in the blood of his victims and stealing a tiny portion of their magic. It’s no wonder Zeus has him on his payroll—they both relish taking what doesn’t belong to them.

Redcap continues to cry and thrash against his bindings, but there’ll be no escape for this pathetic excuse for a monster.

“It took me a long time to track you down,” I confess as I once again lower my gaze to the blade in my hand. It shimmers in the fluorescent lighting of my torture chamber. “I’ve been away from my mate for an entire fucking week. Do you know what it’s like to be away from your mate for that long?” I don’t wait for him to respond. “I can’t imagine you do, considering you don’t have a mate. But it’s been torture.” I chuckle dryly and take a step closer, causing his screams to increase and ricochet off the walls. “It’s funny, if you think



about it. I denied my feelings for Violet Dracula for too damn long, and the second I confess the truth to her? The second I fully give myself to her, body and soul? I'm forced to leave. Then again, my prolonged absence will be worth it if I can provide my mate with the information she desires."

Abruptly, I crouch down in front of the bulbous goblin and stab the knife into his hand. A howl of agony escapes him as he whips his head from side to side, tears cascading down his wart-filled face.

"My sources say you're one of the few monsters who knows where Zeus is keeping Hera, Lucifer, and Dracula. Where are they?"

Anger momentarily flares to life in Redcap's eyes, eclipsing the pain and fear from only a few seconds ago. I have to hold back my chuckle.

Apparently, this little monster has a backbone.

"Fuck you!" Redcap hisses, though his voice still trembles with barely suppressed terror.

I click my tongue disapprovingly. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid I have my mate for that. Thank you for your offer, but I'm going to have to decline." I tug the blade out of his hand and then drop it into his thigh, precariously close to his cock. If there's one thing I've found that terrifies both monster and man alike, it's a threat against their nether regions.

"Tell me where they are." The cocksure smile slips from my face, replaced by the stone-cold calm I always feel before I make a kill. This is the Dimitri Gray Violet should fear—the one who lurks in the shadows, blade in hand, and stabs the unsuspecting foe in the back. I'm a demon disguised as an angel, hell-bent on death and destruction.

“Fuck you!” Redcap screams again.

“Wrong answer.”

Retreating to the place deep inside of me—the one where the shadows rule supreme and the light cowers away—I slide the dagger out of his flesh.

And then, to the soundtrack of his screams, I begin to cut.

## CHAPTER 26



## VIOLET

I throw my head back in laughter as Jack finishes his story, utilizing over-the-top hand gestures and exaggerated impressions.

“You can imagine my surprise when I woke up the next morning to see my own face in the newspaper,” he continues, his eyes glimmering with mirth behind his wire-framed glasses. “And to discover it’s because I was caught streaking through New York City?” He chuckles as he takes another sip of his wine. “This was 1923, Violet. Even saying the word penis got you locked up in prison.”

“I can’t believe Hux did that!” I place a hand over my mouth to smother my incessant giggles.

“In his defense, he didn’t realize that clothes were mandatory,” Jack says with a sigh. He reaches across the glass coffee table and grabs the bottle of wine he procured for this meal. “More wine, m’lady?”

“Why thank you, kind sir,” I reply in a posh British accent.

We sit side by side on the floor in Lucifer’s apartment, using the couch as a backrest. This date has been everything I haven’t allowed myself to dream for. Food. Laughter. And spending time with one of the men I love more than life itself.

Jack’s definitely one of my more timid mates, preferring to quietly assess the situation and only speak up when he deems it necessary. However, that just makes everything he says even more poignant and so goddamn special. His gaze alone feels like specks of hot ash blowing against my cheeks.

“You know, alcohol doesn’t really have an effect on me,” I say as I take another long sip of the red wine. I don’t know what the name of this bottle is, but it’s delicious.

“Are you saying you’re trying to get me drunk to take advantage of me?” Jack asks jokingly, sounding so much like Mason that my heart gives a painful thump. Sometimes, I think it would be easier to forget about Mason and move on with my life. The pain wouldn’t be as intense, then. Maybe I could cauterize the wound and no longer be in danger of bleeding to death.

But I refuse to forget about Mason, refuse to allow him to drift silently into the abyss. He’ll always be a part of me, even though he’s no longer physically here. I’ll see him in the sun shining down on the unsuspecting world below. In the way the sky darkens at night, the stain of twilight spreading across the blue. I’ll see him in the faces of my other mates and in strangers I pass on the street. Mason will live, because I’ll refuse to let him go. The knife wedged in my chest will always remain, a physical reminder of the man I loved and lost.

*Love and lost.*

I still love him.

I’ll always love him.

It’s almost as if he’s here with me, sitting beside me, whispering in my ear . . .

“You can take advantage of *me* anytime you want, kind sir,” I tell Jack with an impish grin.

The smile Jack grants me is breathtaking. My heart trips over nothing, falls face-first onto the asphalt, skins its knees, and then gets back up with a newfound determination.

How can anyone deny the love emanating from my sweet mate's eyes?

“You know, Hux isn't happy with me for sharing that story with you.” Jack chuckles and moves to lean farther back against the white couch. “He thinks it makes him . . . What's the word I'm looking for? Oh. A loser. He thinks it makes him a loser.”

I laugh out loud at that, envisioning Hux's grumpy retorts to every story Jack regaled me with—most of which featured him doing something ridiculously inappropriate.

“Oh, Hux.” I shake my head with a smile. “You'll never be a loser to me.”

“But you haven't heard the time that Hux once thought orgasm and organism had the same meaning. He—” Jack's right hand moves with an almost blistering speed and slams over Jack's mouth. I throw my head back in laughter, knowing Hux is controlling that one wayward limb to stop Jack from sharing more of the embarrassing stories from his past.

“I can't even begin to understand all you've lived through.” I sigh as I begin to push my spaghetti around with my fork. “You both have lived so long. You've probably been in love hundreds of times—”

Jack's shaking his head before I've even finished speaking. “We haven't. I haven't. Hux hasn't. I'm not saying that there haven't been other women, but we've never known love until we met you.” He hesitates then, seeming to consider his next words carefully, and his fingers begin to tap anxiously against his thigh. “We think fate's always been leading us to you, Violet. I've been around for hundreds of years and never even considered attending Prodigium Academy before. Then, suddenly, out of the blue, I had this grand epiphany.” He

lowers his head so his dark, onyx-colored hair conceals his features from view. “I’ll admit that my intentions weren’t the greatest at the time—”

“What do you mean?” I ask quizzically.

Jack hesitates yet again, but whatever he sees on my face encourages him to continue. “I hated Hux back then. I thought . . . well . . . I thought he was a crazy murderer.” He chuckles softly, and deep laughter bubbles out of me and washes away the filth from the day. Because, yeah, that sounds like an adequate description for my sweet, slightly oblivious, mate. “But then I realized he wasn’t the one who committed all those atrocities. That was Balor. Hux was only trying to protect me when he hid those bodies because he thought *I* was the one killing monsters and humans alike. He always protected me, even when I didn’t deserve it.”

My amusement dwindles marginally when I think of everything Balor put my mates through. God, what would their lives have been like if they hadn’t spent centuries hating each other? If Jack hadn’t locked Hux away, refusing to let his soul brother come out? Would things have been different? Would they have still come to Prodigium Academy? Would I have met them?

I’m so engrossed in studying Jack that I completely miss the next part of the conversation. I’m only dragged back to the present when his hand lands on my knee. The warmth of his touch sends heat skittering through my body.

“I love Hux, Violet. He’s my brother, my twin, the other half of my soul.” He once again hesitates, and I watch as his perfectly straight teeth nibble on his lower lip. “We’ve been talking . . . um . . . We just think . . . um . . . We don’t want to separate.” He blurts out the last sentence as if he’s afraid if he

doesn't, he'll never get the nerve to say it. Red encroaches the edges of his cheeks as he fights a blush. "What I mean is . . . we don't want two bodies. We want to stay like this. Together. As one. If you . . . um . . . If you want us, that is." Fear creeps its way across his handsome face. "If you don't, we can talk to Frankie and work something out. We'll do anything for you, Violet. Anything. We just think—"

I lean forward and plant my lips against his, cutting him off in mid-sentence. My eyes, however, remain open, tracking the blush that spreads from his neck to his cheeks. I pull away just slightly, so he can see the sincerity on my face.

"I just want you both to be happy," I confess. "I love you guys so, so much. If you want to remain together, then I'll support that one-hundred-percent. If you want to find a new body, then I'll happily murder some people for you." I shrug. "I'll do anything for you guys. *Everything.*"

Tension thickens like fog over a graveyard as Jack leans even closer, allowing me to see the flecks of white in his startling blue eyes. They may not be as bright as Dimitri's, but they're beautiful all the same, reminding me distinctly of waves lapping against the shoreline, crested with white foam.

"You may be willing to kill for me, Violet Dracula." Jack's voice is a hungry growl I've never heard before, and it sends my pulse skittering. "But I'll burn the world down for you."

He grabs a fistful of my hair and tugs my mouth to his. There's nothing gentle or soft about this kiss. He brands me with every movement of his lips against my own. Possessiveness permeates every inch of his body, and hunger taints his handsome features.

I've come to realize that Hux and Jack are extremely different when it comes to the bedroom. Hux treats me like



I'm made of glass—fragile and invaluable. He worships me with the reverence reserved for deities and goddesses.

Jack, on the other hand, devours me. Every swipe of his tongue against my own is further proof that I'm his and he's mine. All my doubts and worries over the upcoming battle are gone, banished by the promise his kiss is offering.

He'll protect me.

He'll stand by me.

He'll fight with me and for me.

His kisses quite literally zap all residual thoughts away, until all I can focus on is his hand in my hair and his lips against mine. Pain explodes through my skull as he tugs just hard enough to send lightning spurting through my bloodstream.

Somehow, I find myself straddling him, my hips moving of their own accord as I rub against the hard cock tenting his pants.

“Jack,” I whimper as I tug my lips away from his to meet his eyes, the color of a stormy sky. Lust has darkened the pupils until the blue I've become so familiar with appears almost gray in the lighting.

“Yes, my angel,” he murmurs as he peppers kisses down my neck.

“I need you.” I grab his hair as tightly as he fisted my own, loving how soft the black locks feel beneath my fingers.

“You have me.”

Is he . . . teasing me? I detect a smile in his voice as he continues to suck and nibble at my skin.

“You know what I mean,” I growl out.

Jack pauses, his lips directly above my collarbone, his lips curved up in a smile I can feel against my skin.

“Do I?”

His touch has rendered me useless. All I can do is pant and gyrate against him, desperately seeking friction.

“Fuck, Jack. I need you. I need your cock.” I don’t want to beg, but I’m desperate. My body is on fire, and I know only Jack’s touch will be capable of diminishing these particular flames.

Anticipation lances through me as Jack’s warm, sultry chuckle reverberates through my body. He pulls away from my neck to study me. The amused, wicked smile fades from his face, replaced by something infinitely sweeter and softer.

“I love you, Violet Dracula. I love you more than I ever thought possible.”

I desperately drop my mouth to his, feeling the weight of his kisses in the marrow of my bones and the depths of my soul.

“I love you too. Both of you. So goddamn much.”

And then it becomes a desperate race to get each other’s clothes off. Jack isn’t gentle or worried as he rips off my sleep shirt and tosses it aside. I didn’t wear a bra after my shower, so my breasts spring free, my nipples already hard and aching for his mouth.

He doesn’t disappoint as he lowers his head to one of the nubs and begins to suck on it. The hand not holding me in place inches into the waistband of my sleep pants and panties to rub at my slick folds. When he bites down on my nipple,

pain unfurls inside of me, but it's eclipsed by the pleasure Jack is rousing with his skilled fingers.

"You're so wet for me, angel," Jack murmurs as he pulls away from my breast to resume kissing me. His words are raspy, heated gasps against my lips.

"I need you, Jack," I whimper. "I need your cock inside of me."

A wicked grin, so unlike my usual shy and timid mate, spreads across his face. He tugs away from me, just far enough to gauge my expression. "I suppose I should indulge my lady," he murmurs as he curls his fingers in a beckoning motion inside of me.

I'm rocking my hips faster, chasing that release, when Jack pulls out of me. He grabs my waist and lifts me off him, settling me beside him.

"Jack!" I feel like a pouting toddler as I cross my arms over my naked chest and fume.

Jack simply smiles as he tugs his pants and boxers down the rest of the way, a pearl of precum glistening at the tip. Somehow, he lost his shirt, though I don't remember tugging it off him. Perhaps it was when he had his fingers deep within my pussy . . .

I take a moment to admire his sculpted, naked body.

Mine.

All mine.

Jack grabs the base of his hard cock and gives it a squeeze, his eyes never leaving mine as he does so.

"Well?" A teasing glint manifests in his gaze. "You said you wanted my cock inside of you. What are you waiting for?"

“Someone’s feeling cheeky tonight,” I tease as I move to my hands and knees and offer a languid lap of my tongue across his tip. His dick jerks, and I smile inwardly to myself, pleased at his innate reaction to such a small touch.

Jack abruptly grabs my cheeks between both of his hands. His worried eyes survey my own. “Is it too much?” he asks nervously. “I know I can be a little rough with you—”

“It’s perfect, Jack,” I promise him. “I love the way you touch me.”

And I do.

Sometimes, I need the careful reverence and gentleness that Hux offers. Other times, I need to have complete control like I do with Vin. Then there are times I need to give up my ironclad control and allow Dimitri to take the reins. With Jack, I don’t need to take control nor give it up. We’re equals when we touch each other. He doesn’t hesitate to work my body the way he wants to, but he doesn’t begrudge me the same chance.

“Now . . .” I offer him what I hope is a seductive smile as I resume my work on his hard cock. As my mouth works the tip of him, I wrap my hand around the base, stroking and twisting. I apply just enough pressure that he cries out in alarm but not enough to actually hurt him. I suck him hungrily, ravenously, desperately, loving the way his cum tastes on my tongue. When I’m sure I won’t choke, I remove my hand and lower my mouth all the way to the base.

“Violet, frick . . .” He tangles his fingers in my hair as he fucks my mouth, pistoning in and out of me, his eyelids fluttering with pleasure.

I can’t help but smile coquettishly against his length.

Because, yeah, I'm a smug bitch. And nothing makes me smugger than knowing I put that expression of unfettered pleasure on my mate's face. Me.

"You're so perfect, angel. So beautiful. So incredibly beautiful. God, I love you. I love you so much," Jack mutters, his voice as smooth as cognac.

My pulse races, my adrenaline spiking, and I just know Jack is close to that edge. I can feel the way his cock jerks inside of my mouth, hear how erratic his breathing has become, see the fluttering of his lashes as he struggles to hold on.

A gleam ignites in his eyes, and he abruptly tugs my head off his cock. He uses his grip on my hair to guide my face to his, kissing me hungrily, each swipe of his tongue sending heat spiraling through my body.

"Take your pants off, Violet. Now," he growls as he takes one of my stiff nipples into his mouth and then releases it with a pop.

As he does that, I work to fully remove my sweats and panties, kicking the clothing away from me.

When I'm naked, Jack grabs my hips once more and helps me straddle his legs. I can feel the hairs on his thighs rubbing against my skin, somehow lighting up all of my nerve endings.

"Put me inside of you, Violet," he murmurs against my nipple as he continues to lick, suck, and nibble on the sensitive nub.

Eagerly, I reach between our bodies until I'm grasping his rigid length. It takes a few tries to line myself up with him—my body is too-overstimulated and my muscles feel like lead

—but soon, I feel the tip of his dick brushing against my most sensitive folds.

I put some weight on my heels to push myself up, and then I slam back down on his dick. We both groan at the contact, my walls clenching around his length as I struggle to adjust to the intrusion.

“Fuck, Violet,” Jack murmurs, and the use of that swear word has streaks of red dancing across my vision. Jack only swears when he’s feeling a strong emotion or close to losing control. So, to hear it now . . .

I once again push off him, causing the tip of his dick to drag over my most sensitive spots, before slamming back down.

“Yes,” I groan.

“Ride me, angel.” His fingers move to grip my hips, tightening just enough to leave bruises. “I want to feel you ride my cock.”

I use my heels to push myself up and down his length, easily finding a rhythm. Jack thrusts his hips upward in time with me, his hands moving from my hips to my bouncing tits, kneading the overstimulated flesh and rolling my nipples between his fingers.

His cries of pleasure harmonize with my own as we both take running dives off the looming cliff. I scream as I explode around him, wave after wave of pleasure rippling through me and somehow settling the maelstrom raging in my mind. All the fear, the worry, the panic . . . They all dissipate as I wrap my arms tight around Jack, trembling through the aftershocks. I’m barely even aware of Jack roaring his release as well, my body limp and languid.

Love fills me, and I swear I'm close to bursting with the enormity of it.

How could I have gotten so lucky to have him in my life?

"Jack," I whisper as I drop my sweaty forehead to his shoulder and work to modulate my breathing. "Fuck, Jack."

An amused chuckle tinkers through the room. "Angel, that was ama—" Jack cuts off abruptly, and the hands gripping my waist suddenly turn gentle, becoming lax. And then a deep, accented voice booms, "Precious Treasure."

I force my head up just as Hux removes the glasses from his face and tosses them aside. With his sweaty hair mussed and pushed away from his face, I can clearly see the scar slicing through his cheek.

"Hux," I whisper, taking in my enraged, psycho, perfect mate.

"It's been an hour and a half," Hux explains in a dark voice. His heated eyes roam over my naked body, peppering my flesh with goose bumps. "Now, it's my turn."

I smile in eager anticipation as Hux slowly removes his cock from my pussy and then rolls me onto the ground. He continues to kneel over me, a droplet of precum sparkling on his tip, as he surveys me from head to toe.

"You're beautiful, my precious treasure." Tenderly, he lowers himself over me and presses his lips to my own. "You look radiant, naked and covered in my brother's cum."

One of his fingers reverently traces one of my nipples, and I have to bite back the groan that threatens to escape.

Unlike with Jack, there's no foreplay or waiting. Hux knows what he wants, and he takes it.

And what he wants more than anything else in the world—more than *anyone* else in the world—is me.

“Are you ready for me, Precious Treasure?” he asks as he moves between my thighs, his cock rubbing deliciously against my already tender folds.

“Make love to me, Hux,” I plead. “Please.”

I need more. So much more.

I need it all.

There’s no hesitation as Hux slides inside of me, his hips jerking forward in one graceful motion. His hands move to my breasts and begin to gently caress them. His touch renders me useless, boneless, a heap of skin that’s characterized by the pleasure he can inflict upon me.

Hux begins to move then, his eyes ensnaring mine and refusing to look away. I’m helpless to do anything but stare up at the face of the man I love.

We don’t fuck; we make slow, sensual love. Every touch along my body sends heat skittering through my veins—burning, scorching, blazing.

He lowers his hands to either side of my face as he continues to move slowly inside of me. His chest brushes against my sensitive nipples with each glide of his hips.

“I love you, my precious treasure.”

“I love you too.”

My impending orgasm holds my body hostage. I’m aware of nothing but the sweat dripping down my face and the feel of his cock deep inside me. One of his fingers reaches between our bodies to play with my clit, and it’s over. I detonate with a



scream I'm sure could be heard by Zeus himself in Mount Olympus.

My climax rampages through me as I throw my head back and cry out. I dig my fingers into Hux's shoulders, hard, as his hips begin to move faster, faster, faster—

He spills his seed inside of me with a possessive snarl, pure need and love emanating from the eyes I love so much. I can't help but stare unabashedly up at his beautiful face. Post-orgasm, he looks like an entirely different person. There's a softness in his eyes that I only ever see with me. The tension usually lining his shoulders has diminished.

"I really do love you, chocolate bar," I murmur as I tilt my head up to claim his lips once more with my own. I'll never get tired of kissing him, just as I'll never get tired of blood or books or stabbing my enemies in the eye. I could kiss my mates forever.

"I love you too."

My heart swells as Hux shifts us so I'm sprawled across his chest, my ear directly over his rapidly pounding heart.

We don't move for over an hour. Hux simply holds me, content to tenderly run his fingers up and down my bare arm. I don't feel the need to move, either. This . . . this is paradise. The only thing that would make it even better is the rest of my mates joining me.

As if the universe heard my unspoken plea—and decided to be a raging bitch about it—the door to the apartment opens and Frankie stumbles inside.

Bloody, bruised, and covered in stab wounds.

I jump in alarm, a cry of fear ripping from my throat, just as he falls over, landing unconscious on the ground at my feet.

# CHAPTER 27



VIOLET

“**W**hat the fuck happened?” I demand, aiming a scowl at Memphis, who stands near the doorway of my room.

Frankie lies on the bed, conscious but groggy, numerous wounds marring his flesh.

“According to the demons who accompanied Mr. Frankie Frankenstein,” Memphis begins in a low, scratchy voice, “a group of monsters, all spelled by Zeus to attack vampires and any vampire sympathizers, ambushed them.”

“They had the rune?” I ask as I dab at Frankie’s face with a washcloth, attempting to clear it of dirt, grime, and blood. It says a lot about Frankie’s state that he doesn’t pull away or tell me to stop, insisting he’s okay. Instead, he merely looks up at me through heavily lidded eyes, his brown hair grazing his forehead in sweaty clumps.

“They did.” Memphis nods once. “There was a fight, and Mr. Frankenstein here was injured. Fortunately, my team was able to escape before anything serious could happen.”

“Anything serious!” A bark of dry, slightly hysterical laughter escapes me. “Do you not see Frankie? He looks like shit!”

“Thanks, Vi,” Frankie murmurs dryly, but his voice is muffled and nearly incoherent.

“Shush.” I gently swat at his shoulder—one of the few places on his body that isn’t bloody. “You know I love you.”

“If that’ll be all . . .?” Memphis waits for me to dismiss him, and I do so without a backward glance. I can’t focus on

anything but Frankie, hot to the touch and covered in stab wounds and bruises.

What a way to end date night.

I scowl at nothing in particular as I drop the washcloth into the bowl Jack provided me and then rub my hands on the bottom of my shirt. Well, Jack and Hux's shirt. In my haste to get clothes on, I didn't really pay too much attention to what I grabbed. I'm pretty sure I'm not wearing any underwear, either.

"Violet, I'm okay," Frankie whispers, his voice still a soft whisper that caresses my skin like the breeze clawing at the window outside. He coughs, pain lancing across his face, before he reaches for my hand and gives it a squeeze. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine." Tears well in my eyes, and it's a testament to my control that I don't allow them to fall. "I almost lost you today, Frankie."

"Vi—"

"No, Frankie." I shake my head adamantly as trembles rattle my body, causing my teeth to literally chatter. "I almost lost you, and I can't . . . I won't . . ." Fuck, it's happening. I'm going to cry. Goddammit. "I can't lose you too." A single tear cascades down my cheek but stops before it can reach my lips. It just hovers there, this ominous presence, but I don't dare lift a hand to brush it away. I don't want to stop touching Frankie.

Frankie doesn't have such qualms.

With a tremulous smile, he brushes away that traitorous tear and then opens his hand to cup my cheek. I close my eyes and lean farther against his palm, relishing the heat his body

seems to emit. It's just a reminder that he's alive, he's here, he's with me.

“Violet, you don't need to worry.” He chuckles dryly. “I'm not even sure I can die, remember? I'm not a real monster.”

“Don't say shit like that,” I snap fiercely. “You're just as real as me and the others.”

Shadows momentarily darken his eyes, and his fingers flex instinctively where they're gripping my face. “I'm a failed experiment, Violet. I was created in a lab—”

“Stop it.” I squeeze my eyes shut, as if that will somehow equate to blocking out his horrible, self-deprecating words. “I hate it when you say that.”

“It's the truth.”

“It's not the truth. You're real, you're Frankie, and I love you.” I grab his wrist and slowly lower his hand from my cheek. I then entangle our fingers and settle our combined hands in my lap. “Now, tell me what happened.”

Frankie sighs and gives my hand a reassuring squeeze. “Everything was going fine at first. We got to my lab with no issues, and I was able to grab all the ingredients for the potion without running into anyone.”

My brows furrow. “So, what happened?”

Something akin to guilt crosses Frankie's features.

“I was stupid,” he confesses. “I came up with an idea, and instead of leaving my lab, I decided to follow up on it.”

I tighten my grip on his hand, forcing myself to relax my tight hold when he winces.

“And?”

“And . . . that extra time spent in the lab is what gave me away. Before I knew what was happening, we were surrounded, and I was fighting off twenty monsters, all with that damn rune stamped on their skin.”

Tears once again prickle the backs of my eyes. I’ll never begrudge Frankie’s amazing, scientific mind, but it almost cost him his life. I know he gets lost in his projects, but what if he hadn’t gotten away? What if one of the monsters had stabbed him or beheaded him or—

“Hey.” Frankie’s soft voice drags my attention back to the present. He offers me a soft smile, one that somehow demotes him from intimidating to approachable. It’s not often I see that particular smile gracing his handsome features, but it’s been becoming more and more common with me. “I can see the wheels in your mind turning. I’m okay.”

“You almost weren’t.”

“But I am okay.” Pain creases his face as he glances down at where our hands are joined. “I know I sometimes become hyper-focused on my experiments and projects—”

“I wouldn’t change that for anything in the world, Frankie,” I confess on a tired sigh. “I love that about you. But sometimes, I wish you would care a little bit more about your own health and safety.”

I heard from Vin that Frankie once remained in his lab for almost two weeks, working on an experiment. By the time the guys convinced him to join the land of the living, Frankie had lost fifteen pounds and was paler than a ghost.

“I know. I’m sorry.” Frankie gives my hand another squeeze. “I just thought I may have come up with a way to turn the tides in our favor.”

My curiosity piques. “What do you mean?”

“Well, while I was down there, I started thinking about god-blessed daggers and their rarity. It makes sense, because a god-blessed dagger is one of the only weapons that can kill almost every living creature on this earth.” The longer Frankie talks, the more animated he becomes. His face practically seems to glow with his excitement. “So, I studied the god-blessed daggers I had on hand, and I started thinking . . . What if we could make more god-blessed weapons? Hundreds of them? One for every member of our army?”

“That would definitely give us an advantage, but I’m not even sure there are that many daggers in existence,” I admit, my mind attempting to catch up to some inevitable conclusion Frankie already came to.

The smile lighting up his face is glorious, and I momentarily forget how to breathe as I stare down at it.

*Focus, Violet!*

“Violet . . . you’re a goddess,” Frankie says softly, still smiling adoringly up at me.

God, the things I want to do to this man. If he wasn’t in pain and healing, I would grab his cock and—

Damn.

Head. Out. Of. Gutter.

Sometimes, I swear I’m part goldfish. It’s hard for me to focus on more than one thing at a time.

“Yes . . . I suppose I am?” I blink at Frankie, unsure of where he’s going with this.

Fortunately, Frankie doesn’t treat me like an idiot for not understanding his thought process. That’s one thing I

appreciate about my genius mate.

“What if you can use your own magic to create god-blessed daggers,” Frankie explains, his eyes igniting with excitement and glee. “And maybe not even just daggers . . . but arrows and swords and even bullets.”

Something akin to hope beats through my blood like a pulse. I find myself leaning forward, smiling enigmatically. Frankie’s excitement is fucking contagious.

“You think it’s possible?”

“I’m not sure,” Frankie confesses. “I still have to work out the logistics. And, of course, if it does work, we need to decide who will get such a weapon. It’s immensely powerful and one of the few things capable of killing you, Violet.” His eyes begin to glaze over, as they always do when he’s attempting to unravel a difficult problem. “Perhaps if I can continue my study of god-blessed daggers, I can identify what magic is used to create such a potent weapon, and then we can attempt to replicate it. Maybe I could even isolate the magic and—”

“Okay, you amazingly sexy genius.” I lean down to peck him on the lips. “While I love it when you talk science-y to me, I want you to heal, first and foremost. And that means getting some rest. You look exhausted. Did you even sleep while you were away?”

Frankie throws me an exasperated glare, but even he can’t hide the dark shadows beneath both of his eyes. “Violet, this is important.”

“You’re more important,” I counter immediately. “Sleep. Tomorrow, you can work on the truth potion and continue your study on god-blessed daggers. Tonight, you’re sleeping.”



Frankie looks as if he wants to protest, but then he sighs, his expression softening. Vulnerability momentarily peeks through his mask as he stares up at me.

“Will you stay with me tonight?” he asks. “I don’t mean for sex or anything like that.” A blush tints his cheeks, proof that he’s alive, despite what he believes. “I just want to hold you.”

I smile down at him. “You read my mind.”

Slowly, making sure not to exacerbate any of his injuries, I crawl into bed with him. He wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me flush against his chest.

“Am I hurting you?” I whisper, my lips directly against his neck. I feel more than see him shudder at my words, goose bumps peppering his skin.

“You can never hurt me, Violet. Never.”

And then, in a moment plucked straight out of a fairy tale, the princess falls asleep in the arms of her handsome prince. It’s a moment too perfect to last.

Any second now, the dragon will descend and drown the world in fire.

But for now . . .

For now, I sleep in the arms of one of the men I love.

## CHAPTER 28



## VIOLET

I bounce on my seat at the head of the war table, restless anticipation scuttling directly underneath my skin, like an infestation of beetles. I try to appear nonchalant and impassive as my mates and the Fomorians discuss battle tactics, but I can't rip my gaze away from the cups of water lining the table.

As I watch, Athena brings one to her lips, taking a tentative sip before lowering it.

“Only those in Zeus's inner circle are acting of their own freewill,” Vin insists for the one hundredth time today alone. Frustration lines his handsome face. “The goal should be to incapacitate, not kill. Most of the monsters are innocent, a victim of that damn rune.”

“We're risking our own soldiers, boy,” Ares retorts with a growl, his hand gripping his glass of water tightly. “You can't possibly suggest that we merely knock these bastards unconscious. That'll put us at a severe disadvantage. The enemy won't hesitate to kill.” He takes a gulp of water, rubs his mouth clean with the back of his hand, then reclines in his seat. His hard, granite-like eyes volley from face to face before locking on me. “You need to control your men, Violet.”

A scowl distorts my face before I can stop it. Screw civility. No one gets to disrespect my mates.

“You need to control your mouth, Ares,” I retort coldly.

Balor, sitting beside his father, rolls his eyes heavenward. “Violet, stop being a petty bitch and just—”

“Balor, my dear, what exactly are you incest-uating?” I ask sweetly, batting my eyelashes.

He glares at me. “Knock that shit off.”

“Make me, asshole,” I retort. Balor opens his mouth, as if he plans to do just that, but Vin slams his fist down on the table, startling us all.

“Enough. This bickering will get us nowhere. Does anyone have anything prudent to say?” A muscle in his jaw begins to twitch like a ticking clock. Out of all my mates, Vin looks the most haggard, and that’s saying something, considering Frankie got the shit beat out of him only a few days ago. I make a mental note to force Vin into bed as soon as this meeting adjourns.

Iris, one of the quieter Fomorians, tentatively lifts her hand into the air.

She’s a pretty woman, with light brown hair, soft features, and full red lips. However, there’s something about her eyes that always gives me a pause. They just appear . . . empty. Bereft. Half the time, I swear she’s not seeing anyone, despite being in the same room as us.

In a voice that’s both musical and eerie, Iris whispers, “Sometimes, I lie down on the sand and pretend to be a starfish. Then, when people walk by, I ask them to throw rocks at me.”

Um . . . okay?

Iris blinks and smiles innocently—those dull, empty eyes traveling over us all.

“Thank you for sharing, Iris. I’ll, um, make a note of that.” I scratch at my wrist hard enough to draw blood.

“It looks as if my potion is working,” Frankie murmurs, his husky voice sending delicate tremors through my entire body. I can’t help but remember the night before when I

“nursed” him back to health, as I’ve been doing the last few days. Who knew the poor chap just needed me to sit on his face while he ate my pussy? The things I do for medicine, I tell you. Perhaps I should write a thesis on it. Doctors everywhere will pounce on my cure-all solution to any and all ailments.

I clear my throat and shake my head simultaneously, hoping to disperse some of the cobwebs clogging my mind. Now is not the time for my libido to get rather inappropriate ideas.

Besides, I have a rat to . . . unrat-ify? Yeah. I have a rat to unratify.

I fold my hands on the top of the table and smile serenely at the group of Fomorians. “Do you guys have anything you’d like to add to the conversation before we call it quits for the day?”

Balor squints at me, a crease materializing between his brows. “Why do you look like you’re up to no good?”

Fuck.

Play it cool, Violet.

Play it cool.

“Whatever do you mean, you strapping, fine sir?” I ask in an over-the-top British accent that’s probably just a tad offensive.

Balor’s eyes narrow even farther, but Athena cuts off whatever he’s about to say with a negligent wave of her hand. “There’s a lot I want to say, Violet, and most of them have to do with your leadership capabilities.” She hefts up her chin imperiously, her gray eyes appearing almost metallic in the artificial lighting. “You’re supposed to be the queen—*our*

queen—yet you can't take control of a simple meeting. Do not let any of us walk all over you, child." Abruptly, her face creases, confusion eclipsing the domineering look from only seconds before. "Why did I say that out loud?"

A cold, satisfied smile erupts on Frankie's face. "Because I placed a truth potion in all of your glasses."

"You did what?" Ra's face twists with rage as he jumps to his feet.

My guys explode into movement almost instantly. Hux ventures a few steps closer to where I still sit, attempting to appear unruffled, despite the way my heart slams in my chest and goose bumps pop up all over my skin. Cal and Barret both circle the perimeter of the room, their eyes tracking the Fomorians with all the ruthlessness of predators preparing to pounce on their unsuspecting prey. Vin palms the hilt of one of his daggers, dark mist encircles Alex's wrists like iron bands, and Frankie straightens almost imperceptibly, his eyes thin slits.

"Settle, Ra." Athena waves a hand at the other Fomorian, though she never takes her eyes off me. Confusion and disbelief, warring with something that looks oddly like respect, cloud her vision. "Explain."

"We need to know your intentions," Frankie answers for me, his voice sharp and succinct. He uses his middle finger to push his glasses farther up his nose. "We need to know if we can trust you."

"And you didn't believe me before?" Amusement colors Athena's face.

"Excuse me for not being confident that you're not a traitorous, murderous bitch," Vin drawls sardonically.

Balor whips his head in the vampire hunter's direction, his teeth bared and his eyes glimmering with an incandescent rage. "Don't you dare talk about my mother like that—"

"You're smart," Athena interrupts, her eyes still locked on mine. "I'll admit that, if I were in your shoes, I would do the same thing. How does that saying go? Keep your friends close but your enemies closer?"

"Is that what you are?" My heart flips over in my chest as nerves assail me. A part of me fears the answer to my question just as desperately as I know I need it. "An enemy?"

Athena tsks her tongue. "You're asking the wrong questions, Violet. But if you want the truth from me . . . no, I don't have any intentions of betraying you. I meant what I said before. I believe you're what the world needs if we're ever going to move forward. You may not be a ruler yet, but you will be. As long as you allow my people to do their sacred duty, then we won't have a problem. We're called the Wild Hunt for a reason. We don't bow to anyone. Is that something you can accept?"

The knot in my heart loosens at her words. A part of me is still cautious—understandably so—but hearing that she has no intentions of betraying me washes away some of the tension locking up my shoulders.

"There has to be more to the story," Frankie continues in that cool, detached tone he uses with everyone but me.

"I'll admit that my son has a part to play in all of this," Athena confesses, shifting her gaze toward the man sitting beside her.

Balor's mouth drops open in shock. "What?" he barks.

“You care about these monsters, even if you don’t want to admit it,” Athena coos, licking her thumb and reaching forward to wipe at Balor’s cheek.

Balor pushes her away with a scowl. “I want to kill them all.”

“You’ve come to consider Jack and Hux brothers,” Athena continues. She seems utterly oblivious to the way Balor’s face flushes crimson. Or maybe she just doesn’t care. “And I know you have a soft spot for the little demoness.”

“I dream about stabbing her,” Balor deadpans.

“So, to answer your question, Violet Dracula, my reasons for helping you are not purely selfless. I want freedom for my people, and I believe you’re the only one who can grant me that. I also wish to make my son happy—”

“I’ll only be happy if she’s buried alive without any of her organs,” Balor interjects.

“But I’m going to tell you right now . . .” Her mercury silver eyes, so bright they almost blind me, harden. They sear my very soul, burning with the flames of Hell itself. “If you ever spell me or mine again, I will cut you up and end your life. Do I make myself clear?”

Her threat doesn’t scare me, mainly because I know it’s not necessary. I got what I needed out of her, so the only way I’ll ever use magic on her or the Fomorians is if they choose to rebel. As of now, we’re at a stalemate, both sides frozen on their halves of the chessboard.

That’s what being a leader means, after all—understanding the game and manipulating it to fit your needs. It’s nothing but a lightning-swift business decision. Buy or sell? Invest or pass? Open or close? It’s my duty to survey all my options and



articulate an informed decision based on the knowledge I have.

And right now, I know we need the Fomorians on our side.

“Crystal clear, Athena,” I tell her sweetly.

“Perfect.” Her ruby-red lips stretch into a smile. “Then let’s adjourn for today, shall we?”

## CHAPTER 29



BARRET

When my cheese curd texts me the next morning, telling me to drop everything and come to meet her in the living room of the apartment, I do exactly that.

Drop everything and hurry to my beautiful, perfect mate.

I don't like to admit this aloud, but I've been feeling self-conscious about my relationship with Violet over the last few weeks. I know that she cares about me, maybe even loves me, but I can't help feeling inadequate when compared to her other mates. Does she merely see me as a packaged deal with Cal? Does she care about me the way I do her? She said she did, and I don't have reason to doubt her, but . . .

Doubt lingers like a malignant tumor.

To know that she requested my presence has hope unfurling in my gut, so palpable it's like a living force, a poltergeist strong enough to haunt a centuries old mansion.

I all but race into the living room, desperate to set eyes upon my cheese curd. Is she okay? Is she hurt? Did something happen?

I find my mate sitting on the sofa, her blue eyes glazed and distant. Seeing her has tides of fire sweeping across my skin and rays of sunshine exploding inside of my chest.

"Thank you for coming," Violet says softly, finally shifting to meet my gaze.

Abruptly, her jaw unhinges, and shock splays itself across her face. Her beautiful blue eyes practically bug out of her head.

“What the fuck, Barret?” she screeches, jumping to her feet.

“What?” I frown.

“Why are you naked?”

“Oh.” I glance down at my half-erect cock and absently wrap my fist around it, giving it a squeeze. “You told me to drop everything and come here. I was in the shower when you texted,” I explain with a smile.

“I didn’t mean . . .” She pinches the bridge of her nose, but her eyes sparkle with amusement. “I didn’t mean to drop *everything*.”

“Don’t worry about it. The only thing I had in my hands was a bar of soap. I didn’t mind dropping it for you.” I continue smiling at her dreamily, trying to ignore the desire that burns deep in my belly like swallowed coal.

She always looks ravishing, but today, I can’t help but think she appears almost ethereal. She reminds me of one of those stained-glass portraits of angels you would see depicted in churches. Her blonde curls, highlighted with shades of white and copper, cascade around her shoulders like liquid gold. She wears a short skirt, a thick black belt, and a purple blouse that shows just a hint of cleavage. And with her blood-red lips currently stretched in a sensual smile . . .

“No. Bad cock,” I hiss as the member still gripped in my fist begins to lengthen, turning harder.

“Ugh. Why do you have to be so distracting?” Violet mewls, her voice taking on a slight purr that does absolutely nothing to dampen the heat blazing inside of me. And when her startling blue gaze trails down the length of my body, stopping at my cock? I just about rip her skirt off and fuck her

against the couch. I actually take a step to do just that when she barks out, “No! No fucking! Not now.” Her lips purse. “I actually have to talk to you about something serious.”

I release my dick and move to join her on the couch, but she lifts both of her hands up to stop me.

“No way, rocket launcher. You are not coming near me with that lethal weapon. I know exactly what I’ll do if I come into contact with that thing—and while we’d both like what would happen next very, very much, it’ll defeat the point of this little meeting.”

My brows furrow. “I’m confused. Do you want me to . . . drop my cock?”

“I suppose you can say that.”

“Like, get rid of it?” Horror fills me at the idea. Why would Violet want me to cut off my dick? She seems to rather like it. Perhaps this is a demoness thing? I know she’s been training to control her demon abilities. Maybe one of the requirements is sacrificing the largest cock that ever existed.

“No!” Violet slaps a palm to her forehead. “God, no. I love your cock.”

“It loves you too.” My chest puffs in masculine pride.

“But I need to talk about something serious with you.”

“And you don’t want my cock around for the conversation?” I surmise. “Are you afraid it’ll . . . reveal classified secrets? Because I can assure you, my cock is very trustworthy.”

“No. I mean, yes. I mean no! Ahhh! Your cock is distracting me.” She dramatically throws her arm across her eyes. “Put it away.”

“Um . . .”

“Put pants on!”

*Oh.*

Quickly, I run to Violet’s bedroom, where all of us have been keeping some of our clothes. The rest of mine are in the apartment right next door to Lucifer’s.

I stumble into a pair of gray sweatpants that Violet once told me should be “illegal”—whatever that means. The pants have never hurt anyone before.

Anyway, once my cock is neatly tucked away, I head back into the living room.

Violet still has her arm draped over her eyes, but when she hears my approaching footsteps, she tentatively squeaks out, “Is it gone?”

“I didn’t cut it off, if that’s what you’re asking,” I reply nervously, unsure of what this strange and intoxicating female wants from me.

Slowly, reluctantly, Violet lowers her arm so she can see me clearer. A rosy flush paints both of her cheeks as she heaves out a sigh. “That’s not any better!”

“I’m . . . confused.”

“Gray sweatpants should be made illegal. It does horrible things to a girl’s libido.” Her face is almost as red as her lips, and molten heat swirls in her vivid blue gaze. She sensually licks her lower lip as her gaze trails over me, stopping at my bare feet and ending at my chest. “Mama likey.”

“Um . . .” Did she hit her head? Is that why she’s calling herself my mother?

Violet blinks repeatedly, as if coming out of a daze, and then begins to shake her head. She stares at me a second longer before abruptly throwing herself onto the couch. “Why do you have to be so sexy, Barret?” She sounds almost frustrated by the fact, her voice a cute growl more befitting a kitten than a tiger.

“Sorry?” I move to perch on the armrest beside her. She immediately leans into my side, and a sense of rightness I never felt before floods my body, spurting through my veins like lava.

I’ve never realized how lonely I truly was until Violet Dracula came into my life, with her cocky smiles and sassy attitude. I had Cal, of course, and I love him, but it’s nothing compared to what I feel for my mate. What Cal and I have is completely different compared to what I share with Violet—and what Cal has with her.

Cal is my best friend and lover, but both of us can agree that our relationship formed out of necessity more than anything else. We were trapped in detention for our so-called crimes, and a relationship bloomed out of the carnage. A part of me wonders if we would have even noticed each other if it hadn’t been for that.

Then Violet came along, and we both definitely *did* notice her.

How could we not, when she was everything we ever wanted in a romantic partner?

When she’s near me, all the demons crowding my mind dissipate, if only for a moment. Her lightness is a balm I hadn’t even realized I needed. One smile from her is capable of slaying any monster.

I inhale her flowery scent—no doubt from the body wash Memphis supplied us with—and wrap an arm around her shoulders, forcing her farther into my embrace.

“Tell me what’s bothering you, Cheese Curd.”

“I have something I need to tell Cal.” Her voice is a hushed murmur, slightly muffled from where her lips have pressed themselves against my skin. “And I don’t know how he’s going to take it.”

Ice travels down my spine, freezing my joints into place. “What is this about, exactly?”

“His family.” That one word has every muscle in my body stiffening. Fear bangs against the outside of my consciousness, begging to be let in, like skeletal hands scratching at a window.

If there’s one thing that’s capable of completely destroying Cal, it’s any mention of his family.

Years ago, Cal discovered he had the power to strengthen mate bonds between monsters—he would feed his power into the bond a little at a time until it bloomed and flourished. He was one of the only half-incubus-half-fae monsters in existence, which made him a cupid. *The* cupid, both rare and powerful. When the monster council discovered what he could do, they murdered his family and sentenced him to one hundred years in detention at Prodigium Academy. To this day, Cal doesn’t know why he was punished for a seemingly innocent act. He blames himself for the death of his family. He only recently received his freedom when he won the Roaring, alongside me and the rest of Violet’s mates.

“What did you discover?” I ask in a tremulous voice.

“Yes, what did you discover?”



Both of our heads whirl toward the intruder to see Cal standing against the doorway, his pink hair ruffled and his red wings spread out behind him, the inky black veins appearing particularly brutal in the pale lighting of the apartment. As always, the cupid bleeds poise and sophistication, even with the scowl marring his perfect features.

“When I received your text, Violet, I was afraid you were breaking up with me. Of course, I wasn’t worried. Not truly. I’m too handsome to be broken up with.” Cal huffs haughtily and steps farther into the room. Despite his domineering attitude, I can see a sliver of fear seeping into his eyes, emphasized by the crinkles on his face. “What’s going on?”

“Come here, my love,” Violet says, her voice soft. She pats the couch cushion next to her, and Cal stalks forward without an ounce of hesitation. He moves to sit next to her, and she immediately grabs his hand in both of hers.

“What is it? What do you know about my family?”

Steel bands encircle my chest as I volley my gaze between the two of them. Violet seems at a loss for words, her perfect teeth lowering to nibble on her lip, as she squeezes Cal’s hand hard enough to leave bruises. Unable to stand the tension saturating the air, I slide off the armrest and perch on the opposite side of Cal, placing my arm around them both. Their combined scents envelope me, and my feeling of contentment and peace ratchets up a dozen notches.

“When we went to the monster council, Alex discovered something that concerns you,” Violet whispers. “I didn’t want to mention anything until I knew for sure, but I need to go to the monster council today and . . .”

“Violet, just tell me.” Cal’s free hand comes to land on my thigh, and I quickly place my palm on top of it, hoping I’m

able to provide him even a modicum of comfort.

“The White Stag seems to believe that Zeus was behind your imprisonment and the murder of your family.” Violet keeps her gaze lasered in on Cal, tears brimming in those bright blue orbs.

“What?” Cal has gone completely still beside me. Frozen. Even his hand in mine feels like an icicle.

“The mate bonds . . . They’re a connection between two or more souls, as you know.” She offers us both a wobbly smile, but it doesn’t meet her haunted eyes. “Apparently, once a mated monster dies, his soul doesn’t immediately pass on to the afterlife. He or she remains on Earth, tethered to the other half of their soul. According to the White Stag, when Zeus discovered what you could do, he bribed the council members to . . . get rid of you and your family.”

A gasp of pure anguish rips from Cal’s chest. “But why? It doesn’t make any sense. My parents . . . my siblings . . . my aunts and uncles and cousins . . . They couldn’t do what I could do. Why kill them? Why let me live?”

“I don’t know, Cal.” Tears trickle down Violet’s cheeks as she leans in close, as if she means to hug the cupid. At the last second, she pulls herself away, her eyelashes fluttering shut. “But that’s why I wanted to talk to you about it. I need to meet with the monster council to gauge their sincerity when it comes to fighting with us against Zeus, but I also thought we could discover the truth about your family in the process. Of course, we don’t have to if you don’t feel comfortable with it. Or I could gather the information, if you need—”

Cal throws himself into her arms as another low, heart-wrenching sob echoes through his chest. His pain slices at my own skin like a razor.

“I’m so sorry, Cal. So, so sorry,” she whispers as she hugs him back, rubbing her hand up and down his spine. I move to hold him from behind, and he leans into me, allowing the two of us to sandwich him between our bodies.

“You’ll be okay, my friend,” I whisper, pressing a kiss to his temple. I lift my head to meet Violet’s eyes over his shock of disheveled pink hair. “We have your back. Always.”

“Always,” Violet agrees, and then her voice hardens, turning to granite. “Even if that means killing every last fucker on that monster council.”

# CHAPTER 30



CAL

**I**t feels as if there are a thousand needles being jammed into my skin.

I thought I knew pain, grief, and guilt, but it's nothing compared to what swirls inside of me now. The cumulation of those emotions, compounded by my rage, makes me a living, breathing force just barely hanging on. I can feel the darkness inside of me clawing toward the surface, demanding I let it free to play, and claws burst from the tips of my fingers.

*Maim.*

*Kill.*

*Destroy.*

But then Violet places a hand on the small of my back, and some of the darkness percolating inside of me fades away. Not all, but enough to keep me coherent and focused on the matter at hand.

The last time I felt such rage and fury was when Alex's bastard of a father tried to kill my mate during the Roaring. I lost myself to the beast within me, kidnapping the fucker and torturing him until he begged for mercy.

And mercy came, of course.

In the form of a knife to his chest.

I suppose I need to apologize to Alex for killing his father, but the necromancer doesn't seem too shaken up over the bastard's death. Perhaps he'll even thank me one day for ridding the world of such a despicable excuse of a monster.

That fury from before burns within me now, only it's not the same blistering heat that I remember. It's . . . cold. Icy. The type of frost burn you'd receive if you stayed outside in a snowstorm a little too long for comfort. Hurt has lodged itself in my ribs like a sliver of ice, and no amount of wiggling will remove it.

I tighten my grip around my bow almost imperceptibly as I struggle to modulate my breathing. This plan hinges on me keeping a level head during this very important gathering.

We're meeting the monster council at an abandoned warehouse a few miles away from Hell's most famous doorway—Hell, Michigan. According to Violet, she was no longer able to visit the council at the Field Museum.

“I was banned for inappropriate . . . comments,” she confessed, wincing. “And maybe even a little bit of propositioning. Just a little, itty-bitty bit.”

After Violet texted the White Stag, he agreed to assemble the council at one of their secondary locations, which just so happens to be within walking distance of Hell's portal.

Now, we stand in front of the doorway of the huge, corrugated-iron warehouse as I attempt to fight in vain against the rage fogging my mind. The moon has just come out from behind a cloud, and it lights up the night sky brilliantly. It illuminates the warehouse and the hideous face of the monster who serves as the receptionist.

I'm dimly aware of Violet batting her lashes and asking if she can visit the council. I'm also aware of the receptionist snapping, “No visitors allowed today. Come back tomorrow,” and Barret happily saying, “Kay,” before turning away. Violet grabs the waistband of his sweatpants to stop him from going too far.

I know all of that is happening, but it's as if I'm watching it from the other side of a soundproof box. Can't anyone hear the scream that's leaving my lips?

I feel adrift—a dandelion seed in the wind, unsure of when or where I'll fall next.

How does anyone deal with this pain?

Is there a cure for the gaping wound where my heart once was?

Darkness encroaches the edges of my vision, and I feel myself drifting into the blissful abyss of my rage. How easy it would be to rip off this monster's head with my bare hands and hack off his limbs with a rusty chainsaw . . .

Violet places a hand on my arm, and the rage recedes.

I take a deep breath.

I'm walking inside the warehouse before my brain can catch up. I seem to be moving on autopilot, my brain nothing but a pile of mush.

One step.

Two steps.

Three steps.

A needle drives itself into my heart as I force myself to hold on to my rage, force myself to push it back so it won't impede our mission. I'm a selfish bastard, even I can admit that, but nothing's more important to me than Violet and Barret. I'll never do anything to hurt either of them.

So, I keep my anger to myself as I move to stand in the center of the room, directly in front of the monsters who may or may not have destroyed my life.

According to Violet, the two monsters I don't know are named Spidey and Pan. The middle one is the White Stag. And the last two are, obviously, Frankenstein and Dorian Gray. I've seen Frankenstein around more than once during the Roaring, and Dorian Gray is the spitting image of his son, though both are significantly less handsome than me.

"Violet." The White Stag's baritone voice echoes all around us. It seems to bounce off the walls and nestle itself in the hollow of my bones. "Thank you for coming today."

Violet dips her head respectfully. "Thank you as well. I've come to discuss the upcoming battle with you all."

"Foolish child." Spidey's white lips curl into a snarl, and a furry tarantula crawls out of her open mouth and settles on her cheek. "You have no proof that anything is even amiss. You can't expect us to—"

"Cal?" Violet says simply, cutting Spidey off in mid-rant. She turns toward me with an eyebrow raised, and reality abruptly reasserts itself.

I take a deep breath to control the rage pounding through me and then remove an arrow from the case on my back.

"He has a weapon!" Pan bellows, jumping to his feet.

He may be fast, but I'm faster.

Before any of the monsters can even think to attack, I shoot my arrows at them, one after another, hitting them all squarely in the shoulder. As Violet said, we can't kill them. Not yet. Not until we know the truth about their allegiance.

So, we did the second-best thing—tipped my arrows with a modified version of the truth potion Frankie created.



Spidey gasps and clutches a hand to her shoulder, where black blood oozes from the wound. There almost appears to be shapes withering in the strange goo, like spiders trapped inside of tar.

Dorian screams in agony. “My favorite shirt! It’s covered in blood!”

Frankenstein wrenches the arrow out of his shoulder and holds it to his nose, his eyes contemplative. He sniffs the tip. “Interesting. I believe I recognize the handiwork of this potion. My experiment, Frankie, created this, did he not?” Frankenstein’s eyes glaze over as he begins to speak rapidly, his words falling over themselves in his rush to release them. “It’s fascinating how he changed the configuration of the potion so it no longer has to be ingested but can be transferred through skin. Absolutely fascinating. Did he use a binding agent to do this? Oh. I must ask him . . .” Frankenstein taps his chin as he continues to mutter under his breath, but I zone him out.

Maybe today I’ll receive the answers that have been haunting me for years now.

“I’m impressed, Violet,” the White Stag says, his intelligent eyes locking on my mate. He’s the only one who doesn’t seem overly surprised by the turn of events. “Ask your questions. Gauge my sincerity.”

“Will you help us in the battle against Zeus?” Violet demands, placing her hands on her hips.

“Yes,” the White Stag answers, not an ounce of hesitation in his booming voice. “I saw your heart, and it is pure. You will make a fine ruler one day.”

“Are you kidding me?” Spidey screeches, her shrill voice blasting my eardrums. “You can’t seriously think this little bitch will be able to rule any of the monsters, let alone the world! Even with the runes removed from all the monsters, they’ll still hate her! It’s been ingrained within them since she was born! We should’ve killed the child as a baby!”

Spidey abruptly places a hand over her mouth, as if shocked those words left her mouth in the first place.

Frankie’s truth serum doesn’t just force people to tell the truth. It quite literally rips the truth from their bodies.

“There’s no way I’m fighting on the side of that degenerate,” Pan agrees with a scowl aimed in Violet’s direction. At least, I think it’s a scowl. It’s hard to tell, since his head is that of a goat.

If there’s one thing I can say for certain, it’s that I’m indisputably the most handsome man in the room. That does wonders for bolstering my dour mood.

“I don’t want to fight,” Dorian screeches, sweat dripping down his face. “Not for Violet. Not for Zeus. I just want to read my magazines and hide away from the world.” His lips pop open in shock. “Did I just say that out loud?”

“Yes,” Violet deapans.

“I’m not a coward! Promise,” Dorian pleads, trembling. His face turns red, and more sweat cascades down his cheeks in rivulets. “I just hate confrontation. And dirty hands. And dirty nails. Oh my god. Dirty nails are the worst.” He shudders.

“You won’t even fight if your son is on the front lines?” Violet narrows her eyes at the man.

Dorian gulps. “I know I should love my son, but it’s hard. It’s hard to love anyone more than I love myself. It’s the curse. Fuck!” Dorian places both hands over his mouth to stop his verbal vomit.

Violet looks seconds away from stabbing Dorian but peels her eyes off him to focus on Frankenstein. “And you? What is your stance on the battle to come?”

Frankenstein still appears lost in thought, but he snaps to attention at Violet’s words. “Oh. That’s easy. I’ll fight with you.”

All of us blink at him in shock. I don’t think any of us were expecting him to say that.

“Why?” Barret asks quizzically.

“Because my experiment is a genius,” Frankenstein confesses candidly. “I want to see the things he can accomplish in the future, and that can only happen if he’s alive.”

“That experiment is your goddamn son!” Violet hisses, her hands balling into fists.

Frankenstein shrugs, appearing non-repentant. He doesn’t seem at all ashamed or embarrassed by the confession we’re pulling from his lips, and I realize it’s because he truly doesn’t care.

“Maybe in your eyes, but in mine, I see a creature I created in a lab. I see a monster who doesn’t have a working heart or soul. I see a being that is nothing but wires and cogs.”

Red detonates on Violet’s cheeks, and I admit that I feel my own rage bubbling just beneath the surface. No one talks about my mate-in-law like that. No one.

Except for me.

But that's only because I need all of them to remember who is truly the handsomest.

Tension rises in the air like a wave about to break, cresting and then falling, splicing apart against the jagged rocks lining the shoreline.

Violet takes a single step forward, her entire body vibrating with rage.

“You want to know what I see when I look at Frankie?” she asks in a deceptively calm tone. She doesn't wait for Frankenstein to respond before forging ahead. “I see a man—a monster—who is as beautiful outside as he is inside. I see someone who's warm and vibrant and alive. I see someone who's not only intelligent but caring, someone who's willing to do anything for his family and the people he loves. Perhaps you never saw that side of him because Frankie will never, ever love *you*.” Violet practically spits the word at the end, her chest heaving.

For a moment, silence descends, though it's quickly spliced apart by Barret tentatively clapping his hands together. When he realizes no one else is joining in on the applause, he drops his hands with a sheepish smile.

“I can't even look at these fuckers anymore,” Violet hisses. It's apparent she's not getting the reaction from Frankenstein that she hoped. But some monsters are just not meant to be parents. They're cold, merciless creatures hell-bent on destroying every life they come into contact with. Frankie and Dimitri should both thank their lucky stars that they escaped their parents before they turned into them. “Cal? Do your thing.”

A cold, sibilant smile spreads across my face. I feel the strangest sensation of falling—of plunging headfirst down an elevator shaft, feeling the wind rushing past me and whipping at my face—but I take a deep breath to quell the rising vertigo.

Answers.

I need answers.

I allow my gaze to travel over the five monsters present. “Do you guys know who I am?” My voice is like the edge of a knife, slicing at skin and drawing blood.

Somewhat reluctantly, all five of them nod.

I can hear my heart pounding rapidly in my chest. That one noise drowns out all other sounds. The only thing that keeps me from completely losing myself to the rage and darkness is Violet’s presence on one side of me and Barret’s on the other. The two of them keep me tethered to the here and now.

“Years ago, the council sent me to detention and murdered my family. I want to know why. *Why?!?*” The word is a scream, coming out of my mouth before I can consciously remember speaking it, creating its own reality by being spoken.

Why?

Why?

Why?

“I . . . I wasn’t on the council when you were imprisoned,” Dorian whimpers, dabbing at his forehead with a handkerchief.

“Nor was I,” Frankenstein deadpans.

I nod once and turn my attention away from the two pathetic monsters. They may be spineless swine, but they were

not involved in what happened to me and my family.

Spidey's face has gone unnaturally pale, and Pan has jumped to his feet, looking as if he wants to make a run for it. Only the White Stag dares to meet my gaze, the intelligence brimming in his eyes stalling the breath in my lungs.

"I voted for your freedom and the survival of your family," the White Stag booms. "But I was outvoted."

Spidey has quite literally placed both of her hands over her mouth, but that doesn't stop the words from pouring out of her.

An earthquake rolls through the center of my being as I listen to her speak, anger coiling like a serpent around my chest.

"Zeus told us to!" she squeals, glancing helplessly at Pan, who shifts his weight from foot to foot, as if he's looking for an easy exit.

But there will be no escaping.

"What did he give you?" Violet growls, her fangs elongating as her own anger joins mine.

Spidey desperately tries to stop herself from speaking, but the spell does its job. "Power! He gave us power, okay? Fuck!" Desperation fills her eyes as she pleads with Violet to understand, to hear her out.

"Power . . . that he stole from souls," Violet supplies, though she doesn't voice it as a question.

"Yes, okay, yes! We knew he was digesting the souls coming to Mount Olympus. He wanted Cal out of the way, so there wouldn't be as many mate bonds in existence. He was hoping, eventually, evolution would eliminate them once and for all. He wanted the souls to immediately pass on to the next

life, but the ones mated would remain on Earth as spirits, waiting for their other half.” Tears stream down Spidey’s face as she’s forced to confess all her dirty, horrible secrets. “He told us to kill Cal’s family to make sure no more cupids were ever born. It’s rare for incubi and fae to procreate, and it’s even rarer for a child between the two to actually survive. Zeus didn’t want that happening again.”

“Why didn’t he just kill me?” I scream desperately, pain crashing through me like spikes. I fall to my knees on the cold ground as tears cascade down my face. I think of my sweet mother, my doting father, my little sisters . . . “Why didn’t he just get rid of me?”

Spidey presses her lips together stubbornly and shakes her head from side to side.

Pan pipes in, unable to help himself. “He wanted to use your powers for himself. At least, that’s what he hoped. He thought you would be so broken, he could mold you into the perfect little soldier. In his mind, if you could create mate bonds, you could also break them. He was going to use you until you proved to no longer be useful. Then he planned to digest you. If you would’ve only obeyed, he wouldn’t have had to sentence you to detention.”

Barbed wire coils through my chest as tears fall freely down my face.

Zeus murdered my family . . . because he wanted to control me? Because he feared my powers and how they would impact his plans for world domination?

I feel tiny pieces of my soul flaking away like sawdust. I’m not sure I’ll ever be whole again after what I’ve learned. My entire life, I blamed myself for what happened to my family, and I was right to. If I didn’t have the powers I have,

my family would still be alive, I wouldn't have spent years in detention, and . . .

And I never would've met Violet or Barret.

I can't think about that—I can't think about anything but the pain barraging me from every direction and the noose tightening around my neck. Any second, the floor will drop out from under me, and I'll just be a swinging corpse.

Pan and Spidey chose to murder my family and lock me away for power—power they knew came from innocent souls.

The poison of that discovery slides deep into my veins.

“Violet . . .” My voice is guttural. I'm barely conscious of my surroundings as I home in on the two monsters who ruined my life. Sure, there may have been others on the council at the time, but these two are in front of me, waiting for my wrath.

A wicked grin warps my girl's beautiful features. “Kill them, Cal. Make them suffer.”

In front of us, Spidey and Pan begin to scream.

I don't remember what happens next.

I lose myself to the dark fae inside of me—the monster who calls for blood and pain and death. Screams echo through the cavernous room, but they enter one ear and go out the other.

When I come back to myself, it's to see the mutilated bodies of Pan and Spidey laid out in front of me, their faces ripped to shreds and their limbs in thousands of pieces. Dorian has pushed himself flush against the far wall, fear splayed across his face, but Frankenstein and the White Stag remain at the table, watching with impassive eyes.



Violet kneels in the bloody carnage on one side of me, while Barret sits on the other. Both of them are covered head to toe in red.

Without a word, I reach for them and tug them toward me, the warmth of their touch sending heat skittering through my body.

For years, I wanted to seek revenge on the monsters who took my family from me, and now I finally did. There will always be a hole inside of me, but hopefully, in time, it won't be as prominent.

And I have Violet and Barret to thank for that.

So, covered in blood and gore and other disgusting body parts, I hug the two monsters I love most in the world. Pain continues to ravage my mind, body, and soul, but it's muted by the affection and adoration cascading through my veins.

Once upon a time, my family was taken away from me.

I refuse to allow that to happen again.

I make a vow to myself—right then and there—that I will fight to protect those I love. No matter the cost, no matter the consequences, I won't lose another person.

I refuse to.

# CHAPTER 31



VIOLET

“We can’t eat Zeus,” I lament for the one millionth time as I scrub a hand down my face. “That would be cannibalism, and we’re better than that.”

“But—” Ares begins to protest, but I hold up a hand to stop him.

“No.” I shake my head vigorously. “Besides, how would that even work?”

Barret, who’s sitting beside me at the long table, waves his hand back and forth in the air. A wide, belligerent smile spreads across his handsome face. “Oh! I know! I know!” He waits until he’s garnered all of our attention before happily continuing. “First, we have to capture him, and for that, we’ll need rope. Once we have him all tied up, we can shove one stick into his asshole and the other into his mouth. Then we’ll heave him up over a fire and turn him one hundred and eighty degrees every thirty minutes, so his skin is all nice and toasty —”

“You’re talking about literally spit-roasting Zeus,” I deadpan.

“It scares me how much thought you put into this,” Vin adds, his normally olive complexion taking on a green tint.

Barret’s smile begins to waver at the edges. “You asked me a question, and I answered.” He sounds genuinely confused and a little self-conscious.

Love for him punctures my heart as I give his arm a reassuring squeeze. “Thank you, Barret. That was helpful,” I tell him.

He preens under my attention.

“But we’re not going to be eating Zeus,” Frankie chimes in, sounding entirely bored with the entirety of this conversation. He pushes his glasses farther up his nose with his middle finger. “That’s completely illogical.”

“Thank you!” I give him a soft smile . . . but then he continues speaking.

“How would we even get rope strong enough to hold him while we roast him over the fire?” Frankie continues in his nonsense, clinical voice. He taps a finger to his chin as he contemplates his own question. “Perhaps if the rope was god-blessed—”

“We’re not eating Zeus, dammit!” I slam both of my fists against the table to emphasize my point.

The entire table immediately turns to stare at me.

On one side sits my mates—sans Dimitri, who’s still attempting to uncover my parents’ location—and Vanessa. Across from me, the Fomorians rest, headed by Athena, who looks like an avenging angel with her silver-blond hair and ethereal gray eyes. The White Stag, Dorian Gray, and Frankenstein complete the Island of Misfit Monsters.

This is it.

Our war council.

And considering the fact that one of our esteemed members is having a demon quite literally mop up his sweat—*cough, Dorian, cough*—I’m not entirely certain we’re working with the A-team, if you know what I mean. More like the F-U-team.

My ribs seem to press against my lungs, and it's suddenly difficult to breathe. All of our talks, all of our training, all of it stems back to one thing and one thing alone—destroying Zeus. Fear weaves its way around my neck like a noose. I've never been a fearful person, but back then, I didn't have people to worry about. Now, I have my mates and my family relying on me, and the weight of that settles heavily on my shoulders like a cloak. Somehow, somehow, they've taken a hammer to the walls I systematically built around my heart and are smashing them down.

“Do you even have a solution for our Zeus problem?” Athena asks, drawing my attention back to the matter at hand, a.k.a. cannibalism.

I exchange a glance with Frankie, who shakes his head nearly imperceptibly.

Over the past few weeks, we've been working on imbuing my magic into various weapons that my mates will use in the battle to come. We're hoping they'll become god-blessed weapons, but we have no way to know for sure without testing it on someone. And since the only way to test a god-blessed dagger is to stab it into an immortal being's heart and see if they die . . .

Well . . .

Considering I'm one of the few immortal beings here, I can say with unwavering certainty that I'm not in the mood to be stabbed experimentally, thank you very much. I'll only be pierced by cocks.

Still, if these weapons prove to work . . .

“We have some ideas,” I tell Athena curtly, and her lips thin, the first sign of displeasure I've seen so far sliding across

her face like a sagging storm cloud.

“Some ideas,” Balor scoffs. “That means you have nothing, doesn’t it?”

Acrimonious tension saturates the room as I narrow my eyes at the douche canoe. The silence that follows is fraught with tension.

“Don’t you worry your ugly little head about a thing,” I taunt in a singsong voice. He immediately jumps to his feet, his temper igniting, but Athena places a hand on his shoulder to force him back into his seat. I have to stifle my grin and the retort that threatens to break free about Mommy Dearest being a top in that relationship. I’m pretty sure Balor would quite literally strangle me if I let it fly.

“What you’re suggesting—” Athena begins, but she cuts off when music reverberates through the room.

I frown, glancing from face to face in alarm, before realizing that the noise is coming from my own cell phone.

Oh god.

How awkward.

In my own war meeting, no less.

Vanessa, who’s sitting beside her brother at the table, quirks an eyebrow, amusement glimmering in her brown-green eyes. “You going to get that?”

“Barbie Girl” begins to play as I wince and fumble for my phone.

Balor blinks at me, seemingly unsurprised by my choice of ringtone.

“Why is this doll singing about the benefits of being plastic?” Ares whispers to Athena, confusion creasing his face.

“Shhh.” She waves a hand at him.

I stare at the caller ID, my frown deepening when I don’t recognize the number, before answering it.

*Speaker*, Jack mouths.

With a sigh, I do as he instructs and place my phone on the table.

“Hello, Violet,” a deep, rumbling voice greets, and a cold pebble of dread lodges in my stomach.

No . . .

“Zeus,” I breathe as a veil of silence stretches over the room. Everyone seems to be holding their breath, wondering what the fuck is happening right now.

My breathing turns thready.

Why is he calling me?

What does he want?

“I have something of yours that I believe you want,” Zeus begins, a malicious chuckle escaping him.

“And what is that?” I don’t know why I ask. I don’t want to know. I really, really don’t want to know.

“Have you even bothered to look for your parents since I took them?” He tsks his tongue in mock disapproval. “Of course, you haven’t. They sacrificed everything for you, but you’re not willing to do the same.”

Anger burns through me, a lance of fire across my vision, white-hot and blistering.

“Shut the fuck up, you overgrown nose hair!” I snap, and Cal gives me a *what the fuck?* look. I shrug helplessly. Yeah, it probably wasn’t my best insult, but I’m not thinking coherently. My brain is all muddled, like a pinball has been set loose and is bouncing around, ricocheting off every wall, with no hole for it to drop into.

“You see,” Zeus continues indolently, “I no longer require use of your parents. They’re rather . . . cumbersome.”

“If you hurt them—” I rasp as horror shoots through me.

A figure moves into the doorway, momentarily drawing my attention, and I see Dimitri standing there, his gallant face hard and his sensual lips curved into a frown. He gestures for me to continue speaking.

“Meet me in Mount Olympus in one hour. Alone,” Zeus continues. “And in exchange, I’ll free your parents.”

“How do I know you’re not lying?” I demand before I can stop myself. All of my mates turn to glare at me, as if wondering why I would even consider his ridiculous request, but my mind is moving a mile a minute.

Time.

We’re out of time.

That’s what this all comes down to.

The hands on the clock are blades, slicing through time, cutting its life short.

No more planning. No more meetings. No more training.

Zeus is giving us a deadline.

“What reason would I have to keep your parents with me once I have you?” Zeus asks, cackling. “All I want is you,



Violet. All I've ever wanted was you."

I begin to tap my fingers against the mahogany table as my brain churns, trying desperately to hear everything Zeus isn't saying.

"My mates won't like this."

"Your mates . . ." Anger deepens Zeus's voice, turning those two words into a guttural growl. "If you, your mates, or any of those monsters on the fucking council try to cross me, you'll all live to regret it."

My heart batters against my rib cage like a charging ram.

You.

Your mates.

Monsters on the council.

He didn't mention the Fomorians.

Is it possible that he doesn't know about them yet? I don't want to make any assumptions based on one throwaway sentence, yet hope thrums through my veins like a plucked guitar chord. We've been trying our hardest to keep the Fomorians' return a secret from Zeus and his followers. If we proved to be successful . . .

"So, you want me to come alone?" I reiterate, my fingers continuing to tap, tap, tap against the table.

"Violet!" Vin hisses, his lips molding into a frown. All of my men look ready to protest, but I hold a hand up for them to remain silent. It says a lot about their trust in me that they comply without protest.

Don't get me wrong—I adore it when they declare their love for me, but this, right here, is a true testament of their

feelings. They trust me to do what I believe is best for not only us as a family but also for the world as a whole.

“Meet me at the front of my palace in exactly one hour in exchange for your parents. Arrive even a second late and you’ll be greeted with their bodies. Bring your mates, and I won’t hesitate to kill them all.” With that threat, Zeus hangs up.

Silence once again descends as we all try to wrap our heads around Zeus’s threat. And then—chaos.

“You can’t seriously be considering this.”

“Don’t be fucking dumb, Violet!”

“You can’t go alone!”

“He’ll kill you.”

My mates begin to all talk over one another.

“No, Violet!” Barret growls. His back bows, and his muscles ripple. Green mist begins to crawl across his skin like a translucent snake.

“Enough!” Surprisingly, it’s not me who says the word, though I was certainly about to.

Dimitri stalks forward, the white strands of his hair kissing his face. Despite being gone for weeks torturing and killing Zeus’s followers, he looks as immaculate as always in his three-piece suit. As his icy blue eyes meet mine, love arrows through me, an emotion that seems imprinted on every corner of my soul.

He gives me a nod to take over the conversation, and I have to bite down on my impending smile.

Yup. I definitely don’t need dramatic declarations of love.

I clear my throat and wait until the entire table is focused on me before speaking. “This is it. This is the moment we’ve been waiting for.”

“Violet,” Vin begins somewhat desperately.

“No, Vin.” Pieces of my heart crumble away like it’s made of papier-mâché at the deadened look in his eyes. “You know I’m right. We’re out of time.”

“It’s time to fight,” Athena agrees, her velvet gray eyes appearing almost metallic in the dim lighting.

I nod once. “Zeus is giving us the opening we need. We contemplated for weeks how to attack him, and this is it. This is our way.”

“By using you as bait?” Alex retorts dryly, folding his arms over his chest and scowling. But I detect true fear in his eyes—fear for me. Any anger I may have felt over his cocky attitude dissipates then and there at the sight of it.

“It sounds as if Zeus doesn’t know about the Fomorians. We can use that to our advantage.”

“She’s right,” Balor cuts in, sounding as if it physically pains him to utter those two words. His face actually turns green with disgust. “This may be our only chance to catch Zeus unawares.”

“He’ll be expecting Violet to attack,” Vin points out.

“Yes, he will.” Athena nods sharply. “Which is why it’ll come as a surprise when she arrives at the destination alone.”

“Fuck, no!” Cal snaps, jumping to his feet. Black oozes into his normally vibrant eyes, eating away at the brown I’ve come to know and love. Inky veins expand across his red

wings as he battles with the dark fairy inside of him. “You’re not going alone!”

“Fomorians are some of the only creatures in existence who can enter and exit both Hell and Mount Olympus in the blink of an eye,” Athena begins gently. “We’ll remain here for exactly five minutes and then poof into existence behind Violet.”

“What? No!” Vin snaps.

“Give it ten minutes,” I interject. When Athena turns to stare at me with an arched eyebrow, I explain, “Zeus is probably going to monologue. It’ll be a bit.” This time, everyone turns to look at me with varying expressions of disbelief etched across their faces. I hold my hands up defensively. “What? It’s true! He’s an evil villain, and evil villains always give monologues.”

“You could be dead in ten minutes!” Jack—wait no, Hux—hisses, shoving at a strand of inky black hair to display the scar bisecting his cheek.

“I can protect myself,” I reassure him.

“Perhaps we could come to a compromise?” Dimitri drawls as he steps farther into the room. Anyone who didn’t know him would think he’s utterly unaffected by the topic of conversation, but I can see the tightening of the skin around his eyes and the twitching of his pillowy pink lips.

My god.

Dimitri’s terrified.

“What do you have in mind?” the White Stag asks, speaking for the first time since this meeting began.

Dimitri, surprisingly, turns to Balor. “Have your soul follow Violet to the meeting place. You’ll provide protection for her if anything were to happen before we arrive.”

“What?!” Balor and I both exclaim at the same time.

“You’re practically invisible when you’re in that form,” Dimitri continues. “Just a ball of light. You can protect Violet.”

“Um, he’s more likely to stab me in the back than protect my back,” I point out, glaring at the monster in question.

“She’s right about that,” Balor barks. But then he heaves out a sigh and relaxes back into his seat. “However, I hate Zeus more than I hate you, Violet Dracula. I’ll help you.”

“Um . . .”

“He’ll protect you,” Memphis interrupts from where he’s sitting in the corner of the room, once again attempting to type on a computer to take notes for the meeting. “That’s not what you should be worried about.”

“What *should* I be worried about, then?” I demand, but Memphis is already focused on his task, his huge claws batting the keyboard incessantly. Fucking seers.

“You know, there’s more of a risk to me than there is to you,” Balor snaps. “If you die, you at least get to go to the afterlife and live a happily ever after. When a Fomorian dies, we simply . . . die. There’s no afterlife for creatures who rule the afterlife.”

My stomach sours. “What happens to you?”

Balor shrugs. “No one really knows. We just . . . end. It’s believed that our energy is used to create a new Fomorian—a new member of the Wild Hunt. Sometimes that energy will be

consumed by a soul. A lot of times that energy enters another Fomorian's womb, helping to fertilize the egg there."

"Wait . . . wait . . . wait. So, you're saying that you may be your own daddy?" I cover my mouth to keep my giggles in check.

The glare Balor throws me could melt skin. "Of course not. Fomorians procreate just like any other monster pairing does. However, the baby only comes to fruition with the energy of a deceased Fomorian."

"So, you could be your own daddy?" I repeat.

One of Balor's eyebrows begins to twitch. "Remember, Violet, that I'll be the only help you have for ten minutes after you arrive. You'll do well to remember that."

"You're right." I nod seriously. "Wouldn't want you to impregnate your mom."

"For fuck's sake—"

"And while one team travels to Mount Olympus to take down Zeus, two of us will be heading back to Prodigium Academy," Dimitri interrupts, pulling all attention back to him. His ice-blue eyes crawl over all the men and women present before stopping on first Vin and then Frankie. "You two."

"Us?" Vin snaps. "Why the fuck would we—"

"I have reason to believe that Hera, Dracula, and Lucifer are being held in the tunnels beneath Prodigium," Dimitri interrupts, once again grabbing the room by the balls and squeezing. If being an assassin doesn't pan out for him, he should consider a job as an actor. He's truly capable of bespelling a room full of people with just a single look. "You

two will go and extract the three of them and then return to the battle. There's a portal in my office that will lead you there."

"Why the fuck would we go?" Vin demands, agitation causing his leg to bounce. I can tell he hates the idea of being parted from me in the middle of a battle.

"Because." Dimitri pinches the bridge of his nose and then blows out a breath, as if praying for patience. That only seems to exacerbate Vin's rage. He practically trembles with the force of it, the lines around his mouth deepening, his eyes turning molten with anger. "Frankie knows more about the tunnels than anyone here, and you're one of our best fighters. You'll be able to defend him."

"But—"

"Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula can make all the difference in this battle," Dimitri interrupts, his voice glacial. "If we don't free them, we don't have a chance of winning. Do you understand what I'm saying?" His eyes momentarily flick to me before focusing once more on the Van Helsing.

Vin's jaw clenches, but he finally nods. "Fine. But you bet your ass we're heading straight to the battle after we free them."

Dimitri's smile is as cold as an icicle and just as sharp. It slices through my skin like the serrated edge of a blade. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

# CHAPTER 32





## VIOLET

I can't say goodbye.

No matter how hard I try, no matter how many times I tell myself to, that one word gets trapped in the confines of my throat. It settles on my tongue like gritty dirt, and I'm forced to swallow convulsively around it.

Goodbye.

Goodbye.

Goodbye.

I allow my gaze to drift over the faces of all my mates who are present—my greatest loves.

Vin, who saw me as an enemy he needed to destroy before realizing I'm not so different from him, after all. He always encourages me to push harder, to be better, to fight for what I believe in.

Frankie, the first monster I ever saw at Prodigium Academy and one of the smartest creatures I know. We both chipped away at each other's walls and learned what it means to be in a relationship. What it means to be loved.

Jack and Hux, as different from each other as night and day, yet eerily similar all the same. One regards me as an equal and never seeks to hide me away or coddle me in bubble wrap. The other stares at me as if I'm the most precious creature he's ever had the pleasure of knowing in his long, long existence. Both make my heart skip a beat and surround me in the glow of new love.

Dimitri, a condescending asshole who I hated, then loved, then hated, then loved, then hated, then loved. It seems as if our story has always been fated to be a whirlwind of ups and downs, twists and turns, lows and highs. But I know, despite our arguments, he'll protect me with every ounce of darkness permeating his being. I never doubted that for a second, even when I thought he hated me. He pried me open with every acerbic barb and carved his name on my heart.

Cal, my sweet, cocky cupid. He spent almost an entire lifetime alone, and I yearn to wipe those horrid memories away once and for all. He needs to know that there's an entire group of monsters who love and cherish him. All of us here would fight for him . . . and die for him. He has a family, and though it may not replace the one he lost, I hope our presence will at least alleviate the ache in his chest.

Barret, who never fails to make me smile. He sees life the way I desperately desire to—through rose-tinted glasses. Everything is black and white with him. Some may perceive that as a weakness, but not me. There's a naïveté about the way he views the world, and I desperately hope to replicate it. I hope he never loses that innocence.

Alex, who once made me shit my pants in front of the entire cafeteria. Maybe that shouldn't be the first thing that springs to mind when I think of my newest mate, but it only proves to me how far we've come. Our relationship will always be a push-and-pull dynamic. He'll press every single one of my buttons, but by doing so, he'll make me stronger.

And finally, Mason. Sweet, beautiful, perfect Mason. There will always be a pain in my heart at just the thought of my gorgon mate—an ache that'll refuse to dissipate with time. He's the knife jabbed beneath my rib cage, precariously close

to my heart, but I don't dare remove it. If I do, I'll bleed out. His death is a dark, crackling energy rolling over me with the stifling weight of a heavy wave. But if drowning is my penitence for failing him, then so be it. I'll embrace the ocean with open arms.

The immensity of my emotions for these men barrages me. It quite literally drags me into the vicious winds of a hurricane kicking and screaming, sucking me into its orbit and then spitting me back out, gasping for sweet, precious air.

I can't say goodbye to them.

I refuse to.

Because this won't be goodbye. It can't be.

Vin pulls me into his arms first, his burnt cinnamon scent enveloping me. I squeeze my eyes shut to hold back the onslaught of tears that threaten to fall. He presses his lips against the crown of my head, a tender, reverent kiss I feel reverberating through my entire body and embedding itself into my soul, before stepping back.

Frankie immediately comes to take his place. My scientist's eyes drift over my face, as if he wishes to memorize every dip and curve. They linger on my lips a second longer before he forces his gaze away.

"We'll see you soon, Violet," he whispers, moving toward a stone-faced Vin.

That's it.

No heartfelt declaration of love and devotion.

No goodbye.

Perhaps they both feel the sharp scrape of reality, just as I do.

There's something so . . . final about uttering those words.

*Goodbye.*

A cold breeze drifts along my arms before digging into my skin and weaving around my bones. There's a taste of premonition in the air, this acerbic flavor that reminds me of ash.

*Goodbye.*

Dimitri touches the mirror hanging on the wall, and a swirling portal manifests, glimmering a multitude of colors.

With one last helpless look at me, Vin and Frankie step through the portal and disappear from sight.

Then they're gone.

And we didn't even say goodbye.

No goodbyes.

None.

Cal and Barret pull me in close, one on either side, and I breathe in their combined scents, relishing the peace that seeps into my bloodstream. My cupid and my boogeyman. My best friends.

Their lips meet my cheeks at the exact same time, one on either side, and goose bumps explode across my body. I shiver delicately, attempting to tug them even closer, before they both step away with grave nods.

Alex is there next, his russet-black eyes ensnaring my own and holding them hostage. The tattoos lining his skin have never appeared more vibrant, stark against his pasty skin. His tongue absently fiddles with his lip ring as he continues to stare at me, not saying a single word. But in that one stare, I

can hear everything he doesn't dare say out loud. That he loves me. That he'll fight for me. That he'll protect the others.

We don't say goodbye.

A body coils around me from behind, and the delicate way he places his hand on my stomach clues me in to the fact that it's Hux a second before his husky voice rasps, "Be careful, my precious treasure."

I offer an exaggerated scoff. "Of course, I will. I'm a badass demoness-slash-goddess."

"Just be careful. Please. We can't lose you." That's . . . that's Jack. The tremor rocking his body gives it away, as does the hand suddenly tensing under my stomach, his fingers digging into the smooth skin there where my shirt has risen up.

No goodbyes.

Not a single goodbye.

Dimitri's ice-blue eyes appear over Alex's shoulder. When he catches my gaze, he gives a single nod of acknowledgment.

"Violet will be fine." His jaw clenched tightly, he tilts his chin up, begging the universe itself to defy him. "She's the strongest monster I know."

We don't say goodbye.

Hopefully, I won't come to regret that decision.



BALOR AND I STOP AT THE VERY EDGE OF MOUNT OLYMPUS, where the fluffy clouds break off into a clear expanse of light-blue sky.

“This is where my body will leave you,” Balor drawls with a roll of his eyes. “You have only ten minutes before the rest of the army arrives. So . . . try not to die in the meantime, okay?”

“You’re really good at pep talks, huh?” I snark, already exhausted and ready for the day to end. God, all I want to do is curl up on the couch and cuddle with my mates. Is that too much to ask for? Shouldn’t I receive a goddamn happy ending after all the shit life has put me through?

Balor gives me an annoyed look before his body abruptly drops to the ground, motionless, his eyes vacant and unseeing. A second later, a glittering ball of light oozes out of his stomach and bobs in the air like a balloon tethered to a string.

Balor.

My . . . backup.

The universe really likes deep fucking me, doesn’t it?

But I have to put my trust in Dimitri and his plan, just as he’s putting his trust in me. If he believes Balor will provide semi-adequate backup, then I have no choice but to believe him.

Fuck my life.

Worry for my mates, compounded by my fear of what’s to come, causes my legs to tremble as I step away from Balor’s body and move toward the designated meeting place. It’ll take me at least a few minutes to walk there, so I’ll only have five to six minutes of talking to Zeus before the rest of our army arrives. Hopefully, that’ll be enough time to distract him.

Mount Olympus is what you’d get if you crossed cotton candy with Disney World. In the middle of the pink, pearlescent clouds, a mammoth cluster of walkways, turrets,

and spires hover in the air. Numerous buildings span the length of the cloud, all of them constructed out of bricks that seem to reflect the sunlight. At the very front of the city, a long, golden bridge extends, stretching over thousands of miles of open air. Honestly, I have no idea where that bridge leads to. I half expect it to continue on forever and ever and ever—an infinite walkway of glittering gold and a fathomless abyss of blue directly below it.

The giant castle is surrounded by pink, silvery huts, almost appearing like Barbie-themed mushrooms. The streets are paved with the same shimmery, indecipherable material that the bridge was constructed of, though the color appears eggshell white instead of gold.

And just like the last time I visited Mount Olympus, the emptiness of the immense city is startling, a physical kick to the gut. There are no souls walking the white streets, no gods or goddesses sitting at the tiny café in the center of town, no animals scurrying through the foliage of magenta bushes.

Now, I know the truth behind the bereft city—Zeus has digested all the souls that previously resided here. And the gods and goddesses? They never existed. At least, not in the way story books would have you believe. They're actually the Fomorians and have been locked away for hundreds and hundreds of years.

My hands turn clammy as I continue to venture forward, stopping in front of the gigantic structure dominating the center of the city.

Zeus's castle.

It's one of the few things in Mount Olympus that isn't immaculate or pink. Time has textured the huge building, forming valleys and ridges. It's almost as if the universe itself

is mocking Zeus's claim to power, as if it's trying to tell the almighty god that he isn't truly almighty. That there's one thing that will always be more powerful—time.

And Zeus's time is running out, dwindling like sand in an hourglass.

I inconspicuously look in both directions, searching for any threats, but my search is halted when the front doors to the castle are flung open.

Zeus steps forward like a manifestation of my worst nightmare.

Thick, wavy hair hangs around his face, merging with the prominent beard on his chin. His eyes are keen, studying me with an intensity that has my clammy palms turning sweaty. A ruby-red robe, one size too small for his towering frame, cascades around his body like waterfalls of blood.

Anger immediately singes my bloodstream at the sight of the man who took Mason from me. The monster who's trying to destroy the world. The beast who's threatening everyone I love.

I force myself to take a deep breath, to push my rage aside.

*Stay calm, Violet. Stay calm.*

It's easier said than done when you're staring into the eyes of a cold-blooded murderer.

"Hello, Violet." A smug smile stretches Zeus's lips, and the wrath inside of me intensifies, scorching my veins like liquid heat. I curl my hand into a tight fist, relishing the sting of pain as my nails embed themselves into my palm.

*Stay calm, Violet. Stay calm.*

"I came, just as you requested. And I came alone."



A frown momentarily steals over Zeus's face as he tilts his head to the side, and I realize, somewhat belatedly, that he's listening through an earpiece.

Athena was right. Zeus was expecting me to bring an army. I can see the genuine confusion on his face when he realizes that I truly did come alone, just as I agreed.

"How . . . interesting." His lips purse before he forces them into a mockery of a smile. "But no matter. I'm pleased that you've come to your senses." He extends a hand to me, his fingers adorned with a multitude of golden rings. "Come. Let's change the world together, Violet Dracula."

"Where are my parents?" I demand, not daring to venture a step closer to his outstretched hand. "You said you would free them."

Zeus's voice takes on one of faux sympathy. "Of course, Violet. They're being freed as we speak."

Bullshit.

I just barely hold in the snort that threatens to escape.

How stupid does Zeus think I am? But maybe he doesn't care about my intelligence. Not truly. In his mind, every person and monster in existence comes second to him. He's the smartest creature alive. He's the strongest. He's the fastest. He's the bravest. I'm merely an inconvenience he wishes to eradicate, a roach in need of extermination.

But that's his first issue.

He underestimated me.

And that will lead to his death.

"Why are you even doing this? Why do you need more power? You're already the most powerful monster that ever

lived.” It actually hurts to speak those words. They feel like acid clawing at my throat, burning the skin there. But I need to play to his ego. There’s nothing that will calm Zeus more and put him at ease. If he thinks I’ve given in, that I accepted he’s the biggest badass around, then he’ll lower his defenses.

Maybe.

Hopefully.

Probably.

Zeus eyes me critically, his head tilting to the side. I spot a cheese puff in his mane of snarled black hair, and I have to hold in the vomit that threatens to erupt. Goddamn him. Does he really have to ruin cheese puffs for me, along with everything else he has done? I don’t think I’ll ever be able to eat one again.

“Come.” Zeus jerks his chin toward a pathway directly behind his castle that weaves through the pink and purple trees decorating the lawn. I hesitate, biting on my lower lip, when a bright orb bouncing in the distance captures my attention. Taking unexpected comfort in Balor’s presence, I step forward to follow Zeus, making sure to keep an adequate amount of distance between us.

Now that I’m no longer standing directly in front of the castle’s shadow, the harsh light from the sun blinds me. I squint my eyes and quicken my pace, breathing out a sigh of relief when we reach the edge of the forest, where the twenty-foot trees blot out most of the light, darkening the world. Still, my head harbors a slow and consistent throb of pain that doesn’t seem to want to let up.

Fuck, how much longer do I have until the army arrives?

Three minutes?

Four?

The uneven, winding path of dirt transforms into even brick the farther into the forest we walk. Zeus doesn't seem in any particular hurry to speak, his hands clasped behind his back and his chin tilted to the hidden sunlight. The buildings of Mount Olympus soften the farther away from the palace we get, rolling into hills and streams and small pockets of trees.

Finally, Zeus turns toward me, his features painted gold in the thin shaft of sunlight.

"We don't have to be enemies, you know," he begins conversationally, extending his arm, as if he actually expects me to take it.

"You killed my mate." I don't even bother to hide the rage in those words. He knows what he did, and he would be suspicious if I acted nonchalantly about it all.

"Technically, I didn't—"

"Don't start that shit with me." I begin to tremble with the force of my anger. "You know what you did. I want to know why."

"I already told you." He blows out a breath, as if this entire conversation is tiresome to him. "The prophecy—"

"Why Mason? Why?!" The last word is a screech, ripped from the deepest depths of my throat, tugged upward like a hot coal connected to a string.

"Because it would break you, Violet Dracula," Zeus responds casually, as if discussing the weather and not the death of one of the men I love most in the world. "And did it?" Those penetrating eyes slide my way and stick there. "Did it break you?"

Finally realizing we've stopped walking, the pathway having looped around until we've found ourselves once again in front of the castle's entrance, I ignore his question and ask one of my own instead. "Why are you doing this? You still haven't answered my question. You don't need any more power."

He scoffs. "You don't know what it's like to have a brother like Lucifer." Anger expands his pupils. "Did you know that we were some of the only creatures who weren't born? Lucifer and I don't have a mother or father. We just . . . arrived, exactly as we are, same as the Fomorians. There are a lot of theories for why that is. Some say it was a Big Bang. Others believe it was divine intervention. Hell, some believe that we *are* the divine and we willed ourselves into being." He slowly shakes his head, as if that mere thought is ridiculous. "But for millions of years, it's been the two of us."

"I thought you guys were happy," I interject. "I mean, you ruled Mount Olympus. Lucifer ruled Hell. What more could you both want?"

"I didn't want anything," Zeus growls venomously, hatred sparking to life in his eyes. "It was your bastard of a father who wanted more, more, more. He couldn't be happy just having Hell. Oh no. Your father wanted to be worshiped as well. You see, when I created the humans, your father decided to create his own beings to worship him. The—"

"Vampires, I know." And from the vampires came all the other monsters that now roam Earth.

"Having worshipers on Earth wasn't good enough for him, either," Zeus spits. "He didn't just want the damned and the beasts. He wanted the righteous and holy falling at his feet as well. He was going to go after Mount Olympus. My home."

With an almost blistering speed, he reaches forward and grabs my arm, giving it a shake. I hold in the surprised yelp of pain that wants to escape.

“I understand your—” I begin cautiously.

He squeezes me even tighter. “You couldn’t possibly understand. I always felt inferior to Lucifer, but to know that he planned to take over my kingdom? That he already stole my queen?” He throws his head back in raucous laughter, though the noise is devoid of any genuine humor or mirth. “Did you know that I actually created Hera? She was a human, once upon a time, that I fell desperately in love with. She was smart, beautiful, sweet . . .” A faraway, almost wistful, expression distorts his features. “I asked her if she wanted to be mine, and she accepted. I used almost all of my power to make her immortal, but in the process, she received some magic of her own. I suppose you can say she stole some of my gifts. But I didn’t care back then. I loved her too much.” He gives my arm another savage shake that causes my teeth to rattle. “But then your bitch of a mom cheated on me with *him*. With my own damn brother! She never loved me. She just wanted what I could give her—immortality and power.”

“I’m sure that’s not true.” There’s something deeply unsettling about the rage swirling in Zeus’s eyes. He’s normally calculated and cruel, but just now, he almost appears deranged. Every hair on my arm stands at attention, as if sensing the looming threat in our vicinity.

“And now, I have to see the product of their affair every damn time I look into your face.” His free hand slips beneath his robe as icy fear skates down my spine, freezing the breath in my lungs. Fuck. He doesn’t even seem to truly see me. I’m

merely a manifestation of all his rage, anger, and pain in the flesh. “But no more. Not again.”

A blade glints in the dim lighting as Zeus smoothly extracts a god-blessed dagger.

“Zeus,” I begin, grateful when my voice doesn’t shake and betray my fear. “I thought you wanted me to join you, remember? I came here because I want more power. Do you understand? I want to join you. Hera and Lucifer left me, remember? They hate me.” I’m babbling now as fear sinks its talons deep into my skin. My heartbeat speeds up and trips hastily over itself.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Zeus’s sightless eyes land on my face.

“No more. Not again. Never again.”

He lifts his blade.

I brace myself for pain, for the dagger to embed itself in my skin, for agony to explode through my body . . . but it never comes.

What the . . . ?

I slowly open one eyelid to see a ball of light hovering directly in front of me, the god-blessed dagger sticking out of its side. I would’ve expected the light to be intangible, but the dagger remains in its side, as if the blob is made out of clay.

Balor.

“Balor?” My voice rises to a screech as I stare at the bobbing entity hovering directly in front of me.

“What the fuck?” Zeus roars.

In my pocket, my phone buzzes with the sound of my alarm.

Time is up.

Hundreds of monsters materialize out of nowhere, my mates standing at the front of the group, their eyes resembling frosted-over blades, their bodies tense, their mouths curled into sneers.

Zeus whirls around to face the army at his back before turning back toward me. Fear and shock war across his features before the former wins out.

He says something into his earpiece too low for me to hear, and then monsters pour out of every building, all of them wearing Zeus's rune.

Chaos descends.

# CHAPTER 33





VIOLET

“**F**uck! He’s getting away!” I bellow as I stare after Zeus’s retreating back as he races into his castle, the doors slamming shut behind him.

Fucking coward.

I’m taking a step to go after him when a sword materializes mere inches from my face. I jump back, alarmed, to see an unfamiliar monster girl standing before me, swinging her blade from side to side. Her red gills suggest that she’s part water monster, but I don’t know which one. Sea-green hair cascades down her back in snarled clumps, a few braids woven throughout.

On her neck, looking hideously discolored, is that damn rune.

“Violet Dracula must die!” she roars as she swings the sword at me again. This time, the blade comes precariously close to my stomach. It actually cuts through the material of my shirt and leaves a pink line on my skin.

Behind me, I hear the clash of metal against metal, the ringing of gunfire, the screams and cries of the hurt and fallen. I don’t dare even look over my shoulder, not sure my brain can handle seeing the resulting chaos.

Please, please let my mates be okay.

The monster swipes at me again, and I realize I have a more pressing matter to attend to. Like . . . making sure I’m not going to be skewered. Because this monster? She wants to see me deader than dead.

“Listen,” I begin cautiously, holding up both my hands. “You’ve been spelled by Zeus. That rune on your neck? It makes you irrationally angry. You don’t actually want to kill me. What’s your name?”

“Alixandra!” the monster bellows, spit flying from her serrated teeth and landing on my cheek.

“Alixandra? Yeah. You don’t want to kill me, do you? You want to be my friend. You want to—”

The creature lunges at me again, and I stealthily step out of the way of the incoming blade. Fuck.

It was decided that I wouldn’t come with any weapons, in case Zeus decided to check me for them and became enraged when he found one on me. One of my mates was supposed to throw me a god-blessed dagger as soon as the battle began. The fact that they haven’t yet . . .

No. I can’t think like that.

They’re okay.

They have to be.

I reach behind me and grab the first thing I can find—which happens to be a potted plant. With a cry of desperation, I throw it at the monster’s face, feeling marginally guilty when she cries out in pain, a huge, jagged scratch marring the skin of her cheek.

“You bitch!” she roars as she tosses her sword to the side and comes at me with her claws extended. Apparently, shit just got personal.

I duck out of the way before her claws can connect and debate my next move. I don’t want to kill her, but I need to

incapacitate her if I have any hope of stopping Zeus before he can escape.

I move in a forward roll, so I'm now behind the charging bull of a monster. Then I lift both my hands and take a deep breath, conjuring Hellfire into my palms. Sweat gathers on my forehead from the exertion this particular skill takes, but I can't afford to lose control, not with my mates so close by. Flames of red and blue lick at my hands as they rise and rise and rise . . .

Hellfire is different from normal fire, in the fact that it only burns if I want it to. Right now, it feels cool against my hands, almost ticklish. I will more power into the Hellfire, and it begins to grow hotter.

With a roar of rage, I throw a fireball at the sea creature's face, watching as the flames immediately engulf her petite body. Her desperate screams reverberate through the city, and I inwardly wince.

"Oh, shit," I murmur. And then, as an afterthought, I add, "Sorry! No personalies!"

She continues to scream as she falls over the side of the railing and lands in a pond below. She rolls from side to side, her skin charred and the scent of burnt fish contaminating the air, but her screams have died down.

I pray that simply means she has fallen unconscious instead of . . . you know.

Becoming a fish stick.

"Violet!" I pull my attention away from the fish monster and to Cal, who's running toward me, his pink hair stained with blood and one of his wings slightly crooked. A bruise is beginning to form on his right cheekbone, giving him a

rugged, ruthless look. His panicked eyes lock on mine as he takes me into his arms. “Fuck, we couldn’t get to you. There were too many of them.” He glances over his shoulder, where the battle takes place. I don’t even know who’s on our side and who’s on theirs. It seems to be nothing but a tangle of limbs and splattering blood. “Are you okay?”

“I’m okay,” I rush to reassure him, grabbing both of his arms and giving them a squeeze. “But we need to stop Zeus. He ran inside.” I point at the huge doors behind us, and Cal’s eyes narrow.

“It’s going to take at least twenty of the strongest monsters to break down that door. It’s reinforced with lots and lots of magic.”

“We need to stop him, Cal. This thing won’t end until we do,” I stress as trembles work their way through my body. I can’t stop thinking about my mates in the battle behind us. Are they okay? Are they still alive? Surely, I would know if one of them died, right? I take comfort in the fact that my soul isn’t screaming in agony as it did when Mason passed away.

And dammit, I’m worried about Alixandra too.

I really, really shouldn’t have used my Hellfire on her.

I take a deep breath and shove all my worries and fears into a bunch of tiny boxes. Then I take each of those boxes and bury them in the deepest recesses of my brain, throwing on six feet of cement for good measure. I’ll need to use a sledgehammer if I ever hope of extracting those emotions again.

Focus.

I need to focus.

“Cal . . .”

“I’m thinking.” My cupid’s lips thin as he glances up, inspecting the windows lining the top of the castle. I can see a lightbulb erupt above his head as he turns toward me with a smile. “How do you feel about a little flying, my love?”

“Um . . .”

Cal doesn’t give me a choice as he wraps both of his tan arms around me and shoots into the air, his red wings flapping continually.

Just in time too, because three monsters are charging at us from every direction. One of their claws pierces my ankle before Cal hefts me out of harm’s way, continuing to fly us higher into the air. He winces with every downward flap of his bent, broken wing but doesn’t complain.

“Cal,” I murmur.

“Yeah?”

“Do you have your bows and arrows with you?”

“Of course. Why?”

I shift in his arms as I reach for the weapons strung across his back. It takes a lot of maneuvering to first grab the bow and then a few arrows. Cal’s grip moves from my waist to my ass, holding me in place, ensuring I don’t fall.

“Because a shit ton of winged monsters are heading for us,” I say through gritted teeth as I load up one of the arrows and aim it at the closest monster—a huge dragon with shimmering orange scales.

“Oh fuck!” Cal begins to fly even faster, but with his broken wing, it proves futile.

“Let’s hope those archery classes Daddy Dracula put me through actually paid off,” I mutter.

And then I let the arrows fly.

# CHAPTER 34



FRANKIE

I haven't been back to the tunnels beneath Prodigium Academy since that fateful night so many months ago, when the former headmaster used me to kidnap Violet and try to kill her.

I still feel tingles of terror racing up and down my spine at the memory of what could've happened that night.

Because of me.

The caves are exactly as I remember them—long, winding pathways lit with a soft glow from the ornate brass sconces that line the rocky walls.

“We should be with Violet,” Vin mutters from behind me, the anger and desperation in his voice an echo of my own.

“You know why we need to do this,” I reply stiffly as I quicken my pace. I don't know exactly where Zeus is keeping Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula, but if I had to hazard a guess, I would say it's the same area where the old headmaster had me bring Violet. It's the meeting point of four tunnels and expands nearly twenty feet in all directions. I can't think of anywhere else down here large enough to house three powerful monsters.

“The only reason we were assigned to go in the first place is because you tried to murder Violet,” Vin says with a scoff. The acid in his voice has me spinning around, my hands curling into tight fists.

The flickering torch light wavers and dances on his face, like a mass of golden snakes. As I watch, he agitatedly runs



his fingers through a disarranged piece of black hair that has fallen into his face.

“I didn’t try to kill Violet,” I hiss. “I tried to save her. You’re the one who wanted her dead when she first arrived. You didn’t even know her, yet you were willing to kill her.”

Vin’s mouth molds into a frown as he takes a step forward, his fingers palming the hilt of his blade. “Say that to me one more time . . .”

“Say what? That you’re a specist piece of shit?” I turn away from him before he can respond, though his erratic breathing can be heard as he struggles to regain control of his tenuous emotions.

Humans are so . . . fallible. Weak. Vulnerable. They’re driven by their emotions more than any other creature on this planet. At one point, that fact may have disgusted me, but now . . .

It just makes me wistful.

I half wonder if I feel any of my emotions as keenly as the others do, if my love for Violet is the same as Vin’s. Perhaps my feelings are muted, like dappled sunlight filtering through tree branches. Or maybe they’re brighter, more vibrant, than anyone else’s. Maybe the fact that I’m not human amplifies these foreign emotions licking up my spine and melting the steel around my heart.

“I’m going to ignore you said that shit, because I know you’re scared,” Vin hisses from behind me, that statement accompanied by his footsteps as he hurries to catch up with me. His shoulder brushes my own as we walk. “I’m scared too, brother.”

A cold pebble of dread lodges in my stomach. The analytical part of my brain wonders what, exactly, is transpiring inside of me. Is one of the machines that created me malfunctioning? Is my programmed brain creating a sensation that doesn't truly exist? Because the part of me that belongs to Violet—the part of me that has become convinced that I could be human, at least objectively—realizes that tiny pebble is a manifestation of my fear.

Fear for Violet.

Fear for my brothers.

Fear for Hera, Dracula, and Lucifer.

“What if we're too late?” I voice the question I haven't dared to say out loud. It was the one question that has repeatedly been circulating in my brain since Dimitri first assigned us to this mission. There has to be a reason why Zeus chose to get rid of three of the most powerful monsters in existence in exchange for Violet. Is it because they're already dead?

Or did he never truly plan to free them?

“We can't be.” Vin's voice is roughened by his own fear. “Don't think like that.”

Still, I find my heart beating dauntingly against my rib cage as fear slithers through my veins like thick sludge.

“Do you think Violet will survive it?” I continue. “If they're dead, I mean.”

“Frankie . . .” Vin's voice is a rumbly warning. “Shut the fuck up. We're not too late. We'll rescue them and then go find our girl.”

“You’re probably right. There’s a fifty-six percent chance that at least one of Violet’s parents is still alive. They’re too powerful to kill. I’ve done the calculations over and over again in my head, and if we’re fast enough, that number could move up to fifty-eight. And if we run, we could get that number to fifty-nine. There’s a forty-two percent chance all three are alive, though I’m afraid that number decreases every second. Maybe if we—”

“Frankie.” Vin places a hand on my shoulder, pulling me to a stop. His amber-brown eyes capture my own. “Even if we’re too late, Violet will survive this. She’s strong—stronger than any of us.”

“How much more can she lose?” Pain tunnels into my throat and forms a thick ball of tension that’s impossible to swallow around.

“She won’t lose anyone else,” Vin tells me resolutely, a muscle in his jaw feathering. Anger and pain darken his olive complexion, tinting his cheeks red, and I know he’s thinking about Mason.

I’ll admit that the gorgon is never too far from my own mind as well.

“Fire makes steel, and when the world tried to burn Violet, she simply proved her resilience,” Vin says. “Her flesh may be malleable, but her will to live isn’t. She’ll survive this battle, and she’ll survive the aftermath as well. We’ll make sure of that.” His eyes don’t hold a single shred of doubt, and a little bit of my own tension seeps away. “So, cut this mopey shit out and let’s go. We don’t have a lot of time.” The frost in his tone could rival that of a winter storm.

And it’s exactly the wake-up call I need.

With a nod of determination, I lead the way through the winding pathways until we stop near the room I believe to hold Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula.

Vin gestures for me to wait behind him and prowls forward, his blade extended. He peeks around the corner and then turns toward me with a curt nod.

Hope unfurls in my chest at the meaning of that eloquent nod.

Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula are still alive.

Vin lifts three fingers into the air, and I translate that to mean that there are three enemies.

Easy for a Van Helsing.

Vin lifts a hand, indicating for me to stay in place, before he inches forward, his cold, angry eyes fixed on the threat I still can't see. I wait patiently as Vin jumps into action, disappearing from view. Shouts, growls, and screams echo through the cave, but they're immediately snuffed out. Less than a minute later, Vin returns to me, drenched in blood but smiling wickedly.

When he catches me staring, his eyebrows arch in a knowing way. "What?" he snaps. "I haven't killed anyone in way too long."

I roll my eyes at his ridiculousness and step forward, being extra careful to avoid the now dead bodies littering the floor.

Anger pumps into my veins when I take in Violet's parents . . . or what remains of them.

At first, I believe we were too late and they're already dead, and my stomach physically spasms. But then Lucifer

releases a low moan, and the fear lodged in my throat begins to subside.

“Fuck. What happened to them?” Vin asks, returning to my side and rubbing his bloody dagger on his pants.

I tentatively venture forward until I can study the equipment that seems to be connected to the three prone forms.

Hera, Lucifer, and Dracula are lying on three cots in the center of the room. Numerous wires stick out of their bodies and seem to lead back to a huge machine.

Fear swirls around in my chest like a typhoon as I volley my gaze between the three of them and then the strange machine.

“It looks as if . . . Zeus is trying to find a new way to steal monsters’ powers,” I murmur as I lower myself into a crouch beside Lucifer. At some point, someone must’ve removed his normal white suit. He now wears a fine-threaded tunic and ripped pants. An IV extends from his arm and connects back to the machine, a strange, blue, glimmering liquid visible through the translucent tube.

“What?” Vin barks.

“This . . . this appears to be their . . . magic.” I can’t quite contain the awe in my voice. What Zeus is doing is beyond fucked up, but even I can admit there’s a certain type of beauty in his scientific depravity. “Their bodies continually replenish the magic, and Zeus steals it using this machine. Of course, I would have to study it more in-depth to truly understand how it works—”

“Yeah, how about we don’t?” Vin suggests sardonically. His lips flatten out. “Let’s just get Hera, Lucifer, and Dracula

free of this . . . *thing* and get the fuck out of here.”

I continue to study the wires and tubes protruding from their bodies. “How fascinating. When Zeus digests a soul, it’s a one and done type of deal. He steals the soul’s power, of course, but only that one time. With this, Zeus can continually extract magic from their bodies. If I had to hazard a guess, their magic is stored in this machine for Zeus to digest whenever he comes down here. Interesting. Very interesting. Is this his plan for the future? For Violet?” My skin crawls at the thought. “It would make sense if he wishes to capitalize on the magic of some of the most powerful monsters in existence . . .”

Vin pulls in a staggered breath. “So, you’re saying that our mate could get hooked up to this fucking death trap?”

“It’s a possibility—” Before I’ve even finished speaking, Vin is moving toward the huge piece of machinery and begins to stab it repeatedly. Sparks shoot out in every direction, and a strange whirring sound echoes through the room. The machine gives one final cry before going silent.

“There.” Vin re-sheathes his dagger with a grunt of satisfaction. “Now it’s a dead machine.” His brows furrow suddenly as he turns toward me. “You don’t think . . .?” He can’t seem to finish his sentence.

“What?”

“Well, there are only two monsters I know who are smart enough to create a machine that can quite literally steal power from monsters. You and . . .” Once again, he seems hesitant to complete that sentence, but I fill in the name for him.

“Frankenstein.” Icy tendrils of cold wrap around me in a mockery of an embrace, and my pulse thuds in a rapid rhythm

against my skull. “That lying son of a bitch—”

“We don’t know that he helped Zeus—” Vin tries to reason.

“Who else would be smart enough to pull off something like this?” I counter.

“Violet and Cal used the truth potion thingy on all of the council members. If Frankenstein was involved with Zeus, wouldn’t he have confessed it?”

“Not if he was prepared.” I scrub a hand down my face as anger spreads through my veins like a disease. Fuck. “If he knew Violet was coming, he might’ve expected her to do something like that. And he knows my style well enough to guess what ingredients I would put in my truth serum. He easily could’ve created an antidote.”

Stupid. Stupid.

I was so stupid!

And now, Frankenstein’s “fighting” right alongside Violet and my brothers, pretending to be on their side, pretending to be aligned with them.

Anxiety burrows in my chest.

“Frankenstein’s a spineless sack of shit,” a dry voice murmurs from behind me, drawing my attention to the three cots. Lucifer coughs weakly and then flicks his eyes in my direction. “He’ll do just about anything for Zeus, if it means he’ll receive protection.”

“So, Frankenstein betrayed us?” The muscles in Vin’s jaw bunches up before he shakes his head in disbelief.

“Not necessarily,” a feminine voice trickles toward me. Hera slowly sits up in bed, her blonde, greasy hair hanging

around her face in limp ringlets. She rips the IV out of her arm and then works unhooking the wires from her head and neck. “He may have decided to join your team because he’s tired of being Zeus’s bitch.”

I want to believe that, I do, but . . .

I know my father. He’s a smart, calculated man. If he chose to help Zeus initially, it’s because he believes the god will win this battle. I can’t see him changing his mind now. Even if we defeat Zeus, Frankenstein will always be a threat to those I love. Perhaps I could talk to Dimitri about removing Frankenstein from the equation. Permanently.

The thought doesn’t fill me with sadness or even guilt. I’ve known for a while now that my father never loved me the way a parent should. More than that, he’ll dispose of me and everyone I care about if he believes it’ll benefit him and his convoluted perception of how he wants the world to run. He’s dangerous. Immensely so.

At one point, I believed him to be the only family I have. Now, I have a new family, and I’ll protect them with all the darkness inside of me. He molded me into the monster he needed, but what he doesn’t realize is that Violet holds the reins. I’m hers to command, completely and implicitly.

“Thank you, F-dog, for rescuing us from this shitfest” That comes from Dracula, who groans as he moves to stand, butt ass naked and trembling. “I feel like there’s a breeze in my bumhole region. My cock-a-doodle is feeling rather peckish. What’s good in the neighborhood, homies?”

“Do you have any idea what he just said?” Vin whispers to me.

“No idea.”



“He’s saying thank you for saving us, is wondering why he’s naked, and is asking what the fuck is going on now,” Hera translates as she smooths a hand down her stained white dress.

Lucifer scowls at her. “So, now you speak *Dracula*? And why the fuck are you studying his naked body?”

“Am I not allowed to look at other men naked, Lucy?” she taunts.

“Ain’t no reason for the homeboys to fight,” Dracula drawls, still semi-delirious, his cheeks ashen and his lashes drooping. I’m not even sure he knows what he’s talking about.

Hera’s gaze snaps toward us, the coldness in her eyes encasing us in icy shadows. “Where’s our daughter? Is she okay?”

“That’s why we’re here,” Vin says sharply. “She’s battling Zeus right as we speak. We need to go to her. Now.”

Coherence returns to Dracula’s glazed-over eyes as he jumps to his feet. “Where the fuck is she?” His tone holds all the rage and savagery that gave him the title of the most feared monster in the entire world.

“Mount Olympus,” I say curtly. “Dimitri Gray told us there’s a portal in his office.”

“Makes sense,” Hera murmurs, more to herself than anyone else. “Prodigium was built on some of the most ancient portals. It’s how it got its name, after all.”

“Are you guys okay to fight?” Vin demands.

Hera and Lucifer exchange a loaded look before both of them flick their gaze to Dracula, who stands tall and proud beside them.

Still naked.

Ripples of shadow skid across Lucifer's skin as he nods. "Zeus may have tried to steal our power, but he underestimated us."

"We can fight," Hera agrees quickly, placing one hand on Lucifer's arm and the other on Dracula's.

I suck in a lungful of air as some of the panic percolating in my gut diminishes.

*Violet, we're coming for you, baby.*

*And we're bringing our own army.*

*Just hang in there.*

*Please.*

*Just hang in there.*

# CHAPTER 35



## VIOLET

I kick out as another talon reaches for my ankle, having run out of regular arrows a few seconds earlier. And I refuse to waste one of the god-blessed arrows on this motherfucker.

“Fuck.” I desperately grapple behind me, toward Cal, and grab one of the daggers he has strapped to his belt. Flicking it free, I lower it to the four-headed monster with jaundiced yellow skin and beady red eyes. “Stay the fuck away from me!”

The monster releases a roar as I slice off one of its wings, causing it to dip farther down.

“Almost there,” Cal pants as he tightens his grip on me and heads for one of the only open windows lining the castle.

I kick out once again, hitting the creature squarely in its disfigured snout, and it finally gives up its pursuit with a cry of pain.

At the same time, Cal turns toward the window and flies us inside, landing clumsily on the ground. He staggers forward a few steps, still gripping me tightly, and blows out a breath of air.

“Usually, my landings are much more graceful,” Cal huffs, frowning.

“Of course, they are, baby,” I coo, already racing forward. Where the fuck is Zeus?

I barely notice the framed portraits lining the walls, each one depicting Zeus in a different pose. One shows him swinging a tennis racket, dressed in white shorts and a skin-tight shirt. Another has him bedecked in only a blanket. His

hairy chest is on display as he puckers his lips at the camera. Beside that one is a portrait of Zeus in space, galloping across the moon and holding a flag with his face on it.

“There!” Cal bellows, pointing. I follow the direction of his finger to see a familiar, dark-haired man rushing into a room farther down the hall.

I quicken my pace, desperation a living, breathing entity in my lungs.

Zeus will die today.

I’ll make sure of that.

I reach the door Zeus disappeared into and kick it open. The door careens off the wall with a deafening crash as I stomp inside.

“Zeus,” I growl out as I find the man—*murderer*—in question in the corner of the room, desperately searching for an escape route.

But there’ll be no escape. Not this time. Not ever.

Cal materializes behind me and wraps his arms around my waist, holding me flush to his chest. “Zeus, this ends now,” he growls. Anger laces his tone, and he squeezes me even tighter. No doubt, he’s thinking about his family, who were brutally slaughtered on the off chance that one of them would emerge as a cupid capable of creating mate bonds.

A mirthless laugh belts from the god’s chest as he straightens imperceptibly, smoothing a hand down his long beard. The fear I thought I saw on his face only moments before dissipates, as if it had never been there to begin with.

“You really are stupid, aren’t you, Violet?” An amused smirk plays on his lips. “Leaving the battle . . . the safety of

your army . . .” He *tsks* and gives a slow, sardonic shake of his head. “Do you want to die?”

“I’m not the same girl you once knew,” I hiss, anger clawing at me, even as anxiety burrows into my chest. Because I know, the same way I know the sky is blue and the grass is green, that this is the end. The final showdown. Only one of us will be leaving this room today alive, and I’ll be damned if it’s Zeus.

I shrug out of Cal’s embrace, ignoring his shout of protest, and take a single step forward.

“You tried to break me by killing my mate, and you almost succeeded.” Another step. “But you didn’t break me, Zeus. You made me stronger. You gave me something to fight for, and more than that, something to live for. I’m not leaving this world until Mason is avenged. And if I do go . . . I’m making sure you come with me.” The last words are practically a growl, wrenched free from the confines of my chest where all of my hurt, anger, and fear have accumulated over the past few months.

Surprise flickers over Zeus’s indolent expression before anger quickly takes over. “Once I digest your soul, Violet Dracula, I’ll be unstoppable. No one, not even your mates, will be able to defeat me.” Pure malice glimmers in his eyes as he matches me step for step, stopping when only a few feet separate us. “But it doesn’t have to end like this. You don’t have to die. We can rule together, side by side, until the end of time.”

My heart slams hard against my breastbone as I struggle to wrangle both my anger and disgust. “Aren’t you my uncle?”

Zeus chuckles. “Don’t be daft, Violet. I don’t mean it like *that*.” He turns to stare off into the distance, his eyes glazed,

his lips smashed together. While he's distracted, I inconspicuously grab the hilt of the god-blessed dagger I stole from Cal. "We're both outcasts in a society that would love nothing more than to chew us up and then spit us back out. Together, we would be unstoppable. I'll even allow you to keep your mates. Wouldn't that be nice, Violet? To rule the world with your mates by your side?"

"I never wanted to rule the world." My words are a rasp of air. "I just wanted to save it."

"Oh, Violet." His eyes flick to me, brimming with disappointment. "You truly believe that you're a changed woman, don't you? But is love really capable of taming the beast?" His shrewd eyes narrow in on me. "Or are some monsters meant to roam free?"

"I think—" I jab my dagger at his chest.

Or, at least, I try to. I have the pleasure of seeing Zeus's eyes widen in fear a second before he twists out of the way, grabs my wrist, and snaps it.

My lungs burn with the scream I refuse to unleash as pain assaults me.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

"You stupid, stupid girl," Zeus hisses in my ear as he fumbles for the dagger and holds it against my throat. "I'm a god, you fucking idiot! You can't kill me!"

"Fuck. You." I meet Cal's eyes—wide with terror and anger—across the room and nod nearly imperceptibly. Then I allow my body to turn limp in Zeus's arms, and he curses as I slump downward. At the same time, Cal notches one of his few remaining arrows—now god-blessed—and shoots it at Zeus's forehead.

Zeus shoves me away, and I roll, accidentally putting pressure on my broken wrist. My mind fractures with agony. It feels as if a thousand teeth are ripping me apart from the inside out.

I can already feel my bones mending themselves back together, but it hurts like a goddamn bitch. Pain threatens to send me sinking into oblivion, but I know I need to stay conscious if I have any chance of destroying Zeus. What's one broken wrist?

The bones continue to snap and bend as my body attempts to repair itself. It almost hurts worse than the initial break.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

“You dare try to kill me?!?!” Zeus screams, holding the arrow that he somehow captures in mid-air. Blood oozes from his hand.

“Cal, run!” I scream, keenly aware of the malicious glint in Zeus's eyes, one that promises death and destruction to everyone in the immediate vicinity. My breaths shudder in and out as I attempt to clamor to my feet. Fear envelopes me like a depthless ocean that threatens to swallow me whole.

Cal bares his teeth at Zeus and prepares another arrow, aiming it at Zeus's heart this time.

But Zeus simply lifts his hand, the movement decidedly lazy, and Cal goes sailing through the air, hitting the wall with a loud bang.

“Cal!” I scream, tears streaking my cheeks.

Please be alive.

Please be alive.

Please be alive.



Cal groans weakly and attempts to sit up.

“You know . . .” Zeus studies his nails, as if he hasn’t a care in the world. “This battle could be over in seconds if I chose to activate the runes on your mates’ flesh and use them to do my bidding.” A sadistic grin warps his features as he finally focuses on me. “Do you think that would destroy them, Violet? Killing you?”

“You dumb fuck.” I laugh humorlessly as I finally straighten my spine, shaking out my now healed wrist. “We removed the magic from those runes weeks ago. You can’t control jack shit.” I gnash my teeth together and advance on him. “You’re on your own here.”

Something explosive unfurls in my chest. Something ironically . . . cold. Icy. It cools my veins, stealing all the warmth from my body.

What is this emotion twisting up my insides and casting a red sheen over my vision?

It takes me a second too long to recognize it.

Wrath.

I’m angry. So fucking angry.

This creature before me murdered my mate, one of the greatest loves of my life, and he won’t hesitate to do that again. Who knows what he did to my parents? Perhaps they’re already dead.

The world won’t be safe until Zeus has been eliminated once and for all.

My breaths turn labored, and my mind reels, trying its damndest to catch up to some inevitable conclusion I already

made. My heart's so heavy it seems to be expanding in a slowly closing vise.

It ends today.

Now.

Speckles of red descend across my vision, lancing across it like fire, as I continue to stalk forward, my gaze intent on Zeus.

“What do you think you're doing, Violet?” Zeus laughs raucously, quite literally throwing his head back and airing his amusement to the universe.

But the universe won't save him today.

No one will.

I lose myself to the rage inside of me.

# CHAPTER 36



VIN

“Upstairs!” Alex bellows, taking the steps two at a time as we all race to catch up.

Frankie, Hera, Lucifer, Dracula, and I arrived to see Mount Olympus in absolute chaos. Monster bodies were strewn across the golden asphalt, surrounded by pools of blood. Fomorians fought Fomorians, monsters fought monsters, and it took me a second too long to realize no one knew who the fuck they were fighting or why. It was chaos. Pure and unfettered chaos. Vanessa stood on the roof of a small building, barking orders at everyone who would listen. I was immensely relieved to see my sister was okay. Aside from a small scratch on her upper arm, she appeared unharmed, her eyes glimmering with violence and the need for justice.

And then Barret arrived, a hulking giant of muscle, and told us that Cal and Violet flew to the top of the castle to stop Zeus once and for all. All thoughts of battle and war dissipated from my mind in my haste to get to them.

“Did this place always have so many fucking stairs?” Lucifer heaves from where he’s still a few floors below us, leaning against the railing. Hera places a comforting hand on his lower back, and surprisingly, Dracula does as well.

“Just think about how good it will feel to decapitate Zeus once we get all the way to the top,” Dracula reassures him.

“I’ll even let you do it with a piece of paper,” Hera chimes in, wiping at the sweat on her forehead with the back of her hand. “I know that always puts a smile on your face.”

“It would be fun,” Lucifer mutters, and then the three of them continue to half climb, half crawl up the staircase.

They soon leave my field of vision as I enter a hallway covered in framed pictures of Zeus.

A bellow of pure rage draws my attention to the only open door in the hall.

“There!” Hux races ahead and all but slams Alex into the wall in his bid to get to Violet first.

The rest of us are only a few steps behind him, even Frankie, who once told me that running is the work of the devil and anyone who willingly does it should be executed.

“Holy shit,” Frankie breathes in shock.

Dimitri’s grip tightens on his blade as he studies the room with wide eyes.

“What the fuck?” Hux demands.

Violet stands in the center of the room, hovering a few inches above the ground. Her golden hair whips around her face like tendrils of electricity, and her blue eyes appear almost black in the dim lighting, a cauldron of spilled ink. A dark mist crawls up both of her arms like shadowy snakes as she keeps her attention locked on Zeus.

The ground opens up beneath the god.

I take an automatic step backward when creatures begin to crawl out of the now gaping hole. I’ve never seen any monsters like them before in my entire existence. Their milky, sunken eyeballs rest in faces devoid of any skin, nothing but pink and red muscle. Their bodies are emaciated and appear to be charred, as if they’ve been burnt repeatedly. Bile burns in my throat when one of their heads cants to the side, tottering

as if it has just caught a particularly pungent scent. I can see the stringy tendons on its neck just barely holding its body together.

Their clawed hands reach for Zeus, grabbing at every inch of skin they can touch. Soon, Zeus's entire lower body is consumed by these hideous, grotesque creatures. Each of them digs their talons into his waist, inching their way up his body as he flails from side to side. His magic doesn't seem to be working on them. Or, at the very least, these creatures are immune to it. No matter what he does, the beasts continue to pull at his body, dragging him into the gaping abyss in the middle of the room.

"The souls of the damned," a rough, raspy voice breathes from beside me, rife with wonder. I turn to see Lucifer leaning heavily against the doorframe, his blond hair tousled and his face pale with fatigue.

"What?" Dimitri barks, reluctantly ripping his gaze away from a luminescent Violet, who's still screaming like a damn banshee, her head thrown back, her arms extended, those inky shadows spilling from her skin.

"Violet's controlling the souls of the damned," Lucifer whispers, appearing stunned. "That power . . . it should be impossible. No one has ever been able to control those souls before. Not even me."

An anguished scream pulls my attention back to Zeus, just as one of his arms is yanked clean off his body, blood spurting in every direction. Another one of the creatures drags a taloned hand down his face, plucking at his eyelid and ripping it clean off.

"Violet can control the damned," Dracula says in wonder, his eyes sharpening on his daughter. "I doubt she even knows

she can do it.”

“She probably unintentionally called on this power when those hunters were torturing her,” Hera surmises. “My god.”

When those hunters were torturing her . . .

When my father and his men attempted to steal the love of my life from me.

I try to envision these same souls ripping my dad to pieces, and bile churns in my stomach. I don’t regret what happened to the sadistic man, but . . . he was my father. And maybe a part of me still loves him, despite all he has done.

I shove all thoughts of the wretched man aside, knowing I need to stay focused and present.

“You stupid bitch!” Zeus rages, his one good arm somehow breaking through the pile of decaying, burnt, grotesque bodies. A ball of energy materializes in his hand, glimmering like flames.

With a roar of pure rage, he tosses it at Violet.

“No!” I bellow, jumping forward. The rest of Violet’s mates rush toward her as well, but we’re too far away. And Violet? She’s still lost to her rage, her eyes sightless and unseeing, her lips parting in a scream that refuses to end.

They say that time slows down when bad things occur, and just then, the clock seems to be stuck in molasses. All I can do is watch as the ball of energy zips toward Violet with an almost blistering speed, splicing through the air like a thrown dagger. And I know with unwavering certainty that the second it hits her . . . it’ll kill her. I feel that truth in the hollow of my bones.

“Violet!” Alex screams.

The second the strange ball of energy would've made contact with her chest, a hand appears out of nowhere.

“Holy fuck.” I fall to my knees as I stare, wide-eyed and trembling, up at the translucent shape directly beside Violet.

A purple flannel pulled open over a loose gray shirt.

A beanie covering his snakes from view.

Hard, emerald eyes that emanate nothing but rage.

Mason.

My best friend.

His ghost hovers directly in front of Violet, holding the ball of energy away from her chest. His entire body seems to strain with the force of such a task, and lines dig themselves into his face.

“No!” Zeus bellows as the souls of the damned continue to rip at his flesh, dragging him under. “No! No! No! You can’t do this! You can’t!” His desperate eyes, still sans lashes, flick toward Lucifer. “Brother, please!”

A cold, malicious smile unfurls on Lucifer’s lips. “Welcome to Hell’s worst prison, brother. It won’t be long until you become one of these souls yourself.”

Genuine fear splays itself across Zeus’s face as the souls claw at his chest, attempting to pull him under.

“Offer Violet your power!” Hera desperately glances between me and the rest of Violet’s mates. “Quickly!”

My girl is waning, the force of maintaining her hold on the souls pulling at her strength. Her face turns ashen as she sways to the side.



I focus on my connection to Violet, on the silver cord that thrums between us like a plucked violin string, and then funnel all of my power into it. Fatigue threatens to drag me under, but I remain upright, focusing on the love of my existence.

I can tell the rest of her mates are feeding her their power too. Cal's head droops, Barret staggers forward, and even Dimitri begins to sweat.

But as we fade, Violet seems to burn even brighter, her eyes gemstones in her face, sparking with unparalleled power. The shadows around her arms snap out like whips and collide with Zeus's flesh, curling around him.

And then, with one last roar of rage, Zeus disappears from view entirely, consumed by the souls of the damned.

The gaping chasm in the center of the floor closes over as if it had never been there to begin with—a sea of darkness replaced by smooth, meticulously polished marble.

The battle is over.

Zeus is dead.

And . . .

Somewhere in the distance, a cry of anger and utter despair pierces the still air.

# CHAPTER 37



## VIOLET

**R**eality reasserts itself with the same painful sluggishness of my wrist bones snapping back into place.

For a long moment, I can't remember where I am or how I've come to be here in the first place. My brain feels fuzzy, as if someone loaded it with wet cotton balls.

“What the . . .?” I blink, attempting to orient myself, and swear I see familiar emerald eyes staring down at me, rife with pain. But then I blink again, and the face dissipates like ashes in the breeze. Still, his name settles on my tongue, the sweetest of poisons, acerbic in flavor but tantalizing my taste buds like melted chocolate. “Mason?”

“Violet!” Hands reach for me, touching my face, my hair, my legs—basically wherever they can reach.

The heaviness in my chest lightens, and safety floods me, something I don't get to experience often.

My mates.

They're here.

The compulsion to pull them close is undeniable, but I feel as if there's something I need to remember, something I need to do . . .

“You did it, Precious Treasure.” My breath mingles with Hux as he presses his forehead to my own, his lashes fluttering against his cheekbones. However, despite his words, the sharp jawline that blesses his features is bunched, betraying his fear and tension. “Zeus is gone.”

“What?” Confusion swirls around in my chest like a typhoon as I struggle to coincide his words with everything I know. The last thing I remember is Zeus using his magic to toss Cal aside as if he were nothing but a rag doll, and then . . . rage. So much rage, it seemed to encase me in an icy shadow, crawling up my throat like a spider.

Oh god. Cal.

I desperately search for my cupid, only breathing a sigh of relief when I see his face directly above Frankie’s shoulder, his eyes hooded with worry.

“You’re okay,” I breathe, tears burning my eyes. I flick my gaze from his to take in the rest of my mates—all dirty, disheveled, and bleeding, but alive. “You’re all okay.”

The tightness in my throat subsides, even as panic beats like a snare drum in my chest.

What the fuck happened?

I don’t know if I spoke those words out loud or if my mates are just apt at reading my face, because, in eerie unison, all of them turn to stare at the figure leaning against the doorway.

“Lucifer,” I breathe as my bio dad hobbles toward me. His face is haggard, and violent black shadows hover beneath both of his eyes. “You look like shit.”

“Is that anyway to greet your tortured dad?” Lucifer’s lips twitch in the beginnings of a smile.

A throat clears obnoxiously from behind him. “Bio dad. Not real dad. There’s a difference.” Dracula moves to stand beside Lucifer, his eyes intent on me, love emanating from every pore of his . . . very, very naked body.

I immediately turn away with a cry of disgust. “Dad! Oh my god! Put your dick away!”

“Ha!” Dracula sounds smug. “I’m Dad, and you’re Lucifer. Suck it.”

“Nobody is sucking anything!” I plead.

My skin quite literally crawls.

“Dracula, put your dick away.” Hera’s musical voice reverberates through the room. “And Lucifer, talk to our daughter. She’s freaking out.”

Our daughter.

Sparks of excitement shoot off through my body at those two words, crackling down my nerve endings.

Our daughter.

“I don’t know what you did, Vi, but you stopped Zeus. You did it.” The warmth of Dimitri’s breath hits my earlobe and sends chills down my spine. I can feel his arms coil around my waist from behind as he pulls me against him.

“I . . . did?”

“You called upon the souls of the damned,” Lucifer tells me briskly, straightening a hand down his rumpled tunic and tattered pants. I’ve never seen him in anything but an immaculate white suit, so I can’t help but think he appears almost unrecognizable in his ordinary clothes.

My parents . . . are alive.

They’re okay.

They’re here.

Relief has me sucking in lungfuls of air, and all I want to do is throw myself into their arms.

“Are you even listening to me?” Lucifer cocks his head to the side curiously as I brush at my wet eyes with the back of my hand.

“I’m just so grateful you guys are okay. I-I would’ve been sad if you died,” I manage to choke out.

Lucifer’s expression instantly softens at my words, and he kneels down until he’s at eye level with me. His gaze briefly zooms in on my mates’ hands caressing my skin, anger expanding his pupils, before he focuses back on my face.

“Do you remember anything that happened, Violet?” he asks gently.

Something about his tone zaps the residual heat from my body. Not even my mates’ presence around me can replenish it.

I shrug helplessly as the surrounding coldness seeps deeper into my bones.

“I remember being angry. I thought Zeus would hurt Cal, and I just . . . snapped, I guess.” I shake my head minutely as I struggle to grapple with my missing memories.

“Somehow, you were able to summon the souls of the damned and convince them to do your bidding,” Lucifer explains. And though he’d already told me that, this is the first time those words really register in the tumultuous whirlpool of my brain.

“I . . . what?” I turn to stare at my hands—speckled in blood and gore. I half expect to see one of these so-called souls crawling out of my pinkie finger. “What is that?”

“They are souls that are too dangerous to be normal demons, too horrid to be allowed free to roam Earth, too evil to be anywhere but imprisoned in Hell’s most secure prison.”

Lucifer gently places his hand on my knee. “Do you understand what I’m saying?”

My pulse thuds a rapid rhythm against my skull, drowning out all other sounds.

Wordlessly, I shake my head.

“Your powers . . . They go beyond what even I can do, Violet. The prophecy was right when it claimed you would take the throne from Zeus. No other monsters can come close to holding an inkling of your power.” Lucifer shakes his head in grim disbelief, though I detect a spark of pride in his eyes, the color so much like my own. “Those souls came when you called, and they dragged Zeus back to Hell with them. He’s gone, Violet. Trapped. He’ll never hurt you again.”

“I didn’t mean . . . I didn’t even know . . .” I’m shaking my head from side to side as I struggle with what I want to say.

“You just need to learn how to handle your powers, Violet.” Dimitri’s warm breath fans over the back of my neck.

“I’m dangerous,” I whisper, continuing to stare at my hands in heady disbelief.

How could I have done something like that? Me? I’m just . . . Violet. I can’t even control Hellfire, for fuck’s sake. I shouldn’t be able to summon the souls of the damned. That seems way above my damn paygrade.

“Don’t say shit like that,” Vin snaps, anger coating his words. “Every time you’ve used that power, it’s been when you were in danger. It saved your life. Twice.”

I still can’t wrap my head around it. Questions shove at one another, each one demanding my attention, and I settle on the most important one. “Zeus is truly gone?”

“Trapped in Hell’s worst prison with no chance of escape,” Lucifer tells me with a tiny nod.

“And it looks as if the battle outside has stopped too.” This comes from Frankie, who stands at one of the huge oval windows overlooking the town. His brows furrow at whatever he sees there. “It appears as though, when Zeus was tugged into Hell, the runes lost their power. There are a lot of confused and very angry monsters down below.”

It’s . . . over.

It’s really, truly over.

I don’t know what I expected when I arrived here today, but it wasn’t this. I suppose a miniscule piece of me thought I would leave Mount Olympus in a body bag. That may be macabre thinking, but it’s the truth. I thought my destiny was fated to end in death—*my* death. The pages of my story were written in blood, each letter meticulously crafted in bright red ink.

But I’m alive.

My mates are alive.

My parents are alive.

Why does this feel too good to be true?

The universe seems to be listening to me, because at that exact moment, another scream ricochets through the room. It’s louder than any sound I’ve ever heard, blowing my hair away from my face and sending my body farther into Dimitri’s.

Athena.

I shakily move to my feet, ignoring the way my legs wobble, and turn toward Cal.



“Cal?” I ask softly.

He nods once, his jaw muscles bunching together, and reaches for my waist, plucking me out of the pile of bodies.

“We’ll meet you downstairs,” Frankie murmurs, easily recognizing what I’m about to do.

With Cal’s arms wrapped tightly around me, he takes a running dive straight out the window and flies toward that low, keening sound.



ATHENA KNEELS BESIDE A STILL BODY, TEARS STREAMING down her face and her blonde hair caked in blood. She whirls around when she hears us approach.

I expect to see condemnation in her gaze, maybe even anger or accusation, but there’s only pain that slices at my skin like a dozen razor blades.

Slowly, I move away from Cal and drop to my knees next to Balor.

He’s exactly where I left him at the edge of the city, his body partially hidden behind the bristle of pink bushes.

But before, his skin wasn’t ashen, there wasn’t blood on the corner of his lips, and his eyes weren’t glazed with pain.

“Balor.” His name comes out as a sob as I take one of his hands in both of mine, hating how cold he feels to the touch.

“I never expected to die for you, little vampire,” Balor murmurs, his tone dry. A cough shakes his body, and more blood trickles out of his mouth, cascading down his chin. A wry smirk twists up his lips. “But alas, here I am.”

A watery smile forces its way on my lips as I laugh humorlessly. “I’m not a vampire, you ass canoe.”

“Well, it seems counterproductive to call you a goddess, doesn’t it?” he drawls. “That may make it seem like I like you. Though, I suppose, it wouldn’t hurt to call you a demon . . .”

“You can call me any name you want as soon as you get better,” I promise around the second sob that threatens to escape. The suddenly cold air is like needles in my lungs. Breathing is impossible, nothing but a ragged sound distant through the thrumming in my ears.

“We both know that’s not going to happen.” Even in agony, Balor still manages to roll his eyes, a scoff of exasperation escaping in the process.

“You’re going to be okay,” I assure him, already scanning his body for injuries, though I know I won’t see any. It wasn’t his body that got stabbed by that god-blessed dagger meant for me—it was his soul.

“Stop bullshitting me.”

Pain rushes through me, but my rage tempers it. “Listen here, Balor,” I hiss, lowering my head so my blonde hair swings forward, curtaining us from view. “You’re going to live, so I can kill you another day. Do you understand? This isn’t how you’re going to die.”

His savage, self-deprecating grin chases a chill down my spine. “I think my mother knew I was going to die here today,” he murmurs, shocking the shit out of me with the abrupt change in topic.

I physically reel back, as if he slapped me. “What?”

“I think Memphis had a vision about my death . . . which is why my mother insisted I accompany you here today.” Balor

doesn't sound upset about the news. Just . . . accepting. He huffs out a dry, humorless laugh. "She knew that if I wasn't here, you would die. And if you died, we would have never been able to defeat Zeus. My own damn mother sold me out."

"She wouldn't do that," I insist, shaking my head quickly. "She loves you."

"Not enough," he murmurs, his slashing eyebrows pulled low over pain-filled eyes. "Never enough."

"Balor—"

He pierces me with a look that reminds me of a flaming sword. "I've done horrible things, Violet. You know it, I know it, and the world knows it. You should be celebrating my death, not trying to make me feel better."

Grief coils through my chest like barbed wire. "I never wanted you to die, Balor," I confess softly, stroking his sweat-soaked hair. "Even when I hated you."

He scoffs again. "That's a goddamn lie, and we both know it."

I pause and then quickly amend myself. "I only wanted you to die a few times."

"Better." He offers me a shaky smile that only serves to make my tears fall faster. "Violet?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm scared." The fear in his eyes is like a blazing beacon that calls to the broken part of my own soul. "What's going to happen to me?"

"You're going to go to paradise or wherever it is that Fomorians go," I tell him, more tears cascading down my cheeks.

“There’s no paradise for us,” Balor whispers tightly, but his eyes . . . They glimmer with hope, as if my words can somehow become reality just by me speaking them.

“Of course, there is.” I continue to stroke his matted hair as I struggle to speak through the pain compressing my chest. “And you’ll go there and annoy the shit out of all the other Fomorians. And, maybe in the future, you’ll find a way to visit me and the others. To, you know, annoy the shit out of me.” I laugh through my tears as Balor offers me a tumultuous smile.

“Do you really think so?”

“I know so,” I say quickly.

For a few moments, we sit in silence. I don’t even hear Cal and Athena, though I know they’re nearby.

Then Balor speaks. “Are Hux and Jack coming?” Vulnerability peeks through his normally apathetic eyes. “I need to talk to them.”

“They’re on their way,” I promise. “They’re coming.”

“I really did love them like brothers.” Balor’s eyes begin to water. “Do you think they’ll ever forgive me?”

“They already do, Balor,” I promise, needing to assuage the guilt I can see written across his face. My tears land on his cheeks, merging with his own. “I know they already do.”

“Can you tell them I’m sorry?” he whispers hoarsely. “Tell them . . .” He swallows heavily. “Tell them I’m sorry.”

“They’ll be here soon, Balor.” I stroke his hair even faster as sobs rack my body. “Just hang in there, okay?”

“And I’m sorry to you, too, Violet,” Balor continues. “I shouldn’t have . . .” His chest gives a rattling heave, rising and falling.

“You shouldn’t have what? Balor? Balor?” I give his shoulders a shake as my tears fall faster, each one burning my skin where it touches.

Balor’s features have slackened, and without that combative, almost ornery glint in his eyes, he looks like a completely different person. I can see the man he would’ve been if his entire family hadn’t been ripped away from him, if he hadn’t been forced to travel from host to host, if he hadn’t been fueled by his anger and rage.

“Balor?” I whisper, reaching for him.

But I’m thrown back when a ball of light bursts from his chest, racing through the air and then disappearing from view.

I try to shut down, try to retreat to a place where grief and guilt can’t reach me, but both gnaw at me, tightening my muscles, feeding the tension in my shoulders, refusing to be shut out.

And then I place my head against Balor’s still chest, and I cry.

*Wherever you go next, whatever you find in the afterlife . . . I just hope it’s good to you.*

*I hope you find the peace you’ve been missing.*

# CHAPTER 38



MASON

**T**here's nothing more final or damning than the sharp scrape of reality, splicing at the skin of your knee and reminding you that every time you fall, you may not always get back up.

I've never felt as helpless as I did watching the battle waged in the land of the living while I was stuck on the other side of the veil, this floating, disembodied entity.

I screamed, I cried, I thrashed, but no matter what I did, I couldn't breach the divide between this land and the next. A dark, static-like energy rolled over me with the stifling weight of a tsunami, pulling me in, spinning me around, and then unceremoniously spitting me back out.

Helpless.

I felt helpless.

And then I saw that ball of pure energy hurtling toward Pinkie, and I . . . lost it. The energy reverberating through the center of my being seemed to solidify, becoming almost tangible. The gritty taste of soil settled on my tongue.

Violet couldn't die.

Not her.

Somehow, somehow, I was able to claw my way through the veil, my body aching, my soul screaming, my muscles straining. For a brief, brief moment, I was a real boy again, standing before his mate, begging her to look up and notice him.

But fate's a twisted bitch, and the second Violet opened her eyes, it pulled me back into the fathomless abyss of souls long forgotten.

Now, I hover here, watching Violet cry over a monster who once made our lives a living hell. I'm not surprised, though. Pinkie's heart has always been too big for this fucked-up world. She sees the light in everyone, even the souls as tarnished, twisted, and tainted as Balor.

Pinkie . . .

Seeing her in the flesh, being so close I could smell her sweet perfume . . . It was like wandering through the desert, my throat unbearably dry, and being offered a single droplet of poison in return. It was the sweetest type of agony—a candy laced in acerbic venom.

“Precious Treasure!” Hux's voice precedes his appearance in the small clearing, his hair slick with sweat and his eyes wild. Those same eyes narrow when they land on Balor's still form, and something indecipherable passes in his dark blue eyes. He takes a tentative step closer. “What happened?” His tone is sharp, a serpent striking and recoiling, threatening to attack again at the slightest provocation.

“Hux, Jack . . .” Violet reaches up, and Hux willingly moves forward, taking her into his arms. “I'm so sorry.”

Hux blinks as he pulls Violet against his chest, his eyes never straying from the monster lying dead on the ground. I can't imagine the thoughts percolating through my friend's head. On one hand, Balor hijacked his body and killed countless people using it. On the other . . .

Hux continues to examine the body the way you would a skinned animal strung from the wall to be scrutinized. There's



a cold, clinical detachment in his eyes.

“I’m sorry, brother,” Vin murmurs as he and the rest of Violet’s mates surround the two of them. Vin places a hand on Hux’s shoulder and gives it a squeeze before focusing his gaze on Violet. “Baby, are you okay?”

I can’t hear Violet’s response, suddenly preoccupied with the ball of light bouncing enigmatically above Balor’s still form. It’s apparent that none of the others can see it—probably because it has crossed into the land of the dead or wherever the fuck I currently am.

“Balor,” I greet the bundle of pure, unfettered light. It’s so blinding, I have to strain my eyes to stare directly at it.

Can Balor understand me when he’s in this form? Is that even still Balor?

My heartbeat begins to echo in my skull, the drumming of an army cresting the tallest hill, prepared to march into battle with their swords and guns drawn.

“Welcome to the land of the dead.” I spread my arms wide in greeting. “We have cookies.”

The blob just continues to . . . hover there.

What the fuck is it doing?

“You okay, man?” I venture another hesitant step forward. “Are you—”

A startled cry catches in my throat as the ball of energy rushes at me, zipping through the air like a damn meteorite. It slams into me with the force of a one-hundred-pound bowling ball, and I fall backward with an oomph of pain.

My body . . .

It's on fire, but this fire has teeth, serrated incisors that clamp down on my arms and legs, searing my nerve endings. My veins blaze, my lungs fill with embers, and I'm keenly aware of the flaky taste of ash on my tongue.

What the fuck is happening to me?

Panic pries open my chest as I claw at the ground, surprised when I feel dirt and leaves beneath my bare fingers.

Burning.

I'm burning.

Every inch of my skin is on fire, the blistering flames eating me alive, cocooning me in smoke, infiltrating my airways. Tears burn my eyes, and I squeeze them shut in order to quell the rapidly growing pain.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

*What did you do to me, Balor?*

*I swear to all that is holy, if you chose to kill me after I've already been killed, I'll be so pissed.*

And then, in a soft, lyrical voice, Violet whispers, "Mason?"

I force my eyes open, blinking rapidly to clear the grit and ash that seemed to have congregated there.

Violet remains crouched beside Balor, but she's no longer looking at him. She's peering at me—*right at me*. Not over my shoulder. Not through my body. Not off in the distance.

Her brilliant blue eyes clash with my green ones, and time seems to stand still.

Every tense muscle in her body strains with reluctance as she places a hand over her mouth. More tears flow down her

cheeks, falling faster and faster with every second that passes.

“Mason?” Vin’s croaky voice drags my attention off the girl I love and toward my best friend. His normally olive complexion has turned ashen, a startling contrast to his mop of dark hair.

“You can see me?” I ask dumbly, shock pumping into my veins. I’m belatedly aware that my hands are still fisting in the dirt on the ground, my fingers catching on one of the stray magenta leaves.

I can . . . touch things?

I drag myself up into a sitting position and lock eyes once more with Violet. The compulsion to hold her is almost a physical ache, one I can feel in the marrow of my bones.

“That’s . . . It’s . . .” Athena blinks rapidly at me, her gray eyes glazed with tears. “Impossible.”

“What the fuck is going on here?” Violet demands, whipping her gaze between me and the Fomorian.

“My son’s final gift to you,” Athena answers in a breathy whisper. A single tear cascades down her cheeks.

“What?” Violet demands.

“Yeah . . . what?” I parrot, and both Violet and Vin seem to wince at the sound of my voice. The rest of the men simply stare at me with varying expressions of disbelief—and suspicion, if Dimitri’s dour expression is anything to go by.

“When a Fomorian dies, his energy transfers to another soul . . . usually an unborn baby in his mother’s womb. But when Balor died . . .” Athena can’t seem to finish her sentence. Her hand hovers over her throat, as if she wishes to clutch a string of pearls that doesn’t actually exist.

“Are you saying Mason is a Fomorian?” Violet whispers, her voice shaking.

Fear lodges in my throat as I await Athena’s answer with bated breath.

“He’s a member of the Wild Hunt now,” Athena replies, pulling in a staggered breath. “A Fomorian.”

“W-what does that mean?” I’ve never heard Vin sound anything less than calm and collected, but just now, he appears two seconds away from a full-blown panic attack.

“It means that Mason no longer needs to remain in the veil.” Athena sounds slightly awed, and her gaze continually flickers to the still body of her son. “He’s not alive, not truly, but he’s—”

“One of you,” Violet breathes, still not pulling her gaze off of me.

“He’ll need to ride with the Hunt every night to collect wayward souls, but he’s no longer restricted to the afterworld. He’s here, just as I’m here, just as you’re here.”

Sparks of excitement skid down my body, crackling through my nerve endings, as I hold Violet’s stare. I can scarcely breathe, and the world has quieted around me, the sounds of conversation and exclamations turning to a distant thrum.

“Mason,” Violet whispers.

And then she’s lunging for me . . . or I’m lunging for her. I honestly wouldn’t be able to tell you which one.

She smashes her lips to mine as I hold her desperately to my body, refamiliarizing myself with her soft, supple curves.

“Is this real? Is this really happening?” she asks between kisses, her tears merging with my own.

“I’m here, Pinkie. I’m here.” Even though I repeat those words, I can scarcely believe them. For months, I’ve tried to find my way back to Violet and the others, but something always held me back. No matter how hard I tried, no matter what I did, I couldn’t breach that divide.

But then Balor—asshole extraordinaire—threw his energy into me, turning me into a Fomorian.

Was it a conscious decision on his part?

Did he know what he was doing when he chose me, or did he merely find the first available soul?

I know the answers to those questions, even before they fully form.

Balor knew *exactly* what he was doing. He always has.

This was his apology to Violet and the others.

This was his chance at redemption.

A strange feeling arrows through me at the thought of the other man, and I swear I can feel his presence around me, his voice carrying on the breeze ruffling my beanie, his accent lilting and sardonic.

*“Take care of them.”*

My heartbeat echoes in my skull as I hug Violet tighter to my chest.

*I will, Balor. I promise.*

“Mason!” Vin bellows, sounding angry, relieved, infuriated, and joyful all at once. A second later, he pounces on me, causing all three of us to fall onto the ground.

“Group hug!” Barret shouts, joining his body to the pile. Cal immediately jumps on top of him, and then a reluctant Frankie and a grinning Hux join in.

“Oh, what the hell,” Alex scoffs as he, too, joins the puppy pile. Only Dimitri remains standing over us all, his glacial eyes thawing ever so slightly as he takes us in.

I sob into Violet’s neck as I realize . . . this is real. I’m here.

She’s here.

My family’s here.

I don’t know what the future holds for us now, but as long as we’re together, nothing can stop us.

# CHAPTER 39



## VIOLET

**T**he few days following the battle prove to be a whirlwind of . . . well . . . sex.

I know there are things we should be doing, but Mason's miraculous return from the land of the dead reshapes my priorities.

My mate's alive.

And I'm never letting him—or any of the others—go again.

Despite the elation I feel at having Mason back in my arms, grief still threatens to strangle me in an impenetrable chokehold. I can't help but think of Balor and everything he sacrificed.

He died—for me.

And then used his energy to bring Mason back to me.

Any anger or hatred I may have felt for him dissipates at that reminder. For the first time in my life, I can say that I've truly forgiven him. The wrath that once boiled explosively close to the surface no longer threatens to scald me.

*I forgive you, Balor.*

*I really, truly do.*

Aside from Balor, there were only a dozen other casualties—two of them being Dorian Gray and Frankenstein. I'm not sure what happened, but their bodies were found in the carnage of Mount Olympus, covered in blood and gore. I don't want to say anything out loud, but those stab wounds? I would recognize Dimitri's handiwork anywhere. It seems as though



he finally got tired of his father dicking around. I wonder if Frankie asked Dimitri to eliminate his own traitorous father as well?

Dimitri and Frankie assure me they're fine, but Dorian and Frankenstein were their parents, as horrible as they may have been. That's a wound that won't just heal at the drop of a hat.

And then there are *my* parents.

I bite down on my lower lip hard enough to draw blood as I knock on the door of Lucifer's apartment down in Hell. Dracula, Hera, and Lucifer have all been living together since the events of the battle, and I'm not sure why. Or maybe I am sure and don't want to think about it too hard.

Because, in my mind, parents don't have sex. It's not a thing that happens. Babies are conceived by storks, and you can't change my mind.

Lucifer pulls open the door almost as soon as I finish knocking, stepping back to allow me entrance. "Violet, my dear, come in."

"Daughter walking in!" I call loudly enough for everyone in the apartment to hear. "Please put clothes on if they're not on already!"

Hera snorts as she steps out of the far bedroom, brushing at a strand of disarranged blonde hair. Surprisingly, she's dressed in casual clothes—a faded red hoodie and black leggings. It makes her look years younger than her true age of . . . oh . . . over a thousand, give or take a few thousand.

"Don't be ridiculous, Violet," Hera tsks as she slides gracefully onto a barstool across from a still-standing Lucifer. "We're not animals."

“Even though we fuck like them!” Dracula calls from farther into the apartment, appearing a second later in a T-shirt and jeans. Jeans. Actual jeans.

What is the world coming to?

“Dad. Ew. No.” I place both of my hands over my ears. “Stop it.”

“You call that fucking?” Lucifer gives my dad a narrow-eyed glare. “You lasted all of five seconds.”

“I will kill you all,” I warn as I press my hands even tighter over my ears. Curse my superior hearing.

“You try to last when the King of Hell himself is pounding your ass,” Dracula replies.

“AHHHH!” I wail in misery.

“We all know you have trouble pleasuring women,” Lucifer continues, either oblivious or ignoring the way I begin to dry heave. “You know, because your dick is so tiny, it’s like a cotton swab rubbing against vagina lips.”

“Nope. Nope. Nope.” I shake my head from side to side, still clutching my ears, and Hera, thankfully, takes pity on me.

“We wanted to talk to you for a reason, Violet,” she says gently, reaching forward to place a hand over mine.

But then I think about what that hand might’ve touched, and I reel away from her as if I’ve been electrocuted.

“Yes. Let’s get to that reason. Now.” I quickly claim the barstool farthest from Hera, Dracula, and Lucifer. I clear my throat, desperately trying to take an eraser to the last few minutes, and then say, “I know why you called me here.”

Hera and Lucifer exchange an unreadable look, but it's Lucifer who answers. "The throne is yours, Violet. The people will follow you. After what you did to stop Zeus—"

"Hold that thought." I place a hand up in the air to cut him off. "I'm just going to be blunt here and say . . . no."

Hera's brows furrow. "No?"

"No. I don't want the throne or the crown or whatever else a queen requires." I keep my hand in the air to ward off any protests. "I'm going to be straight with you all—I'm not even remotely ready to rule. Hell, I can barely keep myself alive, let alone a kingdom . . . or two. I don't want to rule Mount Olympus or Hell or the monster world or any of that shit."

Hera appears aghast, though Lucifer's eyes glimmer with a begrudging respect. I can't see Dracula's expression, but I sense him venturing a few steps closer, his presence a silent comfort.

"But the prophecy—" Hera begins, flummoxed.

"I'm not saying I'll never be a ruler, but . . . God, how do I say this nicely? I'm not smart enough to rule a kingdom." There. That's clear enough. "I haven't even graduated from Prodigium Academy. Literally, the only thing I did was defeat the big bad. How does that make me qualified to take over an entire goddamn kingdom? I know nothing about taxes or laws or any of that shit." I swivel slightly on the barstool until I can see Dracula's face, where a tentative smile flits on the corners of his lips. "You three are kickass leaders. The Queen of Mount Olympus." I direct this at Hera, who straightens almost imperceptibly. I then shift my gaze to Lucifer. "The King of Hell." I finally turn toward Dracula. "The unofficial ruler of the monster world. Because, let's be real, Dad, you have all of these monsters by the balls."

Dracula puffs out his chest. “I suppose you can say that . . .”

“I want you guys to keep your thrones until I’m ready,” I continue. “I want to learn from all of you. Maybe, in the future, I’ll be able to be this grand ruler that the world expects me to be—the monster capable of bringing together all three realms. But that day isn’t today. I want to live and learn and travel. I just got Mason back.”

Dracula taps his fingers against the linoleum countertop as he moves to stand in front of me, beside Hera. “With Zeus dead, and the runes inactivated, most anti-vampire rhetoric should be over. Of course, there are still monsters who will always believe that vampires—and anyone who’s different—should be eliminated, but you should be safe on Earth. You can just pretend to be a normal, innocent vampire and go about your life. And when you’re ready, the thrones will be here.”

“No.” I shake my head again. “I’m not hiding who I am. Not anymore. I’m the biological daughter of Lucifer and Hera and the adopted daughter of Vladimir Dracula. I’ll shout that truth from the rooftops if I have to.”

Dracula’s eyes mist over with emotion, but he quickly ducks his head before I can call him out on it.

“We can teach you everything we know,” Hera adds, sounding excited by the prospect. Her eyes glimmer in the gaudy fluorescent lighting. “We can spend time together.”

Lucifer clears his throat and forks his fingers through his tousled blond hair. “Of course, we would like to spend time with you outside of the work environment. As your parents.”

“*Birth* parents,” Dracula retorts. “Not her real parents. I’m her real parent.”

Lucifer and Hera both turn to stare at me, hope emanating from their eyes.

“You don’t have to say yes,” Hera rushes to say when I remain silent. “But we want to get to know you. We missed out on years of your life, and we don’t want to miss another day.”

“You and your mates are going to be around for a long, long time—” Lucifer begins, but something he says strikes a chord in me.

“Wait. Me and my mates?” I know I’m immortal, and some of my mates have longer lifespans than the average monster, but men like Vin are simply . . . human. They’ll live and die, and my soul will cry for theirs all over again. This time, we won’t have Balor to bring him back to life.

Lucifer gives me an odd look. “When mating bonds are complete, the mates share the longest lifespan of the mated pair. And that means immortality for all of you. Your mates will be alive for as long as you are. You didn’t know that?”

My stomach seems to be turning over itself, folding in half like a piece of damn paper. The pounding of my heart echoes in my skull.

“But Mason . . .”

“He died of a god-blessed dagger, Violet,” Hera reminds me gently. “Your mates can still be killed. But as long as they don’t step in front of any swords or daggers or arrows . . . they’ll live forever. With you.”

I can barely wrap my head around this information. My mates will be by my side . . . forever? I want to jump for joy, but a part of me worries I’m being selfish. Do they even want to live forever?

But I dismiss my worries quickly. I know that they'll never want to leave me, and they'd fight tooth and nail to return to me if anything were to happen. Mason is living, breathing proof of that. Not even death can divide our souls, fated as they are.

"We'll be more than happy to teach you all the benefits of soulmates," Hera says quickly, her eyes beseeching mine. "Maybe over dinner . . .?"

"Oh!" Lucifer's eyes gleam. "I can buy us all matching shirts that say Morningstar Family on the front. One for you," he glances at Hera, "one for you," he turns toward me, "and one for me."

"You railed my ass last night, Lucy," Dracula deadpans. "The least you can do is buy me a damn shirt."

"What? Sorry? Can't hear you over the sound of my conversation with my bio daughter," Lucifer taunts.

"Ew, Dad. Ew!" I wave my hands in the air, as if I can somehow swat away his disgusting words.

"So, what do you say?" Hera asks hopefully. "Maybe we can do dinner? Or lunch? Or breakfast? Or all three?"

A laugh bubbles out of me, unbidden. Maybe it's the absurdity of this conversation or the relief of having Mason back or the fear of the future. But I suddenly find this conversation hysterical.

"Baby steps, okay?" I tell them all around my laughter. "Why don't we just start with dinner?"

"Every night?" Hera bats her lashes at me with an adoring smile.

"How about we do once a week for now?"

Her face falls, though she quickly masks it with another smile. “Of course. Oh! We can go to that one super fancy restaurant down on Earth. The one Mason recommended yesterday?” She pats Lucifer’s arm excitedly. “What’s it called?”

“I believe he referred to it as Micky Donalds.”

“Um, yeah, I suppose we can go to McDonalds.” I scratch at the nape of my neck.

“Yay!” Hera claps her hands together excitedly. “I’ll make us a reservation for this Friday.”

“Make it for three,” Lucifer and Dracula both interject at the same time . . . before glaring at each other. And then, in eerie unison, they add, “You’re not invited!”

I once again have to keep in the giggles that threaten to escape.

Never in a million years did I think I would have a good relationship with *the* Vladimir Dracula. Now, I’m closer to him than ever and also have the ability to learn about my birth parents.

And as I watch Hera place a hand on Dracula’s chest—causing Lucifer to snap at her and Dracula to grin smugly—I wonder if my love story isn’t the only one forming here.

I just pray I never have to hear the details of theirs.

# CHAPTER 40





## VIOLET

**I**t feels strange to be back at Prodigium Academy after everything that happened.

Strange, but not uncomfortable.

There's a tranquility that blankets the air as I step into the house Frankie, Vin, Mason, Jack, and Hux share at the very edge of campus.

Within a span of a year, my life has changed so drastically that I barely recognize the girl I once was. The Violet Dracula who first arrived at this school for monsters is completely different from the woman I am now. I've been broken, destroyed, and then reformed into a new and improved version of myself. The fire didn't burn me; it forged me.

I remain standing in the entryway, watching Vin and Jack laugh and shove at each other as they head to their rooms to grab a few of their belongings. Frankie has already left to go to his lab in the main academic building, and Dimitri has returned to his office to meet with a few officials. Cal and Barret move to sit on the couch in the living room, whispering to one another, contented smiles adorning their faces.

"Pinkie, you know I love you, but you really need to let me go," Mason murmurs as he presses a kiss to the side of my head. One of his snakes wiggles out from underneath his beanie and caresses my cheek. "I need to go pack up my things."

Instinctively, my grip tightens around his bicep, but I force myself to relax and remove my hand one finger at a time.

I'll be the first to admit that I've become a grade-A clinger since Mason returned to me. He hasn't been able to leave my sight for more than an hour. Hell, I even followed him into the bathroom last night after I had a panic attack. I'm not sure if my fear will ever allay when it comes to him or if it'll always remain, clogging my airways and siphoning the breath from my lungs. I lost him, and there's a part of me that fears, if I let him out of my sight for longer than a few minutes, I'll lose him again.

"Yeah . . . okay . . ." I very reluctantly take a step away from him, curling my hands into fists to stop myself from pulling him back to me.

Mason must see the dilemma on my face, because he leans forward to kiss me soundly on the lips. And then he's gone, taking the stairs two at a time, his whoop of joy cascading down to where I stand.

It only occurs to me now that . . . it's over. It's really, truly over.

Zeus is gone, my mates are safe, and I'm closer than ever to getting that happily ever after I've always craved.

I have no idea what the future holds for any of us, if I'm being perfectly honest. I know that I have to finish my schooling at Prodigium, and then I'll go where the winds of fate take me, a dandelion seed blowing in the breeze. In the future, I'll take over the "family business," but for now, I'll merely live.

We decided that we would all get a large house in the town next door to Prodigium. That way, we can all be together while we finish our schooling. Most students are required to live on campus, but most students aren't fucking the headmaster.

Well, they better *not* be fucking the headmaster or heads.  
Will. Roll.

It seems as if my life finally has a direction that isn't a squiggle of random lines. It's nothing but straight shooting from here on out.

Hopefully.

Probably.

Maybe.

A throat clears behind me, and I turn away from the staircase to see Alex watching me from the entryway, his arms crossed over his chest. He nibbles absently on his lip ring as those bloody onyx eyes crawl over me, infusing my veins with liquid heat.

“Why are you hovering in the doorway like a creeper?” I offer him a smile, but he doesn't relax, his shoulders tense and his eyes hard.

“I'm not sure if I'm . . . wanted in here,” he confesses after a long moment of silence, peeling his gaze away from me to stare off into the distance.

I can feel my brows furrow. “Alex . . .”

“It's fine, Violet. I don't need you to pity me.” His voice is rife with self-loathing and vitriol. “I know I was an asshole to all of you when I first arrived.” A low, husky chuckle—one devoid of any true humor—rumbles through his body. “Even my own father hated me.”

Before I can stop myself, I whack him on the shoulder.  
Hard.

His eyes widen as he stares down at me, at a loss for words.

“You knock that shit off!” I growl, dimly aware that Cal and Barret have stopped their murmured conversation and have both turned to face us.

“Someone’s in trouble,” Barret singsongs.

“You kick his ass, Vi,” Cal adds.

“But if you spank it, let us know, so we can watch,” Barret adds, and then the two doofuses fall apart in laughter.

I roll my eyes at their antics, biting down on my own blossoming smile, and grab the front of Alex’s leather jacket, pulling him outside.

The cold air raises goose bumps on my arms and seems to seep into my skin, settling in the hollow of my bones. An icy wind whips my blonde locks around my face. The setting sun brushes the sky with copper and flames, creating patchworks of orange and yellow within the monotonous gray. Those startling colors somehow emphasize the red in Alex’s eyes.

“Since when have you become all ‘woe is me’?” I demand, pushing up onto my tiptoes to maintain eye contact. It’s surprisingly difficult to do, considering he’s a whole head taller than I am.

Alex brushes a hand through his tousled hair, heaving out a breath. “It’s nothing, Vi baby. I’m being stupid.”

“It’s obviously not stupid if you felt the need to say it out loud,” I point out. “Talk to me.” Gently, I cup his face between both of my palms. His skin is like silk, raveled here and there by old scars. I hadn’t ever noticed them before, but I feel them beneath the pads of my fingers, slightly raised bumps that I’m desperate to explore.

His eyes burrow into my own as he seems to wrestle with something. Finally, he comes to a decision, and a muscle in his

jaw flexes. “You’ve never said you love me,” he whispers.

Out of everything I expected him to say . . . it wasn’t that.

“What?” I breathe, my fingers moving from his cheeks to the dark strands of hair that hug the angles of his face.

“You’ve never told me that you love me,” he repeats, his lashes fluttering shut, concealing his russet-black eyes from view. “And I need to know . . . I need to know how you feel about me. Because I think I love you, and it’s terrifying that you might not feel the same way, and—”

Instinctively, I place one of my hands over his mouth, cutting off his words. I don’t even know why. I think I’m just panicking. There’s so much vulnerability peeking through his normally indifferent eyes. All I want to do is soothe him any way I know how, to smooth away the lines of worry creasing his brow.

“Alex,” I begin.

He says something then, but with my hand still over my mouth, it sounds like a foreign language.

“I didn’t say I love you because I wasn’t sure back then,” I confess, watching as his eyes shutter and then harden. I can see he’s closing himself off to me, constructing walls around his heart, pulling away from this connection between us. I hurry to continue before he can get the wrong idea. “And I’ll admit, with everything that happened the last few weeks, the timing wasn’t right. When I say I love you to someone, I mean it. Those aren’t just throwaway words for me.” His spicy scent tunnels into my throat and forms a thick ball of tension that proves impossible to swallow around. “So, you’re right. I didn’t say I love you, because I was never sure how I felt about you. You pissed me off and hurt me, yet you saved my

life and stood by my side through it all. I can feel you in my soul, and I know that you're a part of me, but does that equal love? Do I want this bond between us to dictate how I feel?"

I'm rambling, I know I am, but Alex doesn't seem inclined to stop me. He simply stares at me, my palm still over his mouth, my face nearly level with his. "You push every single one of my buttons, Alex, but you make me a better person. You help me look at every avenue instead of only the most obvious one. I'm not sure when I fell in love with you, but somewhere along the way, I went from despising your presence to craving it. Hate and love are closer than one would think. Both are visceral reactions that can puncture your damn heart. I honestly don't know when hate turned to like, and then like turned to love. But it happened."

Gently, Alex grabs my wrist and removes my hand from his mouth. "What are you saying, Violet baby? Because you're saying a lot of random shit that makes me both confused and aroused simultaneously."

I wrap my arms around his neck, and his hands immediately settle on my waist, pulling me flush against him.

"I'm saying that I love you, you big idiot. I don't know when it happened—or even how, because you have the personality of a bloody tampon—but I love you." A giddy smile unfurls on my lips. "I love you, Alexander. With my whole heart."

He lowers his forehead to my own, his breath fanning against my face, his heat seeping through my clothes and settling into my skin. "I don't know when it happened for me, either. I mean, we both know your own personality is the equivalent of a dictionary—"

"Useful and smart?"

“Boring and monotonous,” he quips, his lips tugging into a smile meant just for me. “But I love you too, you bigger idiot.”

“You’re the bigger idiot,” I retort as I pull myself even closer to him.

“You are,” he snaps.

“You definitely are.” My lips brush his, and sparks shoot off through my body like fireworks. My nipples pucker, and all the heat in my body rushes straight to my core. “But I suppose I can put up with you.”

“Hmmm.” He kisses me even harder, faster, his tongue tangling with my own.

A tight rubber band constricts around my chest, hell-bent on suffocating me.

Alex pushes me against the window and then spins me around. I instinctively place my hands on the glass as I take in Cal’s and Barret’s shocked expressions.

Alex’s piercing drags along my skin from behind as his hands snake around my body, tugging at my shirt and bra so my tits spring free. “How about we put on a show for your other mates?” he purrs against my ear, the vibrations of his voice rumbling through my entire body like a damn earthquake.

“God, yes,” I pant, pressing my ass against him. Alex chuckles huskily as reaches for my aching breasts and begins to twist my nipples in his fingers.

Cal and Barret watch with wide eyes and unhinged jaws, but then I see a decidedly mischievous expression splay across Cal’s face. He leans forward to whisper something into Barret’s ear, and the boogeyman’s eyes turn molten green with lust. He nods eagerly.

Cal reclines on the couch, his arms spread along the back, as Barret unzips the cupid's pants and removes his hard, erect cock.

"Holy fuck," I whimper as Alex tugs at my skirt and panties, pulling them down my legs.

I know that we're still on campus, that anyone could walk by and see us, but that only amplifies my lust. Excitement burns in my veins, thrumming like an electrical current, and I know the only thing that will satiate the ache in me is Alex's cock.

I hear him drop to his knees behind me, and a second later, his tongue enters my slick folds, performing tantalizing patterns that have me seeing stars.

Cal's brows quirk in a challenge, and then he grabs the back of Barret's head, his tan fingers fisting in my boogeyman's green locks, and pushes him toward his awaiting cock.

Barret doesn't need to be told twice as he takes Cal deep into his mouth, his cheeks hollowing.

Fuck.

A whimper escapes me, but that noise only seems to spur Alex into action. He tongue fucks me ruthlessly, savagely, possessively, each sweep a declaration. A stamp of ownership.

Cal's eyes flutter shut as Barret takes him all the way into his mouth before releasing him with a pop. He then suckles each of Cal's balls as he uses his large hand to stroke his length.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.



Alex sucks on my aching clit, and I soar over the edge, my palms slamming against the glass hard enough to jerk Barret's attention off of Cal and onto me. His hooded green gaze locks on my bouncing tits, hunger distorting his features, before Cal once again grabs at his head and forces him back onto his cock.

"Alex, please. I need you," I cry as one of Cal's hands trails down Barret's spine, stopping at the waistband of his shorts. With a sultry, almost impish, grin in my direction, he pushes down Barret's shorts just enough to smooth his hand down Barret's ass cheek. He slaps the skin there, and Barret jumps, though he doesn't remove his lips from Cal's cock.

My heart beats overwhelmingly against my rib cage as I watch the two of them, wondering what Cal will do next. That question is answered when Cal salaciously licks his pointer finger, swirling his tongue around the tip, before lowering it to Barret's ass.

Alex starts to fuck me with his fingers, his mouth suctioned to my clit, and I know I'm nearing that edge yet again. My legs shake with the effort it takes for me to remain standing, and my lashes flutter shut—

But the second I would've fallen over completely, Alex stops his brutal ministrations. I feel his body drag along my spine as he straightens, and then the tip of his hard cock presses against my folds. His piercing drags deliciously over my most sensitive areas.

"Fuck, Alex," I whimper, my pussy spasming around nothing.

His chest gives a rattling heave behind me as he kisses the shell of my ear. "Do you want this, Violet baby? Do you want me?"

This isn't just about consent for him—though that's definitely one of the reasons why he's asking me. The vulnerability I detected previously makes an appearance, softening his voice, his raw beauty juxtaposed by his fragility.

“I want you, Alex. I want you so fucking badly.” I grind against his hard length, desperate to get some friction and ease this ache inside of me. “I love you.”

His lips press to the back of my head.

“Say it again,” he growls.

“I love you.”

He pushes a tiny inch inside of me, his piercing brushing my folds in a way that has streaks of white dancing across my vision.

“Again,” he urges.

“I. Love. You.”

His hips thrust forward, forcing him a little bit more inside of me.

But it's not enough. Not even close.

“I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.”

With a roar, he pushes completely inside of me, only pausing once to allow me to get used to the intrusion. He hasn't even started yet, and he's already on the verge of slashing me to ribbons.

But that's always been our relationship. From the very first moment we met, he drew me in like a moth to a flame, one look threatening to turn me to nothing but flaky ash. I *burn* for this man.

I turn to stare at him over my shoulder, needing that connection, needing the reminder that he's mine, and lust and love flare in his eyes, a corrosive mixture that scalds my skin.

My heart batters my ribs as I push against him, matching him thrust to thrust. And when his fingers lower to play with my clit, I hurtle over that edge, my orgasm scouring away all thoughts, except the pleasure he's wringing from my body.

Through the window, I watch as Cal comes with a shout of his own, his cock jerking inside of Barret's mouth.

Barret, who's been stroking his own cock as Cal fingers his asshole, explodes as well, rivulets of cum spurting across the couch.

And through it all, their gazes remain locked on me.

My heart shatters, every piece cutting up my insides like glass, but it's the best kind of torture. A beautiful pain.

As Alex's hips quicken, his breathing turning thready, the true reality of my life washes over me.

I have nine mates who love me, three parents who would walk through Hell to get to me, and some of the best friends a girl could ask for.

What more could any vampire-who-isn't-really-a-vampire want?

# EPILOGUE



SIX MONTHS LATER

VIOLET

“Can you quit bouncing?” Vin hisses from the left of me, folding his arms over his chest. The movement makes his dark-green shirt bunch around his muscular forearms.

Alex leans forward from the seat behind us, placing one arm on my chair and the other on Vin’s.

“How much sugar did she have this morning?”

“I took away her third chocolate bar,” Frankie replies coolly from the opposite side of Alex.

“Dammit. She had two chocolate bars?” Vin appears pained. “That’s two too many.”

“Hello!” I whisper-hiss, waving my hands in front of his face. “I’m right here. God, why did I think mating with you would make you less of an asshole?”

“I’ll always be an asshole,” Vin retorts with an exasperated eye roll. “That’ll never change.”

Mason, who’s sitting on my other side, places a comforting hand on my knee, giving it a squeeze. A rush of heat migrates from where he touches, spreading through my veins like molten lava. Sometimes, it’s still hard to believe that Mason is truly back, that he isn’t just some illusion that will evaporate with the rise of the sun. It’s true that he spends most of his nights riding with the Wild Hunt, capturing souls and corralling them toward their final resting place, but during the day . . . he’s here. With me.

With *us*.

A tide of emotion threatens to batter down my composure. I inhale sharply and quickly tangle my fingers with Mason's, giving his hand a squeeze. He flashes me a soft smile, his emerald eyes glimmering, and shifts closer to me, until I can feel his body heat permeating through the pink dress I wear. He always seems to know when I'm struggling, when reality seems too good to be true and the claws of depression sink their jagged teeth into me.

"I may have sneaked her another candy bar," Cal interjects with a sheepish grin. He rubs a hand through his tangled pink waves. ". . . or two."

"And I may have also given her two candy bars," Barret confesses. "But she told me that candy bars help her brain."

"They do help my brain," I retort, scoffing. "It makes me most smartest."

"My god." Vin pinches the bridge of his nose.

"The most smartest who ever smarted," I continue.

"You are most definitely the most smartest who ever smarted," Hux tells me reverently, leaning over Mason to grab my free hand and bring my knuckles to his lips. I quickly work to strangle each of the butterflies that pop up in my chest. The last thing I need is to get a female boner in front of the entire school . . . and all of our families.

On stage, the White Stag drones on and on about all the accomplishments of Prodigium Academy's graduating class. And while his speech is actually pretty interesting, his monotone voice has the majority of the monsters in attendance fighting sleep. Cynthia has quite literally removed her ears and is now resting her head on her mate's shoulder.

“. . . the world tried to strangle us, but we did not stop fighting,” he drones. “We’ll never stop fighting. We believe in justice and equality for all.”

“What an amazing speech.” Dimitri stalks across the stage, a fierce scowl distorting his features, though he quickly tries to mask it when the White Stag turns his intelligent eyes on him.

“I wasn’t done,” he says, utterly deadpan.

Dimitri smiles curtly and manages to grab the microphone off the stand.

I have to bite down on my growing smile as I take in my aloof mate. God, how did I get so lucky as to have him as my own? He’s sex and beauty personified, his elegant appearance juxtaposed by the perpetual scowl twisting his lips. I’ve only ever seen that ice in his eyes thaw around one person—me. And as those glimmering blue orbs lock on my own, a delicate shiver cascades through my body like ice water dripping down my spine. A sharp crack wheedles through my chest, and I nibble on my lip hard enough to draw blood.

I’m almost sad that I’m graduating Prodigium Academy early. There’s nothing more invigorating than having sex with the headmaster on his desk while keenly aware that any passing students can hear you screaming his name. I get jealous glares from a lot of the girls here, but I just smile like a smug-ass bitch.

Because the most eligible and sexy men at Prodigium? Yeah, they’re *mine*, bitches.

The longer I stare into Dimitri’s entrancing eyes, the more the lust within me swells, like a snowball gathering momentum down a hill. I have to quite literally shift in my seat to alleviate the ache between my thighs.



Mason chuckles from beside me, and a second later, Cal's raspy laughter joins in. It isn't long until all my mates are holding in laughter, aware of what Dimitri's presence is doing to me. I admit it. I have a weakness—men in power dressed in fastidiously ironed suits.

Ugh.

“Let's give a round of applause for our graduating class,” Dimitri continues in his glacial voice. But while the White Stag puts people to sleep by speaking, Dimitri has the opposite effect. Almost everyone in attendance straightens imperceptibly, desperate to capture his attention.

Clapping and hoots filter through the theater where our graduation is being held. The loudest comes from the seats a few rows behind me, where Dracula, Lucifer, and Hera sit.

Lucifer holds up a sign with my face plastered in the center of it. “That's my girl!” he hollers.

“*My* girl,” Dracula immediately snarls possessively.

Hera simply wipes at her eyes with a handkerchief, smiling excitedly.

I was honestly surprised by the reaction of the other monsters when they discovered the truth of my parentage. I thought I would be a moth under a magnifying glass that's tilted just so to catch my wings on fire. However, most of the creatures I've come into contact with have been pretty cool about it, to be honest. Perhaps it's because they know I'm fated to rule. Or maybe it's because I have three scary-ass parents and nine psychotic mates. Either way, there's only been a dozen or so death threats and only one of those monsters was stupid enough to actually attempt it.

Dimitri and Hux still take turns playing with that particular beast in Dimitri's torture chamber.

As Dimitri begins to call out names and hand the students diplomas, I think of the drastic direction my life has taken.

Only a year or so ago, I was an oblivious vampire attending Prodigium Academy in the hopes of becoming a monster my father could be proud of. He was a hard, cruel man who saw me as a tool to utilize.

But now, I'm surrounded by men who love me and family who want me to succeed. Even Dracula has crawled out of his shell. I know he always loved me, even when he was cold to me, but it was only recently that he decided to *show* me it as well. I think I have Hera and Lucifer to thank for that, especially the latter. My two fathers seem to have a competition over who can out-dad the other. Just the other day, Dracula invited me and my mates over to his house for a barbecue. He wore an apron that said "Kiss the Vampire Chef" and spent the entire time telling the stupidest dad jokes. When Lucifer arrived, everything changed. And not for the better. Suddenly, the two men were arguing over who can cook burgers better on the grill. Lucifer quite literally ran to the store just to get an apron that said "Who's Your Daddy?" Don't even get me started on the dad jokes. I still have nightmares over "Hi, Hungry. I'm Dad."

While that part of my life is flourishing, I can't help but think of all the people who are no longer a part of it.

Cheryl Ness, for one. I know it's strange to think of her in that respect, but she did sacrifice her life for me. She was a crazy bitch who lusted after my mates, but she didn't deserve to die. The only crime she committed was loving a man who would never love her back.

And then there's Balor.

Sometimes, I swear I feel his presence in the breeze that whips around my face or the rain that pelts over my shoulders. That fucker still feels the need to terrorize me, even in death. Hux and Jack don't talk about him, not really, but I know they regret how everything transpired between the three of them. They didn't necessarily consider him a brother, but he was still a piece of them for such a long time. He was a murderous asshole, sure, but he was also grieving when he committed all those atrocious acts. I can't say I would have behaved any differently if I were in his shoes, desperate to free my family members who have been locked away for hundreds of years.

The only thing I can do now is accept his sacrifice and *live*.

"Violet Dracula." Dimitri's voice drags me back to the present, and I jerk my attention toward the stage. He cocks one white brow at me, a mocking question in his gaze, and I stick my tongue out at him. His eyes flare instantly with banked fire.

"That's my girl!" Dracula calls, making sure his voice is louder than Lucifer's.

Lucifer scowls and immediately moves to stand on his chair in the auditorium, clapping energetically.

Dracula stares at his chair, frowns, and then stands on the thighs of the poor monster sitting beside him, so he's now a head taller than Lucifer.

The entire auditorium is so loud, it drowns out the hammering of my heart. Almost everybody in the monster community knows what I did to stop Zeus, and yeah. I'll be the first to admit I'm a little bit of a celebrity in these parts.

But don't worry. I'm still totally modest and humble about it . . .

As I move up to the stage, I sign a few autographs, pose for a couple of photos, and then direct everyone to Cal, who's my manager.

"That'll be five dollars," I tell the lady whose shirt I just signed. "We accept cash, card, or PayPal."

Totally modest and humble.

The familiar claw of panic rakes down my spine when I finally reach the stage. I'm distinctly aware of every pair of eyes on me. Watching. Waiting. Judging.

Not only did I save the world, but I also graduated Prodigium Academy earlier than any other student in existence. I think most of the monsters figured that the world's savior—and feel free to use that title in regards to me—shouldn't need to sit through boring classes. I still have a lot to learn, but I'm better served learning directly from my parents than the stuffy academy.

"Congratulations, Ms. Dracula," Dimitri murmurs when I step up beside him. He hands me my diploma and then shakes my hand as camera flashes explode throughout the room. It's only as I'm walking away does he squeeze my ass . . . just out of view of the crowd.

I smirk back at him and put a little bit of swagger into my step, striding down the stairs—before promptly tilting forward and falling down.

Whoops.



“I’M SO PROUD OF YOU, CHEESE CURD.” BARRET PRESSES HIS lips to mine in a heated, passionate kiss that has errant fireworks exploding through my body. I dig my fingers into his green hair as I step even closer, his hard length pressing against my stomach.

“I’m proud of you too, my sexy boo bear,” I murmur between kisses.

Alex begins to clear his throat obnoxiously. “Did you forget that we’re still in public?” His voice is sharp, but underneath the ire, I detect a hint of lust that even he can’t contain.

I pull away from Barret with a sheepish smile, one that he matches. “Oops?” I don’t sound sorry whatsoever.

The eight of us—sans Dimitri, who’s been pulled into a conversation by a group of overeager parents—stand in the lobby of the auditorium, waiting for our parents to greet us and give their congratulations. Well, what remains of our parents.

Frankie doesn’t have a mom, and his dad is dead, same as Dimitri. Vin’s father is dead, and his mother hates my guts. And his guts, if I’m being completely honest. Cal’s family was murdered, and Barret’s died of natural causes many years ago. Hux and Jack’s father is currently in Italy, though I doubt he would’ve attended, even if he was around. The brothers haven’t been close to their father—or is it fathers?—since they were young kids. I don’t think they even know who their mom is. Both of Mason’s parents are dead.

That only leaves Alex’s mom, Helena, and my parents.

I see Helena hurrying through the crowd, a beaming smile on her face. She has become a lot happier since Cal murdered her abusive, piece-of-shit husband. The bruises that had

constantly adorned her pasty flesh have disappeared completely, and there are no longer dark shadows beneath both of her eyes.

I'm surprised by how much I've come to like the petite woman. She adores her son and seems to consider me her daughter already. Not only that, but she has carved her way into the hearts of all my mates, even Dimitri.

"I'm so proud of you all," she gushes as she pulls first Alex into a hug and then me.

"Mom . . ." Alex murmurs, embarrassed, but I can see that he enjoys the attention she bestows upon him.

"Looking as beautiful as ever, Helena," Mason flirts, causing Helena to blush and swat his shoulder.

"Oh, you." She abruptly pinches Mason's cheeks and studies his face intently. "Have you been eating well, Mason? Why do you look so thin? Do I need to come back over and make my homemade chicken parmesan?"

As Helena continues to fuss over all my mates like a doting mother, Alex sneakily steps up beside me and wraps an arm around my waist. "Don't forget, it's my turn tonight," he murmurs huskily as a rush of heat floods my body.

"How can I forget?" I reply, though my voice is nothing but a rasp of air.

A lot of times, things with my mates progress naturally, especially in the sex department. There are days when I sleep with all nine of my loves . . . and then there are times when I only have sex with one.

But during special occasions, like today, all of my mates tend to become a little—how do I put this delicately?—horny.

Yes, horny. And we learned pretty quickly that there's only so much my poor body can take.

Nine guys in my vagina? Hell, no.

I do, however, have five openings. Wink. Wink. Nudge. Nudge.

My ass, my pussy, my mouth, and my hands. We tried DVP at the same time as DP, but that didn't work. Cocks were slipping all over the place like penguins gliding on ice.

So, we came up with a fair system to determine who has what hole during these important events.

Picking straws.

The longest straw gets to choose which hole he wants to pound first, then the second largest, then the third, and so on. The other men are forced to watch, unless I'm feeling generous. I keep telling them that they're more than welcome to suck each other off as long as I'm there to watch, but so far, only Cal and Barret have taken me up on that offer.

What a shame.

Tonight, Alex gets my pussy, Barret gets my ass, Jack gets my right hand, Frankie gets my left hand, and Mason gets my mouth. Poor Dimitri, Cal, and Vin are forced to watch. And Hux too, I suppose, though I guess he technically also gets my right hand.

It's complicated.

"I want you to fuck me so deep that I feel you in my uterus . . . oh, hey, Dads!" My voice turns into a high-pitched screech as three familiar faces appear in front of us.

Alex's face drains of color.

“What were you saying, my darling daughter?” Lucifer’s eyebrow begins to twitch, and I swear Hellfire dances along his palms. “Something about . . . I don’t remember. I swore I heard the word uterus.”

“And fucking,” Dracula hisses, baring his fangs at Alex.

“Are you fuck faces deflowering my daughter?” Lucifer roars, the force of his anger causing the ground to tremble beneath my feet.

Barret takes a step closer to me, looking genuinely confused. “I’ve never touched your daughter’s flower, sir. It’s still in the vase.”

“Um, what?” Some of Lucifer’s anger begins to subside . . . though, really, he’s being ridiculous. The turd knows damn well that I’m getting fucked every which way every night. Just a few days ago, he caught Dimitri walking out of my room tugging up his pants.

We quickly changed all the locks on my door after the “incident.”

“The flowers you bought Violet to celebrate her graduation.” Barret turns toward me, as if confused over why Lucifer’s confused. His brows furrow together. “I’ve never touched them. I certainly never deflowered them. Do you want to deflower them yourself?”

Lucifer chokes on air, Dracula snarls, and Hera simply smirks at us all.

To me, Barret whispers, “I don’t understand what’s happening.”

“It’s okay,” I assure him, also whispering. “You’re cute. You don’t need to know what’s going on.”



He beams at me, as if I've made his day.

Before Lucifer can respond to Barret's innocent comment, he's shoved aside by my spitfire of a best friend.

Vanessa Van Helsing is the only woman in existence who doesn't seem afraid of the three most terrifying beings in history. Even Dimitri is scared of them, though the stoic bastard would never admit it.

I'm pretty sure Vanessa isn't afraid of anything.

"Hey, designated bestie," Vanessa greets with a teasing glint in her eye. She wears the same stereotypical black graduation gown as the rest of us, though she passed on the hat, content to braid her brown hair around her face.

"Where's Cynthia?" I push up onto my tiptoes to see over Vanessa's shoulder. "Is she still here? I want to say goodbye."

The three of us have become surprisingly close over the last few months. A bloody battle will do that to some people. And more surprisingly, Memphis has joined our group of friends, though he was forced to stay in Hell to manage Lucifer's appointments today.

During the battle, Cynthia lost her arm, which she bitched about for days until she ordered a new one from Amazon. However, when it arrived, it was in a damaged box, because the shipping for Amazon is atrocious. So now, she's forced to wear a limb that's missing a few fingers until she can receive a replacement.

The struggles of being a first world monster, I tell ya.

"Last I saw, Cynthia had her lips inside her mate's pants. Literally." Vanessa rolls her eyes with an exasperated, but genuine, smile. I can't help but note the wistful tilt to it. I know, at one point, Vanessa had a mysterious girlfriend, but

that relationship has long since ended. Over the months, she's dated a few people—boys and girls alike—but she's never settled. She once confessed she's looking for a love like the one I share with her brother.

And I want that for her.

She deserves it.

“Honestly, I don't even know what we'll do with this damn diploma,” Vanessa laments, holding hers up with a frown. “It's not like we can get a real job with it. Mine literally says I got a degree in ‘body disposal.’ Like, how the fuck can I get a job with a degree like that? I can't even transfer my credits to a human college, because most human schools don't have classes like ‘how to use acid for cleanup’ and ‘extinct supernatural monsters.’”

I snort. “You could work for me once I become queen. Be my head of security or something.”

She folds her arms over her chest and casts me a savage smirk. “I may take you up on that. The only other job I could possibly get is that of a serial killer.”

“What did I tell you? Stabbing is not a sane coping mechanism.”

“It makes me happy,” she deadpans. “And I like being happy.”

“It's called murder, my dear sister,” Vin interjects, moving away from Helena and my parents to pull his sister into a hug.

“You're lucky I'm here, brother,” Vanessa murmurs. “Our family decided today would be a good day to visit.”

Vin rolls his eyes. “And, let me guess? They want us to rejoin the family business of murdering vampires like my

mate.”

I wave my hand in the air. “Hello. Remember? Not actually a vampire here.”

“Shush.” Vin smacks my ass as he falls into conversation with Vanessa once more.

I can’t help but glance around at all the men and women present.

My mates, my friends, my family.

I don’t know what to expect now that I’ve graduated Prodigium, but I’ve never been more excited.

Or more hopeful.

## EPILOGUE TWO



THREE YEARS LATER

VIOLET

“**S**top bitching!” I swat Jack’s hands away as I waddle toward the portal in our living room—a portal that will lead me straight to Mount Olympus, where my mother and fathers are currently waiting for me.

“You shouldn’t be going anywhere in your condition,” Dimitri growls fiercely, flipping his dagger over and over again in his hand. Sometimes, I think he wants to stab that dagger into my eye. Or into my pussy. It’s hard to tell with him.

Ahh. The joys of young love.

“I’ll be fine,” I assure him, brushing a hand down the bright pink maternity shirt Cal picked out for me. “I need to attend this meeting.”

Over the past few years, I’ve been training extensively to take over for Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula, the latter of whom took over the monster council after the White Stag decided to retire, return to the forest, and surround himself with a harem of bushy-tailed doe. They seem to believe that I’ll be the creature capable of bringing peace and harmony between all three of the worlds. I’m not sure if I necessarily believe them, but I’ve been learning what I can, nonetheless.

Honestly, I wonder if the prophecy was wrong. Maybe I was never meant to take the throne. Maybe I was merely the bridge to close the gap between our worlds, creating peace where there was once discord.

After all, Lucifer, Hera, and Dracula have never been closer.

A fact that still makes me vomit to this day.

There are some things you don't want to see, hear, or know about, and your parents banging is one of those, even though Lucifer and Dracula still insist that they're enemies with benefits.

Yuck. Ew. Vomit. Gag.

Once a month, we meet with the Fomorians in either Mount Olympus or Hell to discuss the state of the afterworld and all that jazz. Athena has kept her word and has been a surprisingly welcome addition to our little makeshift family. She took Mason under her wing, treating him like her own son, and now, Mason is second in command of the Wild Hunt.

I just hope Athena doesn't get any ideas about fucking him, son or not . . .

"Why don't I just go instead?" Mason suggests tentatively, venturing a step forward with his hands raised, as if he's afraid he'll need to fend me off. "I could write everything down for you and—"

"No," I growl. "I'm the future leader of the world, dammit. I can sit through one meeting while pregnant."

"You're two days past your due date," Vin says, his eyes fierce, his tone acerbic.

"It's actually three now," Barret pipes in helpfully.

"What can we say?" Cal reclines back on the couch with an indolent smile. "Our little mate is nothing but stubborn. She'll give birth when she wants to give birth, and not a second sooner."

"Damn right," I reply, folding my arms over my chest and scowling. "Now, can we get a move on?" I address this at

Dimitri, who's in charge of directing the portal to the correct destination.

One of his eyebrows twitches, anger lining his face, before he concedes with an exasperated sigh. "You're impossible, Mrs. Dracula."

"You're impossible too, Mr. Dracula." I smirk widely, and his own lips quirk in a responding smile. His eyes briefly flick to the ring adorning my finger—and then the ring on his own, matching the ones my other mates have.

With a mocking bow, Dimitri gestures toward the portal, and I give him a smug smirk before stalking inside.

Even after all these years, it still feels weird walking through a portal. It's like I'm standing on an icy surface that's cracking and shattering beneath my feet, drawing me into its glacial depths. I have to hold my breath to keep from gasping as I fall, fall, fall . . .

Before abruptly being spit out into a motherfucking hospital room.

"What the hell?" I whirl around, my hands clenched into fists and anger pressing into my lungs like needles.

Frankie stands across from me.

"Violet," he says calmly, not at all affected by my ire. "Why don't you have a seat?" He gestures to the bed behind him.

"Is this some kind of Chris Hansen, true crime bullshit?" I demand as my stomach spasms. The familiar claws of pain scratch down my spine, but I try to keep the agony off my face.



I'll never admit to these fuck faces that I've been having god-awful contractions for over an hour now.

"We're your mates, Violet." Frankie cocks an eyebrow at me and takes another step closer. "Do you think we wouldn't notice when your contractions started?"

"They're not that—holy fucking shit with a side of meatball diarrhea!" I feel as if my damn womb is trying to tear me apart from the inside out.

Why did I agree to have sex?

Why, oh why?

I should've just been content to remain a virgin forever. Who needs cock? Not this girl, surely.

"Violet, just let us take care of you." This comes from Alex, who has materialized behind me, alongside the rest of my mates. Our eyes meet, and a bolt of ice slashes through my chest.

Or that could just be the damn baby trying to crawl out of my body like a demon from *The Exorcist*.

"I'm fine." Tears burn in my eyes even as I say that. "I'm totally fine. I'm not going into labor. I'm not. I'm not!"

"Vi, baby . . ." The skin under Cal's eyes is violet with exhaustion. "Stop being a stubborn shit and get on the damn bed."

"Why did I marry you assholes again?" I pout as I move toward the bed, knowing I'm outnumbered.

"Because you like our cocks," Vin deadpans.

"Not anymore."

Another wave of pain ripples through my body, and I groan, twisting in on myself to try and alleviate the ache.

“MOTHERFUCKER!”

Frankie moves to stand in front of me and places a comforting hand on my bulging stomach. “Your contractions are coming every three minutes,” he tells me seriously. “Violet, you’re having this baby. Right the fuck now.”

“But the meeting,” I whine, somewhat hysterically.

Vin’s green-gold eyes, like spring with bits of fall flecked throughout, fill my vision. “You don’t truly care about this damn meeting, Violet. You’re just terrified of being a mother.”

“That is not true, you—SHITBALLS OF FIRE AND GRAVY!”

“Get your clothes off, Pinkie, and change into this hospital gown.” Mason offers me a smile, though I can see the anxiety creasing the corners of his eyes.

Yeah, my mates won’t admit it, but all of them are terrified of becoming dads.

Jack literally had to tie Hux up in their shared mind in order to stop him from obsessively building every type of wooden toy he could think of. Even Dimitri, the most unflappable man in existence, has been freaking the fuck out. Just yesterday, I visited him in his torture chamber to see him simply staring at his prisoner instead of stabbing him.

My mates are spiraling.

“I don’t know . . . I can’t . . . God . . .” My heart races, my blood spiking with fear. “I can’t do this. Get this baby out of me! Oh god.”

“You can do this, Violet.” Barret grabs my hand in his and gives it a squeeze. His husky voice curls around me like dark smoke, seeping into my skin and putting me at ease. “*We* can do this.”

I stare into his eyes, which radiate an astute intensity I’ve come to expect from my sweet mate, and some of the panic inside of me ebbs away.

We can do this.

We can do this.

We can fucking do this.

I nod, and Barret smiles hugely, helping me stand to change into the pink hospital gown Mason grabbed for me. Once I’m back in bed, my feet in the stirrups and my damn vagina on display, Frankie rolls a stool up to the bed.

“You’re going to need to push when I tell you to, my love,” he says fiercely. “And don’t forget to breathe.”

“We’re having a baby,” Dimitri murmurs, drawing my attention to where he stands in the corner of the room, looking dazed. “Oh god. We’re having a baby. We can’t have knives around babies, can we? Knives are bad. Knives are super bad. We’re going to need to remove all the knives from the house.”

“He’s panicking—” My words turn into a screech as pain rockets through me. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

“Oh my god. We’re going to be parents,” Mason chimes in, his face turning stark white. “We’re going to be in charge of a tiny little monster. What if he or she is half Fomorian? What if he or she has to join the Wild Hunt?”

“What if there’s more than one?” Jack’s voice takes on a panicked squeak that has my own anxiety flaring.

“Somebody stab these motherfuckers to shut them up! Please!” I growl as I squeeze someone’s hand so hard they grunt in pain. I don’t look to see who.

Cal’s face is pinched so tightly, you’d think he just swallowed a lemon. “I don’t know if we can do this. We can’t do this, can we? We can’t be fathers. What if we fuck up?”

“We can’t murder people around babies.” Vin agitatedly runs his fingers through his tousled hair. “What if we stab someone in front of him or her, and that impedes their development?”

“CAN WE FOCUS ON ME AND MY BREAKING VAGINA FOR A DAMN MINUTE HERE?” I screech.

All of my men immediately turn to look at me, their faces wary, as if they’re staring into the eyes of a rabid dog, one foaming at the mouth and straining against its flimsy chain.

“Somebody’s hormonal,” Mason whispers conspiratorially to Vin.

“MOTHERFUCKER PEE SOUP!” My heart expands in a rapidly shrinking vise, one encased in barbed wire and thorns. “GET THIS BABY OUT OF ME!”

Sweat drips down my forehead.

All at once, my men spring into action.

Mason puts a wet cloth on my forehead while Cal claims my free hand. Barret simply brings my knuckles to his lips to plant a tender kiss against the skin there. His hand must’ve been the one I strangled previously.

“You can do this, Violet baby,” Alex growls as he stands beside Cal, his eyes intent on my sweat-soaked face.

And then Frankie's voice cracks through my pain like the slash of a whip. "On the count of three, you're going to need to push."

# EPILOGUE THREE



FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

VIOLET

“Dads. Stop embarrassing me.” Lyric’s face tints pink as she glares at her fathers with an almost fervent fury.

“What do his parents do for a living?” Hux fires off, his scowl more prominent than ever as he glowers at our eldest child. “Does he have any arrest records? How does he feel about knives . . . in his stomach?”

“Dad!” Lyric stomps her foot and then turns toward me with an exasperated eye roll.

I shift Rake in my arms, and my little angel gurgles, twisting slightly with a contented smile on his chubby face.

“Don’t look at me,” I tell my daughter. “I’m staying out of this. But I have to say, you look gorgeous, baby girl.” Tears glimmer in my eyes as I take in the beautiful creation my freaking eggs created.

Her hair is more white than blonde, tumbling around her shoulders in natural waves. Her heart-shaped face is emphasized by the dewy flush to her cheeks and the sharp curve of her brows. Right now, she wears a floor-length red gown that swoops over one shoulder and has a slit up her thigh.

“I can’t believe my baby girl is going to monster prom.” I dab at my eyes repeatedly, trying to stop the onslaught of tears.

“Mommy!” Angel tugs on my shirt, drawing my attention down to my other daughter. Her light brown hair is braided into an elaborate updo, courtesy of Cal, and she wears a ruffled blue dress and a tiara. She’s going through a princess phase—no surprise, given that her grandparents are always



rambling on and on about how I'm going to be the queen once they retire in a few hundred years.

Sigh.

“Yes, baby?”

“Why are you crying?” This comes from Angel's twin brother, Callum, who has the same brown hair of his sister but none of her softness. His emerald-green eyes are fierce and laced with perpetual irritation. He always looks at the world as if he's planning ways to destroy it. It's honestly quite cute for a five-year-old.

Before I can answer, Alex appears in the doorway and scoops Angel up, a wide smile on his beautiful face. That smile has become so frequent over the years, I've forgotten what he looks like without it.

“Mommy's feeling a lot of emotions due to the baby growing inside of her.” He gives his daughter a kiss on the forehead as she giggles and preens.

Callum simply stares at my tummy, as if it holds all the answers to questions I didn't even know he wanted to ask.

“No one will hurt you, little sister,” he vows fiercely, not pulling his attention away from my stomach. “I'll kill anyone who tries.”

I glance at Alex in alarm and whisper, “Who taught Callum the K word?”

“Don't worry, baby.” Vin slings an arm around my shoulder. “All monsters are obsessed with death and murder at this age.”

I laugh awkwardly.

Because, yeah, I think I may have given birth to a psychopath.

Ohhhh well.

Vin slides his eyes toward Lyric, who's still glaring at Hux. My hunter's expression freezes over, shock giving way to anger.

"What are you wearing, Lyric?" he bellows, stalking forward.

"A prom dress. God, Dad, you're so old." She rolls her eyes and places a hand on her hip, cocking it to the side. "Grandpa is way cooler than you."

"She has a date," Hux growls, his eyes riveted on Lyric, the madness in his gaze growing from an ember to a blistering inferno.

"Fuck no, you don't!" Vin snaps.

"Oh, let the child be," Cal retorts. He leans against the wall, his wings ruffling out behind him, his pink hair tousled. "Don't you remember what it was like to be young and in love?" His voice takes on a dreamy, wistful quality that has me smiling. But then my cupid's eyes harden, turning to granite, and he scowls. "But I also remember what it was like to be a hormonal teenage boy. On second thought, I agree with your other dads. You're not going."

"DAD!" Lyric stomps her foot yet again as I hide my face to keep my laughter in check. Immediately, my face connects with a hard, broad chest—Barret. I would recognize him anywhere, his power tickling over my skin in the smoothest of caresses.

Lyric suddenly freezes, her face draining of all color and her eyes growing wide. She glances around the room.

“Where’s Daddy Dimitri?” she asks in a hoarse whisper. When no one responds, she repeats, louder, “WHERE IS DADDY DIMITRI?”

“Um . . .” All of my mates suddenly look uncomfortable, shifting from foot to foot and avoiding both my eyes and Lyric’s.

My suspicion swells like a snowball rolling down a hill.

“Mason,” I begin sweetly, knowing he’s the one mate who won’t refuse me. “What did Dimitri do to Lyric’s date?”

“Be strong, man,” Vin whispers. He places a hand on his best friend’s shoulder. “Be strong.”

“Um . . .”

“MASON!” I snap.

“He brought him to his torture chamber!” Mason rushes to say, wincing nearly imperceptibly at the rage on my face.

“You’re weak. Weak,” Vin hisses angrily.

Frankie blows out an exasperated breath.

“You guys are all assholes!” Lyric cries. Anger distorts her features, and fire blossoms in the palms of her hands, crawling across her arms like sleeves of flames. Her blonde hair sways around her face, as if caught in an invisible breeze, and the full brunt of her fury pours out of her in a wave.

“Lyric,” I warn, my gut lurching with fear.

“I HATE YOU ALL!” she screams as, somewhere in the distance, the sound of glass shattering echoes through the house. My daughter is having one of her temper tantrums again—you know, the type where she destroys everything in the house.

“Lyric!” Dimitri booms from behind her, causing Lyric to spin around, her red dress flaring around her ankles.

“What did you do, Dad?!” she demands, her words ending on an angry screech. “Did you hurt Roger?”

“What the fuck kind of name is Roger?” Mason murmurs.

I elbow him in the stomach. “Be nice.”

Dimitri’s features remain utterly impassive, the face of the Grim Reaper himself, come to claim all the unruly souls and drag them to Hell.

A monster.

*My* monster.

“I wouldn’t have hurt him if I didn’t need to,” Dimitri replies ominously, still using that cold, detached voice of his.

“What did you do?” Lyric demands.

Dimitri sighs and grabs one of his blades, absently wiping the blood off using one of the kitchen towels. “Did you know that your . . . Roger . . .” His lips curl in heady disdain. “Do you know that Roger has been seeing another girl on the side?”

Lyric freezes, the anger seeming to sizzle out of her as the fire disappears from her hands and her hair falls limp around her shoulders once more. “What?” she asks weakly.

“That bastard was cheating on my baby treasure?!” Hux barks, his hands curling into fists. Vengeance paints every line of his handsome face.

“I vote we kill him,” Vin adds seriously.

“You can’t kill him,” I point out. Though, I admit, I’m extremely tempted to, as well. “He’s the son of the freaking

Skeleton Man. That would cause a world war.”

“What’s one more?” Mason replies, throwing me a wink.

Lyric stares at Dimitri for a long moment before she says, “Let me see him.” Abruptly, she grabs the knife out of Dimitri’s hands and expertly twirls it around. “I’m going to stab that motherfucker.”

The anger from before makes a reappearance like dark, pregnant storm clouds moving across the sky. The light in her eyes brightens the woody brown to a honey color.

“Don’t kill him,” I remind her as I shift the now waking baby in my arms. “Remember the rules. We only kill—”

“—monsters who don’t have any family to remember them.” Lyric waves away my words with a dismissive hand. “Yeah, yeah, I know.” She turns toward Dimitri with fire in her eyes. “Can we go now, Dad? Please?”

Dimitri’s lips quirk into a cold, insidious smile that sends heat skittering up my spine. “That’s my girl.”

“I’ll come too!” Callum marches forward with steadfast determination, his tiny hands grasping at the toy sword Vin bought him for his fifth birthday. He always keeps that fucker tied around his waist.

Still snuggled in Alex’s arms, Angel giggles as she stares after her brother.

I lean back into Barret’s embrace, a smile stretching up my own lips.

Mason and Vin are currently arguing over the best ways to hide a body. Dimitri’s attempting to create a portal while Lyric watches on impatiently, her eyes glimmering with unfettered rage. Frankie’s trying to convince everyone that the best way

to murder Roger is to make it look like an accident—though Lyric insists that accidents aren't nearly as painful as cold-blooded murder. Alex is tickling Angel's stomach as she giggles, and Hux is attempting to teach Callum how to properly hold his sword. Cal is leaning against the wall, watching everything with amusement, his eyes continually dipping to my swollen belly. Biscuit, our pet monster, chews on one of the severed limbs Dimitri provided him with earlier this week.

“What are you thinking about, Cheese Curd?” Barret rasps in my ear, giving the skin behind it a light kiss.

“How happy I am,” I reply in a whisper, though I know everyone hears me.

This is the life I always wanted but never dreamed I would have. I fought for this—bled for this—and somehow, my deepest fantasy became reality.

I may be a monster, but maybe, just maybe, monsters can have happy endings too.

And I damn well found mine.

## AFTERWORD

I can't believe that this is the end!!!! AHFFF! It's always surreal to finish a series, and this one is no different. Prodigium Academy has been one of my favorite series to write. I can't even express how much I adore Violet and her monstrous mates. Did I cry while writing the ending? Yes, yes I did. Do I want to write more in this world? Most definitely. Maybe Vanessa should get a story?

Or Lyric?

Hmmm...

Want to see more of Violet and her monsters? Make sure to subscribe to my [Ream!](#) I plan to release exclusive bonus chapters and scenes to celebrate the ending of Violet's story.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I honestly can't thank my team enough. They were my rock while writing this book.

Thank you to Leanne, for being an incredible PA and providing amazing feedback.

Thank you to Rachel and Tami for all of your helpful feedback.

Thank you to Autumn for polishing up the manuscript and making sure I put my best piece of work out there.

A big thank you to Logan for creating these amazing covers.

And finally, I would like to thank Elena and Tami for their unwavering support!

I love you all!



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie May is a reverse harem author, a KDP All-Star winner, and an *USA Today* Bestselling Author. She lives in West Michigan with her family, cat, and adorable puppy. When not writing, she can be found reading a good book, listening to Broadway musicals, or playing games. Join [Katie's Gang](#) to stay updated on all her releases! And did you know she has a TikTok? Yeah, me neither. Follow her [here](#)! But be warned...she's an awkward noodle.



## ALSO BY KATIE MAY

Together We Fall (Apocalyptic Reverse Harem, COMPLETED)

1. [The Darkness We Crave](#)
2. [The Light We Seek](#)
3. [The Storm We Face](#)
4. [The Monsters We Hunt](#)

Beyond the Shadows (Horror Reverse Harem, COMPLETED)

1. [Gangs and Ghosts](#)
2. [Guns and Graveyards](#)
3. [Gallows and Ghouls](#)

Out of Sight (Prison Reverse Harem, COMPLETED)

1. [Blindly Indicted](#)
2. [Blindly Acquitted](#)

Kingdom of Wolves (Shifter Reverse Harem Duet, COMPLETED)

1. [Torn to Bits](#)
2. [Ripped to Shreds](#)

Tory's School for the Trouble (Bully Horror Academy Reverse Harem, COMPLETED)

1. [Between](#)
2. [Beyond](#)
3. [Beneath](#)

Prodigium Academy (Horror Comedy Academy Reverse Harem, COMPLETED)

1. [Monsters](#)
2. [Roaring](#)
3. [Venom](#)
4. [Fangs](#)
5. [Blood](#)

The Damning (Fantasy Paranormal Reverse Harem)

1. [Greed](#)
2. [Envy](#)
3. [Gluttony](#)
4. [Sloth](#)

5. Pride

6. Lust

7. Wrath

Kings of Grove Academy (Contemporary Academy Reverse Harem)

1. Mania

2. Psychotic

3. Pandemonium

4. Delirium

The Death Whisper (Fantasy Reverse Harem)

1. Of Rain and Wrath

2. Of Heat and Obsession

Supernaturalette (Interactive Reverse Harem)

1. Introductions

2. First Dates

3. Group Outing

4. Game Night

5. Exes

6. Truth or Dare

7. Scavenger Hunt

8. Reveals

CO-WRITES

Afterworld Academy with Loxley Savage (Academy Fantasy Reverse Harem,  
COMPLETED)

1. Dearly Departed

2. Darkness Deceives

3. Defying Destiny

Darkest Flames with Ann Denton (Paranormal Reverse Harem, COMPLETED)

1. Demon Kissed

1.5. Demon Stalked

2. Demon Loved

3. Demon Sworn

Darkest Queen with Ann Denton (Paranormal Reverse Harem)

1. For Whom the Bell Tolls

Dark Temptations with Ann Denton (Monster Reverse Harem)

1. Ravaged by Monsters
2. Devoured by Monsters
3. Worshipped by Monsters

Fae Revealed with Quinn Arthurs (Paranormal Reverse Harem)

1. Courting Darkness
2. Seducing Shadows
3. Loving Demons

STAND-ALONES

Toxicity (Contemporary Reverse Harem)

Not All Heroes Wear Capes (Just Dresses) (Short Comedic Reverse Harem)

Charming Devils (Bully/Revenge Reverse Harem)

Goddess of Pain (Fantasy Reverse Harem)

Demon's Joy (Holiday Reverse Harem)

Broken Howl (Wolf Shifter Reverse Harem)

Dark Paradise (Paranormal Motorcycle Club Reverse Harm)

Ruthless as a Cheetah (Paranormal Romantic Comedy Reverse Harem)

Harlow (Contemporary College Reverse Harem)

BOXSETS

Together We Fall

Beyond the Shadows