



BLOOD

&

WRATH

RUMER HALE

BLOOD AND WRATH



RUMER HALE

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BLURB

She was taken from us...*again*.

And now she's in the hands of that sadistic psycho.

But thanks to our bond, we have abilities that surpass even the strongest of our kind.

We'll get her back.

And when we do...

Those who have hurt her will pay...

Along with anyone else who gets in our way.

Blood and Wrath

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To Mum,

*Thank you for everything and more...including never reading
this book.*

CHAPTER 1



KAI

A RUMBLE VIBRATES through the ground beneath me, shaking the building's foundation, and along with it, my rage ignites. Embers crackle like kindle on my skin, it travels in jagged dark lines up my arms as flames erupt alongside them. My body grows and expands to make way for my hound.

Or one of them.

I grit my teeth, squeezing my eyes shut for a moment, and push back the shift before I destroy the entire building and everyone in it.

Not that me or the boys would die. Thanks to our mate, we are pretty much indestructible now.

I'd be lying if I hated the upgrade, but our abilities were not the only thing that grew. Our beasts also became... *more*.

More powerful. More dangerous. More fucking terrifying.

My hound always had two sides. One more vicious than the other, but this... new side, awakened from our bond, is more deadly than them both.

He wants our mate—the only thing we can agree on at the moment—but he also wants out, and even I fear what he will do when fully unleashed.

As if hearing me, a ripple of dark power seeps over me, the new beast inside wanting revenge and destruction for our lost mate.

Soon, I promise us both.

Soon, it agrees. It sounds more like a threat than a deal.

The dark power slowly retreats, releasing its grip on me and halting the near shift about to happen.

I pull back the rest of the shift bit by bit, until it's completely back inside me, focusing only on the present and what we need to do to get Kiarra back.

What she needs is us focused, not running around destroying everything in our path. Burning the world down when she's still out there isn't the way to do it. At least... not yet.

The deteriorating building gradually slows its shaking. Dust and chunks of concrete fall around me before it comes to a halt.

What was once an old hotel is now nothing more than a barren construction site that sits on the edge of Manhattan.

Glancing around the silent crumbling building, I move to find the others.

A thunder-like whip shatters the silence, cracking what's left of the walls around me. They rip and tear open.

Axel slams into the ground beside me, cracking the floor beneath us while leaving a large gap in the ceiling above from his landing. Ripples of scales slide over his skin, slowly retreating along with his wings, but his eyes tell the truth to his emotions.

He's not in control. His dragon is trying to force its way to the front to take over.

We're lost... again. Without our center, without our mate, we're hanging on to whatever we can, trying in vain not to lose it and take out everyone and everything around us. Add heightened emotions and new powerful abilities, and you have one psycho group of alphas on the loose.

With Axel's gold eyes now red-rimmed, I can tell it's only going to get progressively worse if we don't find our mate soon.

Until then, we need to stay focused.

We need *her*.

“Go. Before you take down what’s left of the building.”

We still need to find the traitor for lying to us. He won’t be getting off easy now that we know he betrayed us.

Axel growls out a warning, smoke seeping from his breath as he tries to intimidate me, but we both know who will be the first to yield, should it come to it.

I narrow my eyes on my brother, releasing a bit of my alpha power around us before he attempts something stupid, like trying to challenge me.

“Axel. You need to get a hold of yourself before you destroy what’s left of this building and those inside it.” My words have authority, a command, as I take advantage of my alpha power again to reach him before he becomes too lost in his rage and despair.

We’ve all been hanging on, barely holding it together as we wait and watch for the first one to snap.

Believing we were closer this time to finding her, only to have it ripped away from us, might be the thing that makes one or more of us break.

Axel steps forward, a look of challenge lighting up his eyes as he sizes me up.

“Who gives a fuck? It won’t kill us.” Axel’s voice grows deep, his dragon now completely in control. His eyes flash a deeper gold, the red bleeding into his irises, and he gives me a smirk that tells me he’s too far gone to care what happens. “They lied to us. They deserve the graves we dig them.”

Something we can agree on, but I’m not about to lose my brother because he’s a stubborn fool, nor am I about to throw away the opportunity to find out any further information about our missing mate.

That sleazeball knew something about Kiarra; I know it.

“Agreed, but we need them alive. For now,” I tell him. “Besides, if they lied to us, they deserve a much worse fate than a building falling on them.”

Axel takes another step closer, not hearing the truth or promise behind my words. Frustration builds inside me at his pushing, consuming all my senses. I usually avoid using more than small amounts of my alpha abilities on them, but the idiot needs to be taken down a notch.

I need him to get a hold of himself and snap out of it. More alpha power seeps out of me this time. It spreads out around us, hitting him like a swift punch to the chest.

He stumbles back a step, grunting at the impact. Squeezing his eyes shut, he shakes his head a couple of times before opening them. Still unfocused, he grapples with his dragon. A flicker of gold pulses, and his eyes turn hazel, then back again.

I watch him battle with his dragon, fighting it to take back control. Each of his conflicted emotions display across his face as he tries to subdue the beast.

“Come back to me, brother. We need you. *She* needs you.” I take a step closer, releasing the hold on my alpha abilities, knowing he’ll always come back to us, come back for *her*.

Family chosen never leaves one behind. We become their armor and shield until they can get up and fight again.

“Don’t let yourself get lost in the dark, not when you still have a light waiting to guide you home.”

After a tense moment, the deep gold recedes, flickering once before clearing completely. We both let a harsh breath out, grateful that he isn’t lost to us. At least, not this time.

Axel gives me a look of apology before glancing around, a frown on his face as he speaks. “She’s not here. That son of a bitch lied to us.”

We should’ve known better than to trust that slimy underling, Garath. He gave us what we thought to be the closest thing to a lead. The only reason any of us even gave the slimeball a chance was the pull from the bond between us and Kiarra, telling us he was on to something.

Garath had overheard one of the bear shifters talk about a secret meet-up with one of King’s associates. A secret project that had a special type of cargo needing to be moved with

discretion. He followed up by telling us he saw a girl who was similar to Kiarra's description and knew the location where they were supposed to meet.

The same location the pull also pointed us to. But it wouldn't be the first time we followed the bond, only to find nothing. It made us think we were going crazy.

Our bond with Kiarra allows us to sense her location, but only to an extent. The location itself could be the whole of Manhattan, but it won't grow stronger until we are close enough to her. Every time we think we are close, feeling the bond slightly stronger, she is ripped from us completely and we have to start our search all over again.

It's possible that King is able to manipulate it somehow. That, or he's three steps ahead of us each time and pulls her out from under us before we even make it to where she is.

Either way, we are going around in circles, getting nowhere. Trusting Garath for even a moment made us all foolish, but none of us cared if there was the possibility that it ended with Kiarra back home with us, where she belongs.

The meeting was supposedly taking place right under our noses, on the edge of Manhattan. Another huge red flag, as King wasn't naïve enough to try something so close to us. But with doubts creeping in from lack of sleep and being constantly on the move, it made us question if his arrogance would try something this stupid to prove how powerful he thinks he is.

He knows we're alive. He knows we're on to him, and he's toying with us.

We felt the pull of the bond. But just like every other time, once we got close enough, it grew distant, like she was moving farther away from us, disappearing completely out of our reach.

King knows we are coming for him. The bastard's been moving her, but how he's able to tell when we're close is something none of us have figured out yet.

A few times, the bond has completely disappeared, ripping our hearts out along with it.

Just like when we arrived here a few minutes ago to wait out this so-called meeting. Minutes into our stakeout, we knew something was off. Especially when the bond cut off minutes later.

We all know what the absence of the bond could mean and had felt it multiple times over the last few days.

It means she's gone, that she no longer exists. Not in this world or any other.

That monster is killing her, and if not for her ability, we would have lost her by now. Lost the very heart that keeps us whole.

The thought alone makes everything around me turn dull and gray. This world is no longer vivid and full of hope or happiness without her in it; instead, it is full of despair and darkness as it swallows me up.

When her bond disappears, time becomes stagnant. Each one of us no longer anchored to her. We fracture a little, becoming less whole. The longest few seconds blend into minutes, moving by in agonizing waves as we wait for the bond it to reattach once more.

Rubbing the spot over my heart, I take a deep breath, focusing on our bond and the slight pulse that's been weakening every day since she was taken.

It's been seven days since King showed up and took her. Seven days with only scraps of sleep and food to keep us going. Each of us is struggling to adapt to our new abilities and forms, while becoming more beasts than men the longer it takes to find her.

"Find Garath. I want to see the life seep slowly from his eyes when I rip the truth from his throat."

Axel gives me a savage smirk, about to turn and find him when Rion appears from nowhere, splatters of fresh blood on his white shirt, his suit jacket destroyed and tore open.

“He’s gone.”

A tremor of rage works its way through my body, threatening another shift. Glancing at Axel, I see him in a similar state, trying to push back his dragon.

“That rat bastard.” Axel punches his fist into the wall beside him, smashing what’s left of it.

I stay quiet, my own rage a split second from trickling out and becoming another problem we could not afford.

“We need to stay focused,” Rion says, his basilisk voice sending a wave of calm around us.

“On what? She’s not here. Every time we think this is it, she slips right through our fucking fingers.” Axel thumps his chest. His dragon is not fully subdued, and his rage turns to anguish and despair.

“It’s getting weaker.” Axel’s words are broken, making me think he might be the first of us to break.

“We’ll find her.” I try to pacify him.

Rion yanks the shredded jacket off him and throws it to the ground, meticulously folding his sleeves as he attempts to rein in his own temper. Out of us all, Rion is the one who has always remained calm and collected even in the toughest of times, but the fine tremor in his hands and the distant look in his eyes tell me otherwise. This was pushing even *his* limits.

Kiarra.

A violent pang shoots through the right side of my chest. Where the hell is she now?

Seeing my family break in front of me snaps something inside me. We can’t go through this, not again. We barely made it through the first time.

I push back my own emotions, determination lighting my veins to keep my family together and find our lost mate. “He’ll get what’s coming to him. We need to find out where King has taken her now.”

Rion and Axel subconsciously rub the same spot in their chest.

“I can’t tell where she is anymore. It’s too faint.” Axel bows his head.

Rion swallows hard, staring off into the distance.

I reach for the bond and the pull, hoping to have better luck and get any lead in the direction we could go, but it’s like a limp rope loosening and fading off into nowhere.

Clearing my throat, I push back the panic and try to come up with another way. “Let’s stop and think for a minute. Where could he have taken her now?”

The bond has led us to a ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, a couple of islands around our cities, and a small town in New Jersey.

He’s picking places that are secluded, with no civilization around. But apart from where she’s been, no other secluded places exist near us. At least not on any map we’ve seen.

“What about The Cardinal Three?” Axel asks. “He might’ve taken her back there?”

I shake my head. “I have my contacts out, watching for anything unusual. It’s been on full lockdown since he took Kiarra. No visitors are allowed in or out. There’re swarms of shifters guarding the borders making sure no one leaves or enters.”

Rion frowns, giving me a look. One that tells me he’s worried. I know what he’s thinking, King leaving the Cardinal, but having an army guarding it, means he’s had something in the works before all this.

“He could be using portals?” Axel pushes.

It’s also something I thought of but crossed out as soon as one of my contacts came back with an update.

“Whatever invisible shield he had blocking the use of powers showing up is gone. My contacts have been monitoring it and can sense even the smallest of spikes of

abilities across the entire cities. No portals have been used in the Cardinal Three since King took her.”

“How or where does someone like King get that kind of power in the first place? To be able to shield entire cities and block others sensing powers and then take it down like it’s nothing, with no one being the wiser?” Axel asks.

None of my contacts knew what King was or where his power came from, but I had a feeling we’d soon find out.

“I don’t know, but what I do know is that if he’s brought down that shield, his focus has shifted. He’s got other plans. Plans that involve Kiarra on a larger scale. We need to find them both before it’s too late.”

“We need to be smart about this. We’re getting nowhere with the way we’re going,” Rion tells me.

“What are you suggesting?”

King somehow knew we survived. Whether it was a hidden mole or betrayal, I don’t know... yet. But he also seems to be one step ahead of us, even with the help of the bond. Any time we think we’re close, she’s yanked out from under us.

As if a lightbulb turns on, the answer comes to me, making me feel like an idiot for not thinking of it sooner. It was right in front of us the whole time.

“Concealment spells.” Just like the one he was using to shield the Cardinal. He might have diverted the spell to conceal her location instead.

But he never took into account how powerful the bond would be, or our determination to get Kiarra back.

“Know anyone who can unblock them?” Axel asks us.

“I might. I’ll need to contact a few people, call in a favor or two,” Rion tells me.

I didn’t care if we had to call in every favor, every contact we had, if it meant getting her home to us.

“Do it. We’ll clean up this mess and follow you back.” Rion nods, silently slipping out before disappearing among the rubble.

I turn to Axel. “Where are Jax and Luka?”

A loud boom shakes the building. The floor beneath us cracks further, tearing open. We move out to the hall just as the entire room crumbles, leaving a large, open gap.

Axel shares a look, knowing damn well who caused it.

“Jax?” I ask.

Axel nods his head, agreeing. “The fucker thinks he’s immortal now.”

If we thought Jax was a handful before, he was ten times worse now, causing chaos whenever he felt like it. The boost in his abilities only added to his anger and pain, fueling and feeding it to wreak havoc across the city. No matter who or what was in the way.

“He isn’t wrong.” Axel shrugs. “It’s not like we can die.”

We make our way through the destroyed halls filled with shattered glass and equipment covered in concrete. What was once a five-story office building is now nothing but crumbling rubble.

I pay the destruction no mind, my focus on locating one of my idiot brothers.

“No, but it doesn’t mean we can push our limits, either. He doesn’t need to test just how far they go.”

I wasn’t losing another family member simply because he wanted to see how indestructible he was.

His way of dealing with Kiarra being gone was nothing more than an added distraction. One we didn’t need right now.

“Luka won’t let him go too far.” Another complication building like a silent storm. Luka wasn’t far off snapping himself, and with his shadow side gaining power, it only made things worse.

I rub the spot on my chest where our six threads rest, trying to ease the deep ache telling me something is wrong, that something is coming, and that we needed to be together. We need to find her soon, before it's too late.

“Let's go get him before he destroys any more of the city.”

CHAPTER 2



KIARRA

LOVE IS something we all hope to feel at least once in our lives. It's an emotion so vast, so vivid and bright, it can make your entire world feel brand new, brimming with possibilities and new adventures.

You notice more beauty around you because that's how you feel.

It's a feeling of being whole and complete, of finding those missing pieces you didn't realize you needed.

We all fear the loss of that love, of the happiness and hope that comes along with it.

So, when it's ripped from you, your entire world shifts and you're left with nothing but darkness.

A haze drifts over you, making you feel heavy as you try to push through the sludge that is your every waking moment.

Days grow longer and nights become never ending, and that fullness that you once felt becomes so empty, so hollow, you start to wonder if it was ever there to begin with.

Or if it was all just a dream.

Was any of it real? Or did my fractured mind make up a fairy tale to help me push through King's endless torture?

Kai. Jax. Luka. Rion. Axel.

Each of their faces flash before me, something deep inside me telling me it was real, that every moment I spent with them couldn't have been faked.

But that also meant their last moment was real, too.

They didn't deserve this. They didn't deserve their lives ripped from them, all because of me. I should have been the one to pay that price. Not them.

Never them.

How was I supposed to move on from this? From them?

A little voice in my head and heart told me, *You don't*.

My life was tethered to theirs the day they walked into it and stayed that way until they found me once more.

With my ability, there was no way out, not until I grew old and left this world to join them. If that was even an option.

I can't feel anything, my mind the only thing aware right now, which is something I'm grateful for.

I know that if I wake up, the pain from their loss would be felt in every inch of my body. And so I welcome the darkness and numbness that comes along with it, craving the silence it brings me.

My mind has already been awake for too long now. I know it's only time before the darkness pulls me back under.

I wait and wait, but it never comes. My mind slowly becoming more alert as each moment passes. And instead of succumbing to the void, my body also starts to wake.

Cold is the first sensation to hit my body. It wraps around me, dulling everything else while also making me feel heavy and weak.

So weak and tired, but not enough to drag me under.

Sound comes next, with a ringing that lessens the more that time passes. It's followed by a hum and soft whirring noise somewhere close by. The buzz of a fan clicks on and off every few seconds, and once the ringing completely leaves my ears, I hear... screaming.

The scream is loud, so loud I don't know how I missed it to begin with.

It's raw and broken, and I can hear the pain inside it as it bellows out around me.

I want to cover my ears, but something sharp and heavy clamps around my wrists and ankles, holding them in place.

A gnawing pain eats away at my stomach, making me want to curl into myself, except I can't bend over. I can't move much at all. I'm lying on my back, and there's something heavy around my waist, holding me in place.

Tightness wraps around my chest, making it hard to take in a deep breath. I try to breathe through my nose, but the scent of bleach assaults my senses.

Peeling my eyes open, the harsh light above burns. I close them instantly and squeeze them tight, the sensations of everything around me too much, too overwhelming. The smells, the sounds... the heart-wrenching scream. It's all too much.

My mind and body catch up to one another and memories flash through my thoughts like blades. They slice down my body, shredding and slashing every piece of me until the pain is all I can focus on.

It soars over me in waves, building up before crashing down on me and carving out one more piece of me each time.

The agony feels more physical than anything King or Morana have ever done.

Time becomes an endless series of repetitive cycles, one filled with agony, loss, and despair.

My mind finally shutters to a stop, the overload of pain too much to bear. My body shuts down next along with it, and I welcome the quiet numbness.

Seconds later, the darkness takes me under.

* * *

I glance at the moon from my bed. Its luminous beam lights the world beneath it, making everything look magical. There's a warmth in my chest that makes me think this is where we're supposed to be, where we were always supposed to end up.

We've moved around a lot, and usually I stick to myself knowing first-hand how cruel other kids can be, but then I met the guys. My guys.

Jax, Luka, Axel, Rion, and Kai.

Kai said we're family, all of us. And that we need to stick together and watch out for one another.

I like that idea. Of looking out for them and keeping them safe.

Mom is usually overprotective, but even she says it feels right here. Hopefully, she'll let us stay this time. She never tells me why we have to leave, just that she has a bad feeling, but she always makes it feel like another adventure.

It's well past my bedtime, but I can't sleep. The boys are taking me exploring tomorrow in the forest behind Axel's house. He's been a bit grumpy lately, but he always brings me homemade food, so I know he's not too upset or angry with me.

Jax said he might show me his wolf if I hold his hand the whole way through the forest, and Luka said he'd do the same, but his wolf isn't ready to come out yet.

Rion's parents are super strict and... cold, but he said he'll still be able to make it. I haven't met Kai's foster parents yet, but he said that it won't be a problem and will come by tomorrow to pick me up on his way.

Sighing, I get into bed. Kai will be upset with me if I don't get enough sleep. And the others will back him up and gang up on me... again.

The last lecture they gave me was about needing to take better care of myself. I told them to stop acting like my older

brothers, and they got all weird and told me to never call them brothers again, that we were family.

Which didn't make any sense. Boys are confusing sometimes.

My eyes begin to drift when a loud bang makes me shoot up in bed. My heart races.

"Mom?"

I push the blankets off me and rush across my room to my door. Wrenching it open, I peek outside. My eyes widen when I see a man dressed in all black running straight at Mom, a large sharp knife aimed at her head.

Flinging the door wide open, I rush out, opening my mouth to scream a warning when she spins around and kicks the knife right out of his hand.

A glint of silver catches my eye, and I spot the knife Mom is holding as she slams it down into the man's chest.

A gasp slips out. I hold my hand to my mouth to cover it and take a step back.

What's going on? Mom doesn't even kill spiders, saying we all have a purpose in life. That just because we fear something doesn't mean it should suffer. This can't be Mom. She'd never hurt anyone.

The man grunts in pain before turning to ash and falling to the floor.

My body trembles, my stomach twisting in knots as I stare down at the pile of ash.

This is a dream. It has to be. That, or I'm going crazy.

Before my mind can even process what's happening, more men appear from nowhere and head straight for Mom.

My heart stutters to a stop, my eyes widening as I reach a hand out to her, but it's like she knows where they're coming from and anticipates each move, blocking and striking them down like she's been fighting for years. Once they're down, she wastes no time and stabs them, turning them to ash.

My hand drops to my side as I watch, not knowing what else to do.

Maybe I've lost it. Maybe I've listened to too many of Jax's crazy stories and I've started to dream up some wild version of them.

Time seems to slow as she turns toward me, her eyes blank and filled with none of the love she's always shown. An icy chill runs down my back the longer she stares.

"Mom?"

She doesn't move, her whole body tenses like she's ready to pounce. But she wouldn't hurt me... Would she?

"Mom..." Something in my voice makes her pause as she shakes her head, her eyes slowly clear as she glances around. "Why am I—?"

She looks at me, moving forward, but stops when I stumble a step back.

"Baby?" She brings a hand to her chest. "What's wrong?"

She looks around, her eyes falling on the ground where the ashes lay. She flinches back, her wide eyes finding mine.

"I don't know how..." she starts but stops.

Looking down at her hands, I see a slight tremor work its way through her body. She grips them together, closing her eyes, and takes a deep breath before opening them to look at me.

Wearing a pained expression, she gives me a small smile and reaches a hand out.

"Kiarra? Baby? I would never hurt you. Please don't be frightened."

The tightness in my chest starts to ease seeing the look in her eyes. I take a tentative step toward her. "Are you... you?"

She gives me a watery smile, nodding her head, "It's me."

I wait a second, seeing the truth in her words, before stepping forward and straight into her open arms. She hugs

me tight, rubbing her chin on the top of my head.

“Oh, baby. I’m sorry for frightening you. Please don’t be scared of me. I would never, ever hurt you.”

“Mom... What happened?”

There’s still a tremor in her body as she pulls back to answer. “I don’t know...”

She glances around again as if she might find something that will give her a clue to what just happened.

“What about those men? Who are they, and when did you learn to fight like that?”

“I don’t... know...” She looks at me, her eyes telling me she’s just as confused and scared as I am. I wrap my arms around her and squeeze her tight.

We stay like that for a while until her body stops shaking and we both calm down.

Rubbing my arm, she pulls back to look at me. “Let’s... Let’s clean up and get to bed. You don’t want to miss out on going with those boys tomorrow.”

I can’t go, not now that she needs me to help her figure out what’s going on. I shake my head. “No, I need to stay here and help—”

“No. No, you’re going. You’ve been looking forward to this all week.”

“But, Mom—”

“This was... nothing. I’ll be fine.” She gives a forced smile and starts cleaning, telling me to drop the subject. But I can’t stop seeing her with the cold look in her eyes.

Something in my stomach twists and turns at the thought of it happening again.

“Everything will be fine,” she mumbles, more to herself than me.

By the time we’re finished cleaning up, it’s late. I know I’m going to hear it off the boys tomorrow for not sleeping enough,

so I head straight to bed.

Closing the bedroom door behind me, I turn, spotting a shadow near my window. I freeze. My stomach drops when the shadow grows and moves forward. I step back, ready to head straight to Mom when a voice calls out.

“Kiarra? Kiarra, it’s me,” Kai whispers.

“Kai?” I take a tentative step forward, the tightness in my chest easing.

“It’s me.” Hearing his voice, I make my way to the window.

I push it open, and he climbs in. “What are you doing here?”

“I just... had a feeling you might...” He shakes his head, frowning. “I don’t know... need me?”

He glances around the room, his frown deepening before his eyes find mine. “I’m not making sense, I know.” He releases a harsh breath. “I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Without thinking about it, I lean forward and wrap my arms around him, letting his scent of warm flames surround me.

Without a second thought, he hugs me back. “Hey? What happened?”

I pull back, glancing over at the door. “My mom, she...” But what was I supposed to say? That she turned into a ninja and took out a group of men? It didn’t make any sense and just made me sound crazy.

“What is it?”

“Something happened with her...”

“What?”

“I don’t know. It’s doesn’t make sense.”

“We’ll keep an eye on her. Don’t worry.”

His promise makes something in my chest warm. "I'm glad you came." I give him a small smile.

He shrugs like it's no big deal. "We're family."

Heading over to my door, he peeks out, looking around before shutting it and turning around. "Get some sleep. I'll keep watch."

"But you need sleep too."

He gives me a smile. "I don't need as much as you do."

"But—"

"Remember what I said?"

I roll my eyes but smile at him. "Family looks out for one another."

"Exactly. Now get some sleep. I'll head out in a bit and be back before you wake."

"Okay, but you better get home and get some sleep, too."

I hear his muffled chuckle as he moves to the window, standing in front of it like he's guarding it.

Silence stretches out around me as sleep starts to pull me under.

"Kai?" I whisper.

"Yeah, Kiarra?" His voice is soft in the quiet room.

"Thank you."

He pauses, and moment passes before he answers.

"Always."

CHAPTER 3



JAX

“WHERE IS HE?” I was not letting that fucker, Garath, get away a second time. Not after he betrayed us. The slimy fuck was going to pay in blood.

The weasel shifter below my boot grunts out a reply, but I’m pressing into his throat, cutting off his air supply. *Oops.*

I release the pressure slightly. He starts coughing and gasping.

I roll my eyes at the pathetic weakling. “I said, where is he? If I find out you’re keeping anything from me, you’re going to find out what it’s like to live without arms and legs.” I give him a vicious smile. “And if that’s not enough of a reason to heed to my warning, then we’ll see what my shadow wolf has to say.”

My wolf pushes forward, and I know from the frightened look in his eyes that he sees him.

I drag the weasel up by his throat, holding him against the wall by his neck.

“Now. Where were we? Oh, yes. You were about to tell me where that slimy fuck, Garath, is.”

He coughs before wheezing out an answer. “He’s dead.”

My grip tightens, and the fucker starts to turn purple. But I don’t care. I only see the violence as it suffocates me, demanding I take his life as payment instead.

“Well then, I guess you get to join him.”

The weasel's eye widens, my threat finally hitting home.

Tightening my hold, I'm about to snap the fucker's neck when Luka walks in, making me pause. "Jax."

"Yes, brother?" I turn to look at him, my smile dropping when I see the blank look on his face.

"Never mind." He sighs, leaning against the wall and staring off into space.

"You don't care if I kill him? Gut him where he stands?"

The little shit starts getting desperate, pulling at my hand. I give him a bored look before focusing back on my twin.

Luka lifts his head up and looks me dead in the eye. "No."

I narrow my eyes on him, noticing the black circles around his eyes, the clothes he has been wearing since last night, and the way he holds himself. It's as if he has given up.

Damn it. He looks like he's barely holding on.

How did I miss that?

We're all lost without Kiarra, but I should've been keeping an eye on him after everything he's been through.

I mentally kick myself for being so damn selfish.

When Kiarra was taken by that sadistic prick again, I couldn't focus on anything but my pain and decided to rip apart the city so they could feel it too. But I forgot about my brother. I let him chase me around while he suffered in silence.

I drop the weasel, my priorities starting to shift. "Go, before I change my mind."

He scurries out of there like the little rodent he is.

I walk over to Luka. "What's up with you? You're usually calling me out on my shit."

"It doesn't matter anymore. Do what you want." He pushes off the wall and heads out.

I follow him. "Luka."

“What?” His voice is cold, detached, like he’s already given up.

“We’ll get her back,” I tell him, knowing that this will not be the end for us. I’ll make damn sure of it.

He stops, his shadows appearing, but the minute he sees them, he pulls them back. I spot the tremor in his hands before he pockets them.

“You don’t know that.” I see a spark of agitation in his eyes.

“Well, I’m sure as hell not going to roll over and not even try.”

His head whips up to me, looking like he wants to strangle me.

Good. It’s better than the blank look he had a minute ago. He needs to focus on something more than the pain he feels right now.

“That’s not what I’m doing.” The spark lights up, and I get what I’ve been looking for. Luka fighting back.

“Then what are you doing?” I push him, wanting more. He didn’t get to lie down and roll over. Not now. Not fucking ever.

“Well, I’m not running around destroying the city and killing whoever gets in my way.”

If he thought that was a hit, he was losing his edge. I didn’t give a shit what people thought about me and knew that whatever I did go through with, my brothers would always have my back, him included.

“Maybe you should give it a go. Let off some steam.”

Luka opens his mouth to reply when something behind me distracts him. I turn around, my eyes widening at the scene in front of me.

“What the fuck is that?” My eyes are glued to the large beast wreaking havoc in the middle of the vacant street where Luka and I stand.

Two large horns curve from its head, its face a mix between a minotaur and demon.

Basically, an ugly motherfucker.

The demon Minotaur slams its hoof on the ground, causing a ripple effect. It cracks the road open, moving down the entire street and stopping just short a couple of feet in front of us.

“Where the hell did that come from?” Luka asks, but I’m as clueless as he is. That thing wasn’t there a minute ago.

We move towards the beast instead of away because why the hell not? My wolf is itching to get out and play. Even with its towering height, I know our chances are good.

The closer we get to the demon minotaur, the more I realize how slightly off my description of it was.

It’s even uglier up close.

Black slime drips and oozes from its snout and onto the ground in front of it. It sizzles, burning through the ground like acid. Drooped curved ears sit under its large horns, looking like sacks of extra hanging skin.

Its eyes are blood red and rimmed with black, the same shade as the matted fur that runs down its chest and surrounds its wrists and ankles. The rest of its body is covered in a dark leathery skin, making it look like it had been out in the sun for far too long.

The demon minotaur spots us as we make our way towards it, pausing its destruction. Its nostrils flare. Tilting its mammoth head, it raises it and sniffs.

“Mmorrtemm.” Its deep voice growls, echoing around us.

Luka raises a brow, giving me a look.

“What the hell is it saying?” My wolf pushes forward, wanting blood. I hold it back a moment, seeing if we can get any information on this thing before we take it down.

“Morrteemm.” It repeats itself again, this time dragging out the word like it’s trying to sound more intimidating.

If it is trying to scare us, it picked the wrong people. All I feel right now is pissed. Pissed that this fucker is wasting our time when we could be searching for our mate.

“Either go back from where you came from, or let’s get on with this. We’ve got somewhere to be.”

It growls, lifting an arm up like it’s reaching out to us. Instead, its hand merges and expands, curving upward and transforming into a thick blade the same color of its skin.

Stomping forward, it swings its weapon at our heads. We both duck in time, rolling out of the way.

The shift comes over me, sliding down my back and across my body with ease. My body expands, becoming larger than it was before, becoming a beast that’s also far more vicious.

Blue flames coat my form like a second skin. Together, my wolf and I feel powerful, untouchable, all thanks to our mate.

Landing on all fours, I become part of the shadows, slipping into them and appearing behind the demon minotaur’s trunk of a leg. I latch on.

The taste of rotten eggs and ash invades my senses as my teeth puncture its leathery skin. The demon doesn’t make a sound or cry out in pain as it raises its weapon and slams it down towards my head.

I release its leg and move out of the way just as the blade hits the ground, cracking the concrete with the force behind it.

It doesn’t feel pain, my wolf says, noticing the same thing. Guess we have to get a bit more creative.

The demon transforms its weapon back into its hand and stalks forward.

Black slime drips from the puncture wounds on its leg, leaving behind a trail of small holes where it drops.

Standing still, I wait for it to come to me, unleashing my fire the second it’s close enough. A blaze of blue and white flames engulfs its meaty arm as it reaches forward.

It pauses, examining its arm as it slowly melts before its red eyes.

The fuck?

It drops its arms as it melts away, leaving only a black bone like substance behind. Its eyes now turn to examine me once more.

“Morrtteemmm.” Its deep voice vibrates through my sensitive wolf’s ears, making us cringe.

This thing is obviously missing a few screws. It is time to end this.

As if it has the same thought, it takes a step forward, only to pause and tilt its head.

My wolf picks up their scent before we see them. Dozens of rodent shifters with backup appear, looking ready to fight, but with Luka and me as the targets.

I knew I shouldn’t have let that slimy weasel go.

I glance around for Luka, but he’s still in his human form. His eyes glow as he fists his hands, concentrating on pushing the shift back.

Dark shadows slide over his face, appearing like thick tendrils around him.

Damn it. He’s suppressing his wolf again. Normally, he can work with him long enough to get the job done, but he must be too close to the edge if he’s not even trying to shift.

Another thing I missed and need to fucking kick myself for.

The rodents shift into their animals. Porcupines, weasels, and a couple of foxes all move forward to attack, but they’re not what has my attention, it’s their backup.

The leopards, hyenas, and damn bears.

The demon, no longer intrigued by their presence, moves forward.

I crouch, getting ready. My flames come to life as I watch the shifters and beast head towards us.

Luka glances up, his eyes widening at the scene before narrowing on the shifters. I see him make the decision, a determined look in his eyes, right before he lets go. He manages to stay in his human form but partially shifts to use his abilities.

His dark tendrils of shadows emerge from his body and whip out at the shifters, who are trying to cage me in with the demon.

My chest turns tight every time I see those shredded shadows. They should be whole, wrapping around his whole body when he shifts, they should be a bright orange, not dark and grey like they were now, but thanks to our fucked-up family, Luka will never have the same bond as I do with my beast nor the ease of the shift that goes with it.

The shadows coil around their necks, snapping them with a flick in a matter of seconds.

And they call *me* vicious... They've never met Luka when he decides to come out and play.

He moves beside me just as the demon reaches out to grab us.

Luka expands his coils to wrap around the beast, holding it in place.

Slipping into the shadows, I become a part of the shadow itself. Moving forward, I travel through the demon, lighting my flames as I slip through its body.

Coming out on the other side, I watch as the blazing blue and white engulfs its body. Luka holds it in place until it falls to the ground, unmoving.

Most of its black skin has melted, leaving a disfigured outline of a cross between a large animal and human.

Shifting back into my human form, I move closer to get a better look. Luka does the same, standing beside me.

He checks me over before focusing on the demon.

Looking down at the disintegrating demon, the smell of sulfur leaks out around it, permeating the air. “Smell that?”

“Sulfur?” Luka confirms, leaning down closer.

Black slime starts to seep from its body, leaving holes where it hits the ground.

“Any ideas?” I ask him.

If anyone would know, it would be him. He always has his head in a book. I can’t complain. It’s come in handy more than once and saved our asses a few times.

Luka shakes his head, “We should let the guys know about this, but...”

Kiarra. We all should be focusing on her, not this... demon. It’s just another obstacle in the way. One we didn’t fucking need right now.

He stands, staring straight at me, but he’s lost in his thoughts, so I know he doesn’t even see me.

Luka sighs. “We need to find more information on this thing, and fast. Then we can focus on Kiarra. She’s our main priority.”

“Agreed.”

Luka frowns, his stare becoming more focused as he tries to come up with a way that we can find some information on this demon quickly.

I let him do his thing, knowing I’m useless at this point unless he needs some physical back up.

“We can see if the demons in Staten Island know anything?” he says, but we both know that’s not much of an option.

“You know better than me. They want nothing to do with us.”

The dicks like to think it’s better to be apart from the rest of us, keeping their so-called dark gene pool pure. A shitty excuse to segregate their kind from the rest of the supes, was all it was.

“We’ll need to figure this out somehow and we’re gonna need help,” he says.

“Well, think of something else, because that’s not an option.”

Luka would like nothing more than us all to join hands and talk it out, but people with power—especially supes who already have a shit ton—like to keep it to themselves. Horde it and hold it over others to use as leverage to gain more.

The demons won’t help us unless we have something to offer them, and as new alphas trying to find their mate and run a city, we have nothing but extra problems for them.

“We can check out some books we have back home.” He doesn’t sound convinced. “We might find something.”

More like, he might find something. I’d rather claw my eyes out than sit down and read old dusty books. My wolf agrees. Our joined energies always need to be on the move, the bond we shared in sync, sharing the same goal.

Luka gives me a look, toying with his phone. I narrow my eyes on my shifty twin, knowing he’s come up with something but doesn’t want to tell me.

“Spit it out. I know you enough to know when you want to do something I don’t like.”

Luka narrows his eyes but tells me, anyway. “You know who might have some information on this? Cillian.”

I snarl at the fucker’s name, my wolf rising at the mere mention of the sick and twisted excuse for a supe.

“No. Not happening. That sick fuck isn’t coming anywhere near us.”

Luka releases a harsh breath, frowning. After what he did to us, especially him, he shouldn’t even be thinking about that... *demented psycho*.

“He might know what type of demon that is. He’s the maven of the family.”

That man—if you could even call him that—broke us. Luka more so than me. So Luka even mentioning his name surprises the hell out of me.

“First of all, that psycho is not our family. In fact, apart from Luna, neither are any of the rest of them. It’s the five of us and Kiarra, that’s all the family we need. We’ll figure the rest out ourselves.”

“If anyone knows anything about this, it will be him. I don’t know about you, but I want to focus on finding Kiarra, not running around chasing after demon minotaurs that appear from nowhere.”

I clench my jaw and fists, needing a target for my rising temper. Looking away, I focus on the sounds around me, trying to calm the chaos running through my veins.

Cillian is the maven of all the wolves in Manhattan and those stupid enough to listen to him outside it. They all fucking *respect* him because of his expertise and knowledge in the supernatural community. And it’s because of that, he’s gotten away with what he did to us and more.

He’d already be dead if I had my way, but he got his claws in Luka a long time ago, spewing his cult nonsense about how neither of us should exist. And those claws are so fucking deep that I can’t even get to them.

I hate this. I know he is right, that he is the one who would know about this, but I fucking *hate* it.

Even when it fucking broke him, Luka was always thinking logically and shit. But that was Luka, always thinking of others, even if it put himself in danger or, in this case, dragged up dark memories.

What Cillian did to him was unforgivable. I promised myself if we ever saw him again, I would rip his throat out and laugh while the fucker choked on his own blood. Then I’d dig him a grave myself just so I could dance and piss on it.

Luka didn’t need another thing to add to his nightmares. I’d have to deal with the fucker myself.

“I’ll call him.” Taking out my phone, I swallow back the bile, trying to rein in my temper before I speak to the asshole.

“I’ve got it.” Luka has his phone out and to his ear before I get the chance to stop him.

I go to grab it, but he sidesteps me. “We both know you’ll lose your temper and we’ll be back to square one. Leave it to me.”

I fist my hands, needing to punch something as soon as I hear *his* voice. I see nothing but violence and bloodshed. Cillian’s blood as I carve pieces of him out, just like he did with Luka.

The sick fuck deserves to be bled out and broken until there’s nothing left of the piece of shit. I clench my teeth hard, nearly breaking my jaw.

“Never thought I’d see the day.” His grumbling laugh grates on my ears, making me want to cut them off.

Luka ignores him, getting straight to the point. “We need —”

But the miserable bastard cuts him off, making my blood boil. Cillian’s laughter gets louder. My wolf pushes through, wanting to hunt him down and go through with my earlier promise, but also add a few torture tools and get way more creative, so the fucker dies much slower.

Taking deep breaths, I focus on all the things I can do to make him pay in the most painful ways. My bloodthirsty nature revels in the thought alone, calming my rising temper.

“Of course you do. I always knew you’d call asking for something, but just like the rest of the family, I want nothing to do with you.”

“This is bigger than us and our fucked-up past,” Luka tells him.

“Isn’t it always. But anything to do with you and that brother of yours doesn’t concern me.”

“Well, it fucking should,” I tell him, no longer attempting to rein my anger in. Luka gives me a look like he wants to

strangle me.

“Ah, there’s the other mongrel. Knew you wouldn’t be too far from your brother. You know... if it weren’t for you, he might have had a chance to be normal.”

“We *are* fucking normal, you twisted fuck. It’s *you* who’s a piece of shit.”

“And here I thought you called me wanting help.”

“We do—” Luka starts, but the ignorant fuck ignores him, again.

“I’m not listening to a filthy mutt who has no restraint.”

“I’m going to—” I start, but Luka gives me a sharp look, cutting me off.

“Look, we called to ask if you know of a beast that looks like a mix between a Minotaur and demon.”

The end of the line goes quiet, making me think the dick has hung up on him for a minute.

Luka continues, probably still hoping he’ll help. “He bleeds black tar-like blood that burns through the ground like acid.”

Cillian sighs. “I might have an idea, but I’ll have to get a look to make sure.”

Damn. The fucker would have to come here.

“I’ll make my way over to you, but after this, lose my number. Our debt for Luna is paid.”

I go to grab the phone and tell the miserable fuck where he can shove his help when Luka sidesteps me again.

“Agreed. We’ll see you soon.” Luka hangs up and puts his phone away before I get the chance to move.

“Luka.” I rein in my temper, keeping it for Cillian but wanting to slap Luka upside his head. Maybe knock some sense into the idiot while I’m at it.

Luka gives me an innocent look. “Yes, brother?”

“Don’t give me that look. You know damn well we can’t work with him. You, especially.”

“We have no choice. He knows something. The quicker he tells us, the quicker he can leave, then we can focus on Kiarra.”

“I don’t like this.”

“Noted. But it doesn’t change the fact that it’s still going ahead.”

I glance around at the dead shifters, eyeing any that might have survived for round two, but none of the idiots are alive, leaving me to stir in my irritation.

“I’ll grab a sample of the beast.” Luka heads over and looks for a piece of the demon to bring back. He takes off his jacket and wraps it around the blackened chunk of meat before heading back to me.

“Let’s head back to contact the others and update them. Hopefully, they had better luck than us.”

Here’s hoping.

Kiarra... Where the *fuck* are you?

* * *

Back at the penthouse apartment, we find a comfortable spot and close our eyes. Focusing on the guys and the separate bond we have as brothers; I push myself into the link. A place where our bodies and minds can subconsciously travel to and communicate in. More than communicate.

The link is a room we created and built on a bond none of us realized we had until Kiarra left.

After she was taken six years ago, we fell apart. In more ways than one. We didn’t realize at the time she was our mate,

but looking back now, it made sense. Not having her around anymore destroyed us.

Our so-called families saw this and tried to widen the gap between us further by keeping us apart. We were no longer a family, just a group of lost boys who were too broken to fix.

We were all going through our own types of hell, nearly giving into the dark when we all showed up inside the link one day.

We were shocked as hell, thinking we had teleported somehow. The room we were in felt as real as any other. The furniture and floor all as solid as the actual things.

Over the years, we've tested out just how real it is and have used it to our advantage when training. Although a slice of a blade feels just as real inside the link, once we leave, it's as if it never happened and disappears.

The room can be malleable but takes a while to create and secure so other supes can't listen in or overhear us. We could be overthinking it, but Rion thought it might be a possibility.

The link isn't something that any other shifters can normally do either, though none of us are normal by any means, but nothing we've found out about it over the years leads us to believe there's anyone else out there with the same ability.

My body forms in the new room. The large white sofa set and wide-open spaces is a mirror image of the lounge in the penthouse. The kitchen has a long marble island table surrounded with gray chairs.

A nice change from the dingy room we somehow conjured up as kids.

After being restricted by King's spells in the Cardinal Three, it feels like coming home. Rion would never have let us test its limits while King was near, should he or someone find out. Though we didn't really need it with all of us being together.

The room is set up to sense when one of us arrives, so I know it won't be long before the others show up. They'll also

be waiting for an update.

Luka appears beside me, looking carefree and relaxed, but I know it's an act. Talking to Cillian has dragged up old scars we both want to keep buried. I know I'll have to keep a closer eye on him and his wolf for the next while.

Kai arrives with Axel and Rion. All wearing somber expressions.

“Anything?” I ask, but he shakes his head.

Damn.

Kai releases a sigh, looking a lot older than he is at this moment. The stress of everything weighs heavily on us, but more so on him, since he thinks it's his fault that Kiarra is missing.

The simple idiot that he is should know that we all fucked up. We all should have tried harder to stop her somehow.

We need to stay positive, even if I feel anything but.

“We hit a dead end.” Kai drags his hand down his face. “The vampire hadn't a clue what we were talking about.”

“He thought we were part of an undercover rival crew hunting for intel to carry back,” Kai says.

Axel huffs. “The idiot wasted our time.”

Rion gives him a bland look. “But you made sure he knew that.”

Axel shrugs his shoulders. “Turns out, vamps are highly flammable. Who'd have thought?” He smirks, a glint of mischief in his eyes. The same fucking glint I recognize from my own face when I went off to cause a bit of mayhem.

A low chuckle works its way up my chest.

Rion sighs. “We've been trying to chase the information back to the lead we thought we had but ended up nowhere.”

My amusement dries up, realizing we're nowhere closer to where we were yesterday or the day before that. We're going

in circles each time, getting further from where we needed to be.

“Find anything on that slime ball, Garath?” Kai asks us, a glint of wrath in his eyes.

Luka gives me a look before answering him. “He’s dead.”

“Fucking great.” Axel turns and kicks one of the lounge chairs over. It fixes itself immediately as he huffs to the side.

Kai’s eyes narrow on us. “Is there something else?”

How the fuck does he do that? Always knows when we have more shit to tell him. It annoys the hell out of me.

Luka tilts his head at me. “We ran into a... complication.”

“What kind of complication?” Kai raises a brow.

“The ugly kind that was a mix between a minotaur and a demon,” I mumble, but with their shifter hearing, they hear me.

“What?” The guys look between me and Luka, probably wondering if this was some sort of prank. It wouldn’t be the first time.

“A... demon appeared when we were looking into that lead.”

“How did it just appear? From where?” Axel asks, looking confused as hell.

“Literally fucking nowhere,” I tell them.

“We’ll look into it once we find Kiarra,” Kai says.

I give Luka a look, telling him that he’s the one who can tell them. This will be his shit show about to go down.

“We contacted Cillian.”

The guys get near whiplash from how quick they turn to look at us.

Axel loses his temper, a look of shock and disgust across his face. “Why the fuck would you contact that dick?”

Luka keeps a stoic face, but I see the slight tremor in his hands as he fists them. “We needed information on the demon, fast. He’s the best option to finding out more about it, and that’s all that should matter.”

“The fuck it should,” Axel grinds out. “We can deal with this ourselves.”

“We still haven’t found Kiarra,” he tells them. That shuts everyone up pretty quickly.

We already know we’re running out of time. The clock is ticking over our heads like a timed bomb.

“He’ll be here and gone before you know it,” Luka says.

“He shouldn’t be going anywhere near either of you, and I’m not making any promises that I won’t end up killing the fucker.” Axel growls.

“Well, try to contain yourself. At least until he leaves,” Luka tells him.

“*If* we let him leave.” Axel clenches his jaw, turning to break some more furniture.

Luka sighs. “Look, Kiarra needs to be our priority.”

“She is,” Axel grits out, whipping his head around to glare at him.

“Then this conversation is pointless,” Luka tells him. “Cillian will give us the information he has, and then we can tick this off our list and focus on her.”

Kai opens his mouth to speak up when he pauses. “One sec.” He disappears, leaving Luka and Axel in a stare off. Rion is doing his usual, seeing more than he does shit, so I ignore them all and think of ways I can release my anger before the twisted psycho shows up. If I don’t, Axel won’t have to worry about hurting him. I’ll do it myself.

Kai returns a couple minutes later, a frown on his face. He looks from me to Luka. “This conversation isn’t over, and we’ll be discussing why you made decisions like this without us later.”

“Yes, sir.” I salute Kai, giving him a smirk.

Kai shakes his head at me before continuing. “That was Draven.”

“The demon leader of Staten Island? What does he want?” It couldn’t be anything good if he was calling.

“To meet.”

I choke out a laugh.

“What the hell?” Axel asks, but I cut him off. This has to be a trap. “Why now? They’ve never wanted to meet before.”

“He said he has information on Kiarra,” Kai says.

That shuts us up.

“How does he even know about Kiarra, let alone that she’s missing?” Axel asks.

“It’s not like we’ve been quiet on the whole, *‘Tell me what you know about my missing mate, or I’ll string you up and torture you slowly,’* spiel we’ve got going on.”

Axel narrows his eyes on me, looking for a fight. I give him a smirk, ready to challenge the hot-headed fool, still needing some outlet for the storm growing inside me.

“Not now.” Kai gives me a warning look not to push it.

I nod, knowing I’ll now have to head out later to hunt to release this built-up energy. My wolf perks up immediately, liking the idea.

“It could be a trap,” Luka tells him.

“It could be, but I’m not willing to take the chance in case it’s not,” Kai answers before looking at Luka and me.

“You two will stay here and keep an eye on the city. Axel, Rion, and I will head to Staten Island and see if he has anything.”

“Did he say what type of information he had?” I ask him, wondering if there are any clues to this being legitimate.

Kai shakes his head. “He said he might be able to help us find her, but only if we help them.”

I share a frown with Luka. “What could they possibly need our help with?”

Kai sighs. “Guess we’ll find out.”

CHAPTER 4



KIARRA

MY EYES OPEN, followed by a sharp gasp, my mind and body coming awake all at once. I try to reach for my chest to rub the weird pulling sensation from deep inside, but stop short, forgetting about the tight clamps around my wrists.

I'm in a room, but it's dim, the light above me nearly completely off.

My head is heavy, like it's full of lead. I lift it slightly, getting no further than a couple of inches. There's a large strap around my chest stopping me, but it's enough to see down my body.

My clothes are changed. I'm no longer in my jeans and top but a white t-shirt and leggings. I'm lying on a metal table with metal cuffs wrapped around my wrist and ankles and a larger metal band around my waist.

There are wires leading straight from the band up to the wall beside me, where I can make out some type of rectangular metal machine. Buttons and switches run along it, but it's too dark to decipher what they're for.

I try to pull my wrists out of the metal bands, but it's no use. They're too tight, leaving no space to move. I try the same with my legs and body but have the same problem.

Squinting, I look around the room. The wall with the machine is on my right and only an arm's length away, but to the left of me is complete darkness. I can't see how far back it goes. The door in front of me is close enough to see. It has

long metal bars, making me think I'm in some sort of cell instead of a room.

I lay my head back down and look up at the white ceiling. There's a small dark crack that runs along the middle of it. I stare at the crack until it's all I can see.

The silence stretches out around me, suffocating me. I stare at the crack, at its darkened shades and long open gap until it's all I see. The longer I stare, the more it starts to feel like it's a part of me. The part of me that's being spilt open in two.

I once thought that King had come close to breaking me, that he had tortured me for too long and taken pieces that I couldn't put back.

But I never truly understood what breaking meant. Not if the pain inside me now was anything to go by.

I don't feel... *whole* anymore, but I don't want to be either. I don't want to be anything.

I just want to give up. To drift away and cease to exist. To not feel this kind of torment inside me anymore.

What's the point now that they're gone? Why try to stay and fight?

They were my fated mates. A bond not many people come across or even get the chance to experience once in their lifetime.

The bond was there from the very beginning, since the first time we met, and I knew it, we all did. We had something special, something worth fighting for.

But that's gone now, and I'm too tired to continue the fight.

Just give it time. Isn't that what people say?

Give it time to heal, time to move on. But time can be endless when there's no hope or future to look forward to.

Time can be the enemy when all you want it to do is stop. To rewind and start again, start afresh.

I'm aching all over, but I know it's not a true physical injury or sickness of any kind. I know it because the pain feels so much deeper than anything I've ever felt before. Like the inside of my bones and muscles are bruised and broken. My chest is heavy and tight, making it hard to take in a full deep breath, and there's a hole carved into the place where my heart sits.

The pulling sensation continues, draining me further.

Tired. I am so tired. It won't be long before I'm pulled under by sleep once again.

I sense a presence in the room before I see it. To my left in the darkness, I catch a glint of white.

I squint my eyes just as two white, floating orbs move toward me. The shape of a tall figure comes into view before it steps closer, revealing its identity.

King.

But not the same King I've known. His eyes are completely white, his face and jaw sharper, more pointed. Shadows move across his face as he stares down at me, his white eyes void of emotion.

"I can taste your pain." King closes his eyes and tilts his head upward. Opening his mouth, he sucks in air, his mouth widening unnaturally as he does. An icy chill slides down my back just as the pulling sensation grows again.

"It's... exquisite, and much stronger since you've bonded."

I knew there was something not right about King and that when he finally revealed what type of supe he was, it wouldn't be anything nice. But this... *form*... was not something I ever expected nor understood.

"What are you?"

The dark shadows that seem to be a part of his skin slide down his shoulder, disappearing behind his shirt only to come out on his hand. It lifts off his skin and, like a snake, slithers up and over to me.

Standing still, the shadow snake watches me a moment before whipping out and striking me in the neck. I gasp, feeling the sharp burn and wetness that follows before the shadow snake slides back up to King and disappears in the shades along his face.

The sharp burn in my neck disappears as quickly as it appeared.

I look up into his ominous, empty white eyes and feel a pit of dread fill my stomach. King's dark chuckle slides over my skin, making me shiver. He ignores my earlier question and pulls something out of his pocket. He moves closer and only then do I see it. The green vial, but in a syringe.

"I'm going to need something stronger for what I have planned." I feel the sharp prick as he injects the potion straight into my bloodstream.

"Why... Why do all this? What plan?"

After six years of pain and torture, I still don't understand why he chose me to be his victim. I didn't believe it was just because I could heal. I knew there had to be some sort of purpose that he was pursuing. But I never understood what.

King continues to mess with the machine. I'm about to give up on asking anything more when he answers.

"Death leaves a mark, and the more violent it is, the larger the mark left behind."

Death... like their deaths. Final and violent, leaving behind a mark so large, I can't see where it starts and ends.

"Is that why you killed them? You get sick pleasure out of killing others?" None of it makes sense. What is the rhyme or reason to his goal? Why did he kill them to reach it? Why is it so important that they died, and I live on to become nothing more than something he gets to toy with?

I need to know. I need to know why their lives meant so little, and yet he went through the trouble of finding them and making sure we met again.

"Tell me why?"

He gives me a smirk, like he's amused by my outburst. Which alone should tell me something isn't right.

“*Why?* Why does anyone do anything? To reach a goal, a purpose. They were a means to an end, with you as the goal, always the goal.”

A means to an... *end*. An end, their end. With me as his goal.

“What goal?” I ask, but his words sit on my chest, tightening it and making it burn. It was because of me they were dead. It was my fault.

A blow to the chest would have felt less painful.

Why he wanted me, though, is still as elusive as ever.

“Why me?” He could have picked anyone.

“You're... special. Unique. There is no one like you that exists.” That can't be right. There are hundreds of healers out there, and they can extend their ability to others. Unlike me.

King steps closer and my body tenses up. “But after this, I'll no longer require your... *services*.”

The cold chill he evokes in me spreads out to my hand and legs.

“Then why continue on like this?”

I try to flinch back as he reaches a hand out to my face. But I can't move as the back of his cold fingers slides down my cheek, making my stomach turn.

“No one else gets to have you.”

The sick feeling grows with his words, making my insides twist and turn. I was not only his goal but also a sick obsession of his.

King steps up to the machine and presses a switch. I hear it the noise of fan turn on just before a loud beep sounds. It's followed by a clicking sound that ticks out in a repetitive beat.

The noise drums in my ears as I glance back to King.

“Haven’t you’ve already gotten what you wanted?” If he no longer needed me, then what was all this for? Was six years of torture not enough for him?

The first blade of pain slashes across my body, making my thoughts curl into it. It stretches out to every nerve, making the pain feel endless.

King’s cold smile appears before me just as dark spots cloud my vision.

“Oh, my dear, I’m only getting started.”

CHAPTER 5



KAI

CILLIAN SHOWS up and strolls into our building like he hasn't a care in the world and isn't worried about the fact that he's willingly walking into a den of five extremely volatile alphas. All who fucking despise him.

He shouldn't have come here. Not now when we're all trying to hang on to our sanity and caring less and less about our moral compass, the longer Kiarra is gone. Not when we're itching for bloodshed and someone to punish.

If it were up to me, I'd take him down to our underground basement, the one we purposely built for those we need to... question further... and show him exactly how little I care about who or what family he comes from.

I'd rather lose the alliance of the wolves than have that piece of shit think he has even the slightest bit of control over us.

If it weren't for Luka, he'd already be dead.

I can only see small similarities between him and the boys. His height is similar to Luka's, and his slick black hair a close shade to Jax's. But he has neither their warmth or care, nor any part of the heart both boys wear like a sleeve.

To anyone else, he could be seen as someone who takes care of their appearance, his tailored suit and build making it look like he had everything figured out. But I see him for what he really is.

A demented monster who preys on the innocent and spreads lies to get others to follow him.

My eyes follow him on the security cameras as he makes his way through security to the elevator and up the nine floors to our main base of operations.

The building was originally a large office. With its location in the center of Manhattan, we figured it would make a good base and have been converting it to our needs since.

With ten floors, we started with the penthouse, making it into five spacious bedrooms with a large communal kitchen and lounge area. The security and operations floor sits below it, along with a gym and a weapons and training room. Apart from the main underground and one other floor with spare bedrooms, the rest are still a work in progress.

Moving down the hall and into the meeting room, I glance around at the guys, seeing how much the last few days have taken its toll on them. How each of them has become more broken the more time that passes, and the longer Kiarra stays missing.

Draven better have something for me, or the boys are about to go on a rampage.

“He’s here,” I tell them.

The atmosphere in the room takes a swift turn as rage slices through it.

“I still vote we string him up and use him as target practice,” Axel says, earning a smirk from Jax.

Luka frowns, his quiet expression etched on his face. He’s starting to withdraw into himself. The same way we found him when we reunited after losing Kiarra. After he and Jax had suffered at the clutches of their sick and twisted family.

While Jax wears his demons like a second skin, Luka keeps them hidden in the dark. We’ll all have to keep a close eye on him. I’ll make sure Jax keeps me updated.

What they both went through—all because we were too lost in ourselves to reach out—will haunt me forever.

The knowledge that we left Kiarra in a similar situation hits me like a steel bar in the chest. Except she was left there for six years. Six years locked away with King and his brand of torture and pain.

I clench my fists. King will have his day soon enough. And when I get my hands on him, I'll make sure to reciprocate the same torture he's shown Kiarra, but tenfold, before I rip out his blackened heart.

The elevator pings, alerting us to Cillian's arrival, shaking me out of my thoughts to focus on the task at hand.

"Well, where's the beast?" Cillian walks up to the long table, a dismissive look on his face.

I watch Luka avoid eye contact with him and hunch his shoulders. Even now, that dick has a hold over him. Rion and Axel notice it too. Axel walks up to Luka, placing himself between him and Cillian.

Jax sneers at Cillian before rolling the cloth-wrapped body part onto the table, revealing the contents as it slaps along the table to where Cillian is.

Cillian narrows his eyes on Jax as he stares him down before looking down at the chunk of seared meat. His face turns white.

"Well, I'll be damned," he murmurs, staring in shock at the remains.

"What is it?" I grit out, having no patience for this.

Cillian releases a harsh sigh, losing any of the confidence he had moments ago. "It's worse than I thought. This isn't any ordinary demon."

"Then what is it?" I ask.

"It's old and dark," he warns.

"Yeah, no shit. Are you going to tell us something we can work with or just repeat yourself?" Jax spits out.

Cillian snarls at Jax, making me want to rip the fucker's lips off his mouth. "I'm not the one looking for help now, am

I?”

“Fuck you.” Jax steps closer to Cillian, his build slightly taller than the bulky wolf. Jax stares down at him, his whole body as stiff as a board and seconds away from snapping and shifting.

“Jax...” Luka looks at his twin. “We need his help... This isn’t the time for this.”

Jax tries to calm himself, but he’s foaming at the mouth to take a swing at him.

Cillian see this and smirks, his smug attitude returned. “Yeah, listen to your brother, Jax.”

Jax moves before I can get to him, but Axel is there, yanking him back.

“What do you know?” I demand.

We need to move this along before I end up needing to call the wolves and inform them that they no longer had a maven. I wanted to gut the fucker here and now and be done with it.

Cillian glances at me. He must see something in my expression that tells him to move on with it because he loses the cocky attitude, looking down at the beast’s arm. “You got Luna back, so after this, we’re even.”

Far from it. He’d pay for what he’s done, but he’ll never see us coming when we do. For now, though, he gets to live another day.

“What I know is, I don’t want to be anywhere near that thing or anything like it.” Cillian scrubs a hand down his face, tilting his head towards the arm.

“It’s from the Underworld, but not just the Underworld, the deepest part of it. The Pits.”

“What the fuck are the pits?” Axel looks at him like he’s lost a few screws.

“It’s not somewhere you ever want to be,” he tells us.

“Stop speaking in riddles and just tell us what it is and where it came from?” Jax says, losing any little patience he

has left. Not that he had much to begin with.

Cillian is about to pick a fight again when I speak over him. “Just tell us what you know so you can get the hell out of here. What’s The Pits?”

I know of the Underworld. I know of the demons and creatures that called it home, more than I want to, but even I have never heard of such a place.

“A place so dark, they say it was the birthplace of evil itself,” Rion says. Cillian nods his head.

An icy chill sweeps through the room, and everyone gets quiet.

“It must have passed through onto this plane, but the guardians usually have it heavily guarded. Very strange indeed.” Cillian glances back at the beast’s arm.

“The guardians?” I ask, this was the first time I’ve heard of them.

Cillian shakes his head. “Those who guard it. If these creatures have made it past them and onto this plane, it means trouble. The kind that only brings about death and destruction.”

He moves to go. “Look, I need to warn the family. We’ll be going dark for a while.”

“So that’s it? You know what this demon showing up means, and you want to run with your tail between your legs? Nice. I suppose that’s what people like you do,” Jax tells him, still looking for a fight.

Cillian snarls at him. “Wolves are not known to run from anything, boy.”

Jax’s chuckle is dark. “Not wolves. People like you. People that are nothing but weak and pathetic. You’re a coward. A spineless piece of shit that should be wiped out. A fucking waste of space that taints the air we all breathe.”

Cillian is livid, his body vibrating as he seethes. He takes a step forward but stops. One look at the rest of us and he knows he doesn’t stand a chance.

“It isn’t my fight,” he grits out.

“It’s everyone’s fight,” Jax tells him.

“Not this time,” Cillian says.

“Good to know where your priorities lie, Uncle.”

“We’re not family, boy. Not since you were both born abominations. If it were up to me, I would’ve gotten rid of you the moment I found out what you were; slit your throats and be done with it. You are filth, the lot of you. And you all deserve to burn in hell.”

I move forward, seeing nothing but red. Grabbing him by his throat, I slam him into the wall, slowly dragging him up it and holding him there as my grip tightens.

My hound pushes forward, demanding we teach him some respect. For daring to insult our family.

When I speak, I’m far more beast than man. “They call us monsters, but it’s people like you who should have that name. People who torture and break apart little kids.” My body expands, my other hound slipping forward with interest.

“Stop. Please,” Luka begs, his voice small, halting me and my beasts.

Jax had told me how Luka still feels like he owes Cillian for trying to help him. That, on some level, Luka still feels that there is something wrong with him. But the only thing wrong with him is what Cillian did.

Cillian tainted everything that’s good about him. What should have been celebrated was turned into something that should be shamed and hidden.

He got into Luka’s head long ago and brainwashed him into believing that being a shadow wolf was an abomination that should never exist.

Shadow wolves are extremely rare, so much so that Luka and Jax are the only ones I’ve come across. Being a shadow wolf makes them different but also fucking powerful. And no matter what we say or do, we haven’t been able to make him see that.

We are all different... unique from our kind, but the connection we share with our beasts don't make us freaks, it makes us threats to watch out for.

"Please," Luka says, breaking through the haze of rage.

The seed of doubt that Luka has, thinking he isn't normal or should exist, will always be there, thanks to the bastard in front of me. For that alone, I want to snap his neck, but I will never put my own wants above that of my family.

Pulling both of my hounds back, I reluctantly drop him to the ground.

Cillian chokes and splutters. A large, red imprint of my hand burned into his throat. "I'll... have your... alpha position... for this. You're all abominations that should never have been allowed to run this city."

Rion swiftly moves around me. Grabbing him by the collar, he leans into his face.

"If you ever dare speak of my family with such disrespect again, I will personally hunt down you and every one of your kin. You won't see me coming, none of you will. But when I do, I'll make sure to leave you until the very end, so I can take my time with you. I'll make you beg for death while slowly destroying every last piece of you, leaving you unrecognizable."

Rion shoves him toward the door. "Go. Now. Before we change our minds and gut you like the spineless prey you are."

Cillian scurries backwards, stumbling on his way out. I hear the ping of the elevator as he gets in, then the door closes behind him. My hound inches forward, itching to go after him, to hunt him down and make him bleed.

"You're just going to let him leave?" Axel looks at us like we're crazy.

"For now," I tell him, barely holding on and wanting to make him pay myself.

"No one is killing him," Luka says, glancing out the window as Cillian staggers out of the building and into his

waiting car.

“That’s not your choice to make,” I tell him. We’re a family. Each of us looks out for one another. Even if one of us is too hurt or blind to see what they need.

Luka whips around, his eyes bleeding darkness. “And it’s yours?”

The fight leaves me when I see the pain and sadness in Luka. The darkness he tries so hard to push away instead of accepting.

“He was always going to pay for what he did.”

Luka chuckles without a speck of humor in his voice, raising his brows. “And I don’t get a say in any of this?”

Luka looks at each one of us. We stay quiet, our decision made. His eyes land on his twin. Jax looks back at his brother, a silent conversation happening between them both. Luka’s chest rises and falls quicker the longer Jax stares. Luka unravels, frustration etched across his face. He’s so full of conflicted emotion, it makes me want to go after Cillian right now.

Luka silently stares at us all before leaving the room without a backward glance.

Jax sighs. “I’ll go check on him.” He follows him, a somber look full of exhaustion on his face.

“When you decide it’s time to go after him, I want in,” Axel says, coming over to me.

I nod, agreeing. Everyone would get their shot at Cillian when the time came. But it would be only right for Jax and Luka to deliver the final blow and finish him off.

Rion walks up beside me and Axel.

“What did you figure out?” I ask Rion.

Rion shakes his head. “Nothing should be able to get out from the depths of the Underworld. If he’s right, and it was from The Pits, then more will come.”

“Then we’d better find our mate, and soon.”

* * *

“How is he?” I ask Jax, just as we make our way toward the car.

Axel and Rion are already there, ready to head to Staten Island to meet with Draven.

Jax shrugs, looking away. “He’s strong, but... ever since he found out what Kiarra was going through and how... similar it was to our past, he’s started to slowly to pull back again. He still thinks what he is, is wrong. That he’s too broken to be fixed.” Jax shakes his head looking away. “I can’t lose him.”

I grab his shoulder. “You won’t. We’re here, and as soon as we have Kiarra back, we’ll make sure he never forgets that.”

“Keep us updated and only contact through the link. I don’t want any of King’s people overhearing us because we got lazy and used a cell phone.” I give him a look.

Jax rolls his eyes. “Kai—”

“If any of those creatures show up, don’t try anything stupid,” I warn.

“We can’t die—” Jax starts, but I cut him a look.

“You don’t know that.”

Jax rolls his eyes at me. “Go. We’ve got this. We’ll contact if anything fun to play with shows up.” He smirks.

Shaking my head, I move toward the car. Rion and Axel get in after me.

“They’ll be fine,” Rion tells me, giving me a look.

I didn’t like us splitting up, but we also held the position of Alphas of the city. We needed to protect those within our city

walls. Leaving this place unguarded when old demons from the Underworld are showing up wouldn't look good.

Kiarra comes first, always. We just need to spread ourselves a bit more to make sure she had a home to come back to. One she would rule alongside us.

CHAPTER 6



KIARRA

A BLANKET of numbness coats my body like a weight, pushing it down. My mind feels muddled with no clear thought or reasoning. It floats, wavering from one clouded void to another.

Something pushes me through the void to the light outside it.

“It’s okay,” a voice whispers beside me.

That voice. I recognize it.

“Ka...ne?” My voice is raw, dry, and scratchy. Like I’ve been screaming for hours. My mind tries to clear the fog holding it hostage, but it’s no use. My brain is just as exhausted as my body.

“Don’t try to talk, it’s okay. I’ve got you, and I’m going to get you out of here.”

“Out?” I mumble, feeling myself start to curl back into sleep.

“I... I didn’t know Kiarra... I promise I didn’t know...” Kane’s sad voice floats around me as I drift back toward the void.

“Hey! What are you doing in there?” a voice shouts out, just as I slowly drift back into the darkness.

* * *

My mind is filled with a thick fog that slowly begins to clear. I hold on to it, wanting to stay in the haze, letting it wrap around me and pull me back under.

The pain in my body still lingers, my ability slowly pushing through the stagnant green potion to heal. But the pain is no match for the constant battle my mind and heart are in.

My logical mind wants to figure a way out of this hell, like it always has when it comes to King. To figure out a way to survive long enough to find some hope along the way. To fight. But it was never really me I was fighting for, was it? It was Alana or... Morana.

I wanted to escape so she could be free of the torment and suffering I thought she was going through because of me. If that ended up with us both living happily together... then it would have been a gift. But it was never the end goal. Getting her, and then us, free was.

My heart doesn't want to feel any more pain. Her betrayal was not something I ever saw coming.

But even then, it's nothing on what I feel now. On the torment and agony that consume every inch of my body.

My mind tells me to fight, but my heart asks, 'for who?'

There's no one left to fight for. And I wouldn't know where to start if I had to fight for myself.

I'm wallowing in my own self-pity and grief, letting it devour me when a loud banging starts up beside me.

The banging becomes a continuous beat. One that grinds on my ears and shoots throughout my skull like a hammer to the head.

Peeling my eyes open, I squint against the harsh burn from the light above. The half beam is a lot brighter than before,

and it takes me a moment to adjust before I can fully open my eyes.

Lifting my head slightly, I turn to look at the source, but there's nothing there apart from the machine.

The banging picks up speed, and the machine shakes slightly from the impact behind it. It's coming from whatever is in the next room. As if someone is slamming their body into the wall and using their full weight to do so.

I lay my head back down; the pain growing with each thump, making my mind turn scattered, no longer able to focus or think.

The banging continues, again and again, until my brain feels like it's about to explode.

I try to move, but I'm barely able to lift my head again.

"Please..." I want to yell for whoever it is to stop, but it barely comes out in a whisper. I need just a moment to think... to try to focus on anything but the pain.

But the loud banging continues, shooting through my ears in waves.

I wait until the wave of pain eases before calling out again.

"Stop," I plead, but it's not loud enough for anyone to hear in my room, let alone the next.

The thumping in my head grows sharp, cutting across my eyes and down my face.

"Please..." I beg, but whoever it is still doesn't hear me.

My teeth begin to ache deep inside my jaw. It makes me want to pull out each one of them to ease even a sliver of the pain.

But the banging continues, making it hard to focus on anything but the pain as it ravages me.

The thumping and cracking and slicing in my head, the sharp cutting stabs into my eyes, all becomes too much... too painful. It overloads my senses. My whole body trembles and screams, craving some form of relief.

Mustering up any and every last piece of energy I have left, I call out once more. “Stop!”

The banging stops immediately.

I hear a stumble and thump on the wall beside me, before short, harsh gasps follow.

“What did you do?!” a gruff male voice calls out.

But I don’t know what he’s asking for, and he doesn’t give me long enough to come up with an answer before speaking again.

“What did you do?” His voice is more violent and angry and claws along my thumping head, making me wince.

“Answer me!” His loud voice slices straight across the top of my head, ringing in my ears.

I wait for the wave of thick pain to pass before attempting to answer him.

“I... don’t know... what... you’re... talking about,” I tell him, each breathless word harder than the last.

He grows quiet for a moment, his short, shallow breaths slowing.

The silence allows me to focus on something else while my ability pushes through the pain. The more time that passes, the less pain I feel as it eases and lifts from my head.

“You *made* me stop.” His voice is quiet and laced with confusion.

That makes no sense, considering all I did was ask him.

“I asked—” I start, but he cuts me off.

“No. You made me stop.” His tone is thick with accusation.

But how could I make him do anything? I’m strapped down on a table, locked in a separate room.

“I didn’t,” I tell him.

He grows silent once more.

“You made me stop when I couldn’t.”

His words shock and confuse me, as if he’s implying that my words alone had made him do something.

I stay quiet, not knowing to what to say.

“What *are* you?” he asks, his voice soft.

I continue to stay silent, not having an answer for him or myself.

* * *

Loud boots stomp closer before two guards appear at my cell door. Unlocking it, they both walk inside, leaving the metal door open behind them.

“She’s awake.”

I want to roll my eyes at the idiot of a guard. Of course, I’m awake. I’m staring right at him. But I wasn’t stupid enough to provoke him when I was strapped down to a metal table and hooked up to a machine that could electrocute me. Or at least that’s what it feels like when King turned it on.

The guard that spoke has blonde hair and dull blue eyes. He’s looking at me with a spark of interest in his eyes. One that reminds me of the King’s men back in King’s hotel.

He moves closer, along with the other guard. The other one is slightly shorter with short, mousy brown hair and gray eyes. His eyes are not as sharp and cold as the blonde-haired guard.

He watches me warily with a frown. Turning to the blonde guard, he gives him a sharp look. “Don’t engage.”

But the spark of interest is already lit in his eyes and doesn’t dim as he moves closer.

“She’s a pretty little thing, isn’t she?” His words make me feel sick to my stomach.

I turn away from him and watch the other guard, hoping that he'll lose interest and leave me be.

The other guard huffs a reply, pulling a small rock from his pocket and places it on a small table beside me before turning the machine on.

The metal cuff tightens, and I tense, knowing what's coming next.

They haven't given me the green vial, so maybe this time I can heal quicker.

"Come on, we'll collect the energy later. Our job here is done."

But the other guard doesn't move, still staring down at me with a wide smile full of cruel intentions. "You heard what Demetri said. She can't die. Don't you want to see it?"

The guard looks at him like he's crazy. "Fuck no, and neither should you. Let's go. Now."

The blonde guard narrows his eyes on me, his friend's words not deterring him the slightest as the spark grows. He stares down a moment longer before turning and following his friend.

Just as the lock clicks into place, the first slash of pain slices down my body, and drags out, becoming endless.

Moments later, my vision darkens, and I'm pulled under once more.

* * *

A thick blackness surrounds me. It's all I see and feel, like a slick oil coating my skin. I turn around, but everywhere I glance, it's the same.

Complete and utter darkness.

With not even the slightest shade of gray showing, I reach up to my eyes to see if I've closed them. But they're open, leaving me to think that I might have gone blind.

Logically, it's not possible with my ability, so instead of jumping to conclusions, I take a deep breath and try to focus on what I can control.

Taking stock of my body, I realize that I'm no longer lying down but standing up.

Am I dead?

Raising my hands out in front of me, I take a step forward. When I don't fall down some strange black hole, I take another and another until I'm wandering aimlessly through the dark.

The longer I move through the endless black, the more I start to believe that my body has given in and accepted death.

That, or my mind has finally cracked, and I've lost it.

Whirling around, again and again, I see no difference, no change... no light.

Maybe this is hell? Or at least my version of one.

A place where I'm completely alone with no one around me. No warmth or love or even light.

My breath quickens, turning shallow the more that I think about this being my afterlife. And if that's true, then it means that even after everything we went through, I'll still never get to see *them*.

To tell them how sorry I am for what I put them through. For causing their deaths. For bringing them nothing but pain.

The thought of never getting to talk to them again brings me to my knees.

Wrapping my arms around my body, I curl into myself, pleading with the gods, or whoever is up there, to let me see them. Even just for one more moment. Just so I know they're okay.

But the thick silence lingers, becoming stagnant.

Starting to feel stupid for even pleading with some elusive gods, I focus on each of the guys and pull them to me. Wrapping their warmth around me, I hold on tight, not wanting to forget any piece of them. Not wanting my memories of them to dull, especially if that's all I have left of them.

The pull grows the more I think of them. I think nothing of it, craving them and their touches... their smells and their warm embraces. The tug continues to grow, and I do nothing to stop it, allowing the thoughts of my mates to fill me up, to make me feel less hollow and alone.

It grows and expands until I'm yanked forward. My body turns to shadows and smoke before tumbling into the light.

Stumbling up, I blink against the intense brightness after being in the dark for what feels like a long time.

It takes me a minute to adjust to my new surroundings, as sounds slowly filter in around me. I squeeze my eyes shut and slowly open them. A room comes into view.

One with a large white sofa with plenty of space around it, making it feel airy and spacious. Wide-open windows line the wall, overlooking the heart of a city.

Muffles sounds grow louder behind me, pulling me from my inspection.

The sounds grow louder the longer I listen to them. It takes a minute to recognize their voices.

The next voice that speaks is louder and clearer, making my heart stutter and stop.

I'm afraid to turn around and find out it's not them. That this is a cruel prank or trick of some kind.

“So far, he hasn't told us anything useful.”

Axel.

“They're being attacked by old demons as well. I'd say that's useful knowledge.”

Rion.

I slowly turn, my eyes widening with what I see, with who I see.

It's them. The guys. All of them.

Axel leans against the counter, looking pissed off as usual, bringing a smile to my face. Rion and Kai stand close to him, wearing mirrored expressions of frustration.

"The same one?" Jax asks, pacing back and forth, like he has too much energy he needs to release. And Luka...

Where's Luka?

I look over past Jax to find him leaning against a shadowed wall, staring down at the floor.

Something eases inside me, seeing all of them together.

But they all look... exhausted. Beyond exhausted, they look lost.

I must not be dead after all, because this has to be a dream. A beautiful, hopeless dream sent to torture me some more. Even in my dreams, they're haunted, making me feel guilty for causing it.

I step closer and closer, making my way over to them until I'm only a few feet away. But they can't see me. I'm just as invisible as the shadows, watching on as they talk to one another.

"What about Kiarra?" My heart jumps at hearing my name from Jax's lips.

Axel clenches his jaw. "Draven is still in meetings."

Kai sighs. "We're meeting with him later. We should know more then," he tells him, looking just as annoyed as Axel.

"How's everything there with you two?" Kai asks.

"Good. Quiet," Jax tells him.

"At least there's that. It looks like they need our help with the demons. They're more... volatile than they expected, but we seem to be able to deal with them."

“This isn’t what we came here for,” Axel grits out, his dragon pushing forward, his voice growing deep. “Kiarra needs to be the priority.”

Kai narrows his eyes on him. “She’s always been the priority.”

“Then we should hunt down Draven and get him to tell us what he knows.” Axel seethes.

“He obviously needs our help, and in exchange, we’ll get the information we need,” Kai says, his patience starting to waver.

“He could be lying to us,” Axel tells him.

“That’s a risk we’ll have to take. For now.” Kai gives him a pointed look.

“We should burn them all. Make him tell us.” Jax narrows his eyes, the hard set to his jaw telling me he meant it, too.

“I’m down for some destruction.” Axel nods to Jax.

Kai sighs just as Rion speaks up. “We can’t kill them—”

“Actu—” Jax starts, but one look from Rion stops him.

“I know we have the abilities to take them on, but in the end, it will get us nowhere. Draven knows something. We could use this alliance,” Kai tells them.

Fighting starts up, and they hurl insults at one another. Kai closes his eyes, his head tilted up at the ceiling. Jax and Axel go at it with Rion and Luka... but Luka looks so lost I want to just wrap my arms around him and take away all the pain and torture etched across his face.

My boys. My mates. This isn’t how I wanted to see them. Lost. Broken and arguing among each other. They’re a family. My family. One I so desperately want to reach out to touch.

I want to comfort them, but instead I have to watch on while they suffer.

“Damn it!” I shout out, knowing they can’t hear me.

“Why did you have to come after me?” They could’ve gone back to Manhattan and been safe... alive.

“Why did you have to die?” My heart squeezes inside my chest. A tight grip yanks at it, threatening to pull it right out.

I rub at my chest, wanting it to happen. For someone to rip it out and along with it, the pain it carries.

“Please...” I beg. Even if this is a dream. Some cruel, beautiful dream. I beg someone to help them.

I squeeze my eyes shut, letting the tears run freely down my face.

Moments later, silence surrounds me. It makes me think I’ve gone back to the darkness, but light seeps in from behind my closed eyelids, telling me differently.

Blinking away my tears, I open them to look at the guys.

They’ve stopped fighting. In fact, they’re not even moving, just all looking at Luka. He takes a step out from the shadows, looking straight at me—or at least in my direction—a shocked expression on his beautiful face.

“What did you say?” Kai asks him with as much patience as he has right now.

“She... she’s here,” Luka tells them, swallowing hard.

“How?” Jax asks.

“Where?” Axel glances around.

Kai whips around to Rion. “Is the connection secured?”

“Of course.” Rion frowns, looking at Luka. “Can you see her?” he asks him.

“No... but I can sense her... She’s here. I’m telling you.” Luka stays frozen in his spot, staring right in my direction, while the others look around the room.

“I don’t see or sense anything out of the ordinary,” Kai tells him.

“It’s almost as if...” My heart picks up speed as Luka takes a step closer to me. The guys freeze, following Luka’s every

move.

This isn't real, and they can't see me. This is just another cruel trick my mind is playing on me. They're gone, and nothing I dream or hope or wish will change that.

When Luka is a couple of feet away, he frowns, looking around me as if trying to figure something out.

I desperately want to reach out and touch him. To run my hand through his beautiful white-blonde strands. To trace the small scar above his eye. To drag his lips to mine for a taste. To hold him tight and never let him go.

Just as the thought leaves my mind, something inside me tugs.

Luka's eyes widen, his eyes no longer staring around me, but looking right at my face

“Kiarra.”

He can't... This isn't...

The guys all freeze, their eyes widening as they also look right at me.

“Princess?” Glancing over to Axel, his anger is now replaced by shock and a glint of hope in his wide eyes.

I know this isn't real. I know it, but my naïve, broken heart holds on to whatever this is. Whether a dream or some twisted afterlife full of wishes and hopes.

“Baby?” I glance at Jax, his face is an open expression full of sadness and relief.

“Talk to us. Please.”

I open my mouth to speak but only manage to mumble, “Dream.”

“No. It's—”

A sharp, violent pain shoots through me, making me gasp and bend forward.

“Nooooo!”

They all reach for me, but I'm yanked backwards. I hear Luka calling out to me just as I'm pulled from the dream and back into the vast blackness.

CHAPTER 7



KAI

SHE WAS HERE. Kiarra was right there. I stare at the spot she stood before being ripped from us once more.

“Did I—” Axel starts.

“No, you didn’t imagine that. It was her. We all saw her,” I tell him.

“How?” Jax asks me, but I have no answers for him, not understanding it myself.

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think she can do it again?” Axel asks.

“Maybe?” I tell him, unsure and not wanting to get his or any of our hopes up. Kiarra looked shocked that we could see her. “It didn’t look like she knew where she was.”

“She thought it was a dream, right?” Luka says, looking at us. “That’s what she said... *Dream.*”

“So, she was able to jump into our link, but thought that she was just dreaming?” Axel asks, still confused as hell about the whole thing.

“Why now?”

We all turn to Luka. Axel is looking at him like he’s got a third head. “What are you talking about? How can you not be happy to see your mate?”

Luka sighs. “Of course I am. I’m just wondering why it’s taken this long for her to reach out to us. We’ve been feeling the bond for a while, up until recently.”

“Yeah, so? What’s your point?” Axel crosses his arms, frowning at him.

“My point is, why now? We’ve been pulling on the connection for days, feeling nothing from her. What’s happened to her that’s pushed her to us now?”

He thinks something bad has happened. That Kiarra must have been in trouble to reach out to us.

Draven better know something.

We were fractured when she was taken the first time, only becoming whole once we found her again. We know she can heal from anything, but there’s always the little doubt in the back of my mind telling me this time might be it. If anything happens to her, none of us will survive it.

“Well, whatever just happened can only mean something good... right? I mean, she might try it again,” Jax says with a hopeful gleam in his eyes.

“Or she might not.” We all turn to look at Rion.

“Way to put a downer on the only breakthrough we’ve had.” Jax narrows his eyes on him.

“She thinks we’re dead. It was the last thing she saw. Us dying right before her eyes. To her, this probably was all just a dream,” Rion says, giving Jax a pointed look.

I rub my chest, the tight feeling turning suffocating the more I think over Rion’s words.

He’s right. I release a harsh breath, shaking my head.

“That’s why she hasn’t been trying to reach out to us using the connection. She thinks we’re dead,” I tell them.

Why didn’t I think of this before? I just assumed she’d feel the bond and know we were out there looking for her.

Instead, she’s been mourning our deaths all while trapped with King.

“Fuck.” Axel spins, slamming his fist onto the marble table behind him. It shatters in half before mending itself back together.

“This is going to make things a lot harder,” I tell them.

“A shitload harder.” Axel sighs, shakes his head.

“But she still might try to reach us again.” Jax looks at me with a hopeful glint in his eyes, waiting for a reply.

I couldn't tell them this was going to be easy or that it was all going to work out the way we wanted. But I wouldn't let them lose hope either. I had to make sure that if it went our way, someone would be here for her.

“We have to be open to the possibility that she may try. Even if she thinks it's a dream, she might still try to reach out again.”

I look at Rion. “Keep the link open. We'll check in regularly, just in case.”

Rion nods.

I turn to the others. “We'll let you know if Draven has anything. If not, we'll see if we can use this to our advantage.”

We leave the link with a little more hope than we had before.

* * *

AXEL AND RION walk on each side of me as we make our way along the hall to the room where Draven is having his so-called meetings. The excuse we've been given since we arrived a few hours ago.

But we weren't waiting any longer. Every hour wasted was another hour Kiarra could be suffering.

Two of Draven's guards block the door to the room. My shifter senses pick up Draven's voice inside. Once we have confirmation that he's in there, we move toward them.

“You can move out of our way, or we can make you. Either way, we're going in there,” I warn them, not playing the diplomatic leader anymore. My patience has reached its limits.

The guard narrows his eyes on me. “I’m afraid we can’t allow that. Draven will see you when he’s ready.”

Is that so?

Before the guard spews out another word, I move, slamming him into the wall. The other guard comes up behind me. I grab him by his throat and throw him through the door, giving us an opening and one hell of an entrance.

Axel laughs, stepping over him as we walk into the room where Draven sits among a room full of supes. “Guess we’re not playing it safe anymore.”

No, we’re not.

The demons get up to fight when I call one of my hounds forward, slightly shifting so he’s revealed through my eyes. I know each of the demons, witches and warlocks sense his presence when they sit the fuck back down, growing quiet.

“So, it is true.”

Draven gives the warlock who spoke a nod, confirming whatever question he asked. I ignore them both, focusing on what we came here for.

“You said you had information about our mate. Tell us now or we’re leaving.”

Draven sighs, signaling to the room. “Leave us. All of you”

“But, sir?” One of Draven’s guards questions his order, but with one look from Draven, the guard bows and leaves with the rest of them.

“Forgive me. We’ve been overwhelmed with the non-stop attacks on the Island,” Draven says before standing.

“The old demons?” Rion asks him.

“Yes, it’s one of the reasons I’ve asked you here—”

“Tell us how you can help us find our mate first. Then we can move onto what you need from us.”

“There’s something I need to know first.” Draven leans against the table in an attempt to seem at ease, but I know better.

Demons know how to reel you in and keep you distracted while they get what they want. Dangling something in front of you, all while pulling the rug from beneath you.

But I’d play along... for now.

“Go on.” Crossing my arms, I give him a look that says not to waste my time.

Draven nods. “You have Jazmyn, yes?”

My eyes narrow on the demon lord. “We’re not trading her for Kiarra.” She’d have my balls if she knew I handed her over to him.

“I wasn’t suggesting it.”

Rion shares a look with me. He’s picking up on something Draven isn’t saying, but I continue to play along to see where he’s going with this.

“Then what would you need her for?”

Draven moves around the table with ease, trying to make it look like he’s the one in control here.

“I take it you know little about my family tree, or demons in general?”

Axel scoffs. “We know enough, but demons don’t like to share and prefer to keep to themselves.”

Draven tilts his head in an appeasing manner. “I meant no harm.”

“What’s Jazmyn got to do with your family?” I push.

We haven’t gotten any closer to finding out what he knows about Kiarra. It grates on my patience, and my hound tries to push forward.

“I’d advise you to tell us exactly what it is you know now. Before I let my hound out, otherwise those demons will be the last of your worries.”

“Kane is my brother.” My hound pulls back slightly, not expecting that answer. I glance at Rion, and I can tell this is also new knowledge to him. But what does any of this have to do with Kiarra?

Axel voices my thought. “That’s great and all, but what does any of this have to do with our mate?”

“Your mate is with King, yes? And my brother works for him.”

“If that son of a bitch has anything to do—” Axel moves forward.

Draven raises his hands, his eyes widening as my alpha power seeps into the room.

“No. No. That’s not...” He shakes his head. “Kane doesn’t work for him, not really.”

“Why should we trust him or *you*? Especially if he has been around that psycho.” Axel narrows his eyes on him.

Draven sighs, moving around the table to sit back down. “Kane despises King. If he knew he had your mate trapped, he would have already gotten her out. It’s his... flaw—always trying to save those in need.”

Rion’s focus is on Draven and his expression. I remind myself to ask him about it later.

Draven leans back in his chair. “What matters is, I might be able to find your mate through Kane.”

“How?” I ask, a ripple of excitement rushing through me.

“Demons who share the same kin can... connect with one another.”

“Then what would you need Jazmyn for?” I ask, needing the specifics.

I know demon and witch relations aren’t at an all-time high, especially for those who wanted a future together. I wasn’t about to send Jazmyn to her death.

“I’ll need her help. Kane and I... We’ve been estranged, which has made the connection between us weaker. She’ll act

as a link to help forge a better one.”

“How would... unless...” Rion smirks. “She’s your mate.”

Draven clenches his jaw. “That’s none of your business.”

“No, but Jazmyn is Kiarra’s friend, which means she’s under our protection. If anything happens to her, it will be you we’ll be coming for.” I push a bit more of my alpha power into the room, backing my statement.

Draven clenches his jaw, glancing down and unwillingly submitting to my demand.

“I would never...” Draven clears his throat. Straightening his tie, he squints and glances up at me. I pull back my alpha power, and he relaxes his stiff position.

“You have my word. No harm will come to her.”

It’s enough for me to move on to the topic of how we’d find Kiarra. “So, in theory, if Kane is with King, then he should lead us to Kiarra’s location?” I ask.

“Yes. If King is focusing all his efforts on blocking Kiarra from you, we shouldn’t have the same issue when finding Kane.”

Meaning Kane might not have any concealment spells on him keeping his location hidden from us.

It’s the best lead we’ve gotten in a while. I look at the guys. Both wear a similar expression: hope.

“What do you want from us in return for your help?” Rion asks, making sure we know what the payment is.

Not that it would matter. We’d give up everything to get her back or destroy it all in our search.

Draven sighs, his expression telling us he’d rather keep whatever information he was about to share to himself.

“There’s a reason supes that lean towards the darkness choose to settle on Staten Island. There’s dark power here that needs to be watched. Sometimes demons from the deeper levels get through, and we make sure to get to them before they move on and cause havoc on this plane. But something

far darker has been awoken, and with it, demons from its depths. A few have shown up here and already caused a lot of damage.”

I share a look with the others. “Our brothers have already met one of these... demons.”

Draven sighs, nodding. “I thought as much. But I had hoped we would have more time to contain it here first.”

“Why do you think we can help? Surely an island full of demons and warlocks can take on a few creatures. Luka and Jax dealt with it easily enough,” Axel says, probably wondering if Draven has an ulterior motive.

“You and your mate are not like the rest of us,” he declares, as if it’s a statement we all should know.

Axel narrows his eyes on him. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“You’ve become stronger since you’ve bonded, no?” Draven looks from Axel to Rion, and then his gaze lands on me. He raises a brow. “You were powerful before, but now...” He shakes his head. “Now, you might as well be unstoppable. We can fight them, but with your help, we can send them back and close whatever portal they’ve come from.”

There’s something he’s not telling us, but it’s a problem we’ll deal with later. Right now, I want Kiarra in my arms and home with my family.

I share a look with Axel and Rion before turning to Draven. “Fine, you help us find our mate, and we’ll help you with the demon problem.”

Draven nods, releasing a harsh breath. He’s more worried about the old demons than he’s letting on.

“When can you start searching for our mate?” It needs to be his priority if he wants our help.

“As soon as you get Jazmyn here.”

“Consider it done, but remember your vow.” We’ll contact the guys and should be able to have her here within the hour.

“You have my word. She will not be harmed and can leave once we find Kane.”

Draven gets up to leave. “I’ve arranged private rooms for you. They should be ready if you’d like to make your own arrangements.”

I turn to the guys and head out.

“Do you think he’ll follow through?” Axel asks.

“Yes. I think he’ll have no reason to go back on his words, but I do feel he’s keeping something from us,” Rion says.

“You picked up on that too?” I didn’t miss the way he acted when he mentioned us bonding to Kiarra and how he already knew about our stronger abilities.

Rion nods, “He knows something about our bond with Kiarra, but he doesn’t trust us.”

“Goes both ways. I don’t trust anyone here.” Axel seethes, staring at a warlock, who stares back with a look of disgust on his face.

“It could be something important. We should press him on it. *Make* him tell us,” Axel says.

“*After* we get Kiarra back. Once she’s back with us, we can figure the rest out,” I tell them both.

Axel and Rion nod in agreement.

Once we’re inside the apartment, we check around for any concealed spells or traps. Finding everything clear, we get settled and reach into the link to contact Luka and Jax.

The small thread of hope grows. It feels like it could work this time.

Just hold on a little longer, Kiarra. We’re coming...

CHAPTER 8



LUKA

IT WAS HER; it was Kiarra. It had to be. No one else makes me feel the way she does. No one else has the power to make me feel *whole*.

My broken soul leans into the darkness. It's why I can see and sense more of the darker, hidden things in this world. And probably one of the reasons I was able to sense Kiarra first.

The part of me that's shrouded in the dark is only ever silent when she's around. The constant inner struggle and battle slows down and stops.

I've known she was our mate since we were kids. Since she showed up out of nowhere and quickly became a main part of our little group of misfits. We were a group of lost boys, some with fucked up families, but none of that mattered the minute she came along. She made us complete. A true family. One to fight and live for.

When we reunited with her in the Cardinal Three, the side of me that was always fighting with itself went quiet, sensing what she was to us even before we knew who she was or what she meant to us.

Hope. Love. A second chance.

Not just for me, but for all of us. We all have dark pasts that we'd like to forget, but she isn't just an escape. With one look, she became everything and more.

I move down the hall to the en suite that sits between Jax's and my rooms. He says he prefers it that way to keep us close.

But I know his real reason is to watch me. To listen out for my nightmares. The kind that feels so real, so raw, that I'm taken right back to the slice of the blade and slash of the whip as it burns its way down my back.

Shaking off my fucked-up memories, I turn on the cold water and splash it on my face, trying to tamper down the rising panic.

Glancing in the mirror, I see him just under my skin and behind my eyes. He's watching... waiting for the moment to escape. To wreak havoc on the world that has done nothing but cause him pain.

But I can't allow him to hurt the people I care about.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I push him back, just like I do every time he gets too close to the surface when my thoughts turn dark.

I take deep, long breaths, focusing on the present. On the room around me and the feel of the hard, cold marble sink beneath my palms.

There is no danger here. We're safe, and Kiarra will be back with us soon.

Opening my eyes, my tense shoulders relax seeing him gone. At least for now.

Stripping off my shirt, I throw it to the floor, turning to head into the shower, when I pause.

Are they still as ugly as I remember?

Slowly turning my head, I look over my shoulder at the mirror that now has my bare back on full display. A back that's mangled in scars from one end to the other and moves around to my hips.

I release a harsh breath, my hands shaking.

It's even worse than I remember.

Will Kiarra hate it as much as I do? Will it disgust her?

Whatever happened to us when we bonded didn't fix my messed up back or any previous scars we had. It seems we're

left the way we are but any future injuries heal completely, leaving no scar or trace behind.

Stripping out of the rest of my clothes, I get in the shower, turning the warm water on and letting it run down my face.

I picture Kiarra back with us. Safe. Happy. I think back to the last time we saw her. Just before everything went to hell.

Rubbing my chest, I feel the bond. It's weak. The weakest it's been since she was taken, but it's still there, beating along and in tune with my heart.

I focus on her smile, on the way she's able to light up the whole room just from her presence alone, how she always thinks of everyone else but herself.

Something that will have to change when we get her back.

She deserves the world, and I intend to give it to her. To show her exactly what she means to me.

An image of her stripped bare and spread out beneath me knocks the breath from me. Her eyes glazed over with need as she looks up at me.

I let my hand run down my chest, imagining it's her soft touch. Imagining her lips running down the length of my chest and stomach.

My cock tightens, almost painfully. The image of her kneeling in front of me drives me crazy.

I wrap my hand around my hardening cock and squeeze it gently, every slight touch so much more sensitive.

A drop of pre-cum leaks out the tip and I run it down my length. Her lips part as she watches me, her eyes begging to taste.

Threading my fingers through her hair, I nudge her head closer, her wicked smile almost my undoing.

My breath speeds up as I start to stroke up and down it, imagining it's her plump lips and tongue running along it. The curve of her mouth when she realizes how much power she

has over me. The hunger in her eyes as she widens her lips and takes me deep into her mouth.

My breath comes out in short, rapid pants as she pulls back and twirls her tongue around the tip, teasing me and bringing me close to the brink before pulling back.

Using the shower wall as leverage, I watch as she explores the length of my cock with her tongue. I slow down, savoring each moment, pumping my hand around my length as it begs for release.

Damn.

Kiarra leans back, taking me with her. Arching up, I revel in her beauty, in each and every one of her curves.

Smiling up at me with those innocent eyes, she slides a hand down her body, moaning into my cock; the vibration dragging a moan from my lips.

Keeping eye contact with me, she caresses her nipples before sliding lower. Those lustful eyes just for me.

She spreads her legs wide, opening up for me and showing me how slick she is for me.

My heart picks up speed, beating like a drum in my chest as she slips a finger in.

One pump and I can't take it anymore. I need to touch her. To feel her hot skin against mine as I sink into her.

Yanking her up, I pull her close so I can run my lips along her neck and down her chest. Showering her with kisses before I pin her to the wall, teasing her just as much as she has me.

So fucking close.

Chills spread across my body as my hand speeds up.

And just when she's begging for me to ease the ache inside her, I'd thrust into her, swallowing every cry, every delicious moan before speeding up, pumping my cock into her slick heat. She'd shatter around me, arching into my body, her own orgasm sending me close to the edge.

My cock twitches and throbs in my hand, then it pulses. I thrust as the pressure builds and hits its peak. My whole body tenses as I come into my hand, the pleasure sweeping in waves across my whole body. I grunt, leaning forward to catch my breath.

Fuck.

Smiling to myself, I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. A calm, relaxed feeling settles over me as I continue to see Kiarra, happy and smiling.

Her warmth and love wrap around me, keeping me company.

Turning up the shower, I clean myself off. Reaching over my back, I stop, a dark thought slipping in and shattering the warmth inside me.

What if she hates my scars?

What if it disgusts her?

I have to accept that she might not want to touch me. That my own scars—whether they disgust her or not—might remind her of her own pain.

The water turns colder the longer I stay there, my thoughts turning darker each minute that passes.

My happy vision of her fades, leaving behind one with her face full of horror and disgust. Knowing that it could be her reaction to seeing my scars breaks something inside me.

My body fills with excess energy that has nowhere to go. I glance down at my clenched fists and slam them into the shower wall. The wall cracks on the first punch, the tiles and plaster completely crumbling and falling to the floor, but I don't care.

I drop to the floor, sitting in the destruction I made, water spilling in every direction. I stay in there a few more minutes, soaking up the misery and pain before donning my mask and getting out.

Glancing back at the mess I made, I cringe. I'll have to get it fixed before Jax finds it. Grabbing my phone, I send a text to

one of our maintenance guys to have it fixed as soon as possible.

I quickly grab some clothes and throw them on, pausing when my shifter hearing picks up loud voices arguing. Familiar loud voices.

Moving quickly, I head to where Jax and Jazmyn are shouting at one another.

Turning the corner, I find Jax wearing a smile that's anything but pleasant. His wolf is sitting close to the edge, riding him hard.

"We wouldn't ask this of you if it wasn't important," Jax grits out, his patience wearing thin. He must have been trying to convince her for a while.

"Unless you tell me something more than the shit you already fed me, I'm not doing shit for you." Jazmyn crosses her arms, staring Jax down like he's the dirt beneath her shoe.

"It's for Kiarra," I tell her, coming into view.

She sees me, her pissed off expression turning into a frown. I wonder what it's for until I realize that she's a damn empathic witch.

Giving her a look not to push it, I continue. "It's the closest thing we've had to a solid lead. Draven can't find the connection through Kane without you."

Jazmyn drops some of the tough act, swallowing hard. Jax notices the quick shift in her attitude and gives me a look.

"If you're worried about Draven, we have his word that no harm will come to you."

Jazmyn rolls her eyes, looking at us as if we're both idiots. "I'm not worried about that insufferable dick." She releases a harsh breath.

"Truth is, I haven't heard anything from Kane in a few days. It's not something that I'd normally worry about." She shakes her head. "He goes off for days at a time, but something about this feels different."

I share a look with Jax, both of us now fucking worried. If Kane isn't with King, this plan is fucked.

"What's he doing with King?" I push her, trying to find out if she'll give us any more than what she's told us so far.

Kane was supposedly only doing what he had to in order to find something. Something important.

But she picks up my digging immediately, giving us both a sharp look. "That's not my story to tell."

Which leaves us back where we started. How are we supposed to move forward without knowing whether Kane can be trusted? He could be working alongside King this whole time, and Jazmyn wouldn't be the wiser.

She narrows her eyes at me. "Just know that you can trust him."

Damn empathic witch.

Jax scoffs, mirroring my distrust. "We trust no one but our family."

"I get that. Understand it more than you know, but you *can* trust Kane. You, of all people, should know not to judge someone just because of what they are." Jazmyn gives us both a look like she had expected better of us, but she really hasn't got a damn clue if that's the assumption she's come to.

"Our lack of trust it not because he's a demon, it's because he stood by and watched on as King tortured Kiarra. His damn species has nothing to do with it, and if you knew anything about us, then you'd know we don't give a damn about *what* you are, but rather what you do with it," I tell her meaning every word.

Our family came together broken and forged a bond like no other. We were all outsiders, all seen as something to be feared and killed, but when people judge you based on the fears of others, they never see the real you, only their perception of it. We would never judge those who have no control over what they are or born into.

Jazmyn slumps, leaning into the wall behind her for support, a look of complete devastation crossing her face, one you couldn't fake even with her tough-as-nails attitude.

“Neither of us knew. Not to the extent...” She shakes her head. “Kane always looked out for her, but he didn't know. He would've intervened.”

“I'm sure he would have.” Jax scoffs, not believing a word.

But Jazmyn wasn't the only one to blame. We are also to blame. We thought she left us, never thinking that King would have killed Reyna and taken her away.

“What about you?” she asks, turning defensive. “Don't blame me when none of her *so-called friends* were there for her either.”

Damn. She knows just where to hit us to make it bleed the most. But she's right.

Jax steps forward, no longer caring what she means to Kiarra, his pain too vivid right now. I yank him back, giving him a look to tell him to get a hold of himself. This isn't something we need to get into right now. We are going around in circles, and it isn't helping us get any closer to getting Kiarra back.

“Look, we just need your help. You're welcome to stay here as long as you want afterward. We just want Kiarra back. We *need* her back.” I put as much emotion behind my words as I can, knowing she'll sense the truth and desperation behind them.

Jazmyn frowns, focusing right on me before doing the same to Jax. I know she's searching us both for any deception we might try to keep from her, but she won't find any. We'll do whatever it takes to get Kiarra back, but we wouldn't send her friend to her death to do it. I give Jax a side eye. At least, not all of us would.

Jazmyn loses the frown before returning to her tough act with more attitude than before. “It's for Kiarra, right? And he'll be able to see if Kane is okay?”

“In a roundabout way, yes,” I tell her.

“Then I’ll do it for them, *not* you.” She narrows her eyes on us both, daring us to push her on this, but since she was agreeing to help, I didn’t care about the why.

“Fair enough,” I tell her.

She turns and walks away, hopefully towards her room to pack.

I turn to Jax just as he speaks. “That went well.”

I release a harsh breath, the morning already feeling like it was dragging out longer than it should.

“As well as can be expected.”

“Think this will work?” Jax asks, a glint of hope in his eyes.

“It better,” I tell him.

I need Kiarra back with us more than I need to fucking breathe. If we didn’t get her back soon, the old demons wouldn’t be the only thing the guys would have to worry about.

They’d have a crazed shadow wolf on the warpath too.

CHAPTER 9



KIARRA

LUKA'S wide eyes as he reaches out to grab me follow me through the dark. The harsh lights above me blink on, making me wince. My eyes burn from the brightness, scratched raw from what feels like hours of crying.

It was just a dream. A beautiful, cruel dream. One that shatters my heart all over again.

Now that I'm lying here awake, with reality crashing around me, all I want is to go back to them.

Take me back.

I squeeze my eyes shut, begging my mind to let me succumb to the dark once more. To see each of their faces again.

I'd take them in whatever form I could have them, whether it was just a dream or something my mind conjured up. I don't care.

I needed to see them, to hold them, to hear each of their voices.

My body is fully healed, but my heart hurts, and I don't know what to do to make it stop.

I don't want to let any of them go. To move on from them.

They're home—*my* home—but by the time I realized that, it was already too late. And now they're gone, and I don't know what to do or where to go. I don't know who I'm supposed to be.

They told me before that I was strong for what I had lived through, but they were wrong. I'm not strong. I'm weak. And now without them, I'm lost along with it.

I just want to close my eyes and sleep. I want to be numb to the pain inside me. I want to—

“Hey! Hey!” the voice from the room beside me shouts, shaking me from my downward spiral.

I didn't have the energy to answer him, so I stay quiet.

“I can hear you crying, so I know you're not dead.”

Crying? I try to lift a hand up to check, forgetting I'm still strapped in. Squeezing my eyes tight, I feel the wetness run down the sides of my face.

How did I not know I was crying?

He sighs. “Are you... okay?”

No... but I wasn't going to tell him that.

“Stupid question...” he mumbles, more to himself than me.

But his question surprises me either way. Why would he care? I'm nothing to him. Just another prisoner here.

He sighs again, heavier this time. “I just listened to you get electrocuted, could smell your skin burn from in here... So I...”

I hear him move about before speaking again. “How are you still alive?”

Again, I stay silent and start to wonder what his ulterior motive is.

“Look, you helped me when you... made me stop. I just wanted to see if you were okay.”

Made him stop? I still didn't understand how that worked or if he just made it all up in his head. Maybe he's been here too long to tell the difference.

Maybe I should stop overthinking everything.

“I'm... I can heal.”

I wait for the onslaught of questions about how and why, but instead he sighs, sounding relieved.

“Good. You’ll need it here.”

I’m taken aback by his relieved tone but focus more on what he just said.

“Where is here?” I haven’t a clue where we are. Am I still in the Cardinal Three or somewhere else?

“I don’t know, and I’m not just saying that. I haven’t seen the outside of these walls since I arrived here, and even then, I wasn’t exactly... lucid.”

He wasn’t lucid? Maybe he was unconscious like me, but there was something about his tone that suggested there was more to it.

“How long have you been here?” I ask him.

He takes a moment to answer.

“Too long... Years.” His tone is sad, making something in my chest tighten.

“Years?” Maybe I misheard him.

“Yes.”

Hearing his confirmation makes me sick to my stomach.

Years. He’s been here years... Trapped and alone down here. And for what? Is he also *unique* and *special* and something King wants to keep for himself?

My stomach turns and twists. I can’t imagine being completely alone here for years. But that’s what my future is starting to look like.

Can I live with that? Can I let them torture me over and over until my time is up in this world?

“*How* did you make me stop?” the guy asks, distracting me from my thoughts. It takes me a second to realize what he asked.

“I didn’t—”

“You did.” He cuts me off. He fully believes that I made him stop somehow.

Could he be right? It just doesn't make sense. I've never had any abilities that allow me to control people and thinking that it might somehow evolve from my ability didn't fit either. I heal, that's it.

“Can you do it again?” he asks.

I don't know if it is a possibility, but if it is, it is a farfetched one.

“I... don't know. But why would you want me to?”

Why would anyone want to be controlled? I sure as hell didn't. Not after King controlled the last six years of my life while making sure I knew it too.

My question is met by silence, making me think he's done with talking. But after a couple of minutes, he continues.

“King... he... experimented on me when I first arrived. My demon, he doesn't... *listen* to me anymore.”

His words hit me like a ton of bricks. This guy wasn't just his prisoner, he was King's test subject.

“Sometimes the guards like to provoke me, to bring him out. If you can stop him like that again... Can you try?”

Why would he ask me to stop his demon? If the guards are as bad as he says they are, wouldn't it be better for his demon to shift and protect him?

“Why?”

He sighs. “My demon side doesn't see reason. Whatever King did makes him see only rage. Rage because he's in pain. He's lost and doesn't realize who or what is hurting him... He doesn't know how to react to normal situations anymore. He just sees everyone as a threat.”

Hearing the vulnerability in his voice stops me from telling him no. But I can't get his hopes up and tell him yes either, especially when I don't know if it is a possibility.

“I'll try,” I tell him.

He clears his throat. “Thanks... I’m Malik, by the way.”

“Kiarra.”

I lose myself inside my head, thinking over everything Malik told me.

He was experimented on for *years*, all while never stepping foot outside these walls.

And it’s something that will become my life too if I stay here.

Something in my stomach twists and burns like acid. It travels up my chest and stays there. I fist my hands, feeling the strength from my building rage grow.

Enough is enough.

King has taken so much from me. *Too* much. He took my mother from me when I was just a child. He played games with my mind and heart, using *Morana* to do it. Then killed her too.

He took my mates from me, and he just walks away like it’s nothing.

Why does he get to get away with it? Why does he get to take everyone I love from me?

Why does he get to take years of my life from me? He’s taking *everything* from me and still wants more. Still wants me to be a tool in the games he plays.

But I’m not a tool, and I won’t be used anymore.

King may have taken the last six years of my life. But he won’t getting any more from me. It is time I take it back. Take my life back and fight. Fight against him instead of running away like I’ve always tried to do.

It’s time for King to pay for everything he’s done. It’s time he learns what happens when the thing you’ve tried to break becomes the enemy you never expected.

I’m lost in my thoughts and building rage when a shout and low moan makes me jump.

The shouts grow louder.

Guards. They're in the room next to me.

A low moan grumbles just as something slams into the wall.

Malik.

A punch. A crash.

My stomach drops, and I wince at the sound, knowing exactly what type of pain comes from each one. I pull at my straps, another useless attempt to free myself to help, but neither moves an inch.

“Stop hurting him,” I shout, hoping they'll hear me. But they just chuckle and continue.

“Stop!” I shout louder, my voice cracking. But they continue to ignore me.

They're using him like a toy for their own amusement to pass the time. Something inside my chest tightens and burns.

I pull at the metal straps, and the sharp slice burns against my wrists, scraping it raw.

Malik roars out in pain, followed by the guards' laughter. A loud slam and thump sounds out just as muffled groans follow it.

I squeeze my eyes shut and imagine all the things I would do if I could help him.

A sliver of strange energy sparks from inside me. A type of energy I've never felt before.

It makes me pause, trying to figure out where it's coming from. A low hum answers as if awaiting my call.

I focus on it, trying to figure out what it is. It moves up more, expanding over me. It almost feels... cold... dark... but also powerful.

Malik cries out again. The pain in his voice breaks something inside me and makes the energy build.

I reach down further, digging deep within me for every shred of that energy. I grip onto it and pull.

I pull and pull until something inside me tears and rips. A gasp is torn from my lips just as something inside me cracks open.

The guards' continuous laugh making my blood boil. I grit my teeth and yank the energy up further, feeling it surge up and grow.

I can feel it now, like it's always been there, just waiting for me to take it.

Power.

Pure, absolute power. It pulses inside me, begging to be set free. An endless well, so deep and vast, I can't see where it begins or ends.

I yank harder, dragging it up with everything I have. I pull it from the very depths of my soul and demand it to rise and break free.

The energy inside me expands outward across my body, turning into an endless wave that pulses back and forth.

I pull on the straps as the energy builds and builds. It becomes painful, needing its release. I let the pain fuel my anger, my wrath.

The power continues to grow higher and higher, consuming me whole.

Dark black shadows begin to seep from every pore on my body, no longer able to contain the power inside.

Slithering and gliding across my skin, it moves out around me, growing longer and wider.

A moment passes before it rushes out in waves. The shadows consume everything around me, plunging the room into darkness.

Everything around me turns quiet. The only sound is my breath as it comes out in sharp, shallow pants.

The eerie silence grows, the darkness following it.

“What the hell happened to the lights?” I hear from Malik’s room just as something brushes up against my mind, sensing someone or something else in the room.

I’m about to call out to it when a deep whisper comes from the dark.

“Kiaaarrrrraaaa.”

“What the hell?” I glance around, but there’s not even a shard of light to be found.

“Releasse meee,” a voice calls out.

“What do you want?” I ask it, still trying to find its source.

“Freeee.” Its deep voice sends an icy shiver down the tops of my arms.

Did I... call this thing when I released some of that strange power inside me?

“Freeee,” it repeats again, just as something pulses along with it in the dark. Something I couldn’t see but feel in the air around me as it brushes up against my skin and along my senses.

Maybe I did release whatever this thing is, but maybe it can also help me get out of here.

I’m about to ask it when a loud crash sounds out from the room beside me.

Malik.

The darkness retreats and along with it, its hidden presence. I feel its energy as it pulls away and disappears.

Another crash and grunt sounds out. A loud crash follows the cracking sound of metal bending.

Seconds pass before loud thumps follow destruction as something heavy makes its way closer to my room. A low growl rumbles in front of me just as the lights blink on, and I get a view of the thing now standing inside my room.

A demon. A large pissed off one, by the looks of it.

CHAPTER 10



RION

HIDDEN between the shadows along the small alleyway, I keep my eyes open for anything unusual. My senses are picking up a strange vibration across the whole island, but there's something different about the one beneath the club across from me.

It's a popular club, by the length of the queue trailing around the side of it.

The Night Tavern has brought every kind of demon, witch, and warlock out to play.

My eyes trail along the group of witches huddled together, the warlocks eyeing them and the demons in their packs. Apart from the odd lustful eyes, each group gives the other a wide berth, keeping their distance.

Shifting slightly so it's just my eyes that change, I focus on the people mulling about, waiting to get in.

Each supe's intentions are as clear as day as I search among them for anything suspicious or out of the ordinary.

My ability senses the energy each supe and human emits, similar to a vibration. A lot of people assume my intelligence comes naturally, and to some extent, it does. But apart from my taught skills and lessons beaten into me by my cold-hearted parents during their many private lessons, my basilisk abilities are what give me the upper hand.

Logic and my extra senses are what forms the patterns and, in turn, helps me find the answers and come to conclusions

quickly.

Over the years, I've learned to understand what the different types of energy are.

I see far more than lust among the separate groups. There's excitement, admiration, anxiety, amusement, and, surprisingly, adoration.

It seems not everyone is playing along with Draven's rules of segregation. Something that might work in my favor, should I need it.

A slight shift of energy runs through my body, setting my nerves alight.

There it is again. But what is it?

Since I've bonded to my mate, my ability has grown, extending to not only people and supes but also objects and the ground beneath me. Something I'm still working on to master.

Frowning at the ground as if it can tell me the answer, I try to focus on the vibrations beneath it, but come up empty. I'm unable to compare it to anything I've come across before.

We arrived on Staten Island a few hours ago, and my senses have been alight since I stepped foot on it. The whole island emits a strange vibration, but in the last hour, a newer type of energy has pulled me in this very direction.

Kai and Axel headed off on their own, to see if they could find out any more information about Draven and the island.

The attacks would have to be bad for the demon leader to have asked for help, but so far nothing has shown up, and the supes who live here have shown no sign of their world being affected.

Something that makes us question Draven's intentions or if this is some sort of trap.

The vibration hits me again, harder this time, just as shouts and screams start inside the club.

Using the shadows to keep myself hidden, I stealthily make my way toward the club, slipping past the scurrying

supes as most head in the opposite direction of the raucous.

Only a handful stay to see what the fuss is about.

The security doesn't notice me as I slip past them, my enhanced stealth and agility allowing me to go undetected.

Lights bounce around the club, and music booms from every corner, adding to the loud screams as people run in every direction.

Suddenly, the music cuts off.

My senses pick up on an oncoming threat. I twist out of the way and watch as a large speaker flies past me. My eyes narrow in the direction of where it came from but widen when I see the source.

So, this is an *old* demon.

Standing at least twenty feet tall, the dark demon looked like it was made from black obsidian. Every part of its face and body is sharp, with spikes running all over it. From its face, nose, and jaw to its claws and long tail. Two large horns curved from its ears with another smaller two on top of its head. Cracks run along its hard rock-like body like veins, revealing a substance similar to lava. It pulses as if an entity itself and melts anything that touches it.

Its eyes glow green as it scans the supes around it. A deep growl sounds out, emitting a vibration of its own and sending out a wave of energy to those close to it.

The warlocks, witches, and demons near it fall to the floor, choking and spewing up a black substance.

Focusing on the demon, I can't sense anything other than malicious intent from it.

Moving closer, I feel my basilisk push forward, wanting out. Without ever fighting this creature, I know we can win. Another one of the upgrades I received after bonding. I can simply look at an opponent or challenger and know instantly whether it is stronger than us.

A demon runs into me, trying to escape the scene in front of us. He turns, a snarl on his face, but freezes when he sees

me.

“A-apologies.” He scurries away without a backward glance.

I shake my head, glancing around at the chaos. People are disorientated, most are running in every direction, exacerbating the situation, while a handful attempt to put up a fight against the demon.

I spot a witch and her group standing far enough back from the demon that its growl doesn't seem to harm her. Her energy is different from the rest—a leader of her coven, by the looks of it.

She eyes the demon, looking for its weaknesses. It turns, giving its back to her, and she sees her opening and throws a spell at it.

But it might as well have been a puff of smoke, as it barely touches the demon.

It twists around and heads straight for her and her group. Her eyes widen as she backs away, hoping to escape, but the demon sees this and slams its fist down onto the floor. A stream of lava flies out of its clawed hand, drawing a line of flames in front of her and blocking her exit.

I move quickly through the last of the supes, rushing to the other side of the demon.

I look around for something to throw at it to try to move its focus away from the witch and her group long enough for them to escape.

But as if it senses me, it turns around and stares right at me. I move closer and partially shift. It pauses, tilting its head.

The demon growls low and deep, but whatever effect it had on the others, it doesn't work on me, which pisses it off.

It bends, breaks off a large chunk of the club stage, and flings it toward me. I see the witch and her group escape just before I sidestep it and shift into my basilisk.

Black scales slide down my body as it expands and grows to make way for my beast. Bones crunch and slide along my

body, growing and shrinking to extend and form my beast.

It takes seconds to transform, and the creature is still in the same spot. It stomps forward, reaching out to grab me, but I slide around it, moving so quick it barely sees me until I'm behind it.

Rearing up to full height, I tower over it, striking it from the side. Lava spills onto the floor, burning a large hole through it.

It doesn't stop its advance, its injury causing it no hindrance. It turns, stalking forward, and growls once more. This time lava surges from its mouth, spraying straight at me. I evade most of it, but a chunk touches my tail, burning it instantly.

The pain subsides quickly, healing almost instantly, but my basilisk is pissed off. We evade the next lava attack before striking the demon again and again, causing it to become off balanced.

The demon starts to fall to the side. I spring forward, wrapping the length of my body around it, squeezing my hold as I do.

Drops of lava burn into my scales the more pressure I use, but I heal quickly and don't let up.

A deafening crunch sounds out, just as the creature explodes from within. Its lava eyes leak down its disfigured broken face.

I quickly release its remains, unwrapping my body from it.

What's left of the creature falls to the ground, becoming a block of broken pieces and cooling lava. The soothing air works alongside my new healing ability to quicken the process up.

Shifting back, I turn to leave when I spot them. My mind had been too focused on the imminent threat to seek them out.

Warlock, witches, and demons all stare right at me. They must have stayed to watch.

Their expression and energy ranged from shock and awe to anger and jealousy. I ignore them, making my way out of there. I need to update the others about this.

Just before I leave, a young demon steps up beside me.

“You destroyed it like it was nothing to you. How?”

I stay silent, making my way outside and moving stealthily between the shadows and back to the apartment.

At least we know now that Draven wasn't lying about the attacks, but most of the supes didn't look too bothered. They were frightened, but a lot of them looked like this was a normal occurrence, meaning Draven knows more than he's letting on. And keeping us in the dark isn't helping anyone.

If he wanted our help, he was going to have to tell us everything, and soon. I had a feeling that time was running out for us all.

I needed my siren back with us before it all kicked off. It was only time before whatever was going on with these old demons came to a head.

CHAPTER 11



KIARRA

THE TALL DEMON glares down at me as if waiting for something. But what, I couldn't tell.

A thick, deep-purple horn sits on his head like a mohawk. His skin is a similar shade but much lighter. His muscular build and eyes are black-rimmed tell me he isn't any underling.

No, this is a higher demon, and one you did not want to mess with. Malik never mentioned he was a higher demon, but it had to be him. He said we were the only ones down here.

Maybe I could get through to him before he does something he might regret.

I still can't move, trapped by these damn metal bands. The strange darkness is gone, leaving nothing but confusion and exhaustion behind.

"Malik? Are you in there?" I ask. But he doesn't move an inch or speak.

"Malik. It's Kiarra?" I try again to see if I can break through to him, to remember me, but his dead stare tells me nothing.

He tilts his head, narrowing his eyes on me as if I'm now his newest threat. He takes a step closer, a snarl on his face and glint of violence in his eyes.

My stomach drops just as he reaches out to me.

“MALIK!” I shout. Something inside me expands and settles when I do. It’s like a switch is flipped as I focus on the demon.

“Stop.” My voice doesn’t sound the same. It’s deeper, more controlled, and commanding.

Malik’s demon stops as if frozen to the spot.

My heart races in my chest as adrenaline pumps through me. The energy slithers above the surface, as if also awaiting my command.

I pull it up and the sliver of power grows. But even with this new ability, I am still trapped and don’t know how to use it to escape.

Malik is still in the same spot. The door behind him is bent in half, giving me an idea. Focusing on Malik, I concentrate on the energy running through me and grab hold of it.

“Release me,” I tell him.

Instantly, he takes a step forward, grabbing one strap with both hands and pulls.

Instead of questioning it, I allow hope to spread in my chest just as the metal strap starts to bend.

A deep growl echoes as he pulls harder, the metal a lot thicker than the one on the door. The bar stretches slightly, but just as it’s about to reach its limits and snap, Malik’s demon stops as if shocked.

What the...

He begins to shake like he’s being electrocuted. His whole body convulses in place. His purple eyes roll to the back of his head as he lets go of the straps and drops to the ground, out of my sight.

A couple of moments later, I hear a groan.

“Damn,” a familiar voice says. “What the...” The voice was definitely the same one as my neighbor.

“Malik?”

Malik stumbles up, his eyes widening when he sees me. He's not as tall as his demon side, but still towers over me. His lilac skin is now a golden brown, and dark hair now replaces his purple mohawk horn, while soft brown eyes are in place of his purple ones.

"Kiarra?" He quickly glances behind him before turning back to me and the bands, frowning the more he stares.

"Are you going to help me out or just continue to stare?" I ask him. Confused as to why he's stalling.

Malik glances over his shoulder again. "The guards will have called in back up by now."

It hits me, understanding why he paused. Trying to get me out would stall his getaway.

"You should get out of here then, while you can," I tell him. I'd figure a way out myself.

Malik releases a harsh breath. "Not an option."

I frown, not understanding him. The door behind him was bent open, and he isn't strapped down to anything stopping him from leaving.

"But you're free... aren't you?" I ask him, wondering if King had also tied him to this place like he had me in the hotel.

He shakes his head. "I can't leave... even if I want to. It's better I stay here," he says like he believes every word.

"But—"

Thumps and shouts sound out, getting closer. "Looks like the guards have arrived." Malik rolls his eyes just as they surround us.

"You know the drill." A guard sneers just as Malik places his hands behind his head. It surprises me that he gives in so easily and that he's not even trying to fight back.

The guard making all the demands nods his head to the others. They grab Malik, shoving him against the wall while tying his hands behind his back.

I feel the air charge as energy shifts. Malik growls out in pain.

The ties must have some sort of spell attached to them.

The leader of the group finds amusement in Malik's pain before he turns his attention to me.

"Ah, we haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting, Ms. Valdis." He steps closer.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Malik's body stiffen. His gaze whips to mine. "Valdis? You're King's—"

The guard chuckles, cutting Malik off. He raises a brow, giving Malik a smug look. "Oh, you didn't know? This one belongs to King."

"I belong to no-one," I tell him and Malik.

The guard's cruel grin grows. "We both know that's not true."

Malik snarls, his eyes losing any warmth to them. "Take me back to my fucking cell."

Malik doesn't spare me a second glance as the guards take him back.

It's not long before I hear the machine turn on, and the guards return. The smug guard from before appears in front of me.

Glancing at the strap, he looks over his shoulder. "Make sure you get someone down to fix her straps."

A grunt of a confirmation is all I hear before a pair of boots gets farther away from me.

The smug guard smiles down at me, his smile anything but kind. "It's time you find out where you belong on the food chain in here."

The machine turns on, slicing across my body in sharp jolts. It assaults my body over and over until I can't take it anymore. The guard's chuckle follows me into the darkness.

* * *

A VAST BLACKNESS bleeds out around me, suffocating me with the absence of even the smallest shards of shadows or light. I'm standing but can't see or hear anything around me. It's as if I'm blind. I reach up to feel my eyes to confirm that they are, in fact, open.

Sighing, I drop my hands, feeling stupid. My memories remind me that I was here before. Dreaming of a never-ending, ever consuming pitch-dark.

Why do I keep dreaming of this place?

This time I'm not as panicked, but the fear of being stuck here sits at the back of my mind.

I reach my hands out in front of me and begin to walk. The farther I get, the more I realize that moving is pointless. I end up nowhere fast.

It's dark wherever I look, and no matter where I move or how long, it stays that way.

I plop down on my knees, trying to think of something else I can do. I mean, this is my dream. Technically, I should be able to control it.

Closing my eyes, I focus on being anywhere else but here. Someplace with light. I picture the sun, the way the light reflects off every surface chasing the dark away.

My body begins to feel lighter, as if slowly moving by itself.

“Kiaaarrraaa,” a deep voice growls.

I jump, getting to my feet at the eerily familiar voice that has somehow found its way into my strange dream. Whipping around, I look for the source but still can't see anything beyond the endless dark night.

“Who’s there?” This was a dream. Just some fucked up dream my self-conscious came up with to further mess with me. But then, how did that voice follow me in here?

“Releasse meeee.” Again, it asks me to do something I can’t do for myself.

“Who are you?”

“Freeeee,” it says, like I can just wave a wand and make us both disappear from here.

“If I could get myself out of here, I would.”

Something rubs up against my senses. Like a puff of smoke that slithers, it slides around me, watching and waiting.

The smoke winds around me, pressing in on me, becoming tighter and tighter.

Dread creeps in, overshadowing the fact that this is a dream. The strain around my muscles and chest feels too real to think straight.

The smoke grows, coiling around my whole body now, constricting any air from getting in.

I try to push it away but more replaces it, the invisible binds encasing me whole.

My body turns cold, my body and mind drowning in fear. This can’t be real. It’s just a dream. I repeat it over and over, but nothing changes as the coils grow upward and over my head.

My last thought are the guys and each of their faces. It takes seconds before the dark envelops me whole.

* * *

In the blink of an eye, I’m somewhere else. Somewhere with light.

I release a harsh breath. That last... *dream*... was fucked up. Seems even in my dreams I can't escape death.

I'm now standing in a room, but there's fog everywhere...

No... not fog, shadows.

They float around me like figures made of smoke. I move away from them, not wanting the same thing to happen in my last dream.

As if sensing my apprehension, they move back, clearing the space around me before completely disappearing and giving me a better idea of the room I'm in.

My stomach drops, recognizing the same room from before. The one with *them* in it.

Mumbles of voices grow clearer as I move toward them like a beacon.

I stop just before they come into view. A warmth builds inside my chest as I look at each of them. All still the way I remembered them.

My guys. My mates.

Kai leans against the kitchen counter, his arms crossed as he frowns at something Rion just said.

Although I can make out their voices, their words are mumbled as if I'm hearing the end of an echo.

They can't hear me or see me, either.

This time is different, though. I'm here, but I'm not. It's as if I'm in the world that sits right beside theirs. An invisible film keeping us parted as I watch on.

Rion is wearing his worried look, nodding at Kai's reply.

Axel shakes his head, his angry attitude displayed on every inch of his body. Jax and Luka are standing close to one another. Neither one looking any better than the other.

Why did my dream have to make them look so worried and stressed all the time? Why couldn't they just be happy?

Kai says something that makes Axel whip his head to him. Axel stomps across the room and upends the furniture. Kai looks exhausted as he closes his eyes briefly.

The more I look at them, the more I see how hopeless they all look. The light in each of their eyes is nearly depleted, leaving nothing but emptiness.

Even though it's just a dream, I want to reach out to them and comfort them. To hold them and not let go.

With just the thought, they all freeze. Glancing around, they talk to one another. It's still too muddled to hear. They start searching around, looking for something.

Luka is the only one not moving around. Instead, he's focusing on the spot where I stand.

Moving slowly, he walks toward me, each step making my heartbeat that much faster.

Just before he reaches me, he stops. His hand reaching out but going right through me. Closing his eyes, he brings his hand to his chest.

I mirror him, closing my own eyes and placing my hand on my heart. Imagining the five strands that once used to sit there.

I remember the feeling when we bonded. The lightness and pure joy that filled me up. I wish I could feel it once more.

"Kiarra?" Luka's tentative voice is clear as day.

I open my eyes and find Luka looking right at me, searching my face. But... how?

"Focus on us. On the bond and will yourself to us," Luka says, but I don't understand.

He reaches a hand up as if to touch my face, but lets it hover right in front of it. "You're not fully here yet. Push yourself onto this plane. Please."

Plane?

I glance around the silent room. The guys all stare in my direction.

“Kiarra? Please. Try. Feel the connection right here”—he thumps his chest—“and let it guide you to us.”

“But you’re not real,” I tell him.

Luka gives me a sad look. “We’re here. This isn’t a dream, and we’ll be back together soon; but right now, I need you to focus.”

I shake my head, stepping back just as Luka reaches out to grab me. His hand goes straight through me as a panicked look overtakes his face.

Holding his hands up, I see a tremor work through them, but his focus remains on me.

“Kiarra. Please. *Please*. Just try. Even if you think it’s not real, just try. Please.”

Something in my chest tightens, watching the devastation grow across his face. And even though this is just a dream, I’d give anything to take away that away.

Reaching inward, I imagine the bond once more. Of the different colors and feelings each evokes inside me.

Once I have them together, wrapped around my own strand, I reach out and grab them, pulling them closer to me.

A lightness encases my chest, spreading outward.

I stumble a step as the ground moves beneath me. My hands reach out to catch myself, but instead, someone catches me.

CHAPTER 12



KIARRA

“IS SHE...”

Opening my eyes, I find Luka holding me up, his warm hands seeping through the cold that has laced my body in shock.

How can I feel him? He feels... *real*.

But he can't be. None of this can.

Luka helps me up. His eyes are sad, but with more hope and light than before. I go to pull back, to give myself some space from the storm of overwhelming emotions brewing inside me, but he won't let me. His hold gets tighter.

“You're safe.” He breathes, his grip not letting up, but neither does it hurt.

I shake my head, wanting to pull away, remembering the pain from their deaths all over again, knowing this will hurt too much when I wake up.

Luka inspects every inch of my face while I do the same to him, trying to imprint every detail into my brain so I never forget this beautiful man.

“Kiarra,” he whispers in a plea, begging me with his eyes for something I can't give him anymore.

The rest of the guys slowly move toward me, as if approaching a frightened animal. I want to laugh at their expressions, but no words form on my lips. The shock of how real this feels chokes the words in my throat.

“Baby?” Jax moves beside Luka. He watches me with a wary expression.

“You...” He swallows hard. “You’re here and this is real. It’s not a dream.”

I shake my head, looking from one familiar sad expression to another. Why would my subconscious make up something like this? What would the point be, except to destroy me further?

“This isn’t real....” I choke out. “It can’t be.” Tears begin to run freely down my face as I admit the truth out loud. “You’re... *dead*.”

“Kiarra.” Luka pulls me to him.

I gasp as he envelops me into one of his warm hugs. A sob heaves my chest, making me want to curl into him and never let go. His calming scent full of chaos and night surrounds me in a warm embrace, but it’s all a lie. One I’ll have to wake up from soon.

“We’re not dead. You saved us.” Luka runs a hand up and down my back, and just like before, I feel his power as it spreads throughout my body, chasing away any cold that’s left behind.

Saved them? I shake my head, pulling back from Luka.

“I *killed* you.” Admitting it makes everything around me grow small. My chest turns tight, and I can’t breathe.

I killed them the very minute I let them in. When I should’ve pushed them away and made sure King never got close enough to hurt them.

“No. The bond. Our bond saved us.” Luka pushes, trying to make me believe him. Even in my imagination, he’s still trying to protect me.

“It’s true, baby,” Jax says. I stare into Jax’s eyes and see so much longing and affection. “We’d never leave you.”

Luka tilts my chin up to him, forcing me to look into his beautiful turquoise eyes. They capture me whole. Mind, body,

and soul, but it's just a memory. Something my subconscious has re-created to help me deal with their loss.

"It's us," he tells me.

I shake my head. It can't be. This is just a dream, and no matter how much I want it to be more, it's not. I know that when I wake up, it's going to be *without* them, and these figments of my imagination will disappear, making it hurt all that much more.

"No. *Please*. Stop."

They couldn't be alive. I would know, wouldn't I?

I rub the spot on my chest, trying to feel what was once there, when a small pulse of light starts to spread.

The bond... But it can't be. It's just another fabricated lie my mind is making up.

Luka releases me just as Kai reaches me. Taking my hand, he places the other on the side of my face.

"We *were* dying. Each of us. But you saved us. We healed, thanks to you and our bond, and we're right here." His eyes beg me to believe what he's saying.

The look on each of their hopeful expressions breaks something inside me. I desperately want this to be real, but what if it's not? What if I open what's left of my heart only to wake up moments from now and none of it is real?

Kai sees my hesitancy, my fears and worries, and pulls me closer. "If you won't believe us, then believe this." He takes my hand and places it on his chest, right over his heart. "Feel my heartbeat. My bond. Our connection. It's yours. You know it. Feel it, Kiarra. Focus on the bond we have. The love."

I feel his soft breath along my face as he speaks. "You're ours, Kiarra. You know deep down we'd never leave you. I'd claw my way up from the Hell itself, just to be with you. Nobody could keep you from us, not even death itself. Don't give up on us, because we'll never give up on you."

His words hit me hard. Is that what I'm doing? Giving up on them. I focus harder on the bond, on the five threads woven

together, and imagine it where it sits, right beside my heart.

The thump-thump gets louder the more I focus, just as a lightness fills me up once more. The energy spreads out to my limbs, settling everything inside me and putting it at ease.

Did I imagine it all... their deaths? But I saw them die... didn't I?

"I couldn't feel you..." I look at them all. "Any of you," I tell them, a spark of relief shifting behind their eyes.

The guys share one of their looks before Kai speaks. "We *were* dying. That's probably what you felt, but we healed. The bond brought us back."

Rion steps closer. "Think of this logically. You think this is a dream, but what dream would allow you to feel everything you feel right now?"

I glance around the room, frowning. "But it's not real either, is it?"

"It's... complicated but can also be as real as anything outside this place," Rion says, trying to get it to make sense to me.

"How? Because if you're real, but this place isn't, how does any of that make sense?" I ask him.

"*We're* real, Siren. This place is just an extension of us. Of our bond as brothers... as family. Without *us*... this doesn't exist." Rion smiles in hope that I'll understand but doubt creeps in, making me question everything.

I look up and meet Axel's gaze. "If you're all really here..."

Axel moves closer. "We are, and we're not going anywhere." He pulls me into a tight hug, his smoky scent filling me up.

"Where is *here*?" Still holding onto Axel, I look around the room. We're in a kitchen, around a long marble table. The space is open, with the kitchen leading into a wide lounge area with a large white sofa set. There are wall-to-wall windows overlooking a beautiful cityscape.

Axel is still holding me, so it's Rion who answers. "You're in our link. A place we created to communicate when we're apart. The link is built and sustained through the bond we, as brothers, share."

"A separate bond from ours?" I ask them, wondering how that works. I've never heard of anything like it before.

"Yes." Rion smiles, but there's a hint of sadness to it.

The guys share the same look, but it's Luka who speaks up before I can ask why. "We told you that we fell apart when you were taken when we were kids." Luka shakes his head, frowning. "When we were starting to lose one another, I think the universe, or whatever it was, had other plans and kept us together until we could find you."

Jax smiles as if lost in a memory. "It wasn't as nice as it is now, though. This is a mirror image of our penthouse in Manhattan."

"The first one was a dump." Axel huffs, leaning back to look at me, but he doesn't let go.

"We were able to modify and mold it to our liking, and, over time, strengthen it. From what we've found, it seems to be an advanced form of astral projection." Rion frowns as he tries to explain it to me.

Astral projection. "So, your bodies are someplace else, and your minds are here?"

"Yes, but it's... more. I don't know how to explain it other than it's like we are in two places at once, but anything we do here can be reset once we return," Jax says, sounding more at ease the more questions I ask.

That... just gave me a hell of a lot more questions.

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?" I ask.

"We've been doing it so long; it's become natural to us. As natural as breathing. It's not something we talk about a lot; we just... do it. It was never meant to be a secret from you," Luka tells me.

“That’s not...” I shake my head. I didn’t care or mind that they never told me. I’m just glad they had some way to keep them together, to stay a family.

“Besides that, we didn’t have a need for it when we were at the Cardinal. We were all together, and even if we wanted to, King had spells all over the city. We wouldn’t have risked being overheard,” Luka says.

Sounds damn complicated, but the more they tell me about it, the more my mind opens to this being real and not just something my mind conjured up.

It’s not a dream.

A harsh rush of breath leaves me at the thought. They’re *alive*.

I feel a smile spread across my face as the tightness in my chest starts to ease.

Axel kisses my temple. “When we find you, you better get used to us being all over that ass. I’m not losing you again, Princess. No fucking way. And if I have to tie my damn self to you to make sure that happens, I will.”

“That so?” I raise a brow.

He narrows his eyes on me, slapping my ass before moving back for Rion.

My mouth drops open at the shithead. I move to go after him, watching the spark light up in his eyes, when Rion steps in front of me.

“Siren.”

“Rion, I need to kick Axel’s ass. Move.” The guy’s chuckle around me.

“I’ll do it for you later,” he says, pulling me into him. He holds me just as tightly as Axel did.

“Fine.” I let myself get lost in him, in his scent and warmth. I feel a tremor work its way through his body just before he pulls back. We stare at each for a moment.

He gives me a soft smile. “I know you have a million questions right now and probably still don’t fully believe this is happening, but just remember our promise. We’d never leave you, you’re ours.”

There was still this seed of doubt inside me, but the longer I’m here with them, the smaller that seed becomes.

Jax narrows his eyes on Rion before giving him a playful shove to move out of his way. Rion doesn’t move an inch, but smirks at me, shaking his head, and steps out of the way for Jax.

“My turn.” Jax picks me up and twirls me around. Warmth fills me at seeing his and everyone else’s smiling faces.

“Knew I’d be the one to make you smile.” Jax smirks while the others roll their eyes and scoff.

He places me down, yanking me to him and lining my body up to his. “I fucking missed you, baby, but you know I’ve always thought actions were better than words.”

Without a moment to wonder where Jax was going with this, he slams his lips to mine, awakening a whole other kind of heat.

His lips explore mine, tasting, as his tongue teases mine, dragging a moan from my lips. Jax is addictive in every sense of the word, making everything inside me feel alive. He runs a hand down my back, leaving a delicious trail of heat behind. He deepens the kiss, his lips and tongue more urgent, as if this moment could end any minute.

My hands wrap around his neck, pulling him closer, wanting to absorb every inch of him and hold his body to mine. I feel his thick hard length grow against my stomach. Heat spreads from my core, building and wanting relief.

The feel of Jax’s solid body against mine is undeniable, and although dreams can feel real, something about this goes beyond what should and shouldn’t be and just feels right.

“Damn,” he pulls back. “Tell me you don’t think that was real.” He smirks as I lick my bottom lip. “Tell me, and I’ll

prove it to you again and again. I'll drag every moan and plea from your lips before I make you scream my name."

Jax leans closer, his lips brushing off mine as he speaks. "Tell me, baby, and I'll make sure you leave this place, remembering exactly who you belong to."

Just as he leans in to kiss me again, a throat clears from beside me. We slowly break apart. Still feeling the heat from Jax's kiss and catching my breath, I glance around at the guys. Each of them wearing a look full of pure carnal lust and desire.

"I think we should move on to more... pressing topics." Rion gives Jax a look.

Jax adjusts himself, and I find myself drawn to it. His smirk grows when he catches me watching him.

"Does—" I shake my head, not wanting to ask a silly question.

His eyes narrow as he steps back into me. I hear Axel's groan across from me but can do nothing as Jax draws me back in.

"Does what, baby? Finish your question."

"It doesn't matter." I smile, biting my lip.

"Everything that comes out of that pretty mouth matters." His eyes drop to my lips before moving back to my eyes. "Tell me, or the guys are going to get really pissed at what I do next."

The threat does nothing to sway me; instead, it excites me.

Jax chuckles at my expression. "We'll explore that later, but right now, I want to know what you were going to say."

I clear my throat, avoiding his eyes. "I can feel everything here. As if I were standing right in front of you."

Jax's smirk grows. "You are standing right in front of me."

I roll my eyes. "You know what I mean."

"I do. Please, continue." Jax's smirk is wide and full of mischief.

I glance around at each of the guys. Kai's eyes darken when I land on them. "I was just wondering what else I could feel..."

My eyes move to Rion. He gives me a savage look, knowing exactly where I'm going with this. I look back at Jax. My eyes trail down his body to his hard length as I speak. "... here as well?"

"Damn." Axel exhales, adjusting himself.

"Can't say we've ever tried..." Jax smirk grows. "But I'm definitely willing to find out. How about w—"

"Another time. Right now, we need to focus. We don't know how long Kiarra is here with us. She could be pulled out any moment," Kai says. He gives me a look to say he'd also like to explore my idea further before moving on.

"Cockblock," Jax tells Kai but relents and steps back, sending me a wink and promising that this is far from over. "Next time, baby."

It takes a moment for Kai's words to hit me. The reality of not knowing where my actual body is, and the time ticking over our heads.

"Where are you?" Kai asks.

I release a harsh breath, my mind still reeling from Jax's kiss and this whole crazy situation.

"I don't know..." The table and machine flash into my mind, making me cringe. I can't see beyond the room but know there's one next to me, if not more.

"What is it?" Rion asks, missing nothing.

"I'm in a room, but there's no window. At least not from what I can see."

Kai and Rion narrow their eyes. "What does that mean, from what you can see?" Kai demands.

I hesitate, debating how to tell them.

Something flashes across Kai's eyes, demanding the truth. "No more lies or hidden truths to keep us safe. We need to

know everything.”

“It’s not...” I shake my head, releasing a harsh sigh. “I’m not trying to keep anything from you.”

Axel scoffs at me, raising a brow.

“This time...” I grit out. “And last time, I was only trying to protect you all.”

Axels smirks at me like the dick he still is, while the others look at me like I’m crazy.

“Baby, you know we’re all-powerful alphas, right? And you’re...”

I narrow my eyes on Jax when he stops all of a sudden. “I’m *what*, Jax?”

“Yes, *Jax*, what *is* Kiarra?” Luka adds, the smirk spreading across his face.

“Perfect, *obviously*.” Jax gives Luka a look, telling him he’ll get him back for throwing him under the bus. “But you know... small and fragile.”

My eye twitches slightly. I am far from fucking fragile, and as far as being small, it isn’t my fault they are all freaking giant-sized.

“You know what I mean,” he tells me like I should know. But all I’m thinking right now is that he’s an idiot.

“Rion?”

“Yes, Siren?”

“You can add Jax to that list of people you need to deal with until I can take care of it myself,” I tell him.

Rion smirks, his eyes turning warm. “Yes, Siren.”

Kai gives me a look full of amusement. “Stop trying to change the subject and tell us what you meant... Please.”

It’s the please that makes me lose any defensiveness I was holding on to. “I can’t exactly... *move*,” I tell them.

“What *exactly* does that mean?” Kai steps forward, his hands clenched at his side. Nothing about him scares me,

though. I know his anger isn't aimed at me.

“King has me strapped down to a table in a room that's more like a... cell.”

The temperature in the room drops as silence shatters the good mood.

“That son of a—” Axel turns and slams his fist into the counter behind him. It smashes before fixing itself.

What the fuck?

“Damn it! We need to get her out of there,” Jax pleads with the rest of them, as if they have an answer for him. But none of us know where the hell King has me. I don't even know what country I'm in. I could be on the other side of the world for all we know.

The guys start to unravel in front of me as anger spears through the room like thunder.

Jax takes my hand. “Kiarra, baby, think. What does the place look like? What sounds do you hear?”

“I haven't got much to go on. The room is quiet. There are guards that come and go but only to... turn on the machine.”

“What, machine?” Kai grits out.

Shit. I wince.

Rion notices it, sighing. “I have a feeling none of us is going to like the answer.”

“It basically... electrocutes me,” I tell them.

The guys' expressions switch from shock to rage so quick I barely catch it.

“Fuck,” Axel breaths.

“That fucking—” Jax vibrates with anger. Even in here, I can see his wolf slide over his face, cutting it close to the shift.

“When I get ahold of that bastard!” Kai's eyes turn hard as he clenches his fists tight.

“I mean... it's not the wors—” I start.

Kai cuts me a sharp look, cutting me off. “Nothing about being fucking *electrocuted* is good. In any world.”

As far as deaths go, it’s not the worse one I’ve had, but after his outburst, I am not about to tell him that.

“When I get my hands on him, I’m going to gut the fucker,” Axel grits out, his expression murderous.

Jax looks at Axel like he’s an amateur. “Yeah, okay. But only after I peel his skin off and slit his dick in half.”

What the hell?

“We all want a go at him. We can take turns, make him bleed slowly enough to drag it out,” Rion tells them, nodding his head. He has a crazed look in his eyes, one I’m not used to seeing.

“You were dying...” Luka says. The guys stop their savage plans to listen to him.

They share a knowing look. One I don’t understand.

“What?” I ask.

It’s Kai who answers, rubbing his chest. “The bond, it would cut off. Disappear for hours, sometimes longer. We thought...” He swallows hard, looking sad again.

They thought I was dead, at least for a few moments, until I healed.

Kai swallows hard. “But you’d always come back to us. Just like we would you. We’d never leave you, and even when you thought we were dead, somewhere deep down, you knew that, too.”

Maybe he’s right. I couldn’t let them go. I couldn’t see anything beyond them, but maybe that was my mind and heart trying to tell me something. That they were still here, and all I had to do was look closely enough to find that out.

“Right now, you need to tell us as much as you can about where you are.” Kai’s eyes turn focused.

“I don’t know. Being strapped down to a table in a windowless room doesn’t exactly show me much.”

Jax is the one to give me a sharp look this time. I roll my eyes but continue with what I know.

“There are plenty of guards. The building might be an old facility of some kind. But I’m grasping at straws here. I know I’m at the bottom level and that there’s at least a few above me.”

“How do you know that?” Kai asks.

“Malik told me,” I say without thinking.

“Who the *fuck* is Malik?” Jax spits out.

I ignore Jax’s possessive ass and answer the rest of them. “He’s a demon in the next room to mine. Or cell. There might be others in the building too, but I haven’t heard any of them.”

“But you’ve heard this... Malik?” Axel pushes.

Before I get to answer him, Rion asks his own. “And you know he’s a demon? How?”

I sigh before answering, knowing they won’t like my answer.

“Apart from telling me, he... escaped his room in his demon form and came into mine.”

They all jump in before I get the chance to explain further.

“If he—” Kai starts but stops, a dark glare shadows his eyes, expanding into his irises. He clenches his fist as he pushes back his hound before looking at me. “Tell me he didn’t—”

“Did he hurt you?” Luka comes over to me, checking me over for any injuries, making me smile.

“He just stared at me...” I tell them. It reminds me of the new ability I used when he tried to attack.

Kai releases a harsh breath, running a hand down his face.

“Because that’s not fucking creepy at all.” Jax looks at me like I’ve lost the plot, making me laugh.

Silence surrounds me, as soft smiles grow on each of the guys’ faces. I give them a questioning look, but they just shake

their heads.

“You’re like a fucking beacon for trouble,” Axel says, still with that soft smile.

“Tell me about it. I attracted you lot.” I give him a smile and leave the conversation of my own new abilities for another time, not wanting to break this moment.

Jax gives me a smirk. “Yeah, but our danger is the kind you’ll enjoy.”

“Is that so?” I ask, knowing damn well that I would enjoy every minute of whatever they threw at me.

“Have you seen Kane?” Kai asks, moving the focus back on the task at hand.

I shake my head at Jax, forgetting where we are and what we’re talking about. Jax seems to have a way of doing that. A way of making me forget the bad stuff and to remember everything good that’s still here.

I look at Kai. “No. I’ve seen no one...” The guys sigh. But fragments of a fractured memory or dream cross my mind. “Wait... I don’t know.”

“Kiarra?” Kai pushes.

“I thought it was a dream.” Kane’s face flashes over me as he tells me he’s going to get me out. “He was trying to get me out. It might still just be a dream.”

“Someone might’ve caught him.” Kai shares a look with Rion before turning back to me.

“When was this?” he asks me.

“I don’t know, maybe a few days ago? I don’t exactly have a watch or window to guess.” I don’t even know how long it’s been since King took me, just that it’s felt endless.

“It’s okay. We might have a lead.” Kai gives the guys a hopeful look. “He might be still there. Draven is going to try later today. We’ll have more news then.”

I’m about to ask him more about this Draven person and what lead they have when Kai whips around, as if seeing

something or someone. He stays in the spot for a few seconds longer before turning to us. A look of urgency slashed across his face.

“We have to go. There’s another attack.”

Wait, what? “Attack? What attack? Where are you?” They’re worrying about me, but I never got to ask them where they are or if they are safe.

Kai walks up to me, placing his hands on each side of my face. “We’re going to find you, and when we do, I’m never fucking letting you go. Get used to having five extremely possessive alphas around. We’ll be on top of every little move you make.”

“On top of, under, between... so many options.” Jax sends me a wink.

Kai places a kiss on the top of my head before stepping back.

“Wait. Are you safe? Maybe you should just focus on yourselves,” I tell them, but they look at me like I’ve lost it.

“Don’t be stupid, Princess.”

I narrow my eyes on my favorite dickhead. “Remember that promise of kicking someone’s ass when they’re annoying me...” I give Axel a look, reminding him of his promise.

He gives me a smirk. “I promise you can kiss my ass later. Right now, I need to go have play time with some ugly motherfuckers.”

“*Kick*. I said, *kick* your ass. I won’t be kissing any part of you.”

His deep chuckle warms something inside me. “We both know that’s a lie. Those lips were made to wrap around my—”

“Enough!” Kai sends Axel a glare. “We need to get going, and working us up will do nothing but frustrate the hell out of us. Especially when all I want to do is fucking *hold* her and not let her go.”

“Hold her? I want to do so much more than hold her. I’m going to fucking destroy every inch of her,” Jax tells him, looking straight at me with a savage look on his face.

Fuck. I was getting whiplash from their hot and crazy emotions.

Axel doesn’t let up, though. He comes over and tilts my chin up to him, running a thumb down my bottom lip.

“I fucking bite,” I warn him.

He smirks, leaning down, and his lips meet mine in a punishing kiss before he pulls back slightly.

“So do I,” he whispers, biting on my bottom lip, then dragging and sucking it, sending a bolt of lust straight to my core, making me wet.

Fucker.

Axel moves back, wearing a smug smirk. Before I get the chance to say anything, Kai is there. He leans down and gives me a slow, sensual kiss, pulling away far too quick for my liking, leaving me wanting more, and by the familiar tilt to his lips, he knows it.

“We’ll explain everything later.”

Any warmth I felt moments ago shatters with his words. What if I can’t come back here again? What if this is the last time I see them for a while? What if...

“Don’t. I can see your thoughts going into overdrive.” Kai looks at me, giving me one of the hard looks he gives the guys.

“Kai?” There’s so much I want to ask him. To say to them all.

Kai gives me a smile, running a finger down my frown. “When you wake up and start to doubt yourself...” His eyes soften. “Just remember... Always, Kiarra. *Always.*”

Just like he promised me when we were kids. That he would *always* protect me. That we’d *always* be family. That we’d *always* be there for one another.”

“Always.” I nod my head and try to push my doubts to the back of my mind.

Kai steps back, his eyes not leaving mine as arms come around my waist from behind. A familiar calming warm scent wraps around me. I lean back into Luka and let his warmth soak into me.

“It will all be okay. Trust us,” Rion tells me.

Swallowing hard, I nod my head. I couldn’t constantly think of the worst thing. I needed to have more faith. In them and in us.

Rion walks over, taking Kai’s place. “If I kiss you right now, I won’t be able to stop.” He instead kisses my forehead, letting his lips linger a moment before pulling back. “We’re going to bring you home to us. Soon.”

He looks over every part of my face, reluctant to leave. I reach up and take his hand, squeezing it tight.

“Soon.”

Reluctantly, he pulls back and goes over to Kai and Axel. With one last look full of heated promises and determination, they disappear.

“Guess it’s just us three.” Jax gives me a wicked smile while Luka leans his chin on my head.

CHAPTER 13



KIARRA

“FUCK,” Luka curses. Stepping back, he scrubs a hand down his face, narrowing his eyes behind him at some invisible annoyance.

“What is it?” I look around him, trying to see the source, but just like with Kai, there’s nothing there.

He looks at me and then Jax. “Another attack.”

Jax clenches his jaw, shaking his head at Luka. “Fuck them.”

“You know we can’t do that.” He glances at me, his eyes softening. “As much as I want to... I also want us to have a home to go back to.”

Frowning back at Jax, exhaustion settles over Luka, making him look a lot older than he is right now. “I want us to have the future we’ve worked hard for. We earned their respect, but leaving them to fend for themselves when we know they can’t handle it would make them lose faith in us just as fast.”

Luka gives me a sad look before looking at Jax. “I’ll go. You stay here.”

“No, I’ll do it.” Jax rolls his shoulders, giving me a savage smirk. “You know I can’t resist stirring up some chaos.”

Luka cuts him a look. “I’ve got this.”

“Brother...” Jax starts, but Luka gives him a sharp look, stopping him.

“I’ll do what I have to.”

Whatever they were up against was obviously dangerous. There was no need for them to stay here—wherever here was—and babysit me.

I could get pulled out any time, and then this would all be pointless.

“Both of you go, and I—”

They both turn and glare at me, their shadow wolves pushing to the surface.

“Not fucking happening,” they say in tandem.

“I’ll be fine. Stay with her. I’ll call if I need backup,” Luka tells Jax.

They go into a stare-down, sharing silent communication like when they were younger. I still can’t figure out how they’re able to have a whole conversation in a couple of looks, but Jax eventually relents. Sighing, he nods his head.

“You better,” Jax tells him.

“Luka?”

Luka moves in front of me, taking my face in his hands. He leans down, resting his forehead against mine. Closing his eyes, he takes a deep breath.

“I *missed* you...so much.”

He swallows hard before pulling back. I catch the pained expression as it quickly flashes across his face. It’s gone before I know it, masked behind a tight smile.

“I missed you, too. All of you. When I thought—”

Luka stops me with a soft kiss to the lips. “Don’t think about it. We’re all alive, and when you’re back with us, we’re never letting you out of our sight.”

Giving him a small smile, I open my mouth to joke about not being able to keep me in sight all the time but stop when I see that he’s being completely serious.

He must see the thought run across my face because he narrows his eyes, yanking my body closer to his.

“You *will* listen to us this time. If I have to tie you down and make sure you can’t think straight, I will.”

A shiver of excitement runs through me as shadows begin to cloud his eyes, stretching out to slide down his shoulders and arms.

“Promise?” I watch the shadows as they reach out to me, and the excitement turns into something else.

Luka’s eyes darken at my words. He reaches a hand out to me but pauses when he notices the shadows. Cursing to himself, he squeezes his eyes shut.

Clenching his jaw, he slowly draws them back until they’re completely gone. Reminding me of my new ability and leaving me to wonder if there is any connection with it. Maybe I also got an upgrade from the bond.

I make a note to ask him about it next time. When he doesn’t look so completely lost and conflicted.

After a moment, he opens his eyes, the shadows now gone, but left behind is a cloak of pain and powerlessness. Any excitement I had is now gone with it.

He goes to take a step away from me, but I grip his shirt. “Tell me what’s wrong, Luka.”

“Nothing.” He flashes me one of his forced smiles, making me want to knock some sense into the idiot. He must see where my thoughts go, giving me a real smile this time. “You can kick my ass later. Right now, though, I have to go.”

He’s hiding something, something that’s making him worry. Maybe these attacks are a lot worse than they’re letting on.

“What about the attacks? You haven’t told me anything about them.”

Luka ignores my question, leaning in to give me another quick kiss. He leaves the taste of him on my lips, then steps back out of reach.

“Luka?!” I growl, reaching out for him again. Another real smile crosses his face just before he backs up and disappears.

“Damn it.” Turning to Jax, I find him leaning against the kitchen counter, wearing a relaxed smile, as if he hasn’t a care in the world.

I move closer to him, wanting answers. “Jax, tell me what’s going on.”

Jax pulls me into him, wrapping his arms around me. Instead of answering me, his smile grows, expanding to his eyes.

“Jax?” I push.

“I don’t want to talk about shit-ugly beasts with no fucking manners.”

What? I push the mention of beasts to one side for now and focus on Luka.

“What about Luka? There’s something going on with him.”

Jax sighs. “The last couple of weeks have brought up some... unwanted memories for him.”

The pain slashed across Jax’s face at the mention of these memories, tells me it’s not only Luka who’s involved.

“And you?” I run my hands up his back, trying to soothe the pain from it.

Jax gives me a soft smile. “All good, baby. Let’s just focus on getting you home to us.”

“But—”

“Shush.” He smirks as I narrow my eyes on him.

My mind keeps turning back to Luka and how lost he seems. “Maybe you should go after him. He might need the backup, and I don’t—”

Jax places his finger over my lips. “He’s got this, baby. You gave us a pretty big upgrade. He’ll be back soon.”

I open my mouth and bite his finger, watching his eyes darken and breath quicken.

Jax raises a brow, giving me a wicked smirk. “Baby? You better know what you’re doing, because if you start this... we’ll be testing out that little theory of yours quicker than you think.”

I press a kiss to his finger before pulling back with a wicked smile of my own. “What type of upgrade?” As much as Jax draws me in, I’m not going to be so easily distracted, not if there is something wrong with Luka.

Jax’s smirk widens, turning carnal. The glint in his eye tells me I just gave him a challenge

“Well, it looks like we’re just as indestructible as you are now.”

“Really?” The thought that they could heal like me eases some of the knots in my stomach.

“Really. Come here.” Jax leans in, nudging his nose up my neck, breathing me in.

“What’s really going on?”

“A lot, but I’ve missed you like crazy, so I’m not wasting time talking about shit that doesn’t matter.” Jax kisses my forehead. His lips linger there for a moment.

“Everyone just left to go fight off some attacks and look stressed as hell. I’d say that matters,” I tell him.

“Nothing matters but you. The rest can wait.” He grabs my hand and pulls me over to one of the white lounge chairs, tugging me down onto his lap.

I watch his smirk grow as I raise a brow. “Comfortable?”

Jax runs his hand up my thighs and hips to around my back. Looking straight into my eyes, he gives me one of his sinful smirks. “Extremely.”

I shift in place, trying to distract myself from the feel of his hands roaming my body and the large bulge growing against my ass, but all it does is turn me on more.

Jax gives me a knowing look as he places soft kisses up my neck.

Clearing my throat, I grasp at anything to try to stay focused. “How am I still here? It feels like I’ve been gone a long while.”

Jax kisses my chin. My pulse beats rapidly as he works his way to my lips. “Time works differently in here. A few minutes out in the real world could feel like hours, if not days, in here.”

I glance around at the beautiful modern decor full of neutral colors, making the place feel airy and warm. The high-rise ceiling and amazing view adds to it, making me feel like I’m not trapped.

What I wouldn’t have done for a place like this to escape to over the years with King.

“Tell me what’s been going on?” There is something big happening with these attacks, and I need to know they are safe, even with their new ability to heal. I can’t lose them again.

He pulls back slightly. “We’ve been searching for you.”

“I kind of figured that part out.” I bump his nose with my finger, making him smile.

“And Jazmyn?” His eyes narrow, losing some of their warmth.

“Annoying as hell, but safe.”

Laughing, I kiss the spot I bumped to thank him. Pulling back, I catch him staring at me. “What?”

He shakes his head, smiling at me.

“What about these attacks? What’s happening?” I push again.

“How about we talk about that when we get you back? For now, just let me hold you for a bit longer.”

I sigh, relenting and dropping the conversation for now.

Reaching up, I run my fingers through his hair. He closes his eyes briefly and when he opens them, his whole focus is on me, his eyes filled with a tenderness I'm not used to seeing in Jax. He swallows hard, searching my eyes.

“I fucking *love* you, Kiarra.”

A smile spreads across my face as my chest fills with warmth. “I love you too.”

With my reply, his smile turns wicked. “Of course you do.”

I laugh at his reply, feeling lighter than I have in a while.

Leaning back, he positions me so I'm straddling him, a leg on each side, before yanking me closer, lining my core up with his hardened length and dragging a moan from us both.

“Jax... we should focus on everything else going on,” I breathe. But my own focus becomes muddled the more he touches me.

He runs his hands up my sides, his eyes following them as they slowly drag up my body.

A delicious shudder follows his touch, leaving a hot trail behind.

I lick my bottom lip as our eyes lock.

“I'm not playing anymore. It's no secret that I don't give a shit about being an alpha leader. I do my part, but I'm not giving up any more time with you than I have to. I'm going to make every fucking moment with you count. Every minute I can hold, kiss, or touch you, I will. I don't care if the fucking world is burning around us. I will lay you down and leave my mark on every inch of your skin while it burns to ashes.”

Warm shivers travel across my whole body at his words and the vow behind each one.

I don't get a chance to process everything he said before he leans in, slamming his lips to mine and silencing any reply I have.

I sink into him, consuming every sinful taste and touch. Jax kisses me like he's hungry, like he can't get enough. He deepens the kiss, drawing me in, making me melt into him.

And I fucking *melt*. I let myself fall into the kiss. I wrap it around me and willingly *drown* in it.

Lifting my arms, I wrap them around his neck, letting the tips of my fingers drag through the bottom of his hair, pulling a throaty moan from his lips.

His hands move up my back, pulling me tight against him. I can feel the hard thump of his heart against my chest.

Pulling back, I trail my hands down his chest and under his shirt, needing to feel him. His muscles tense as soon as I touch him.

His lips leave mine; the harsh, uneven rhythm of his breath brushes my cheek and sends a delicious shiver of heat down my back.

“Baby... this is about you... but if you keep touching me, it's going to be about us, and all I want to do right now is make you feel good.

“But—”

He silences me with a kiss, tracing his tongue in a path across my lips before he bites down hard. A bolt of lust shoots straight to my heated core, dragging a moan from my lips.

He sucks my injured lip before working down my chin and neck.

“Jax...” I plead, my heated body throbbing with the need for more.

I feel his cock twitch beneath me. It's thick, hard length sits right at my core. I grind on it, making him groan.

“Fuck,” he breathes. “Baby. I need to feel you.”

Flashes of heat rush across my body as he places wet, open kisses down my neck.

Jax trails a hand down my body, over the curve of my breast, down to my stomach, and into the front of my leggings.

I gasp and arch into his touch, needing more. I feel his smile against my chest as his hand slides beneath my pants towards my slick folds.

“You’re so fucking wet for me.” His ragged breath drags along my skin and shoots straight to my core.

My mind turns numb, pleasure taking over every one of my senses. I crave the feel of his touch.

As if answering my silent plea, he slowly slides a finger inside me, then drags it out and pushes back in again. I suck in a startled gasp as pleasure starts to build.

“Jax...”

He adds another finger, the slight pressure and stretch delicious. Each push and pull makes me gasp and moan for him.

I bite my lip, holding in any further embarrassing sounds.

Seconds later, a hand wraps around my neck and chin, pulling my lips apart.

“Each of those delicious sounds are *mine*. Don’t you fucking *dare* keep them from me.” His harsh breath runs along the side of my neck, making me shiver.

The dark look in his eyes calls out to something inside me, making me crave more of it.

“Please,” I beg, my whole body trembling in need, as he keeps up his agonizingly slow pace until I’m panting.

“Fuck, baby.” His warm breath fans across my cheek as he pulls his fingers out and holds the tips at my entrance.

“I think I like it when you squirm on me. Reminds me of all the things I’m going to do to you when I get you back. But for now... I want to see you come apart for me.”

And then he starts to move. His fingers thrust into me over and over in a relentless pace. He takes my lips, swallowing each gasp and moan that leaves my mouth.

The new position is deeper. I tilt my head back and close my eyes, feeling the pleasure inch closer and closer.

He curls his fingers, making me gasp and roll my hips.

“That’s it. Ride me, baby. Ride my fingers like you would my cock.”

The thought of his cock in place of his fingers as it thrusts inside me, stretching me, makes me lose my damn mind. I can’t think or focus on anything but his touch, his scent. It overwhelms each of my senses as the heat builds and builds to new heights.

I grind into his hand as he thrusts into me; the pleasure becoming all-consuming.

He tilts his fingers, reaching deeper and making the mind-numbing pleasure spread across my entire body.

Using his thumb, he circles the bundle of nerves that is about to explode.

“That’s it, baby. Come for me.” Along with his touch, his words are my undoing. His mouth comes down on mine just as I explode, swallowing my cry.

I grip his shoulders hard and arch into him, riding out each wave of pleasure as it pulses throughout my body.

It feels endless. The ripples of ecstasy all-consuming as they spread out from my core.

I clench around him, dragging out the delicious feeling.

“Fuck.” He grunts, leaning forward, his lips a breath away from mine.

“I can’t wait to feel your tight pussy clenching around my cock.”

His grip around my waist tightens as I sag into his warm body. Sliding my hands down to his shoulders, I pull back, opening my eyes. Our short, heated breaths are the only thing I hear as I stare into his possessive gaze.

“You’ll always be ours, but right in this fucking moment, you’re *mine*.”

His fingers slide out of me, leaving me feeling empty but sated. How that’s even possible in here makes no sense, but

the pleasurable ache left behind feels more than real.

He brings his fingers to his lips and sucks. The heated look in his eyes makes me want to taste him, too. To run my tongue along the thick length I still feel under me.

“You taste like fucking perfection.”

I lick my lips, wanting to taste him too.

“Jax?”

Jax scans my face.

“What about...” I roll my hips, feeling every inch of his thick length, making us both shiver.

His hungry eyes blaze with need as he shakes his head, a small smile on his face. “That was about you. When we get you back, I’m going to bury myself inside you and never let you go.”

“But I could—”

“Another time. Let me just hold you.” Jax tugs me closer to him.

“I’m going to make you happy, Kiarra. Fucking deliriously happy. So much so that you won’t be able to fucking walk straight for a week. And that’s only because the others would try to kick my ass if they didn’t see you.”

“Try?” I run a finger down his chest, wearing a wicked smile.

“Yes, *try*. We both know I’d kick their asses if I wanted to.”

I roll my eyes at him, laughing under my breath. I don’t even care if it isn’t real. Physically, it sure damn feels like it, though. My whole body is so at ease, so content, and at peace. I never want to leave this place.

“Can we stay like this?” Moving a hand up his chest, I lean my head on his shoulder.

His grip tightens on me before he releases a harsh sigh.

He kisses the top of my head. “Yes, you can be my little koala, and I’ll carry you everywhere.”

I lift my head and look at him, seeing the twinkle in his eyes.

“Why the hell would I want to be carried everywhere?”

“Why the hell *wouldn’t* you?” His smile grows. “You get easy access to—”

I give him a light thump in the chest.

“Oh, you wanted to play rough?” Jax grabs my hand before it lands another punch. Kissing my fist, he opens my hand and leans down. Looking me straight in the eye, he takes a finger into his mouth and sucks it, watching as I melt in front of him.

He nips my finger before leaning back into the seat, thrusting his hips up as he does, making me gasp.

“Dick.”

He knows exactly what he’s doing. I wiggle on him, hoping it makes him just as frustrated.

He chuckles, leaning back into me and brushing his lips against mine. Drawing out the kiss in long, languid strokes that makes my senses spin.

He pulls back, his breath lingering just above my lips. “We *will* get you back to us, baby. Even if I have to go to Hell myself and bargain my dark soul for you.”

I brush a hand down his cheek. He closes his eyes, leaning into it.

“Nothing about you is dark, Jax, nor would I want you to give up anything for me, especially that beautiful soul of yours.”

Jax opens his eyes. Giving me a sad smile, he shakes his head. “I don’t give a fuck about my soul if you’re not part of it. Whether you think it’s dark, light, fucking multicolored... It doesn’t matter, because it’s yours. Always has been.”

I look at Jax. “How did I get so lucky?”

Jax gives me one of his wicked smirks, telling me that whatever comes out of his mouth next isn't going to be sweet or innocent.

“Well... when the powers that be decided to create such a perfect specimen, they knew he'd need a mate to—”

I lightly slap him. “Don't ruin it.”

His deep chuckle surrounds me as he pulls me into him. I breathe in his woodsy scent that wraps around me and settle into his warmth.

A slight tug in my stomach makes me pause. I glance down at it, expecting to see something there, pulling on it, but find nothing.

Another one sharper this time and my hand goes through the chair that I try to grab onto.

“Jax? I think I'm...”

Jax looks at me, his smile dropping when he sees my expression.

“What's wrong?” He tries to grab my waist.

“I think I'm—”

“Kiarra, baby, stay with me. Just a little longer.” Jax's panicked eyes follow me as I'm yanked out of the room.

CHAPTER 14



AXEL

WE FOUND HER. We fucking found her.

Technically, we don't have a clue where she is, but she was in the link with us, and that had to mean something.

I clench my hands, wanting to put my fist through something. Preferably that psychopath's face until no one can recognize the sick bastard. And then I want to rewind time so I can do it all over again.

He's fucking electrocuting her. He's hurting her, and I just want to tear apart the world to make it stop.

She's alive, but even though she keeps saying she can heal from anything, my mind goes to all the fucked up dark places it can.

It sees her gone from this world, lost to us all, and fucking rips my black heart out with it. I rub my chest; the tightness fucking choking me.

My girl is strong, stronger than us all, but there is always the unsettling thought that King, the twisted fuck, would do something to push her over the edge.

Fucking electrocuting her is cutting it close.

Seeing her today has slightly eased the rage inside me. That all-consuming rage that's been slowly eating me up and making me want to give in to the madness and burn everything around me.

Draven better pull through and find her. We don't need to be wasting our time covering his ass when we can be out there looking for her.

The fucking pansies can't handle a couple of their own, a few times removed, that is.

The old creatures that come from the pits of the Underworld are still just demons at the heart of it. Why Draven and his army of demons, warlocks, and witches, can't just handle it, makes no sense.

After we leave the link, Draven's guards are waiting outside our room. All jumpy as fuck. Apparently, Draven told them to get to us as soon as the old demons arrived.

Five of them have shown up and spread out across the island, causing havoc and destruction. A couple have shown up near the club where Rion had come across one, and he and Kai were heading down to deal with them now.

I head for the bridge that sits between Staten Island and Manhattan. One of the guards spotted an old demon near it.

The fucker probably thought he'd take his shit into our territory. Well, not today, asshole.

The shift slides over me. Scales trail down my arms and up my body as it expands and grows. Flames engulf me just before my dragon pushes through.

Towering over the buildings beside me, I take to the sky. Soaring upward, I glide through the clouds and come up over them.

Pulling the energy in the air to me, I let it wrap around me to camouflage my dragon. If anyone was to look up, they'd see nothing but the bright blue sky.

Speeding up, I glide through the clouds, the wind and energy around me keeping the dark thoughts at bay.

I hear the screams and explosions before I see it. Swooping down, I chase the line of abandoned cars and follow it to the carnage. Coming up to the long bridge, another explosion rings out as a car lands into a pit of flames that runs along its

entrance. People are everywhere. Some trying to escape the destruction and others try to head toward it. I fly closer, getting a better look at this old demon.

Damn.

Jax was fucking right. They are ugly, or at least this colossal thing is. Its whole body looks like one big dirty gray rock with multiple heads and arms. Its many eyes look hollow, as if something had carved them out.

The giant of a mutant demon is smack in the middle of the bridge, and there are a dozen small beasts around it, adding to the chaos.

The beasts look like a mix between a hyena and lion, with long pointed tails that whip out at anyone stupid enough to get too close.

The hideous giant is attacking from every angle, tearing apart anything within its proximity. Cars, trucks, and chunks of concrete lay scattered and broken at its giant ass feet.

Supes are trying to get away, some fight back, but most of their attacks are not doing much.

The smaller beasts start herding the supes towards the old demon while it smashes its massive hands onto the ground, cracking it wide open and dragging anyone close enough into it.

Still in camouflage, I glide up and over the bridge. Once I'm far enough out above it, I begin to circle back and swiftly soar down, revealing my dragon and raining my flames down on them.

The giant demon notices me, pausing its destruction. Turning around, it lifts a truck like it weighs nothing and throws it at me.

I drop down, twisting into a spin to avoid colliding with it or any of the beasts that attempt an attack. I take a couple of the little fuckers terrorizing a group of witches out with my flames and make my way back towards the giant.

Circling back around, I draw in my energy and camouflage myself. Just as I get close to the giant, a small beast jumps out of nowhere, trying to hitch a fucking ride. Its thick claws catch the end of my wing, scraping down it.

It heals within seconds, leaving me and my dragon more pissed off than anything.

Hovering for a moment, I get an idea. A crazy ass idea Jax would approve of, though the rest might think I'd lost the plot.

I could destroy the bridge, and cut off its exit, sinking the demon in the process, but it was going to be one hell of a rebuild for Draven.

Fuck it.

I wasn't going to let that demon or any of those beasts get any closer to our territory. And if it ended up pissing off Draven in the meantime, well, that was just an added bonus.

The giant grabs multiple vehicles in each hand and starts throwing them like missiles in my direction.

I avoid them, swooping straight up.

Hovering above, I open my wings wide and bring them together and back out again. A loud aerial echo sounds out as I absorb more and more energy and draw it into my wings.

Opening them wide, I hold my aim on the giant and quickly snap them together. A rush of energy flies out around me, followed by a strike like thunder heading toward the giant. It hits it, along with a couple of beasts beside it, making them all fall backwards.

Once it's down, I rush forward and strike at every angle, attacking and slicing a couple of its arms off in the process. I continue my assault, not giving it a second to retaliate. My flames rain down around it, melting some of its rock-like body.

Before it gets the chance to get back up, I carve out a circle around the demon using my flames, destroying the bridge's foundation.

It cracks open and crumbles to the ocean beneath it, leaving the demon nowhere to go but down. Its hands reach out, trying to grab something, but there's nothing left to hold on to.

It drops into the ocean with a large chunk of bridge landing on it and pushing it down. The water caves in around it before the demon disappears completely.

I finish off the rest of the beasts before landing at the end of the destroyed bridge. Keeping my guard up, I watch for a moment to make sure the fucker hasn't somehow survived it.

More of the bridge's foundation sinks, but nothing comes back up. I wait another moment, but it's obvious the creature is finished.

Soaring back up into the sky, I make my way back to the guys.

* * *

Shifting back, I sense the guys' location. The bond leads me to Draven's headquarters.

Walking into the room, Draven's guards tilt their head in respect, opening the door for me on my way in. I shake my head at their whiplash of a change in attitude toward us and make my way over to Kai and Rion.

"Any problems?" Kai asks.

"Nothing I couldn't handle." I lean against the window, watching around for any further threats.

"We might have a location." Jazmyn waltzes into the room with Draven on her heels. He's staring at her like a lovesick puppy.

Damn, I hope I don't look like that when I'm around Kiarra.

I glance away, catching Rion staring at me with a brow raised, a smirk on his face like he knows what I've been thinking.

Fuck. He probably does, with the way his mind works.

Rolling my eyes, I look back at the train wreck about to happen. With Draven's lovesick puppy act and Jazmyn's act of trying to seem uninterested, it is only a matter of time before the two of them come to a head.

We have enough going on. I want to be well clear of their drama when it starts.

Jazmyn's words finally filter through, hitting me. "What do you mean, might?"

I wasn't messing around, friend or not. I'd fry all their asses if they didn't give me something to work with.

Jazmyn narrows her eyes on me as if knowing what I was thinking.

Oh right, she's an empathic witch. I shrug, not caring either way.

Crossing my arms, I stare the little witch down as she tries to intimidate me. If she is waiting for some sort of apology, she might as well wait for hell to freeze over. She was shit out of luck getting anything from me. I'd fry her ass if it got me even the slightest bit closer to finding Kiarra.

She seems to figure this out on her own. Shaking her head and sighing, she looks at Kai and the others, explaining what they figured out.

"King is using a powerful concealment spell—a couple, by the feel of it—but we think we've got a general location. It's just a lot wider than we expected."

I share a look with the guys. It's better than nothing, but we'll have to move quickly. If King finds out we know, he could move her again and make damn sure we never find her. I can't let that happen.

"Where is it?" I ask.

“Basically, in the middle of nowhere,” Jazmyn says, laying out a map on the table.

I move closer.

“He’s good. He even removed it from the maps.” Jazmyn points out the spot they think Kiarra is. It’s up near Boston, out in the ocean—at least fifty miles out. But it’s not as far as I thought.

She’s not halfway across the world, which is something. Not that it would matter with the way we have access to portals, but the idea of her being closer to us helps ease the tightness in my chest a little.

“The area is not only concealed but blocks any portals to or from it, so we’ll have to go the old fashion way...” Jazmyn continues.

“Guess we know where the power from those spells from the Cardinal Three went,” I mumble. Rion and Kai nod.

Jazmyn looks at me. “Unless...” She narrows her eyes at me like she’s trying to drill a hole into my skull.

“Unless? Spit it out. I’m not going to play twenty questions with you just so you can hear the sound of your own voice.”

Jazmyn rolls her eyes so hard it looks like she is about to have a seizure. “That girl deserves a fucking award for putting up with you.”

“I am the fucking reward, and Kiarra will figure that out once she gets acquainted with my dick, so say what you need to, so I can be on my way. We don’t have all fucking day.”

Draven looks like he wants to take me to the Underworld himself. I smirk at him, hoping he’ll try.

“You’re an elemental Dragon?” Jazmyn asks, knowing quite well what I am and where I’m from. But I play along, hoping it’ll get me out of this room sooner.

“Half. What about it?”

“Elemental Dragons are known to have the ability to manipulate energy when shifted,” she says, more in a statement than a question.

I give her a deadpanned look. “Again, what about it?”

Jazmyn clenches her jaw, getting sick of my apparent lack of psychic abilities, because hell if I know where she’s going with this.

“I’m not a fucking mind reader, so spit it out or move the fuck on.”

She sighs, looking like she’s losing all will to live. But she can wait until after she’s helped us find Kiarra, then she can go and jump off a cliff for all I care.

“You should be able to draw the energy from the spells King is using to block portals. And since I have to fucking spell it out, you can then portal there and go all fucking Hulk and get your girl.”

Huh.

I guess it could be possible. Not that I have ever tried before, but power is power, and I can draw it to myself in whatever form it is made from. I just need some way to release the energy I absorb.

I smile to myself, thinking of ways my little mate could help with that.

“But you’re going to need a couple of more members from your flight to pull the amount of energy King is using on these spells,” Jazmyn says with a smug look, making me lose any sliver of happiness I had.

It was no secret that I didn’t get along with my flight—my so-called family. My flight was nothing more than dead-beats and traitors. The thought of having to deal with them made my blood boil.

The guys give me a look, but I’m not about to make a big deal about this. If contacting them was the best way to get Kiarra back, then I’d drag them down there myself.

“I’ll contact them,” I tell her.

Kai turns to me, “If you need me to—”

“No. I’ll do it.”

Kai stares at me for a bit longer before telling Rion to get in touch with Luka and Jax and to put some of the stronger leaders under us in charge while we’re gone.

Hopefully, they can hold down the fort until we’re back.

Making our way through the halls, I see Kai and Rion watch me from the corner of my eye, probably thinking I’m going to lose it, but there’s no way I’d jeopardize something this important, especially not when it comes to Kiarra.

I’d go to the ends of the earth for that girl. She’s my whole fucking heart.

Once they go off to get things ready, I pull out my phone and dial the prick’s number.

“Who the fuck—” The grainy voice on the other end doesn’t get a chance to finish as I cut him off.

“Listen asshole, I’ll be opening a portal to you very soon. Fucking accept it, and I won’t add arson to your list of problems.”

“Hello, Axel. How’s life been treating you? Not too good, it seems, if you have to call us.”

“Fuck you. Accept the portal or I’ll—”

“Yes, yes, you’ll huff and puff and blow my house down. Wait until Father hears this. See you in a few... brother.” The dick hangs up, and I hurl my phone toward the wall. It shatters on impact, leaving a dent behind.

That bastard wasn’t my family. My real family were the guys and Kiarra. The one I chose, not the people who didn’t give a crap about me. Not the bastard who brought me into his world only to make me pay for it.

My biological father was demented and probably took a page out of King’s book. I never met my mum because his fucking wife, Amaris, killed her. There’s no evidence, but

everyone knows it was her. Too jealous that one of her husband's mistresses got pregnant by him.

When I ended up with my aunt—who wasn't really an aunt—it fucking saved me. Even though she was a piece of shit, I met the guys and then Kiarra. Without them, I would have been on a path that led nowhere but down.

I focus on that and push the rest of the shitstorm twirling around in my head away. Kiarra needs this. My shitty past doesn't matter.

After having a quick shower and rearranging the entire room—and by rearranging, I mean completely fucking upending and destroying it—I'm calm enough to meet the guys.

Or at least, now more in control.

Kai and Rion frown at me but say nothing. They know better than to try to baby me. They give me space, talking to one another about the upcoming plans.

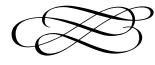
They know me better than anyone. That's what true family is. They know your ins and outs. Your little tics and buttons and help you manage or fight them.

Focusing on them and Kiarra pushes the boiling rage down to a simmer. When they know when I'm calm enough to talk to, Kai grabs my shoulder just as a portal opens.

“Let's go get our girl back,” Kai says.

And destroy anyone who gets in the fucking way.

CHAPTER 15



KIARRA

I GASP AWAKE, my body trembling. Whether it was from the aftermath of the machine or finding out the guys were alive, I can't tell. But they are alive, and that's all that matters.

Closing my eyes, I focus on the bond, and a burst of energy spreads through me, making me smile.

I was too lost in my grief and let it eat me alive instead of reaching inside and feeling the bond that was always there.

I hold on to it, gripping it tightly in my mind and heart. I release a harsh breath, letting everything that happened sink in.

The guys are coming for me, but I can't just rely on them. We don't know where I am or how long it might take them to find me. No matter how much trust I had in them, I'm not built to lie back and let someone save me. I need to fight for myself too.

It's time I took my life back from King.

Listening out for anything, I hear nothing but the silence that stretches out around me. Not even Malik is making a sound. Or maybe he isn't there. Either way, the whole place is dead.

So how do I get myself out of here?

I pull at the wires again, but they barely move. I'm strapped in tight; the metal grip around my waist is solid with no give.

Frustration builds, but I know I can do this. I just need to think... There must be something.

A light flickers above me, fluttering a couple of times before going out.

The darkness.

It came when I thought I had nothing left, but my own fears drove it away. Fears that have been gaining too much power from me.

It was time to feed another kind of emotion, one far more powerful and useful.

Rage.

Leaving my fears behind, I focus on my pain, frustration, anger, and everything I've endured. It fuels the growing storm inside me.

I focus on every slap, punch, and whip I've taken. Every cut, bruise, and broken bone, I've had to heal.

I focus on the pain that nearly took my mates from me and the dread and fear that came with it. I focus on the life that I should have always had, and the person that I once was... and I channel it all back into the energy building inside me.

I take back my power and let it build inside me. It grows and spreads, gaining more strength with each memory, with each part of me that starts to believe in each word I manifest to life.

The energy in the room reaches a peak. Goosebumps crawl across my arms as the temperature starts to drop.

Darkness seeps into the room like a dark fog, knocking out every light one by one. The silence in the darkness becomes deafening, stretching out around me.

I hold my breath and wait as it draws closer. A sliver of cold brushes up against my senses.

I smile as the dark answers me once more.

* * *

“Kiiiarrraaa,” the voice from before calls out, its deep tone an echo around me.

“Freeee.” Again, it asks me to free it, but how? Even with the power thrumming through my veins, I don’t know how.

“Releasee...”

“Release what?” I ask it.

“Reaalleassee.”

Yes, because dragging out the word makes me understand it better.

Mentally shaking my head at myself, I close my eyes and focus on the power thrumming through my veins. I reach down inside me and drag up the storm, which is waiting to be unleashed.

I call it to me, to my aid, and I pull. The slow building energy spirals, spreading throughout my body.

I gather it up, letting it build and build until it becomes almost painful. Just when I can’t take it anymore, I let it go.

Energy, much stronger than the last time, bursts out, sending a rippling wave around me.

The metal bed beneath me rocks, and the light above me flickers on and off.

I don’t notice anything else, but the energy thrumming through me. I feel strong, invincible, like nothing can touch me.

A spark of a connection flickers in my mind, not like my guys, but a strange connection of likeness, of kin.

“Freee.” The deep voice calls out once more and makes me wonder if there is a link between the two.

I pull on the strange connection, and the spark grows. “Yesssss, freee.”

How I had any type of connection to whatever this thing was didn't make sense. But it was a problem for another day.

I was going to be free of this place, and then I'd figure out how to destroy King and everything he's built.

I focus on that spark of energy and pull it to me, then push it out into this world.

The lights flicker on and off as a large dark beast emerges, black smoke billowing from its body like armor. Its yellow eyes stare straight at me as it moves closer. Its body is like a cross between a wolf and bear.

The dark beast continues to stare at me as if waiting for something. The connection bubbles up inside me as I narrow my eyes on it.

“*Free me,*” I order it, my voice deep and commanding with a hint of its own darkness.

The beast moves forward. Grabbing the machine, it slashes its smoky claws through the wires before it focuses on the metal band.

Once its shadows touch it, the metal crumbles, bending in on itself before breaking off. They snap, freeing my arms and legs.

Pushing my body, I pull myself up and slide off the table bed. It takes a minute to shake off the dizziness, but then I head straight for the door.

The guards replaced the bars with new ones after Malik destroyed it. I glance down at the lock and look back at the beast. Instead of talking like when it was in the dark, it gives me a look, one I seem able to understand. It tilts its head as if to say, “*You do it.*”

Looking back down at the lock, I close my eyes and reach inside me, pulling my power up to the surface. Like a shift, I feel the change come over me. My vision is clearer, and I can clearly see the small dust floating in the air.

Focusing back on the lock, I imagine it breaking in half. Seconds later, dark shadows slide from my hand and wrap around it, doing just that.

I pull open the door, and a shrieking alarm goes off around me.

Damn it. I need to get out of here before the guards find me.

Just as I turn to go left, something makes me stop. Glancing over to my right, I look at the door that must lead to Malik's room.

He might not even be there and if he is, I'm probably the last person he wants to see, but I can't just leave without knowing.

Turning back, I move to his room. I see no bars, just a long, thick metal door. His demon side probably needed something a little stronger than a barred one like mine.

With my power still brimming at the surface, I do the same with Malik's door, but instead, I imagine a hole in the lock's place.

My shadows whip out and punch a hole through it, completely destroying the lock.

Pushing the broken door open, I step into the dark room, my eyes adjusting quickly. What I see stops me in my tracks.

Malik is chained to the wall with a mouth guard, and his hands are pulled by his side, similar to the way I was left on the table.

He spots me, and his eyes widen at something behind me. I look over my shoulder, finding the beast staring at him.

"It's with me," I tell him, but it doesn't ease the fear in his eyes.

Malik tries to speak but can only grunt and growl with the mouthguard on.

"I'm getting out of here. Whether you come with me or not is up to you." Stepping closer to him, I raise my hands. "I'm

going to release you. That way, you can do whatever the hell you want.”

Malik tries to move but can't with how tight the chains are. Blood drips from his wrists from where he pulled against them.

Looking over my shoulder, I connect with the beast, telling him what I want him to do.

Once the thought crosses my mind, it turns around to watch for any guards coming.

Pulling my shadows up, I push them forward, imagining them wrapping around the chains and ripping them apart. They clang to the floor as Malik follows them with a grunt, landing on his knees.

Shouts come from outside, telling me our time is up. The guards are coming. Even with the shadow beast on watch, we needed to get out of here.

“Looks like it's time to go,” I tell Malik.

Malik rips the mouth guard off his face, glaring at me. “You should have left me where I was.”

“Chained up where your free will is taken from you? No. If you want to stay here, fine. But at least now you get to make that choice yourself.” If he stays, that's on him.

“There's never been a choice. They took that years ago. I've already accepted that I will die here.” The fire in his eyes slowly fades, making something in my chest tighten.

“Maybe, but today that's a decision you get to make for yourself.” I turn to leave but stop when Malik calls out.

“What the—”

I turn back to him. His wide eyes are on the spot where the beast just disappeared. He opens his mouth and looks at me but stops, taking a step back.

“What are you?” he asks, as if he's seeing me for the first time.

Something inside me could sense his fear. It leaked off him in waves, heading straight for me.

“Nothing you need to worry about.” The guards were if they caught up to us.

Malik looks at me warily. He opens his mouth to speak but stops when his body tenses up. He grabs his head, crying out in pain as his body folds to the floor.

I go to move toward him when he begins to shake, as if taking some sort of seizure.

“What’s going on?” I move closer but stop when an unlawful, deep growl comes from his lips.

Malik changes before my eyes into the pissed off demon with the purple horn. He flinches a couple of times before going completely still.

“Malik?” Nothing but silence greets me.

I inch forward, making sure he’s still alive when he jumps up and flashes forward.

Before I know it, he has me pinned by my throat up against the wall, all the while snarling in my face.

It takes a moment for the shock to clear before I get pissed. I am not going to let anyone hurt me like this again.

I let the darkness rise up inside me. It comes quicker than last time, pouring out of me and whipping out at Malik, sending him flying toward the wall in front of me.

Dropping to my feet, I raise a hand to my throat, breathing through the sharp burn as my ability heals it.

Glancing at Malik’s demon, I watch as he starts to tremble again. His horn recedes, replaced by hair, his body shrinking as he transforms from demon to man.

Malik pants. Sitting up, he grabs hold of his head. “I’m sorry... I’m sorry.” He releases a harsh breath and lifts a hand from his face, raising it in apology. I’d tell him to go fuck himself, but the complete look of devastation on his face stops me.

I sigh. “I know you can’t... *control* it.”

Malik shakes his head. “I wasn’t always like this. But it’s why I can’t leave. I’m a danger to anyone who comes near me. My demon can’t tell the difference between who is trying to hurt us. He only sees the threat.”

“And you have no control when you choose to shift?” Did King take that from him too?

“No.” Malik frowns, glancing up at me. “I’ve never shifted back that quick either. Not unless the guards use me as their entertainment to fight those creatures.”

“What—”

Shots and screams sound out in the hall, then it all turns quiet.

Seconds later, the shadow beast stalks in, interrupting the question on my lips, blood dripping from its mouth. It glances at Malik and then at me, as if asking if he also needs to be dealt with.

I shake my head, narrowing my eyes on the second alarm now shrieking around us.

“Let’s go.” I put out my hand for Malik.

He stares at it a moment before grabbing it and pulling himself up, letting go immediately.

We move quickly, making our way out of Malik’s room and into the hall. Red paints the walls with blood, with the bodies of the guards on the floor beside it.

I glance at the beast, but it just narrows its eyes on me as if to say, “*You’re welcome.*”

Shaking my head, we move through the halls, over the discarded bodies of the guards, and out through the door at the end of the hall.

The door opens out to a plain white hallway that leads in both directions.

“Any ideas?” I ask Malik.

“Usually, when they take me out of my room, they’ve knocked me out or I’m in my demon form. I don’t remember much of either. So, no.”

I go with my gut, taking a right. Malik follows, not questioning my decision, while the beast slides in and out of the shadows along the way.

The hall seems to go on forever. I’m about to turn back and try the other way when I spot a door in the corner.

Heading over to it, I put my ear to it, hearing no sound. Giving the handle a shake, I find it’s not locked.

I glance back at Malik, giving him a look to be quiet. He answers by raising a brow.

Edging the door open, I find a staircase leading upwards.

“You said we were on the bottom level?” I ask Malik. He walks around me, looking up the stairway.

“That’s what I was told, repeatedly. That it would be the grave I would die in.”

I shake my head. The more Malik told me, the more my blood boiled. I seize the fury racing through me and trap it inside me, ready to use when I meet King once again.

We move as quick as we can up the stairway, finding another door at the end. Opening it, we find a hall with wide windows looking out onto a large forest. I squint against the sun, my eyes not used to it after being in the dark for so long.

A spark of hope spears through me as we get one step closer to our freedom.

“Let’s find the nearest exit and get the hell out of here.”

Malik grunts in agreement while keeping his eyes out. We move along the halls as quick as we can. It seems to be more active on this level, with sounds coming from all around us.

I tell the beast to go check it out but stay in the shadows. He disappears just as heavy boots alert us to guards coming our way. Not knowing how many there are, we find an open door and hide in it until they pass.

“Well, what have we got here?”

CHAPTER 16



KAI

THIS IS the last place any of us wanted to be, but it's a necessary evil. If we can get rid of the block on opening portals on the location Draven and Jazmyn found, we might also be able to locate Kiarra quicker.

The sooner I have her in my arms, the better. I am never letting her go again. I meant it when I told her to get ready for five crazy possessive alphas. She isn't leaving my sight after this.

There is a strange shift in the atmosphere around me. Something bigger is happening. My hounds can sense it, but what it is, I didn't know. At least, not yet.

Either way, time is not on our side. We need to move fast.

A cold chill washes over me as we step through the portal. Rion and Axel are on each side of me as we walk through.

I glance at Axel. His body is stiff, his eyes narrowed on everything around him.

I'll have to keep an eye on Axel. He won't do well being back here. Not after everything they put him through.

Arriving on the outskirts of Boulder, Colorado, a group of Tarrent's guards meet us on the boundary line. No portals are allowed once you reach the border, so this is as close as we can get.

Boulder homes most of the powerful dragons in the US, with Tarrent ruling over them with an iron fist and an even meaner temper.

The mountains and natural wide-open space and parks are perfect for the colossal dragons wanting to spread their wings while also giving them the privacy they want.

Other species of supernaturals are shunned from living here with the dragons, but humans are welcomed, working alongside them.

Another community of supes that need a damn wake up call.

Checking us for any concealed weapons, the guards move on to spell concealments. Once they're happy we haven't come here with ulterior motives, they direct us into the Jeeps, each manned with more guards.

We speed down the road, lush greenery as far as the eye can see on one side and huge mountains on the other.

Before we reach the valley, a ten-foot wall stands before it with guards lining the length of it.

Tarrent is known for his diligence. There's a reason he's stayed in his position the last sixty years, and although he looks no older than his mid-thirties, he has the skill and knowledge of a scrupulous leader. His wife, Amaris, is just as bad as him. He, at least, has some morals, whereas she has none.

Passing through the armed wall and gates, we pass small homes and shops before reaching Tarrent's home and base. A large gray stone mansion that rests near the edge of the mountains.

Overlooking a wide lake, it sits higher than the rest of the valley, the entire expanse one long view from where it's positioned.

Axel was only a child when he was here, but I doubt anyone would forget his presence, considering what they put him through before they sent him away to live with his aunt.

But she ended up being just as bad as the rest of them, not giving Axel a moment of peace or love.

Once we park, there's another search by more guards before we make our way inside.

We walk into the foyer, a large open area decorated in white and gray marble. Everything looks over the top and expensive.

Glancing over at Axel, I see the anger and pain slashed across his face. His hands are clenched by his side as he stares down the guards, waiting for them to say something so he can start a fight.

I share a look with Rion. He nods, telling me he'll keep an eye out for him as well.

Rion glances ahead and tenses up. I look in the direction and spot the person coming to greet us: Amaris, Tarrent's wife and one of Axel's main tormentors when he was here.

The shrewd woman's icy blue eyes bear down on us. Her dark hair is pulled back against her sharp features, making her look pissed as hell as she moves closer. Even after all these years, she's still pissed that her own son hadn't received Tarrent's ability.

While most dragons can wield poison, only true heirs, like Tarrent's offspring, are immune to it.

Axel and his half-brother were both born in the same month, with Rhory being a week older.

It was no surprise that Tarrent had affairs. Amaris was well aware of her husband's extracurricular activities, having plenty of her own. What did surprise her was the affair resulting in Axel being born.

Not only is it hard for a dragon to get pregnant, but it's extremely rare for one outside a bonded pair to occur. And although Amaris isn't Tarrent's true mate, the bond forged by a political alliance should have prevented any other offspring from occurring.

To add insult to it, Axel, instead of Rhory, ended up receiving the ability of immunity from Tarrent.

She thinks Axel took something from her, something she was owed, and spent the first few years of Axel's life trying everything to take it back. Even if it involved beating it out of him or trying dark spells to remove it.

It didn't work, instead only inflicting more pain on Axel, leaving deep rooted scars of the mental kind behind.

I glance over at Axel, watching his eyes flash gold. A deep growl rumbles from his chest as he stares straight at her.

Placing my hand on his shoulder, I give him a look, reminding him why we're here.

"This is for Kiarra."

Axel clenches his fist, releasing a harsh breath. He nods a reply, but I know he's on the edge right now. One small push and he'll explode, leaving the entire valley in ruins.

Amaris places a smug smirk on her lips, waving us into the lounge. A half dozen guards follow us as we make our way in.

A huge crystal chandelier hangs in the middle of the room, with a large ostentatious beige chair at its base. Plush rugs and large oil paintings decorate the room, making it look more like an art gallery than a lounge.

Taking a seat on the hard beige chair, I focus on the threat in front of me just as she opens her mouth to speak.

"As you are the alpha leaders of Manhattan, we are obligated to go through with this meet, but know that anything you ask will be rejected. We want nothing to do with you and your kind."

Amaris sharp tone claws at my ears. Her demands and refusal to treat us with any type of respect is nothing new.

But it's something that will be swiftly dealt with if her blatant disrespect continues. It wouldn't take much to raze their valley to the ground before whipping it out completely. They have no idea who or what they are up against.

Axel scoffs. "*Our* kind? I'm a fucking dragon, if you haven't noticed."

“You’re an abomination, just like the rest of your little group.” She snarls, looking down on us with disgust.

My hound pushes forward, begging to be released, to teach this bitch some manners, but that isn’t what we came for. At least not today.

Amaris notices the change in me and flinches back. Clearing her throat, she attempts to cover it by sitting up straighter.

But the stench of her fear permits the air around me. My hounds see her as nothing but insignificant prey that can be easily removed.

I’m about to tell her as much when Axel speaks up.

“Well, we can’t all be jealous dicks that don’t get their way, can we?”

Amaris’s eyes pulse a dull gold, her face contorting in anger as she stands up attempting to look intimidating. “You little—”

“Ah, I see little brother has returned.” Rhory steps into the room, a smirk on his face. It drops the minute he sees me.

He tilts his head in respect. “Kai.” The smell of fear in the room grows.

I smile to myself, my hounds spotting another spineless prey.

Rhory makes his way over to us. He stands at least four inches shorter than Axel, and although built, the dragon looks slim next to his *little* brother.

Apart from height, the difference between the two was like night and day. Whereas Axel was gruff and prickly around the edges, he had a heart of gold and always looked out for our family. This dick was the complete opposite.

Rhory is all smooth and suave on the outside, but I can tell from the look in his eyes and the air about him that his soul is as dark as the night itself.

Rhory takes a seat beside his mother just as her faux confidence returns.

“He is not your brother.” Amaris growls, giving Axel a look of disgust. It makes me want to rip her face off for even looking at him.

“Apologies, *half*-brother.” Rhory’s eyes flicker to me before glancing at Axel.

“Where is *Father* dearest?” Axel asks Amaris. “Out seeding more of his oats?”

Amaris snarls at him, about to spit out a reply when Rhory cuts in. “He’s away on business, so whatever you want will have to go through us.”

Amaris turns smug, thinking she’s got one up on us, but she’s dead wrong if she thinks any of us are leaving without what we came for.

“What is it you want?” Rhory raises a brow.

“We need your assistance.” I tell him.

A loud bark is followed by chuckles. “Of course, you do.” But I can see the spark of interest in his eyes. He’s not stupid enough to think we’d come all this way to just ask for their help. We knew he’d never blindly give it. Not without some form of payment involved.

“We need your assistance with a spell. If you do this, we’ll ___”

“No. As I said before. We will not be helping you. Now leave before we have you moved by force.” Amaris cuts me off.

My hound pushes forward again and even the guards shift nervously around us as I send a warning pulse into the room.

Rhory’s eyes move from Axel to me, sensing the change. I catch the slight tremor in his hand before he fists it.

None of them stand a chance if they try anything, and from the look Rhory gives his mother and guards, they know it.

“You’re more than welcome to try. I doubt you’ll get far,” I tell them both.

Amaris opens her mouth to speak, but Rhory gives her a sharp look, stopping her.

I lean forward, clasping my hands together, feeling completely at ease. “Let’s just put it this way... Either you assist us or every dragon here is going to find out how weak their alphas are when I burn the entire valley down. I meant it when I said, we’re not leaving until you give us what we came for. Even if I have to start picking you off one by one to get it.”

Rhory turns white.

* * *

Axel

KAI’S DEMAND ripples through the room, taking the intense atmosphere up a notch.

“How dare—”

“Let’s hear them out.”

Amaris’s head whips to Rhory, a look of betrayal slashed across her face at having her beloved son cut her off. “Rhory!”

But he knows he doesn’t stand a chance against us. He may be a dick, but he’s not stupid.

He gives her one look, and she seethes, raising her head like she’s above us all, and stares us down with so much hate, I could almost taste it in the air.

Rhory and I never had any type of close relationship. Being my half-brother meant nothing to me and sure as hell meant even less to him.

I was the infidelity my *father* couldn't hide, and none of them let me forget it.

Once they found out I couldn't give them what they wanted; the ability they thought was owed to them, they sent me on my merry way into another hell hole.

Just one not as over-the-top extravagant and full of useless rich people stuff.

Instead of any normality or a safe and loving home, I got a junkie aunt who let her revolving boyfriends take their tempers out on me and a shitty upbringing with no care.

I raised myself, stole food to get by, and eventually figured out how to survive. But barely.

If it wasn't for the guys and Kiarra—my real fucking family—I don't know where I'd be right now.

Rhory turns to me. “What is it you want?”

I wish I could say ‘fucking nothing,’ but this is about Kiarra, and I will do whatever it takes to get her back. Even if that meant bargaining with the Devil... or two of the three sitting in front of me.

“Dragons. As we mentioned, we need a spell removed and enough dragons to do it.”

Rhory tilts his head to the side, his complete focus on me as he tries to avoid looking at Kai.

The weak fuck is scared shitless of him. I'd find it funny if I weren't so pissed at being here with them.

“And why should we help you? What could we possibly gain from this?” Rhory knows he doesn't have a leg to stand on.

We could destroy this whole place and burn it to the ground, just like Kai said, but if we want to keep any type of peaceful agreement among the dragons, we need to try the official way first.

We could always destroy their little valley another time. The thought makes me smile to myself.

“We’d never offer an alliance, if that’s where you’re thinking we’re going with this,” I tell him.

As if we’d want to align ourselves with a group of weak fuckers who hide behind their so-called political status and power.

Rhory gives me a hard smile, forcing out a laugh. “But as you can see, we don’t need your *help*.”

He moves to get up, probably trying to get the fuck out of here before shit blows up, but Kai speaks, stopping him.

“No, but you like power.”

Rhory pauses, slowly sitting back into his chair and giving Kai his full attention. “I’m listening.”

I scoff. Of course, he’d help for power. Even the bitch is frothing at the mouth for the chance to gain more.

That’s all this fucked up family wants, more power. The old man wouldn’t be around forever, and since I inherited his little immunity, that leaves his true heir, and any other from his line, vulnerable.

“The spell we’re hoping to break is extremely powerful. We need enough dragons to absorb the energy from it to destroy it. Once it’s done, you and your dragons can keep it,” Kai tells them.

Normally, the power would have to be transferred back to the source, but no way are we letting that twisted psycho, King, get any more power than he already has.

We still don’t know how he was able to get it in the first place.

Rhory’s eyes light up like a fucking kid in a candy shop. Something finally piquing his interest.

“We need at least a dozen of your most powerful dragons as soon as possible,” Kai says.

Rhory’s eyes narrow, quickly glancing from Kai to me and then to Rion. “If this is any kind of setup—”

“It’s not.” I stare him down.

If we wanted to fuck with them, we wouldn't go to the trouble of offering them something and then turning around and betraying them. I'd watch him, wearing a fucking smile while I did it.

Rhory stares at me a minute longer before nodding his head. A smug smirk gracing the fucker's face as he realizes what we're handing him.

“Then we agree to help our fellow alphas.”

My chest burns at the thought of working alongside them. I rub the spot, focusing on Kiarra.

She needs this, and it's one hell of a step closer to getting her back. They would be out of our hair soon enough.

Amaris stays quiet, but keeps a look of disgust on her face, like the old hag she is.

Rhory gets up, holding his hand out to Kai, knowing he's the one to deal with. I'd rather punch the fucker in the face, so maybe he's not so fucking stupid after all.

“I'll have my best dragons ready to go within the hour.”

Kai and Rhory shake on it. I smile when I see the grimace on the fucker's face when Kai grips him a bit too hard. Rhory tries to pull back, but Kai stares him down.

“If anything doesn't go the way we plan, I will make it my personal mission to destroy you and everyone you hold dear.”

Rhory winces, his hand turning a nice shade of red and purple.

“Do I make myself clear?”

Rhory nods. “Yes, of course.”

“Good.” Kai releases him, giving him a feral smile. Rhory immediately calls for his guards to get who he needs, glancing back at Kai with wide eyes.

We head out of the stuffy room to an open area outside. We wait until we're far enough out that they can't hear us before speaking.

“That went as well as can be expected,” Rion says, looking back at Rhory. The wide smile on Rhory’s face makes the fire in my chest grow.

Kai looks to Rion. “Contact the others and update them. It’s time to get our mate back where she belongs.”

Yeah, by our fucking sides.

CHAPTER 17



KIARRA

WHIPPING AROUND, I find a room full of guards—warlocks, by the looks of it. A couple are holding energy spheres while the rest have instruments of some kind, all aimed at a large, humanoid gray creature in the center of them.

The creature looks like a cross between a djinn and golem, leaning more towards the golem side.

Its arms and legs are tied down and chained to the anchor built into the floor. Dark yellow oozes from its wounds. Its chest wheezes as it struggles to hold on.

It was six against one, and it had no way of fighting back. The guards were torturing it for their own amusement.

A pit of fire burns in my stomach, traveling out to each of my limbs. A veil of red glazes my eyes as I focus on the domineering guards.

“Where did you two come from?” the leader of the group asks. He glances behind us, narrowing his eyes.

“We needed some fresh air,” Malik tells them before giving me a look as if to say, “*I told you so.*”

He still thinks we won’t make it out of here. But something inside me has changed, and I know deep down that I am getting out of here today, one way or another.

One of the men slides up beside him, drawing my attention. “Sir, that’s the Veros demon.”

The leader of the group scoffs before narrowing his eyes on Malik. A spark of recognition lights his eyes before they widen in shock.

“Shit. Get him back to his room and call Dimetri.” He glances at me. “Find out where she came from, too.”

I guess I’m not known to all the guards up here yet.

The other guards spread out around us. One throws an energy sphere at the wall behind us, forcing us to move into the center of the room and closer to the gray creature.

Glancing down at it, I can’t tell if it’s dead or not, but it’s no longer moving. My instincts tell me it’s gone.

“How about we have some fun first?” one of the guards asks his boss with a smirk, eyeing me up and down. “They might last longer than this weakling.”

The leader narrows his eyes, sighing. “Fine, but keep the Veros demon alive.”

“Fine by me.” Throwing the sphere up in the air, he catches it like a ball before taking a step forward.

Malik moves beside me, trying to push me behind him. “I’ll distract them while you make it back to your cell. Lock yourself inside and stay quiet until they forget about this.”

A small piece of warmth fills my chest at his words. Though he still doubts that we will get out of here and thinks heading back to my cell is the safer option, he knows they will beat him and yet is still willing to be the diversion to allow me to get out away from them.

A gesture I won’t forget anytime soon.

“You don’t have to worry about them,” I tell him as something inside me settles, knowing on some deeper level that they cannot beat me. Their powers are too weak, and not one of them is an alpha or a true leader of any kind.

“What are you—”

“Try not to die too quick, will you?” The guard cuts Malik’s question off, just as everything around me starts to

move in slow motion.

I watch as the other guards raise their energy spheres right at us. The smug guard thinks he has the upper hand, but from the power pulsing inside my chest, I know he doesn't stand a chance. None of them do.

The darkness inside me boils to the surface, finding its targets. It grows, expanding outward, seeping from my skin.

An inky mass of smoke flies out of me and straight toward the guards.

“What the—”

The guard doesn't get the chance to finish his sentence before my power lashes out like whips and wraps around every one of them. It drags them upward before coiling around their necks, slowly tightening its hold.

I watch on as if it's someone else controlling this, but I know it's all me. A part of myself that's been pushed down and hidden for too long.

The guards try to release its hold from their necks, but their hands slide right through it, as if were made from smoke.

I wait until they're about to pass out before slamming them into the walls around us. Each fall to the ground with a hard thump, knocking them out.

Malik's eyes are wide when I turn to him.

“Ruthless... I like it.” He smiles, but it slowly drops when he sees me still staring at him. I sense his fear as he holds his hands up. “I'm not the threat here, remember?”

His fear becomes a palpable thing, something I can taste in the air around me as it grows. “I know.” He isn't a threat to me. My power can sense that.

Malik relaxes, but frowns. “What are you, Kiarra?”

I open my mouth to answer, but I don't have one. Who or what I am is never something I've really thought about. I didn't truly learn about my ability until King started his

sessions, and by then, I was only trying to survive long enough to get me and *Morana* free.

Why I never fit in with any of the other supernaturals never topped my list of things to figure out.

But in the darkness on that metal table, something inside me awoke... Something dark; and I don't think I'll ever be able to go back to being what I was before. What I am now is something I'll have to eventually figure out, though.

"I don't know," I tell him, exhaustion sitting heavily on me after using my new abilities.

"Let's get out of here before reinforcements come." We move to the door, opening it to find it quiet outside.

My mind turns to the shadow beast, wondering where he went. As if I summoned it, he appears in front of us.

"Oh, now you come." Malik narrows his eyes on it, still wary of the strange beast.

"Find anything?" I ask, but it tilts its head as if he hasn't a clue what I'm asking for, which I know is a lie. It understands everything I've asked it to do so far.

"Show us the way out," I command.

Immediately, it turns and heads down the hall.

"Why does it answer to you?" Malik asks as we silently follow the shadow beast.

"I think it's somehow *connected* to my abilities." Or, at least, that's what I feel. The connection springs to life as if answering yes.

Malik sighs, shaking his head. Pausing, he glances back at the way we came. I see the sliver of doubt and fear in his eyes, but also a spark of hope.

It reminds me so much of myself when I was in King's hotel and desperately craved my freedom, but also feared what that would mean.

But that was then. King will no longer get to control me like that again.

“Come with us.” Malik glances at me. “It’s not worth it,” I tell him.

“What isn’t?”

I glance around before looking back at him. “Staying in a cage because it’s become all you’ve known. It is still a cage. One you’ll die in.”

Malik clenches his jaw, glancing away.

I continue. “There will never be any more than this for you, if that’s what you choose. There’s a whole world out there, but you’ll never know it if you stay here.”

“What if there’s nothing left of the me I once knew?” Malik swallows hard, frowning.

“Then you become something different, something more, but something *you* choose. It’s something I’m also learning for myself.”

Malik hesitates before nodding to himself. “What else have I got to lose?” He turns and heads after the shadow beast.

My stiff body relaxes as I follow after him. If he had chosen to stay, I would’ve knocked him out and got the shadow beast to drag his heavy ass out of here. He reminds me too much of myself, and I’m not leaving him behind when I know it is only his fear that is stopping him from taking his freedom back.

Keeping an eye out for any more guards, we silently move along the hall, passing a handful of more rooms.

We follow it, coming to a smaller hall, one with the odd chair and decoration on the walls. It leads out into a wide, open area with two large tables to the right and a small kitchenette to the left.

This must be where the guards eat.

I look over at the shadow beast and spot him near the double glass doors on the other side of the room. He looks at me before moving through it.

I move toward him, making it halfway there, when someone shouts out behind us.

“Stop!”

I whip around, finding the blonde guard from before. The one who came into my room. His dull blue eyes still have that spark of interest as he moves closer. There’s a thick black baton in his hand and a smirk on his face as he stares right at me.

“Thought you’d make a run for it? I’m afraid that won’t be happening.”

I glance at the door behind me before looking back at the guard and raising a brow. “Looks like you don’t have a say in that”

His smirks grows. “I wouldn’t head that way if I were you.”

I narrow my eyes on him. His smug smile making me wonder why he feels confident right now, especially when we’re the ones closer to the door. “Why?”

“Behind that door is a hell of a lot more guards, and that’s without our special... *guests*.”

He could be lying, but the spark in his eyes tells me different.

“What guests?” I ask, but it’s Malik who answers.

“He means *creatures*. The experimented-on kind.”

“The kind that also only listen to us.” The guard nods his head, taking a step forward. “So, here’s how this is going to go.” He points at Malik. “You’re going to go back to your cell, and we’ll pretend this never happened.”

His eyes veer to me. “But *you*, you’re coming with me, and we’re going to have a little... *fun*.”

I roll my eyes as Malik steps in front of me. “She’s not going anywhere near you.”

I step to the side with a smile of my own. “I’ll pass.”

The guard laughs. "I thought you might say that." He presses a button on his watch, a buzz sounds out just before a loud thumping comes through the door behind us.

The door slides open, revealing the source of the loud noise. Instead of an army of guards, a large creature appears. One that looks like one of those messed up werewolves from a horror movie.

Its long sharp fangs curve out of its mouth to its chin. Its entire body is covered in a muddy black fur. Stepping closer, it towers over us, nearly twice the size of Malik. It moves towards us, looking pissed as hell.

The guard behind us laughs as we back away from it, moving us closer to him.

I hear another buzz just before more creatures show up. All identical to the first one. They keep coming until there are seven large, enraged creatures surrounding us.

All looking ready to kill.

"Fuck."

I glance over at Malik to see him shaking his head and clenching his fists. "My demon is pushing forward. I don't know if I'll be much help once that happens." Before I get a chance to answer Malik, the guard clicks his fingers, and just like that, the creatures move forward, ready to attack.

Great timing.

With my energy levels still slightly depleted from last time, I dig down deep inside and drag up the darkness. It's slightly harder to pull up, but once it does, it settles over me, making me feel stronger.

Powerful.

"What the *fuck* is she?" I hear another voice from where the guard is, but I keep my focus on the creatures coming at me. One slashes out a sharp claw aimed toward my face, but my shadows catch it, breaking it along with the arm attached to it.

Instead of growling in pain, the beast glances down at it. It steps over it and continues forward, ignoring the dark blood that seeps onto the floor.

Just before it reaches me, the shadow beast appears, whipping forward and slicing the creature in two.

It drops to the ground like a sack of meat, falling in half.

“Kill her!” the guard demands.

The six beasts left all step forward. I try to pull up the darkness, but it’s like pulling from a dry well.

A creature reaches Malik just as his body begins to shake and shift. Within seconds, his demon is there, but instead of attacking me, he turns to the creature and lays into it.

Distracted from watching Malik, I miss one of the creatures sneak up from behind, slicing a claw down my side. The sharp burn catches my breath for a moment just before my ability kicks in.

“Did you see that?” A shocked voice floats over to me, but I ignore it, focusing on the newest creature trying to grab me.

Twisting out of its way, I move closer to Malik’s demon, turning just in time to see him land a punch to the creature’s face, knocking him down.

He whips his purple eyes up at me, assessing the threat. Instead of attacking me, he tilts his head as if to ask what I need next. But something behind me quickly grabs his attention.

Flashing forward, he intercepts another beast. The two trade punches, Malik’s demon taking a few hard hits.

Shouts come from all around as more guards arrive. We’re surrounded from all angles now with no way out. The shadow beast whips in and around the creatures, attacking any that get too close. But there’s too many, even for him and Malik to take on.

Too drained to help, I glance over at the shadow beast just as it turns to me. It gives me a look as if trying to tell me something.

“What?!” I ask.

“*Let it out.*” Its deep voice speaks inside my head.

“Let *what* out?” I step back as the guards and creatures get by Malik and move toward the shadow beast.

“*Every... thing.*”

As the guards and last couple of creatures inch closer, I glance over to Malik, now in his human form, as he holds his injured side. There’s a defeated look on his face as he watches the guards.

Glancing back at them, I spot one that stands out from the rest. A look of curiosity and interest lighting his eyes. The kind of look that only breeds cruelty and pain.

He saw what I could do when I healed and, just like all the rest, he will try to bend me until he sees me broken. But no more.

I will *never* be trapped again.

Let it out, the shadow beast whispers once more.

As if the words free the barrier I have on my mind and body, I let loose.

All the pain and anger and frustration and hurt, I let it explode out of me, no longer holding back.

It rushes out of me like a tidal wave, causing complete destruction of everything it touches and covers everything around me in its black smoke.

My body becomes a weight, one too heavy to keep up. Just as the last piece of light flitters out, my body drops to the ground, and my eyes slowly close, following the darkness around me.

CHAPTER 18



LUKA

NEARLY THERE.

Axel and Rhory are absorbing the energy around Kiarra's location, or at least they're trying to. If everything goes according to plan, we can be there within minutes, having the necessary supes needed to create the portal ready to go.

Jax keeps checking the phone in his hand, waiting for the green light from the others. Kai and Rion are still in Boulder, so they'll take a separate portal straight there. That's if everything works out and they're able to drain it first.

As time slowly drags on, I start to doubt myself and everything we've done to get this far. The phone rings, making my heart stop. Jax picks it up on the first ring.

"It's done."

The relief I feel from those two little words lifts the dark cloud threatening to smother me whole.

Jax's tense body relaxes, a look of determination shifting across his face.

I give the supes a nod, telling them to get the portal ready.

"Here we go."

I grab Jax's shoulder as we wait for it to open. "Time to get our girl back, brother."

"And never let her out of our fucking sight again." He gives me a smirk, telling me exactly what we're going to do with our little mate. She has no clue what she's in for.

The portal opens and we rush forward... and straight into complete chaos.

Darkness explodes all around us, reaching nearly every corner of the small Island. It brushes past us but doesn't harm us in the slightest.

"What the hell was that?" Jax's wide eyes mirror my own.

"I don't know, but let's hurry."

Jax nods, rushing through the thick forest. Racing forward, I notice less thick trees the farther in we get, giving me a slight piece of hope. But the farther we get in, the more that hope shrivels up.

The island is quiet, eerily so. My heartbeat kicks up a notch, thinking we're too late.

Damn it. *Please be okay.*

After a couple of minutes, we find a large building that looks like an old military base. Green vines cover the outside, doing a shit job of trying to hide it from anyone. There's a fence around the entire length of it.

Without thinking, we head straight for it, breaking into a sprint before jumping over the fence and landing on the balls of our feet.

I share a look with Jax before heading towards the emergency exit. Just as we reach it, another blast of dark smoke explodes towards us.

We duck but can't stop the dark smoke from reaching us. We dig our feet into the ground and brace for impact.

The smoke feels cool as it brushes through us again, but just like last time, it doesn't harm us.

Jax and I share a frown before shaking it off and push forward. Ripping the door off its hinges, we head inside, only to be met by complete darkness. The same dark smoke that's outside covers every inch inside, making it hard to see anything.

I feel Jax beside me as we move forward, using our other senses to listen for anything, but it's quiet. Too quiet.

I rub my chest. The bond feels stronger, but I can't pinpoint it to one spot. It's like it's all over the building, making my dread grow.

The more we move in, the more the dark smoke begins to clear. Light slowly filters in, revealing long halls with rows of doors.

"Search every room. She has to be here somewhere," I tell Jax, trying to make myself believe it.

Moving through the long halls reminds me of a hospital, but one from a horror movie, as the bloodied bodies come into view. There's a shitload of them, with most ripped apart and in pieces.

If Kiarra is...

The sound of my heartbeat thrashing in my ears drowns out everything around me as terror takes over at the thought of something happening to Kiarra. I can't give a fuck who these people are once I know she isn't among them.

Jax's face is white as he looks over them, searching for her.

"She'll be fine," he tells me, but nothing about the tone in his voice or the look of horror on his face eases the dread choking me.

"Where are the others? They should be here by now," I ask Jax as we make our way through the bodies.

"We're here." Kai, Rion, and Axel come up behind us.

"We had a minor issue with the portal," Axel grits out, looking pissed as hell until he sees the dead bodies. "What the fuck happened here?"

I swallow hard, the thought of Kiarra's body lying among them flashing through my mind. "We don't know."

Axel rubs his chest. "Why can't I feel where she is now that the spell is down? It's almost like..."

“Like she’s everywhere,” I finish for him, still feeling the same.

“You don’t think—”

“No.” Kai sighs, his eyes pulsing as he tries to control his hounds. “Let’s split up and look for her. She has to be here somewhere.” He forces a calm tone, but we all feel the tension in the air, and a blanket of panic falls over us.

Jax and I keep moving forward while the others turn right and down another hall. The farther we go, the more this place feels like a damn maze.

“What the—” Jax moves around a large werewolf, or what looks like a mutant version of one. It’s deformed, with a missing arm.

“Let’s keep moving,” I tell him, not ready to even think about what that thing is.

Not yet.

More unnatural creatures show up the longer we search, making my dread increase.

Where are you, Kiarra?

Finding a staircase, we head down. Coming to the end of the corridor on the last hall, we find three rooms. Two have bars on them.

Heading toward them, we find the bars bent, revealing a room with a metal table and machine to the side.

King has me strapped down to a table. Kiarra’s words flash before me, making my blood boil.

This is where he kept her, in this... cell of a room. I hate it. I hate that she was here, where it’s dark and cold, and all alone.

I glance at the machine, the one that fucking electrocuted her, and lose it. My veins burn with the violence thrashing through me. I need an outlet. Something to burn through the twisting storm gathering inside me.

“Let’s burn it.” I look at Jax, seeing him in a similar state. His fists are clenched by his side as he stares at the machine.

Jax turns to me, his eyes full of rage as he holds back a shift. His eyes glow as his cool blue flames slides up his arms.

“Burn it, Luka. Burn it all.” His guttural voice breaks, and it’s the last straw before I let go.

My red flames take flight and span out, heading straight toward the machine, blowing it up on impact.

I move to the table, doing the same, before I scorch the room completely. Pulling my flames back, I glance around the room at my handy work, my shadow wolf appeased by the destruction.

Once the machine has melted and is nothing but a metal mess on the floor, I turn to Jax. “Let’s keep looking.”

Jax nods his head as if on autopilot, both of us thinking the worst the longer we go without finding her.

Moving back through the halls, we come across more dead guards and creatures, some fucking terrifying-looking, but all dead.

We move up back up the staircase and head in the opposite direction, finding nothing but more dead bodies and creatures. I’m about to turn around when I catch something moving out of the corner of my eye. I glance at Jax before we head straight for it.

Moving closer, we see it’s a dark-haired guy holding a body in his arms.

A very familiar body.

We speed up, my wolf wanting out... wanting to rip this guy apart for touching her... for hurting her.

“Get your *damn* hands off my mate!” My wolf pushes forward, wanting to break his hand for daring to touch what’s ours.

The guy’s head whips up, his eyes widening when he sees us coming. He raises a hand, his other still touching Kiarra.

A low warning growl slips from my lips the closer I get to my new prey.

“Hey, hey.” As if sensing he isn’t going to get anywhere with us, he gently places Kiarra down on the floor and steps back, holding his palms up.

“She passed out after she...” He glances around at the destruction around us. “After she did this.”

His words slowly filter through the red haze, making us pause. Jax gives me a confused look, one I share with him as I kneel and pull Kiarra into my arms.

Checking her pulse, I feel it slow but steady. The dread and fear slowly leave my tense body. I look up, giving Jax a nod, telling him she’s okay... at least physically.

“Who are you?”

The guy shakes his head. “No one... just another prisoner.”

Jax gently picks up her hand, holding it tight. “Kiarra, did all this?”

The guy, demon by the smell of it, nods his head. “I don’t know how, but it just... exploded out of her.”

I share a look with Jax. That black smoke and destruction was her... *But how?*

I glance down at her face, so at peace, so innocent-looking, you wouldn’t think something so fragile looking could cause such destruction.

Not that it matters to me.

She could destroy this whole island, and I wouldn’t give a fuck.

“Fuck them,” Jax says, voicing my thoughts while staring at Kiarra as if she’s the most precious thing in this world. And he’d be right.

“They deserved it, and they better fucking pray I don’t find any of them alive.” He narrows his eyes on the bodies scattered across the room, not one of them moving.

“I don’t give a shit if it was her. I just want her to be okay.” I hold her close to my body and lift her. Jax’s eyes don’t leave her as we make our way out of there. The demon follows close behind but keeps his distance. He doesn’t need to get any closer than he already was to our mate.

Coming out onto the next corridor, we run into the guys.

“Thank fuck...” Axel breathes. “Is she...?”

“She’s unconscious, but alive,” I tell him.

Axel releases a harsh breath, nodding his head.

“Who the fuck is this?” He nods his head toward the demon.

“We found him with Kiarra,” Jax tells Axel, narrowing his eyes on the demon.

Kai reaches us, his eyes not leaving Kiarra. “Go search the rest of the place. Kane must be here somewhere.”

Taking one last look at Kiarra, Rion heads off in the opposite direction.

“Kane?” the demon asks just as his body starts trembling.

“What the—” My eyes widen, wondering if it’s some kind of aftereffect from the smoke.

He drops to the floor, his eyes widening as he looks up at us. “Knock me out.”

“What?” Axel looks at him as if he’s gone crazy, which might not be too far from the truth after being stuck in this place for who knows how long.

“Ple...ase.” His voice breaks as he squeezes his eyes shut.

Jax looks to Kai while Kai’s eyes narrow, glowing and doing some crazy shit of their own.

The guy starts convulsing as he starts to shift, his demon side taking over.

“Knock. Me. Out.” His voice grows deeper with each word.

Just before he loses it, Axel steps forward and punches him straight in the face, knocking him out.

Kai raises a brow at him. Axel shrugs. “You heard him.”

Within seconds, the demon’s transformation comes to a halt, and he reverts back to a man. Which makes no fucking sense but is just another thing to add to this mess.

“What the hell is he?” Axel asks, still staring at the demon.

“I don’t know, but we should take him with us,” Kai tells us.

Axel huffs but grabs his arm. Hauling him over his shoulders, he carries him out.

Once we’re outside, Jax pulls out his phone and sends off a text to let our people know we’re ready for the portal.

Rion comes through the emergency exit a couple of minutes later with a beaten and unconscious Kane. There are multiple incision marks all over his body. His nose is busted, and he has two black eyes, making me think Kiarra wasn’t the only prisoner here.

I push the thought aside for now, focusing back on her.

The warmth in my chest spreads to my hands as I heat them to keep her warm against the cool breeze.

Everyone’s quiet. All of them stare at our mate, unable to look away, as if she’s about to disappear any second. I grip her tighter just as the portal opens.

“Time to go home,” Kai says, taking one last look around.

“What about that?” Jax asks, tilting his head toward the building.

“As soon as we have Kiarra safe, I’ll wipe it out.” He glances over at her. “She’ll never have to worry about this place again.”

Something settles inside me to know that she’ll never see this place again. No one will.

We move toward the portal. This time with our whole future lying safely in my arms.

CHAPTER 19



KIARRA

“WAS IT TOO EASY?”

“No. She’d already destroyed most of the guards. She was getting out of there, with or without us.”

“That’s our girl.”

Familiar voices float around me as my mind slowly wakes up.

“King wasn’t there...”

“Maybe he didn’t care anymore, or maybe he already got what he wanted. Whatever it is, I don’t give a shit. She’s back with us, and she’s never getting out of my fucking sight again.”

Blinking back the drowsiness, I slowly open my eyes.

“She’s awake... Hey, baby.” Jax’s smile is the first thing I see, then Luka’s sad yet hopeful eyes. Both are sitting on the bed in front of me.

Rion is leaning against the dresser to my left, while Axel and Kai are on my right, standing next to the large king-sized bed I’m in.

A mixture of emotions crosses their beautiful faces. From love, relief, and happiness, to worry and guilt. The last one being something none of them should feel.

“Tell me this is real.” It wasn’t a far stretch that I could be dreaming or that I could’ve jumped into another one of their links accidentally.

Gripping the black and white duvet in my hands, I feel its soft cotton touch as it grounds me, but I know the link feels just as real.

I glance over at the large window, seeing nothing but clear blue skies, but again, the same could be seen in the link.

Even with those things feeling similar to the link, there's something inside me that *knows* that this time is different.

"It's real," Kai says, his eyes filled with a familiar warmth. "This isn't the link. We're right here, and we're not going anywhere."

Still feeling drained from the energy I expended, I slowly sit up, looking around the room.

We're in a large bedroom with gray and white walls. There's a large flat screen T.V. on the wall in front of me with a black chest of drawers beneath it. Beside it is a set of double doors with another one to my right.

Everything else in the room is a blank slate with no personal touches or designs, giving me no clues as to who sleeps here.

Kai rubs a hand down the back of his neck, looking unsure of himself as he speaks. "We didn't know what you'd like..."

I frown, not understanding.

"We thought you'd like to add your own touches to your room," Rion says, his eyes not leaving mine.

Wait... did they say... I glance around the large open room and back to my guys, who all wear hesitant smiles. "This is mine?"

"You can have any room you want," Kai says. "Hell, if you don't like it here, we'll pack up and move. Once you're happy, we don't care where we are."

The guys nod their heads, agreeing with Kai.

I blink back tears that are threatening to spill.

"Thank you. For not giving up on me and coming after me."

“You don’t need to thank us for that, or anything else, Princess. You’re ours, and we’ll always come for you, no matter what.” Axel narrows his eyes on me. “No more running unless it’s from Jax. Then I’ll fucking help you get away from him.” He finishes with a smile as Jax’s eyes bug out.

“She’ll be running *to* me to get away from *your* stubborn ass.” Jax looks at me. “And I’ll be waiting with open arms. We’ll head off into the sunset and hide from all of these idiots.”

Luka elbows him in the chest. Jax sighs. “Fine... and Luka.”

Luka nods his head like he approves, while the rest of the guys just shake their heads.

“I can’t believe I’m finally here.” I feel a large smile spread across my face, and any lingering tension in the room disappears along with it.

Jax jumps on the bed beside me. “It’s real. I can always prove it... again. This time with a little more—”

Luka slaps the back of his head, giving him a frown. “Knock it off. She needs to rest.”

Jax rolls his eyes, kissing me on the cheek while whispering into my ear, “Later.”

Axel pulls him off the bed, standing in his place. “You’re here. You’re safe, and we’re never letting you out of our sight again.”

A laugh escapes my lips, thinking they’re joking; but with one look around the room, I can see each one of them is dead serious.

I narrow my eyes on them all. “I realize the past couple of weeks were hell...”

“You can say that again,” Jax mumbles, dragging a hand down his face, the exhaustion written all over it.

“But I’m also not some fragile doll you can keep locked up and away from anything that might be dangerous.”

I have plans. I meant it when I promised myself that I will never run from King again. He is going to pay for what he did to me and my family and all the years he's taken from me.

Axel leans in, mad as hell. "Watch me—"

Kai gives him a sharp look, cutting off his threat. "We're not suggesting that. We want you to live and enjoy everything this world has to offer, but we're not losing you again. If you need to go somewhere, know that one of us will be there with you. If you want to go out, it won't be alone."

The others nod, backing him up.

I sigh, giving them a small smile. Maybe now wasn't the best time to bring up my plans for revenge.

"I get it, okay. I'm not going anywhere, so drop the alpha act. But you all know I'm not some fragile little thing that needs to be handled with care." Going through the last few years has proven that. "I like my independence and have fought like hell to get it—"

Axel opens his mouth to start again, but I narrow my eyes on him.

"But... I also realize what you all have gone through and what the last couple of weeks must have been like, so let's move on and figure it out as we go."

Axel clenches his jaw, not liking my reply, but he can't expect me to stay by their sides every second of every day. I understand where they were coming from. If our roles were reversed, I wouldn't want them out of my sight right now, but down the line, they'd also want their own time.

"We don't think of you as fragile. We just *can't* lose you, not again." Jax's voice breaks, as if pleading with me.

"Jax..."

Before I get a chance to reply, Axel moves closer. "Don't make us choose, because if we do, your ass is getting tied to the bed until you see fucking reason." He leans in, lowering his voice, making me lose my train of thought at his enticing scent. "I'll make every delicious minute worth it, though."

Axel's eyes darken, a smirk growing the longer I stay silent. His eyes dart to my lips as I wet them, remembering Jax's hands and fingers as they...

Rion clears his throat, shaking me from my heated thoughts.

I drop the previous conversation for now, knowing neither of us would get anywhere. "How did I get here?" The last thing I remember was the strange werewolf creatures and the guards attacking us.

"We found your location, but I think you had already saved yourself." Luka smirks, looking proud.

"How? How did you find me?" I ask them as Luka takes my hand in his, running his thumb along it.

"Through Kane. Jazmyn and Kane's demon brother, Draven, used their blood bond to find him and, in turn, you."

Luka's soft touch is so distracting that I almost miss what he is saying.

Kane's face hovering over me flashes before me in distorted pieces of memories.

"Jazmyn? Kane? Are they okay?" The last time I saw Jazmyn was before the docks, and I still didn't know if I had dreamed of Kane or not.

"Both are fine, baby."

My tense shoulders relax until they stiffen back up remembering the rest of the escape. The creatures... the guards... my powers...

"I... I think I..." Memories of darkness as it explodes out of me, slamming the creatures and guards back, flashes before me, making my chest turn tight.

I think I killed them. At the time, I didn't care, and some part of me is still glad that there are a few less monsters in the world, but the other part of me fears becoming just like them.

"I..."

“Don’t.” Kai’s sharp voice breaks through the dread slowly building in the pit of my stomach.

“You don’t owe anyone anything, and you definitely don’t owe those guards a second thought. Whatever you had to do to survive and escape doesn’t change who you are, and it sure as hell doesn’t make us see you any differently. I would’ve ripped each and every one of them apart and enjoyed every minute of it.”

Kai’s words settle inside me, taking root. Not one of those guards cared what happened to me or anyone else there. They wouldn’t have thought for a second before slicing my throat or Malik’s.

My eyes widen, completely forgetting about the misunderstood demon.

“What is it, baby?” Jax frowns at me, leaning forward to check over my face.

“Malik. Where is he?” I glance around the room, each of the guys’ expressions going from worried to angry within a second.

“The demon?” Jax sneers, narrowing his eyes on me.

I roll my eyes at the possessive ass. “Yes, is he okay?”

Jax shrugs, grinding his jaw. “Who cares?”

“I do.” The temperature drops in the room.

“Guys, the possessive act is hot and all, but I need you to tell me if he’s okay?”

Jax smirks. “You think we’re hot?”

“You know damn well what I think about you, so let’s not make that head any bigger than it has to be.”

“Too late.” Jax gives me a wicked smirk, making a show of adjusting himself.

“Dick.”

“Later, baby. Kai and the others will have my ass if I don’t let you rest, but I promise *that* ass belongs to me later.”

Luka groans beside him. “Shut up and let her finish what she was asking.”

I smile, thanking Luka. “Is Malik okay?”

“Why does it matter?” Jax asks, giving me the side-eye and looking put out.

“Why the hell do you think?” I ask incredulously.

Jax stays silent, but his whole body language has gone into defensive mode. I throw him a bone this time, knowing he’s exhausted and not thinking straight.

“He helped me, that’s all.”

Jax frowns, grinding his jaw. “He’s fine. Having a little reunion with his long-lost family as we speak.”

“Long-lost what?”

“Apparently, he’s Kane and Draven’s brother.”

Huh. I didn’t even know Kane had any family.

“Kane has a brother? And who’s Draven?” I remember the guys mentioning the name in their link.

Jax nods his head, playing innocent again. “Yeah, shocked us too. And *two*, he has *two* brothers. The demon leader of Staten Island, Draven, and that Maverick guy.”

“Malik.”

Jax rolls his eyes. “Whatever, but it also turns out they’re Jazmyn’s mates.” Jax’s wicked smile returns.

“And you still got stropo when I mentioned Malik.”

Jax looks at me like I’m crazy. “Having a mate means shit if you still don’t put the work in. You don’t count, though; I’ll happily do all the work.”

Another groan and slap before Jax is pulled out of view, making me laugh.

“How do you feel?” Kai asks, still looking for any type of outward injury. One we both know he won’t find.

“Tired, but good,” I admit. My body is drained, but I’m fine otherwise.

“We should let you get some rest,” Rion says, but no one makes an attempt to move, which I’m happy for. I don’t want any of them to leave my sight yet.

I change the subject, hoping they’ll forget about it altogether. “What about the attacks?”

“We’ve got them under control for now. Don’t worry about that. Just focus on getting some rest,” Kai tells me.

“But—”

“But nothing. Right now, we just want you to rest and get healed up.”

I give him a deadpan look, knowing he knows damn well I can heal from pretty much anything. “I’m healed.”

He narrows his eyes on me. “Then rest.”

Resting was the last thing I wanted to do. I was finally free and out from under King. I had my mates around me, and I wasn’t in the Cardinal Three anymore. I wanted to go explore the city and do normal things, like go for a walk and visit a park. Maybe they’ll have one like the one across from King’s tower.

“Another thing we need to talk about... What you went through when...” He sighs, a look of devastation and guilt crossing his face.

A heavy sigh leaves my lips. I want to spend time with them and not waste it thinking about what King and those guards did to me. There will be time to focus on that sick psycho soon enough. Besides, they are all in a good mood. I glance over at a pouty Jax.

Well, most of them, and I didn’t want to ruin that.

“Later?” I plead, my voice soft, hoping he’ll take the bait. “I’m hungry, like, *really* hungry.”

Kai’s eyes soften, then a heated spark darkens them. Wolfish grins make their way around the room, making me

smile and shake my head at their antics.

Jax pushes Axel out of the way, leaning forward. “I’ve got something for you.” He bites his lip, making the rest of the guys groan. He ignores them, the heat in his eyes expanding. “But after you’re done, *I* get to eat *you*.”

I hear a sigh, followed by a slap. Jax whips his head around just as Luka gives me a look of apology.

“Hey! We’re supposed to stick together. Where’s your twin code gone?” Jax says in mock outrage.

Luka gives him a deadpan look. “It disappeared the minute you opened your mouth.”

Kai shakes his head, smiling at me before narrowing his eyes on Jax. “Let’s get you some proper food.”

Axel leans in, kissing my forehead. “I’ll go get you something.”

“Fine, if we’re not going to have any *real* fun, then let’s make a pillow bed and all sleep in here with you tonight,” Jax says, making me smile.

Luka thumps Jax on the shoulder.

“What?”

Luka sighs, shaking his head before looking at me. “What he *meant* to say is, do you mind if we stay with you?”

“Please.” One word and the guys get moving, grabbing some blankets and pillows. Within minutes, they have piles of bedding all spread out around the bed.

Axel comes back with a large plate and an assortment of food, from small sandwiches to cakes and crackers.

I thank him before tucking in.

Jax gets into the bed beside me while Luka stares daggers at him. “Jax!”

Jax gives him an innocent look. “What?” Jax looks from me to Luka and then to the others. “I never said *I* was going to

sleep on the floor.” Jax’s smile widens. “Someone needs to keep our mate company.”

Luka’s eye practically twitches. “And that needs to be *you?*”

“Someone has to take one for the team, brother. I’m more than happy to do it.” Jax settles himself under the blankets and starts to play footsie with my feet.

He leans in, his eyes dipping to my lips when he’s yanked out of the bed, a large thump following him.

Luka and the others chuckle at the glare Axel and Jax give one another. “Let her fucking eat.”

“Apart from Kiarra, no one sleeps in the bed tonight,” Kai declares.

“We just need a bigger bed. A couple of those super king-sized ones should work,” Luka says, settling his covers beside me on the floor. Realizing what he just said, his head whips up to me, his eyes wide. “I mean...”

A bubble of laughter escapes my lips at the look on his face. “We should definitely get a bigger bed.”

Luka smiles, dropping his tense shoulders.

“I need to clean up first.” I glance down at my dirty leggings and top from the facility and cringe.

“There’s a shower in your en suite, but if you’d prefer a bath, there’s one down the hall,” Luka tells me.

“A shower sounds good.” I thank Luka with a kiss and head straight to the door he pointed out.

Heading inside, I’m stunned by how beautiful a bathroom can look. There’s black marble with gold veining on the floor and a white and gray marble sink and counter. A large mirror hangs over the sink, making the room look even bigger. I turn around and check out the shower. It’s huge, with the black and gold tiling design continuing on through it.

Not wanting to make the guys wait too long for me, I strip and get into it, turning up hot water before finding the perfect

pressure.

I take a quick shower and change into the shorts and a tank top set one of the guys must have got for me and head back out.

The guys have already set up their make-shift beds all around mine.

Getting into bed, I share a smile with all of my guys. Having them around me feels like coming home.

We spend the rest of the night watching movies with Jax's commentary throughout each one. It's funny as hell. I don't remember laughing so much in my life.

Each of them makes sure to hold and touch me every chance they get, sneaking kisses in and making me feel like we were never separated to begin with.

It's not until later on, when the guys are all soundlessly sleeping around me, that it hits me that I'm free. Even with the colossal mess in front of us, we have each other, and that's all that matters right now.

CHAPTER 20



KIARRA

HANDS RUB UP and down my body, inching closer and closer to my core. Every time one gets close enough to tease, it pulls back only to start its slow, torturous trail again. My breathing picks up along with my heart rate as everything becomes too much. I need some type of release.

I moan, begging whatever dream this is to put me out of my misery and to let me have this moment.

“Yes, baby, that’s it.” Jax’s husky voice filters through the haze of sleep. I slowly wake, realizing that this is way better than a wet dream, as he trails kisses up and down my body.

“Jax?” I moan into the side of my pillow. His hand slides up my chest to my neck and chin, turning it to him and his waiting lips. He leans in, brushing his lips against mine, slowly tasting as if savoring every sip, while stroking every ember, every flame, ready to burn inside me.

“Morning.” Jax drags his soft lips from mine, moving down my chin to the side of my neck. His warm breath on my sensitive skin sends tingles down my body.

I try to turn around, but his hand stops me.

“Where is everyone?” My voice comes out in a breathless pant as he continues to explore my body with his lips.

“Kai and Rion had to go out, but the rest are around.” His hand slides down my front to my stomach, his thumb brushing over the hem of my shorts.

“Jax...” I breathe, his touch becoming an ache my body craves.

“Tell me you want this,” he whispers in my ear as his hand hovers over my lower stomach.

“Don’t you *dare* stop,” I demand, as a rush of heat floods my core.

I feel a chuckle against my neck before he pulls my body back against his bare chest. His hard length beneath his trousers presses up against my ass, making the heat expand.

I grind my ass back against him, needing the delicious friction, but the fucker holds me still, stopping me.

He leans in to whisper in my ear, his breath coming in short, shallow pants. “I get to play first, and then when I’m done, I’m going to fuck you nice and hard. I’m going to fill you up and make you fucking shatter around me. So be a good girl and let me have my fun.”

Fuck, yes.

My breath comes out in short, heated gasps as waves of pleasure radiate across my body in anticipation. I reach around and grab his head, pulling him to my mouth, needing to consume everything he has.

My body becomes overwhelmed with all of my senses coming to life, the feel of his chest against my back, his hands and lips and scent as it wraps around me, dragging me under.

“Please,” I breathe.

I want to feel every inch of his hard body, feel his thick length as it fills me up and completely destroys me before piecing me back together.

“I’ve got you, baby.” Jax slips his hand under my waistline, his fingers teasing my slit. He moans into my neck, sliding a finger along my wet folds before circling my clit with his thumb. “Damn, you’re so fucking wet for me.”

My breathing shudders as the pleasure builds and builds with each stroke.

Keeping his thumb where it is, he slips a finger inside my slick heat, easily pumping in and out before adding another, dragging a long moan from my lips.

“You like that, baby?” He drags his fingers out all the way, running them along my folds before thrusting back into my core.

I suck in a startled gasp as ripples of pleasure spread across my body.

“Fuck,” I breathe.

He repeats the delicious rhythm again and again until my mind turns to mush, my only focus on the slowly building heat.

Jax brushes kisses down the side of my neck, and just before his fingers slide back in, he bites down on my ear, making me gasp. A jolt of pleasure shoots right to my core.

“I’m going to mark every inch of you as mine.”

“Yes.” I moan, wanting to feel him inside me as he fills me up, for him to stretch me wide and fuck me until I can’t move.

He freezes his movement, making me groan before he picks up again.

“Damn,” he breathes. “Hearing those words from that sweet innocent mouth has me feeling all kinds of things. But I still want to play. I have plans...”

Shit. I must have said that aloud, but I don’t get to think about it long. He slows down, making me growl out a warning. His warm breath slides along my cheek as he chuckles softly.

I clench around his fingers, making him grunt.

“Naughty... I like it.” I feel his smile against my neck, making me want to push him further.

I grind into his hand, and each swirl of my hips presses my ass against his hard length. The friction and push and pull gets me closer and closer to that shattering release that I know is coming.

So close.

Like he can hear my thoughts, he bites down on my ear at the same time he adds pressure to my clit.

Ripples of bliss pulse through me as the tingling sensation grips my body like a vise. It throbs throughout my body, making me explode on his fingers. I cry out as the mind-blowing climax shatters throughout my entire body.

It takes me a minute before I can think past the pleasure still coursing through me.

Slick with sweat, I turn over and find Jax's possessive gaze.

"Fucking beautiful," he whispers, his husky voice full of need.

Lifting his hand, he brings a slick finger to his mouth and sucks, his dark gaze filled with hunger. "You taste like my own personal treat."

Dipping his head, he places open kisses along my shoulder. "I'm going to claim every fucking inch of you now."

His words are as potent as his touch, sliding down my back and joining the hunger and heat building once more.

I grab him by the neck and pull him to me. His lips meet mine, matching his promise to fulfill all of my wicked desires. It's the kind of kiss that punishes and teases for more.

He drags his lips from mine with a deep moan that shoots straight to my core. I watch as he yanks his trouser down. Sitting up, I pull my top off before pulling down my shorts, throwing them off the bed.

I lie back down and watch his eyes darken as they trail down my body.

"You're fucking perfect, every inch of you."

Biting my lip, I smile, opening my legs for him. Leaning down, he brushes his lips against mine before settling on me, the length of his body lining up against mine. I moan into his lips, feeling his hard length twitch against my stomach.

“Jax...”

He drags his lips down my neck to my chest and hardened nipples. He takes one pebble into his mouth, swirling his tongue around it. I arch into it, as short bursts of pleasure shoot down my stomach to my core.

I slide my fingers through his hair, closing my eyes against the building sensation once more.

He moves to my other nipple, making me moan and gasp as he runs his teeth along it. I let go of his hair and reach up behind me to take hold of the headboard as his lips and tongue trail down my body with open wet kisses until he reaches my core.

“Jax,” I pant at the first slide of his tongue.

My hands tighten on the headboard as I arch into his mouth, dragging a moan from his lips. The vibration around my clit makes me lose my fucking mind.

“Please, Jax.” Needing more of the delicious pleasure, I grind against his mouth.

Jax groans. “Fuck, baby. If you really want my cock that bad, who am I to fucking deny you? We can play more later.”

“Deal.”

I pant as he moves back up my body. He meets my lips with fervor, swirling and stroking my tongue as his body lines up with mine.

Settling between my legs, he slides his thick cock along the length of my slick folds, each push and pull as it inches closes to my entrance makes my core throb with delicious heat.

Holding my neck and chin, he meets my lips again. This kiss is a mix of his wild recklessness and chaos. I’m drowning in him, in his taste and scent, each stroke of his tongue matching the speed of his hard cock as it slides along the length of my core. I’m drenched by the time his tip finally meets my entrance.

“Jax... Stop teasing me,” I breathe, dragging my lips from his.

“But I like teasing you.” He chuckles, moving back.

I go to grab him to pull him back to me, but he grabs hold of my waist, twisting my body around so I’m lying on my stomach.

His hands slide down my hips and yank my ass up. I gasp at the feel of his tongue as it slides along my core.

I moan into the pillow, biting down on it as he spreads my thighs and settles in behind me.

“Jax.” I feel his thick length as he lines it up at my core.

“I love it when you moan my name, but I want to hear you scream it.” He grips my hips hard, then slams into me in one thrust.

I grip the bedding, clenching it in my fists at the delicious feel of him inside me.

Fuck. He *feels* so good.

“Fuckk!” Jax pants out, breathlessly mirroring my thoughts.

He waits a moment, letting us both adjust before he starts to move with me, meeting every thrust. I push further back into him, the feeling of being completely full so fucking delicious as the build reaches higher and higher to that earth-shattering release.

Using his knees, he spreads me wider, the new position touching just the right spot. My mouth drops open, the pleasure from the new angle making every slight push and pull drag gasps and moans from my lips.

Gripping my hips harder, he pulls nearly all the way out before slamming back in. I whimper for more.

No longer able to hold back, he thrusts into me again and again, each surge harder than the last. A bolt of heat builds into another all-consuming climax. The kind that makes you see fucking stars. I’m ready to explode.

“Jax,” I warn him. I’m so fucking close.

“Yes, baby. That’s it, come for me.” His husky, deep voice is like the fucking cherry on top, making me shatter around him.

Pushing my ass further back into him, I clench around him, making him grunt.

He thrusts a couple of times, as if he can’t help himself, before I feel him pulse and spill into me, crying out my name.

I fall forward, Jax’s body landing on me before he twists us to the side and pulls me into his slick, hard body.

“Do you know how many times I imagined being with you? And not one of those times came close to how fucking perfect it was. You were made for me, every sexy, delectable inch, and I’m never letting you go again.”

I’m on a high, too breathless to form words, so I turn and meet his lips instead. He drags me under once again as I start to crave every inch of him.

He pulls his lips away, looking at me like I’m the most precious thing in the world. He runs the tip of his nose along mine before kissing it, making me smile. My whole chest warms, and I feel so completely at ease. Like nothing can come between us or this moment.

The silence grows, but it’s a comfortable quiet. One that makes you feel at home.

“Are you okay?” Jax asks.

I laugh. “What do you think?”

“I wasn’t talking about my mad skills. I meant with everything else. We only just got you back, but as soon as I saw you lying here, I couldn’t keep my hands to myself and had to touch you.”

I run my hands along his arms, making him shiver. His eyes darken as they look down on me.

“You have my permission to wake me up like that every morning.”

His smirk grows wicked. “You’re going to regret saying that... But really, are you okay?”

“I’m still... processing. But I will be.” And I believe that. I know that once I have my mates around me, everything will work out.

He checks over my face, looking for something, before nodding his head to himself.

“Good. Just let me know if you need anything.” He moves back down, placing a kiss on my shoulder before glancing back at me with an innocent look on his face.

“Also, I’m going to need a repeat of that.” The seriousness in his tone rips a laugh from my lips.

Leaning over me, he smiles a genuine smile full of warmth and love. “The most beautiful sound in the fucking world.”

“What is?” I ask him, getting up on my elbows.

“That laugh.”

I’m about to call him out on his cheesy ass line when he swoops down and catches my lips with a kiss. Leaning into the kiss, my body heats, ready for round three. He pulls back, a knowing smirk on his face.

“Come on. Shower and food, and then we’ll find the others. I doubt they missed me making our mate deliriously happy. Your loud moans while screaming my name made it pretty fucking obvious.”

I narrow my eyes on the smug fucker. He chuckles, lifting me up and carrying me towards the shower.

“I don’t know about *deliriously* happy. Maybe a *little* happy.”

Jax gives me a wicked smirk, and I know he’s just taking my words as his new personal challenge.

“Don’t worry, I’m a perfectionist. We’ll keep trying until I get it right. But this time, make sure you scream my name louder. That way, the whole building will know who made you shatter first.”

* * *

I THROW on a soft cotton blue top and light blue jeans, finding a pair of black boots in the large walk-in wardrobe the guys have filled for me. They said there's more stuff on the way, but if they keep this up, I won't have anywhere to put it.

I tried telling them I don't need all this, but they wouldn't hear any of it, telling me I deserve it and more.

Pushing it to the back of my mind, I head out through the lounge and straight to the kitchen area.

Luka is sitting behind the counter as Axel cooks breakfast.

Once Luka spots me, he smiles, waving me over to him. When I'm close enough, he lifts me onto his lap as if it's the most natural thing in the world and nuzzles into my shoulder.

"Morning," he whispers, sending warm shivers down my spine.

Axel places coffee and a plate full of delicious food in front of me, just as Jax takes a seat beside me. They all stare at me.

"Eat," Axel demands, crossing his arms as he stares me down.

I roll my eyes and take a bite. The flavors explode on my tongue, making me forget about the demanding ass in front of me.

"Mm...I forgot how good your sandwiches were when we were kids." I take another bite, licking my lips and savoring every bit. I haven't had food this good in ages.

Too lost in my food, I don't notice the silence around me until I'm just finished. Glancing up, I find them all staring at me, their eyes dark with lust.

I squirm, but Luka stops me, groaning into my shoulder, his thick erection growing against my ass.

Clearing my throat, I look up, finding Axel's eyes as he leans toward me, his hands digging into the counter, leaving imprints.

Luka kisses the side of my cheek, shaking me from the intense moment with Axel.

"Finish your food. You can't have eaten much while you were... missing," Luka says. The air in the room turns stiff with his words.

I give him a smile, brushing over his question and changing the subject as quickly as I can.

"Come on, update me on what's been going on here."

The guys share a look before jumping in to tell me what's been going on with the old demons and how they appeared out of nowhere.

"There's no logic or reasoning to their attacks. They show up in different locations and attack. They have no target, just destruction. Draven thinks it's bigger than what we can see. He thinks King is involved somehow and that his main targets are Staten Island and Manhattan."

It wouldn't be a far stretch to think it was him. He has always wanted to rule over the other two closest cities. It was only time before he went after them too.

"He always said he'd have it all."

"What we can't figure out is how he's got access to them. From what we've learned, these demons are from the pits of the Underworld. Not easily accessed or controlled," Luka tells me as he pushes coffee in front of me.

I roll my eyes at him, smiling. "So, how are they escaping?"

If King is the one releasing these demons, surely, he'll have to have help? I didn't know if he had the kind of power.

I frown, sipping my coffee and thinking it over, when a knock comes from the door. Jax goes to open it, sighing when he sees who's behind it.

Jazmyn steps in, her eyes wide as she searches the room. She releases a heavy breath when she sees me.

“Is Kane, okay?” I ask her. Kai had told me he was there with me at that place and that he took a heavy beating.

But she waves me off. “He’ll be fine. Thanks to you.”

I look at her, confused. “The guys found Kane, not me.”

“No. I mean Malik. Kane’s been looking for him for years, and you brought him back to us.” Jazmyn blinks back tears, getting angry with showing so much emotion.

“Everyone thought he was...” She clears her throat, looking down. “Anyway, I owe you.”

I shake my head. “No, you don’t owe me anything. You helped me over the years—”

“For my own gain. If I’d have known what King was...” She sighs. “I’m sorry... For not looking closer and seeing what was right in front of my eyes.”

The guys grow tense around me.

“I know we’ve never been close, but I was hoping—”

Another loud knock sounds out, cutting off whatever Jazmyn was about to ask. Luka answers it this time, speaking to whoever is on the other side before shutting it.

“Draven wants to meet with us,” he tells everyone, clenching his jaw.

“He does realize this is our city?” Jax narrows his eyes on Jazmyn like it’s her fault.

She rolls her eyes at him before giving him a smirk. “He’s always been like that, controlling and over the top. I guess you all have that in common.”

Jazmyn moves closer, taking my arm in hers. Jax frowns when he notices, moving over to take my other one and giving her the side eye.

“*Mine.*”

Jazmyn rolls her eyes at him, annoyed by his antics. “Well, she’s my friend, so you’re just going to have to learn to share.”

Jax’s smirk turns wicked. “Oh, I know how to share. Kiarra will get lots of hands-on experience when it comes to *that*. Tonight, being one of them.”

I’m about to tell him to cut it out when his last words distract me. “Tonight?”

Jax’s smile grows, the other guys mirroring his excited expression. “Get your dancing shoes on. We’re going out.”

CHAPTER 21



RION

STANDING at the entrance to Kiarra's room, I watch as she glances in the mirror at the silver dress she has on.

It reaches just below her knees, the tight fit accentuating every one of her delectable curves.

She's beautiful... *stunning*. A siren that will always call to my mind, body, and soul. The way she moves, speaks, and commands the attention of the entire room simply by walking into it is breath-taking.

She has no idea the power she wields over us all.

It was Jax's idea to all go out, but one we all agreed on. She needs to be reminded that there is more to life than pain and suffering.

We could all see the dark shadows across her face. She still hasn't told us everything that went on while she was at that facility, but it was still early days. We had the rest of our lives to help her heal.

A small frown puckers her forehead as she glances at the silver dress. I want to reach out and kiss it away, to make sure she always feels safe and happy and, most importantly, loved.

She spots me staring and gives me a small tentative smile. I can see from the look in her eyes that she's still too lost in her own thoughts. I want to know those thoughts, every little thing that crosses her mind, every single emotion she feels. I want to know how to fix any and all of her troubles.

“Something wrong?” I ask her, hoping there’s something I can help her with. Maybe then it will ease the tight ache building in my chest.

She laughs, the sound warming me. “I can’t reach the zipper.” She glances at me with those stunning green eyes and draws me to her. “Could you?”

“Of course.”

She pulls her long dark waves to one side as I move closer. Stepping up behind her, I swallow hard at the sight of her bare back.

Reaching out, I run the back of my fingers down her spine, hearing the quick intake of her breath. I smile and continue to drag my fingers down to the middle of her back, where the zip is open.

I love how easily she settled back in with us. And even though we have a long way to go to learn about each other’s pasts, and everything that comes along with it, I know we can get through anything now that we’re together.

Dragging the zip up slowly, I lean in and brush my lips against the top of her back, hearing a gasp as soon as my lips touch her.

“Rion...”

“Yes, Siren?” I place another kiss on her shoulder and then another on the curve of her neck.

She tilts her head to the side, giving me better access. I run my nose up the length of it, placing a kiss beneath her ear. She shivers, leaning back into me, the warmth of her delicate body heating my own.

I wrap my arms around her waist, pulling her tight against me and let the feeling of being whole and part of something bigger than myself wash over me.

“I’m here, Siren, for whatever it is you need. I may not be the most vocal of our family, but I will always be here to listen or help you with whatever it is.”

Twisting around, she looks up at me, biting her lip. She smiles, but it doesn't reach her eyes.

There are some things I instinctively know, but other times, like right now, I can't get a read on what it is she needs. I reach out with my senses, trying to get a feel for it, but all I sense is a mixture of emotions swirling around one another.

The first and largest emotion is... *love*.

Something that has always been there between us all. I felt it when we were just children, though I didn't understand it at the time. But now it's grown into something more. Something I never thought I would have.

The next emotion is *hope*. A lightness that swirls around her love, protecting it and keeping it safe. *Worry* slithers through it, trying to push past her swirl of light and then next to it sits... *pain*. It coils around every other emotion, taking root deep within it all.

I wish I could take it away. Along with every other negative emotion she feels.

She shakes her head, glancing down at the dress. "It's silly where your mind goes..."

I take her hand and kiss the top of it, beseeching her with my eyes to share her thoughts with me. I will always treasure and protect them, keeping them safe.

"I never got to pick what I wanted to wear..." She bites her lip again, looking down at the dress. Shame and embarrassment pulses among her emotions now.

"You're stunning," I tell her, hoping she'll hear the truth in my voice.

Though she was beyond that. The dress she chose brought out every one of her captivating curves and bewitching features. I was enthralled the minute I saw her, imaging all the ways I could show her how much I adore every inch of her mind, body, and soul.

"But if there's something else you'd like—"

“No, this is perfect,” she says with a frown. Her words were at one with her emotions, confusing me once more.

“Then why do you look sad? I promise no one will be upset if you hate what we bought you.”

We’d remove every item and start again until she has everything she’s ever wanted and more. She deserves the world, and I intend to make sure she has it.

She laughs. “No, really, I love it.” She glances over at the open closet. “King... he used to pick out everything for me. It was always short and tight, making me feel like I was...”

“Cheap?” I finish for her, finally picking up where her mind has gone.

She nods her head, and I promise myself that when I get my hands on that *bastard*, I’ll tear him apart, limb from limb, and make him slowly bleed out while I do it.

I pull her into me, breathing in her enticing scent. She wraps her arms around me, leaning her head on my chest.

I bask in this moment, letting it melt the cold shards in my veins with its warmth. She’s the only one who’s ever been able to make me feel this way.

When our little group was formed as kids, we knew there was something missing. We felt it.

But it wasn’t until she came along, did we figure out it was her.

None of us wanted to be anywhere else but by her side, and when she was taken, we fractured, becoming lost while slowly drifting away from one other.

Even with the link trying to keep us together, we never became *whole* again. Not until we saw her in the Cardinal Three.

Neither Kai nor I feel truly worthy of her love. One of the many psychologists my parents sent me to would say it stems from being abandoned by my birth parents.

But I think it's down to the environment we were brought up in, and those who surround us throughout it.

My parents only saw me as a power play, a chess piece, and molded me as such. If it were not for meeting Kai, and then the others, I'd still be that lanky boy, lost inside himself and too afraid to step out into the world. And then I would have never met my Siren.

Something I can't even bear to think about.

My heart thrashes thinking of all the years she's had to put up with King and his guards. My mind races to all the dark places, thinking about what she's had to suffer through, and stutters to a stop when I think of her being hurt in a different kind of way.

She told us that no one had hurt her like that, but my mind doesn't listen, wanting to see the truth in her eyes when she tells me.

"I know you told us no one ever... *hurt* you like that, but..." When I don't continue, she pulls back, looking up at me, waiting for me to finish.

Still so patient with me, she waits while I gather my thoughts. I fix a stray piece of hair behind her ear.

"Did he or anyone ever force..." A tremor works through my body at the thought of someone touching her like that. Of their filthy hands on her—

She takes my hand, squeezing it. The look in her eyes is unyielding as she stares up at me. "No."

The breath I was holding leaves me at once.

"No one touched me like that. They were either too afraid of King and didn't realize he didn't give a shit about me or knew what my ability was and preferred to see if they could break me in another way."

I snap my jaw shut so quickly I nearly crack it. Her answer did not sooth the beast inside me.

"*Who?*" My voice is dark, my basilisk wanting to take over. "Tell me who, and they'll be dealt with." I'll hunt each

and every one of them down. They'll never see me coming.

For even thinking they could hurt her, I'd crush their bodies, breaking every bone before slicing them apart and making them bleed out slowly. I'd revel in their pain and watch on happily as they choke on their own blood.

She is *ours*. Ours to protect. Ours to love and make happy, and if anyone stands in her way of that... they will pay dearly.

"It doesn't matter now. I'm here with you all, and I don't plan on ever leaving." She gives me one of her soft smiles, and even if it melts my cold, dark heart, I still want to find my new prey and destroy them.

"They don't get a pass because you have a kind heart."

She shakes her head, still looking at me with nothing but patience and love. "My heart is far from kind—"

"You don't see what we see. You don't see the light you carry with you. But we do, and if we have to spend every day for the rest of our lives making sure you see it too, we will."

She melts under my gaze; her smile reaching her alluring green eyes.

"Thank you," she whispers.

I lean in, kissing her forehead, and inhale her scent to carry it with me. Pulling back, I smile down at her.

"No need to thank me, Siren, I'd strike the world down to make you smile. Now pick something you *want* to wear, and if you can't find it here, say the word and we'll get you whatever you need."

Her soft laugh slightly soothes the raging beast inside me.

"I think I'll stick with this one. I just need to find some shoes." She gives me a soft smile before heading into the closet.

I leave her to it, turning and making my way down the hall to my room. I dial one of the contacts we use to find those who might not want to be found.

He picks up on the first ring.

“What can I do for you, Alpha?” Benjamin, our resident tech guy and a crow shifter, asks.

“I need a list of the guards King used over the last six years. Have it to me in the next hour.”

He clears his throat, hesitating. “It might take longer than ___”

“Within the hour.” My voice turns sharp. He knows better than to try to tell me no.

“Yes, sir.”

I hang up and search for what I need. Once we’re back from the club, I’ll slip out and start on the list.

I pull out my new long black daggers, inspecting them. The light glinting off the sharp edges brings a smile to my face as I imagine all the ways I’m going to break them in.

No one hurts my mate and gets away with it.

It’s time to go hunting.

* * *

Kiarra

FINISHING off my hair and make-up, I glance at the long length of mirror the guys had delivered for me earlier today. How they knew my size was beyond me, but anything I’ve tried on so far it fits like a glove.

I tried to tell them again that they didn’t need to get me all this stuff, but they just glare at me and tell me I deserve to be spoiled.

I didn’t have the heart to tell them I don’t want to be spoiled, especially when their eyes light up any time they have something new to give me.

Glancing back at the mirror, I twist and turn, checking to see how see-through the fabric might be.

The silver dress is long, reaching just below my knees with crisscross straps at the back and thin single shoulder straps in the front. The light material molds to my body like a second skin, accentuating each and every curve.

Satisfied that I'm not showing anything I don't want to, I pick up the expensive curling iron and finish styling my hair into thick, loose waves. Once that's done, I lightly brush through it, leaving it down.

My make-up is subtle, my eyes the only thing standing out with a hint of sparkle that makes the green of my irises pop. I add some black open-toe heels, and I'm done.

It's a far cry from what King would have allowed. His voice in the back of my head tells me the dress is too long, not showing enough skin, and that I haven't got enough makeup on to appease his clients.

But no more. No more choices will be made *for* me.

Taking a deep breath, I shake the thought of King from my mind and grab my purse. I make my way out through the hall. The guys' laughter at something rings out, making me smile.

It isn't until I'm at the entrance of the lounge do I see them, making me come to a stop. Jax is wearing all black. A black leather jacket, jeans, and shirt. His tattoos are striking against his skin and clothes, making his bad boy look complete.

He rolls his shoulders, smirking at something Luka says. The movement stretches his taut muscles against his top, reminding me of the feel of each one against my body.

I squirm in spot and look at Axel and Luka. Axel is wearing a light gray top with dark jeans, and Luka has on a white shirt with black trousers.

Axel has his jacket off by his side, revealing his tattooed sleeve and hand. I bite my lip as my eyes trace over each one, my mind drifting to what he could do to me with those strong hands.

Luka stands behind him, his hard angles and defined muscles visible through the shirt and jacket. His hair is messy but styled, making me want to run my fingers through it right before I pull him in to me.

My eyes finally land on Rion and Kai. Both wear dark suits, the cut tailored to their hard, toned bodies, making my own body heat up and my core wet.

The more I look at them, the more worked up I get. It isn't until one of them laughs out loud that I realize I'm still standing there, gawking at them.

Shaking my head at myself, I walk into the lounge.

They all turn, hearing my heels, their smiles frozen as they take me in... I smile, giving them a little spin.

"Damn," Jax breathes, his brows raised as he takes my look in.

Luka swallows hard, his mouth slightly open as his eyes trail down my body. The heat I felt a moment ago turns into flames the longer he stares.

"Beautiful," Kai says, distracting me from Luka's heated look. Kai's eyes trail down the length of my body and back up again, and just like with Luka, it leaves a burning trail in its wake.

I look at Axel, finding his eyes narrowed and his jaw set, making me wonder what I did to piss him off now. I open my mouth to ask but stop when he catches my eyes. The heat in them scorches me on the spot.

"Princess..." Axel growls. A warm shiver slides down my back.

Rion walks towards me, blocking Axel from view. His eyes darken as he searches my own.

"You're beautiful, Siren. There aren't enough words to describe how devastating you look right now, but it's the truth." Locking eyes with me, he takes my hand and brings it to his lips, kissing it softly. "Exquisite."

The rest of the guys move around me. My eyes land back on Jax. He's staring at me with nothing but heat and hunger in his eyes. Seeing that I caught him, his smirks grows.

Leaning over, he whispers in my ear. "When we get back, I'm going to mark every delicious inch of you as *mine*." His warm breath curls around my hair and down my neck, making me shiver.

"Maybe you should change." The others whip their heads toward Axel so quickly that they nearly get whiplash. He sees their angry faces and rolls his eyes, waving a hand in my direction.

"We're going to be fucking fighting them off the minute we enter the club."

I roll my eyes at the guys as they frown, not liking the idea, but Rion speaks over them.

"We'll be doing that, anyway. Let's get going."

Before I get a chance to reply, Rion has a black coat in his hands, holding it out for me. I thank him as he helps me put it on.

Axel sighs, dragging a hand down his face. "Whatever, it's their funeral." I'm ready for his bossy attitude when he walks over to me, but instead, I am left speechless by the depth of affection in his eyes as he looks at me. "You're fucking stunning, Princess, but anyone who even thinks about looking your way will regret it when I burn the eyes from their sockets."

The guys grunt in agreement like the possessive alphas they are.

I'm about to call him out on his insane reasoning when he swoops down to kiss me. I gasp as he slides his lips and tongue along my mouth before deepening the kiss. It's the type of kiss that pulls you in and consumes your every thought. He molds his lips to mine.

I place my hands on his chest, feeling the quick beat of his heart against my hands. I drag them down his chest, and he

pulls me closer, moaning into my mouth. I lean into him, deepening the kiss, wanting him to consume me whole.

His grip grows more possessive, more intense, as he slides his hands down my back. I bite his bottom lip, making him groan.

“Princess.” He growls, making me smile.

A throat clears from behind us, making us break apart. I bite my lip, finding Rion smirking at us. “Maybe we should go? Before it’s too late.”

Looking up at Axel, I take a step back, trying to get my heated body under control. I completely forgot what we were doing, and by the smug look on his face, Axel knows it. I glance around at the others, finding nothing but smiles and heated looks. No judgement or jealousy on any of their faces.

“Well... unless you’d rather stay here?” Jax says, his gaze moving down to my lips as I wet them.

Axel barks out a laugh, the deep rumble in his voice still thick with lust. “It was your idea to go out and have some fun.”

“I can think of many other ways we can have fun tonight,” Jax says with a wicked smirk, making me want to reconsider and find out what he might have in store for us.

I open my mouth to answer when Luka speaks up.

“No,” he says, making us all turn to him. “We’re going out. Kiarra didn’t get all dressed up to stay in all night.”

Something inside me warms at his words. Luka always thinks about everyone but himself. I walk over to him and kiss his cheek, taking hold of his hand.

He smiles down at me, a sparkle in his eyes.

Jax pouts. “Fine, but we get to have our own party when we get back.”

“Deal,” I tell him before anyone can start. Savage smirks fill the room with my answer.

“Well, then... let’s get out of here. The quicker we leave, the quicker we can get back,” Jax says, waving me forward.

I shake my head at his antics.

Jax snaps forward, grabbing me and slamming his lips to mine, making me melt against him. Falling into the kiss, I let myself go, letting Jax take full control.

I go to grab his shirt to pull him closer, but he drags his lips from mine, taking a step back.

There’s a smirk on his lips as he licks them while I stand there in a daze, still trying to catch my breath from that kiss. He chuckles, sending me a wink before turning to head out, leaving me hot and bothered, craving some form of release. I frown, wondering if I should take him up on the offer to stay here instead.

Luka smirks down at me, knowing where my thoughts just went. Taking my arm in the crook of his elbow, we leave the large penthouse, heading towards the open lift, where Jax stands.

Having only seen the inside of the apartment, I glance around and down the long hall, wondering what’s behind the doors that line them.

“Does anyone else live here with you?” I ask them.

Kai turns to me, giving me his full attention. “No. The security guards rotate shifts, but they leave once they’re done. Same with the doormen and anyone else that works for us.”

“So, it’s just us?”

Luka runs his thumb along my hand. I look up at him. “This is our home. Or, at least, we hope it will be if you want to stay here.” His eyes are hesitant as they search mine.

But they have to know by now that I won’t leave them. Not after everything we’ve been through.

I’m about to tell them as much when Jax speaks. “But just know if you ever think of leaving, we’re coming with you.” He gives me a narrowed look, making me think I still have some work to do before they see I’m not going anywhere.

“There’s nowhere else I’d want to be.” I give him a soft smile and watch as his tense shoulders drop.

We all step inside the large lift. It’s wide enough to fit double the number of people with the long mirrors, making it look even bigger.

Kai presses the button for the ground floor, and I watch as we move down each one.

“What’s on all these other floors?” If no one else lives here, then what was on all the other nine floors?

“It was originally an office building. After we built the penthouse, we made the floor below it into our base of operations,” Kai tells me, his smile growing at the look on my face.

I couldn’t believe they made all this themselves.

“There’s also a gym, weapons, and training room. A couple of floors down from that, we have an entire floor of guest rooms and then, apart from the underground basement, the rest are still being refurbished,” Jax says like it’s no big deal.

“I’ll give you a tour later.” He winks. “We can play hide and seek, but if I find you, I get to keep you.”

I roll my eyes at the possessive ass. “You already get to keep me. I’m your mate.”

Jax’s smirk grows as he tilts his head toward the guys. “I meant from *them*.”

Luka slaps him upside his head. I laugh at the hurt look Jax gives him while rubbing his head.

“I’m afraid they’re a package deal,” I tell him, still smiling to myself.

Jax sighs. “Fine. I guess they can spend some time with you, too.”

“How kind of you,” I tell him with a deadpan look.

Jax’s smirk grows. “That’s me... The gift that keeps on giving.”

“More like the one you can never fucking return,” Axel mutters, giving him the side eye.

I’m still laughing at the two of their expressions when the lift pings open.

Stepping out, I glance around, getting a better look at the place the guys call home. It’s not a hotel, but the refurbishments they did to it could make it feel like one. The lounge is long with a reception for the security guys and chairs spread out for anyone waiting.

The expensive touches are subtle, just like them.

An older man with graying hair rushes out, apologizing while averting his eyes. Dressed in a full navy suit, he heads to the door to get it for us. “Have a good evening.”

“Thank you, Jeffery.” Kai nods, passing him.

I thank him and then mouth *Jeffery* to Jax, who smiles, sending me a wink. All they need now is a butler, and they’ll be sorted. I say as much to them, which earns me a laugh.

“The butler is only here on the weekdays.”

I start to laugh but stop when I see they’re serious.

Shaking my head, I push that little tidbit of information to the back of my mind and look around.

Outside, the lights from the building guide our way right to the glossy black Hummer limo. The monster of a vehicle looks like it would fit at least twenty people, if not more. Why the hell would we need all that space?

I turn to look at Kai, raising a brow. “Are we taking a limo?”

Jax steps up beside me. “Only the best for our mate.”

“But it’s... *huge*.” I glance back at the enormous thing.

“Baby, if you’re worried about size... I hate to tell you, but none of us are exactly... *small*.” Jax looks at me with a serious expression before narrowing his eyes on Axel. “Well, except for Axel and his micro dick.”

Luka chokes on air, as if he's imagining what one looks like, then tries to cover his laugh at Axel's disgusted look. But his expression makes me laugh, and as soon as I do, Luka loses it, joining me.

Axel narrows his eyes on Jax. "We both know my dick is bigger than your shitty stump."

Jax smirks, stepping up to Axel. "That so?"

"I mean... if you need me to check..." They both whip their heads toward me as I give them a wicked smile. I shrug. "I'm more than happy to get a measuring tape."

Jax's smirk grows. He's about to head back inside when Luka drags him toward the limo. A driver appears out of nowhere, opening the door for us.

We get in as Luka pulls Jax inside. "But I want to prove myself to my woman."

I roll my eyes, glancing around the inside of the limo. The interior is a beautiful black, similar to the outside, with T.V.s lining all around it.

Jax huffs, gets up, and heads straight for the bar sitting at the back of it.

"I already know how big your dick is. It's Axel who needs to prove himself."

Five pairs of heated eyes swing towards me as Jax barks out a laugh, sending me a wink.

I blink up at them, giving them one of Jax's innocent smiles. His laughter grows as I turn my focus to Axel. I see the challenge light up his eyes, making my smile turn anything but innocent.

"Oh, it's on, Princess."

I lick my bottom lip, watching as his eyes darken and lean back.

"Looking forward to it."

CHAPTER 22



KIARRA

ARRIVING OUTSIDE THE CLUB, we bypass the huge line of people leading around the wide building. As soon as they notice us, the chatter stops, and they all turn our way.

“Why are they all staring?”

The look in their eyes is filled with fear or awe, or a mixture of both.

“They know better than to disrespect their alphas,” Jax says, smirking down at me.

Making our way to the top of the line, the bouncer’s eyes widen when he sees us coming, moving the people at the door back so we can walk straight in.

The bouncer bows his head as we pass. “Alphas.”

Kai tilts his head once, not replying as we walk on through.

If I thought the eyes of the supes outside were bad, it’s even worse inside the club when everyone closest to us stops what they’re doing to look at us.

“I’ll go check everything out.” Rion shares a look with Luka before heading farther into the club without a word. Luka gives me a smile before following him.

I give Kai a questioning look.

“They’re just making sure nothing is tampered with. No one would be foolish enough to try anything, but after

everything you just went through, we don't want to take any risks."

"You know I can't die."

Kai moves closer to me, placing a hand to my face. "And as we've said before, that still doesn't change the fact that you can be hurt, and anything that causes you pain shouldn't be taken lightly."

He leans in and kisses my head before taking my hand. "We're going to protect you from everything we can—every pain, whether it's physical or mental. We'll never let anything hurt you again."

"Kai..."

A short bulky man with buzz-cut blonde hair comes up to us, interrupting the moment. Dipping his head before he speaks, he glances at Kai and then Axel.

"May I have a word?"

Axel sighs. Leaning down, he places a kiss on the side of my head before sharing a look with Kai. "I've got it."

"What's that about?" I ask the others.

"Just work stuff." Jax nods his head in the direction of the man and Axel, just as they disappear into the crowd. "That was Alameer. He helps oversee the dragon shifters that live here. Axel will update us later about what he wants."

I knew the guys were alphas. I had heard rumors about their vicious natures and how they came to challenge and win over Manhattan, but these were my guys, and somehow, I never really thought of the two together. I only ever really saw the lovable, protective guys I grew up with.

Seeing first-hand how people react to them, whether in fear or reverence, was beyond strange. I don't think I'll get used to it any time soon.

Jax and Kai chuckle at the expression on my face.

"What did you think we did all day? Sit back and let everyone else do all the work?" Jax asks, smiling at me.

“Pretty much. But also sitting in your penthouse calling on your butler to carry out your every whim,” I tell them with a smirk.

“We’ve worked our asses off to get to where we are now. We still never take anything for granted, and we always put family first, no matter what,” Jax tells me, sharing a look with Kai.

“I know. It’s just strange. I still see you as being *my guys*, not some big shot alphas.”

Kai shakes his head at me, smiling. “We’re still *your guys*. Nothing about that has changed, nor will it ever.”

Jax moves closer to us. “What he said. I’m yours, and you are most definitely *mine*.” I can feel the glare Kai gives him right before Jax rolls his eyes. “Fine, *ours*.”

Kai tugs on my hand. “Let’s go see if our table is ready.”

We start to move when a woman with short blonde hair and a tight green dress walks up to us. Her gaze finds Kai immediately. It narrows on our hands before she plasters on a wide smile.

“Alphas. I didn’t realize you would be coming tonight.” She raises a hand, waving to someone behind her. “I’ll have the girls set up for you.”

Girls...

My eye twitches as I glance at the blonde bombshell. She is fucking gorgeous. But if the guys brought me to one of the clubs they frequently visited to have a *good time*, someone was getting their ass kicked.

I try to pull my hand out of Kai’s, but his grip tightens. “Like we’ve told you before, Olivia, we’re not interested in spending time with you or any of your girls.”

Kai glances down at me, giving me a warning look not to try to pull away from him again.

I ignore him, focusing on *Olivia*. Her gaze swings to me, and her expression turns calculating as she looks me over.

“Forgive me, I heard about the recent attacks and just wanted to ensure you had an enjoyable time tonight,” Olivia says with an innocent look.

“They won’t *ever* require your type of services here, or anywhere else, for that matter,” I tell her before narrowing my eyes on each of the guys.

They both smirk at me. *Dicks.*

I turn back to Olivia just as her gaze veers right to me; her calculating eyes remind me so much of the people back in King’s hotel. “Ivy never told me she was bringing in another girl.” She sneers at me before glancing at Kai. “I promise you, we have better stock here.”

I open my mouth to reply when Kai loses it. “She’s our mate.” His tone is sharp. The muscles and veins in his neck strain against his skin as his eye pulse red.

Stepping back, a flash of fear crosses her face before she covers it, feigning shock. “My apologies, you look so much like the girls we normally hire for our alphas, I assumed—”

Kai’s hand tightens on mine. I give it a squeeze, trying to comfort him. I was used to people like Olivia, but she was nothing compared to some of the supes I came across. She was definitely not someone I needed protection from.

“Let’s get one thing straight. We’ve *never* used any of your *services*, nor will we, and if you *ever* disrespect our mate again, it won’t just be a job you’re missing,” Kai tells her, releasing some of his alpha power.

I feel it as it seeps out around us, but I lean into it instead of away, feeling drawn to it. Kai notices and starts rubbing his thumb along my hand.

Olivia cowers back, her face turning pale, but she isn’t the only one who turns fearful. The supes near us quickly move away.

She looks to Jax as if he’ll save her, but the vicious smile that spreads across his face tells her he’d do anything but that.

“Leave,” Kai orders.

Jax chuckles under his breath. “Yes, run along.”

She takes a stumbling step back, bowing slightly before scurrying away.

“So... How about we go get something to drink?” Jax says, quickly changing the subject, but I wasn’t done with this topic yet. The thought of being in a club where they had fucked other girls makes my skin crawl.

“I get that you’ve been with other girls before... *us... this*. I understand that. It’s not like I’ve been celibate either, so I’m not judging any of you. But if you brought me to one of the clubs where you—”

Kai turns me to him, cutting off my sentence. “No, we didn’t bring you to a club we used for pleasure, nor would we ever. We *love* you, Kiarra. We would *never* disrespect you like that.” His eyes turn soft, pleading with me to trust him.

I nod at him as the tight knot in my stomach starts to unravel.

Jax’s eyes narrow in the direction she went. “The bitch was stirring up shit and *will* be dealt with.”

He looks back at me, giving me his whole focus. “Now that that’s sorted, tell me who?” Jax raises a brow, expecting an answer, but I don’t have a clue what he’s talking about.

“*Who*, what?” I ask.

“Who fucking touched you before us? Because when I find them, they’re going to wish they never laid their eyes on you, *let alone fucking touched you*.” Jax’s eyes are murderous as they scan the club before coming back to me.

“You know you sound crazy right now? You’ve basically just admitted that you also had girls before me, but it’s not okay for me to do the same? Fuck that.”

Jax clenches his hands before scrubbing a hand down his face. “That was different.”

“How did you come to that idiotic assumption?” I ask, furious that he thinks he’s allowed to have a past, but I’m not.

“Because they didn’t fucking matter. None of them did.” He raises his voice as he begins to unravel in front of me.

“Well, neither did any of mine,” I tell him, like it should be obvious.

Jax’s eyes grow wide. “There was more than fucking one!?” He clenches his jaw, walking a couple of steps away before turning back to me.

“Just give me their names, and I’ll be back in an hour or two, depending on how fucking pissed I am and how much I want to make them pay. I might let them live...” He narrows his eyes as if rethinking something. “Slash that. Either way, they’re dead. Just give me their fucking names.”

I glance at Kai, hoping he’ll talk some sense into him, but his whole body is as stiff as a board, his eyes pulsing red.

“Are you both serious right now?” I glance between them. “So, no one’s allowed to touch me now?” I didn’t mean it in a sexual way, but it seems the guys didn’t see it that way as Jax’s and Kai’s eyes narrow on me.

Jax steps in front of me. “Anyone touches you, and I’ll start severing pieces until they have nothing left to touch with. No one gets to touch you but us. No one gets to even fucking look at you. They do and they’re already dead.”

“I didn’t mean it in a sexual way.”

“Neither do we. But anyone, and I mean *anyone*, touches you or looks at you the wrong way and they’re dead.”

I laugh, but no one else joins me. Jax’s jaw clenches as he stares right at me. The dark look in his eyes makes everything inside me heat up.

“You can’t go around hacking people up.”

“You have no idea the lengths I’ll go to or how depraved my mind really is. Don’t push me.”

“Or what?” There was nothing about Jax or any of the guys that scared me, and they knew that. Just like I knew they’d never hurt me.

“You might not like what happens.” His voice turns husky as he looks into my eyes. He can feel the air change around us and knows none of what he’s saying is scaring me, but rather turning me on.

“Maybe, I will.” I bite my lip as the heat in my core expands.

Stepping forward, he grabs my chin, his eyes pulsing gold. “Mm... maybe you will,” he murmurs, licking his lips.

Jax will always be the one to start a party or try something crazy that could tempt his mortality, but there was another side to him that was starting to show itself. A darker side that called to my own.

And I couldn’t wait until the two clashed.

“What about you?” I turn to Kai, wondering what he means.

He raises a brow at me. “If other girls looked at or touched us, how would you feel?”

Not only does my skin crawl, but I feel the haze of red as it crosses my vision, and it must show on my face.

Jax’s chuckle is low and throaty when he sees it. “Guess you’re *just as crazy* as the rest of us.”

Kai and Jax share a knowing smirk as I roll my eyes at them but smile to myself, knowing they’re right. “Whatever. Let’s go get that drink.”

Jax’s chuckle grows louder before cutting off as he narrows his eyes on me. “I still want those names. Have them to me by tonight.”

I open my mouth to tell them exactly what he can do tonight when he’s alone in his room when Rion and Luka appear. “Our table is ready.”

I narrow my eyes on Jax’s back as we move around the edges of the club, trying to avoid most of the crowds and people. Not that it matters much, as their eyes follow us everywhere we go.

We make our way to the VIP section where Axel sits, a drink in his hand and a tray full of them in front of him.

Rion helps me take off my coat, heading over and getting a drink off the tray. He hands it to me first before getting himself one. I smile a thanks, taking a seat beside Luka.

“Everything okay?” I ask him.

“All good. Don’t worry, there’s nobody in here who will harm you.”

“I’m not worried about that, but thank you. I was asking about you. You never told me what was bothering you.”

Luka gives me a sad smile. “I just needed you back with us, and now that you are, I’m fine.”

But I see it in his eyes. He’s not fine. Something is bothering him. I open my mouth to ask him when he leans in and kisses me. He quickly pulls back before I can even taste him on my lips.

He smiles at my narrowed look. “Let’s just have fun tonight, okay?”

I nod, seeing that he needs this night, too. “Okay.”

“How about a little game?” Jax asks us but stares right at me.

“What type of game?” I haven’t played any type of games in years unless it was called “see how long you can hide from King before he finds you.”

“How about truth or dare?” Jax smirks at me while the others groan around him.

I smile, remembering when we played it as kids. “Like when we were kids, and you always chose dare, because you wanted to prove you weren’t afraid of anything?”

I expect Jax to laugh, but instead, he gives me a serious look. “I *wasn’t* afraid of anything... not until I lost you. And losing you not once, but twice, damn near destroyed me.” He looks at the guys. “Destroyed all of us.”

“Jax... Guys...”

“How about we stick with truth for tonight? That way, we can keep the body count down for anyone who pisses us off,” Kai tells him, taking a large gulp of his drink.

“Good idea. I’ll go first.” Jax leans forward.

“Is it true that you... like me more than the rest of your mates?” Jax gives me a hopeful look.

“No.”

Luka gets up to go over to him, probably to smack him upside his head, but Jax nods his head like it was the answer he was expecting. “Good, that was a trick question, and you passed.”

Luka sits back down while Jax continues to look the picture of innocence.

Axel takes the next turn. “Kiarra.” I roll my eyes, starting to see a pattern with both of them picking me.

“What is something you want to tell us but are too afraid to?” He raises a brow as if challenging me, but I know the sneak is just trying to get me to talk about what happened while I was gone without outright asking me.

“That’s a question, not a truth,” I tell him, trying to buy myself some time to think.

Axel shrugs. “Semantics.”

My stomach twists and turns as I think over what I want to tell them, but worried about how they’ll react.

“If there’s nothing—”

“There is...”

The guys all give me their full attention.

Taking a large swig of my drink, I glance down at it, not really seeing it. “I don’t remember much of when King moved me around, not before that place I was in. But when I was there... something... something happened...” Images of the inky dark power as it poured out of me flashes before me.

“You can tell us anything,” Luka says, urging me to continue, but nerves take hold of me, making me want to change the subject.

“What if it’s bad?” I ask them, wondering if they’ll start looking at me differently once they find out.

“Nothing you could tell us would change the way we feel about you,” Kai says.

“So, you don’t care if I go on a killing rampage?” I ask them, trying to find the humor in it all.

“Nope.” Jax’s quick answer and the surety in his voice makes me smile.

Glancing at them all, I see the resolve in their eyes.

“What if I wanted to burn the entire city down?” This was their home, after all.

“Then we’ll help you light the fucking match.” Jax’s eyes dilate, turned on by the idea. I could see it in his eyes that he meant every word, too. He wouldn’t care if I destroyed this entire city and everyone in it once he was there with me, and even though it sounded crazy as hell, it warmed something inside, easing my turbulent thoughts.

“We’re in, all in. Whatever way you decide this is going to go, we’re following you in this world and every other that exists. We’ll follow you to the end and then beyond that,” Kai tells me.

The others nod their agreement.

“I—”

“Gentlemen, may we join you? We have something we’d like to discuss.” Two men in gray suits approach us, with two bodyguards in black trailing behind them.

One man is shorter, with a curly mop of brown hair, the other one is taller with shades of gray sprinkled throughout his jet-black hair. Both are built but look small next to my guys.

“It’s fine.” I squeeze Kai’s hand. “We can talk later.” Maybe it was better to talk to them back at the penthouse

instead of out in the open, anyway.

“Kiarra.” Kai looks at me, but I shake my head.

“I promise.” And I would tell them everything. It was time to start opening up to them more and to stop trying to deal with it all by myself.

“No. You come first, always,” Kai grits out, making my chest warm.

“I know and I love that you think that, but it’s probably better to talk about it back home.”

He gives me a soft smile. “Home?”

I nod my head, realizing that even though it’s only been a few days, this is now my home, and I don’t want to be anywhere else. “Home.”

Kai shares a look with me, and then the guys, before nodding his head to the men.

I go to move off him, but his grip tightens. “Stay.”

The men look wary but approach Kai and the others like they would a vicious beast. His two bodyguards span out around them. The one closest to me assesses the room, frowning at each of the guys before landing on me. His eyes travel down my body, reminding me of the men back at King’s tower.

“When you’re finished with her, can I take her off your hands?” He licks his lips, making my body turn stiff.

The temperature in the room suddenly drops as each of the guys turns a murderous glare on him. Seconds is all it takes for Kai to place me in Luka’s lap and have the bodyguard up against the wall by his throat.

What’s with everyone thinking I’m an escort for hire? I glance down at my dress, wondering if it really is see-through and maybe I missed it.

“Kai. It doesn’t matter.” I was used to much worse from the men back in King’s Tower.

“No one gets to make you feel uncomfortable, baby. No one,” Jax tells me, moving closer to Kai and the guard.

Scales slide down Axel’s right hand as he rolls his shoulders back, standing up. Flames engulf his hand, his eyes pulsing gold as he makes his way over to Kai and the guard.

“Looks like we’re having a barbecue.”

“Guys.” But they ignore me. Even the men and fellow bodyguard stay quiet as Kai slowly drains the life from him.

“Luka, do someth—” I glance down at Luka, finding his shadows rising off his skin like black flames. His body is stiff, and his hands are fisted at his side.

“She’s... just... a stupid... whore... Why—” the guard wheezes out.

I wince, hearing a deep growl. Turning back to Kai, I watch him snap the guard’s neck, just as Axel’s flames burns his body. It happens in seconds, leaving behind nothing but ash.

“Guess you’re going to need another guard,” Jax tells the men with a smile. “I’d suggest getting one who knows when to keep his mouth shut,” he adds with a nod, making him look fucking crazy.

“Leave. Now.” Kai’s voice is guttural, sounding barely human.

“Of course. We’ll... discuss the issue another time. Apologies to your...”

“*Mate*. She’s our fucking mate,” Luka tells him, clenching his jaw.

The men’s eyes widen before they back out of the room slowly, keeping their eyes down.

Luka closes his eyes, taking a couple of deep breaths before looking at me. “Go to him. He needs you right now.”

I run my hands down the side of his face. “What about you?”

“I’m fine. Kai needs you more.”

I kiss Luka's cheek and get up to go over to Kai. His back is to me, his muscles bunched with the rise and fall of his harsh and uneven breaths.

"I'm not going to apologize, Kiarra. No one gets to talk to or about you or look at you like that. Ever."

I walk around to his front. His eyes are squeezed shut. I lift my hand to his face just as he opens them. They're nearly completely black with a red iris. Instead of being afraid like I think he expects, I feel drawn to them, as though it calls to something inside me.

Just like Jax, my own darkness wants to reach out to his.

He waits to see what I will do, how I will react to this side of him. I step into him, wrapping my arms around his body. His body shudders before relaxing into my embrace.

Maybe it's the years of torture with King that desensitized me to the gruesome death, but seeing Kai upset becomes my focus instead of the dead guard.

He wraps his arms around my back and nuzzles into me.

After a moment, I pull back and look into his eyes, now back to their normal brown but no less beautiful than the other version.

Jax rubs his hands together. "Right. How about some dancing?" He walks over, trying to pull me from Kai, but Kai tightens his hold on me, giving Jax a sharp look.

Jax rolls his eyes at him, crossing his arms. He stands there waiting impatiently.

I laugh at his expression, and he sends me a wink.

Kai sighs, leaning back to look at me. He searches my face, nodding to himself before letting me go.

Jax yanks me to him, twirling me around before tilting me backwards. A laugh escapes my lips, breaking the last of the tension.

We head out to the floor as Kai, Axel, and Rion find a table right beside us. The crowd gives us a wide berth, leaving

half the dance floor to just the three of us.

A song comes on that I recognize, making me smile. Pulling my twins out to the floor, I start to move, feeling the slow beat before it starts to pick up. Jax moves behind me as Luka steps in front of me, each of them caging me in, but I don't feel trapped.

Their dark eyes follow my every move as I let go.

With Jax and Luka surrounding me, I feel safe. This time, I enjoy myself instead of trying to escape into my mind.

Closing my eyes, I feel arms slide around my waist as the scent of Jax wraps around me, and we start to move together.

Opening my eyes, I find Luka's gaze just as he leans in and brushes his lips against mine. His kisses are soft at first before he deepens them.

I feel his hands slide up to my face just as another pair slide down my sides.

Soft lips brush along my neck, making me shiver. I'm lost to my senses. Every slight brush and touch from Luka and Jax makes me want to go somewhere a little more private and finish what we've just started.

Just as one song blends into another, we hear a scream breaking us apart. It's followed by a crash, cutting off the music. We glance around when more screams sound out just as a chair flies over Jax's head.

"What the fuck?"

Jax aims a murderous glare in the direction of where the chair was thrown, but there's too many people to see who it came from.

That is until a large demon rushes in with a familiar purple horn and skin.

"Malik?"

"What the hell is he doing?" Jax asks.

We watch on as he starts trashing the place. Tables and chairs get picked up and thrown across the room, and anyone

who gets in his way bears the brunt of his anger.

Axel comes over, his flames coming to life when I put a hand out, telling him to stop. “He can’t control it.”

“What do you mean?” His gaze whips to mine, a frown on his face.

“King did something to him... experimented on him. He can’t control his demon side.”

His eyes widen. “And you’re only telling us this now?”

“It wasn’t exactly on the top of my mind with everything that went on, and I thought he’d tell you himself, or at least Draven or Jazmyn would.”

“Fuck.” Axel sighs, releasing the hold on his flames. He turns to the others, looking for an answer, but I already know what I have to do.

If the guys didn’t already know about my new ability, they were about to find out about it firsthand.

I reach down, gathering the darkness from within and pulling it up. A mass of inky darkness seeps out of me just as a table heads straight for me. The black mass whips out, catching it and throwing it to the other side of the room before it gets the chance to touch us.

“What the—” I hear Jax whisper, but stay focused on Malik, pulling on that spark of a connection I felt before.

Once I find it, I yank it hard, letting my darkness guide me to what I need to do.

“Malik, stop.”

He immediately stops, turning to look at me as if waiting for his next command.

“Damn.” Jax whistles, looking from Malik’s demon to me.

The guys come closer, but a part of me worries they might fear me after seeing this side of me.

Just before they reach me, I feel another spark and the shadow beast appears, glancing from me to the guys.

The guys stop their advance, their focus now on the large black shadow beast beside me. People from all over the club whisper around us from a distance, most with fear in their eyes.

The guys notice the growing crowd and pause, debating which to protect me from first, the crowd or the shadow beast.

I give them a wary smile, letting them know I'm fine. "I guess I forgot to tell you about my shadow beast."

CHAPTER 23



KIARRA

WE HEAD out of the club. Everyone gives us a wide berth with the shadow beast trailing alongside me. With just a thought, I tell it to leave.

It disappears before we make it outside. I glance back and watch as Malik trails stiffly behind us.

“Where the hell did that puff of smoke go?” Jax glances up and down the street.

“Who cares? What I want to know is how you can control the demon like that?” Axel narrows his eyes on Malik in his demon form.

I swallow hard, my stomach twisting, making me feel nauseous. “I didn’t mean to keep it from any of you. It hasn’t been that long since... I was just trying to process it myself.”

“Let’s get back to the penthouse, then we can talk more about it,” Luka tells us, coming closer to me.

But Axel doesn’t let up. “But how?”

I throw my hand up. I still don’t understand it myself, so how do I even begin to explain it to him? “I don’t know... it’s like there’s a connection—”

Axel fumes. “A fucking, what?! He better not be anyway *connected* to you—”

“Not like that,” I tell the possessive ass.

Axel moves closer, stepping in front of me. “In case you didn’t know, this isn’t a fucking pick-and-mix. You don’t get

to add more to your harem depending on your tastes. We're fucking *it*."

If I could roll my eyes any harder, I'd look possessed. "I have five possessive alphas, one of which is a complete alphahole, *and* you're all crazy as hell and a fucking handful. Why the hell would I want any more?"

The violence in Axel's eyes dims and the muscles in his shoulders ease with my words. "Good thing you recognize how fucking crazy we are. Because I'll use that crazy to fucking destroy anyone who tries to become in any way *connected* to you."

"And as *I* said, I'm not interested in anyone else. But just so *you* know, the same goes for you."

My threat makes him lose the rest of the tension in his body. I give him a baffled look before shaking my head to myself.

Some people like flowers and a declaration of their love... Axel, however, seems to prefer violence and threats.

"*Psycho*," I tell him with a smirk, not denying that I might love the fucker a bit more because of it.

A knowing smirk grows on his lips. He's about to reply when Kai comes over to us.

"Can you get him to shift back?" Kai tilts his head towards Malik's demon, who stands there silently, looking in my direction.

"I can try?" With that thought, I reach down, calling my new ability up to the surface. Pulling it up, I feel it expand throughout my body, and just like in the club, I focus on Malik and pull on that connection, yanking it hard.

"Shift. Now." Something in my voice makes the guys look at me. I keep my focus on Malik, trying not to think too much into it.

Malik's body starts shaking, his eyes roll to the back of his head as he drops to the ground with a thump. I cringe at the hard fall.

A low groan sounds out seconds later, Malik now in his human form. “Where the hell am I?”

“Downtown Manhattan,” Luka tells him, moving over to give him a hand up.

Malik looks back to the club frowning, “Did I...”

“Hulk out and start trashing the place? Yeah. Ruin our night? Also, fucking yeah.” Jax huffs.

“How did I get here?” he asks, looking up and down the now vacant street.

“No clue. What’s the last thing you remember?” Jax asks him.

“Last thing I remember is talking to Jazmyn. She...” Malik stops, shaking his head. “The rest is all a blur.”

Jazmyn... *Shit*.

I look at Kai as my heart rate picks up. “We need to go check on her—”

“I would *never* hurt her,” Malik says to me with complete confidence in his voice.

“But... you can’t control it.” He might have hurt her and not meant to. He said it was all a blur, that he didn’t remember. Maybe he blacked out, maybe—

“She’s...*different*.” Malik looks down, hunching in on himself.

“I don’t—”

“They’re mates,” Kai tells me, glancing over at Malik. Malik swallows hard, looking away.

“I know, but—”

“He could never hurt her.” Kai’s eyes soften as he looks at me.

“But...”

Kai picks up my hand, placing a kiss on it. “Never. The beast side of us isn’t just something we can transform into, it’s

a part of us... a part of our soul. Both recognize our mate and neither wants to see them harmed in any way.

“Somewhere deep down, beneath whatever King did to him, his demon knows that too. He’d rather slice his limbs off than hurt one strand of hair on her head. You don’t have to worry about her, but we can still check on her if you’d like.”

“Thank you.”

Kai gives my hand a squeeze.

Malik’s frown deepens as he looks at me, a light of recognition sparking in his eyes. “You... You told me to stop, didn’t you? No... Not *told* me... *made* me.”

I nod my head, not knowing what else to say. I still didn’t understand it myself.

“Your voice... I was drawn to it. I... *needed* to listen to it.” Malik rubs his chest, glancing away just as the limo pulls up.

“Did it feel like a command? Like something you had no control over but also wanted to do?” Kai asks him.

“Yes.” Malik nods.

The guys share a look before they get moving. “Let’s get back. We can sort all this out then,” Kai tells us.

We get into the limo and head back to the penthouse quickly. The whole time, the guys are quiet, making my thoughts run wild.

Pulling up to the building, we get out. Luka takes my hand. It gives me a small amount of reassurance that maybe this isn’t as bad as my thoughts are making it out to be.

“Where will I...” Malik looks unsure of himself, glancing up at the huge building.

“Come with us.” Kai tilts his head toward the building. “We’ll get you set up, and you can call whoever you need.”

Malik hesitates before sighing. He nods his head, silently following us up.

We enter the apartment, my stomach twisting in knots as I wait for them to tell me what they think about all this. Will they hate me? Will they think I'm... *evil*?

My mind starts going over every little thing, picking at it until it becomes a gaping hole that I can't seem to find a way out of.

I feel the panic as it starts to rise, turning my chest tight.

"Stop." Kai steps forward, gently tilting my chin up to him. His hand and demanding look ground me, pausing my downward spiral.

"I can see the worry in your eyes, but whatever you're thinking right now needs to stop. We have a lot to talk about when it comes to your new ability, but before we have that conversation, I need you to know something."

Kai's eyes turn soft, as he looks over every inch of my face, only warmth and compassion shining through. "There is *nothing* about you that would make me love you less, and *nothing* you could say or do that would change my mind. You're my soul mate, Kiarra, and even if you weren't, I'd still have found you and made you mine... *Ours*. I don't love you *because* you're my mate. I love you because you're *you*. And no matter how many times that changes and grows, I will *still* love you. *Always*."

Warmth spreads through my chest, making me feel like I can finally take a deep breath. This man... this beautiful man, and the way he seems to know exactly what to say to put my turbulent thoughts at ease, is *everything*.

I swallow the lump in my throat, trying to answer him, but it's impossible. I can see how much he means it with every word as he stares down at me with nothing *but* love in his eyes.

"As usual, Kai tries to one-up us with his epic speeches." Jax playfully narrows his eyes at him.

Kai smiles, placing a kiss on my forehead, and shakes his head at Jax.

“But even I can see the doubts racing around in your head.” Jax moves closer. “If it’s because we were quiet on the way back here, that’s only because we were all so fucking turned on from seeing you in action. None of us could think straight.”

I raise a brow, looking at the rest of the guys. Rion gives me one of his slow smiles. Luka gives me a shy smile, clearing his throat and glancing down, and Axel rolls his eyes, crossing his arms. “Like you don’t already know.”

I go to reply to the dick when Jax grabs my hand, distracting me. “Back to the topic of you doubting this... *us*.”

“I don’t—”

“You do, but I know that’s because we still have a lot of work to do to get there. But you need to understand that I don’t care how loud your fucking doubts are. I’m not going anywhere. You want to burn the world down? Have at it. Go on a killing spree? Be my fucking guest. I don’t give a shit, because I’ll be right there with you, every step of the way.

“Me, you, and them, is not an option. It’s the endgame. It’s definite, with no other way, option, or fucking choice. You can’t get rid of us, and I’m sure as hell not letting you go. So, suck it up and tell that little voice in your head to fuck off. It’s bound in blood, written in the stars, and all that shit.”

A laugh escapes me at Jax’s words and how black and white it all is to him.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself, brother.” Luka pats Jax on the shoulder, looking at me. “We’re inevitable, Kiarra. We always have been. We all knew it as kids when none of us wanted to be anywhere else but with you. You were taken from us not once, but twice, and I’ll be damned if I ever let that happen again. As Jax and Kai said, there is nothing you can say or become that will change our minds, and it will always be that way.”

“You already know how I feel, Princess, but if you need me to nail home the point, I’m more than willing to show

you.” Axel’s smirk grows. His eyes are heated as they pin me to the spot.

Before I get a chance to reply to them, Rion moves over to us. “You were made for us, Siren. So, show us. Show us you—*all* of you—and don’t ever hold back. Not from us.”

I glance at them all, seeing the same expression Rion is giving me. It’s the push I need to go through with this. Stepping back, I close my eyes and dig to that deepest part of me. Pulling it up is starting to become as natural as breathing.

I sense the shift in the air before I open my eyes. Cords of dark inky smoke flow around me, reaching out to each of the guys.

None of them move away from it, instead they move closer, reaching out to touch them.

“Baby, your eyes. They’re black.” Jax moves in front of me.

“Scared?” I ask him hesitantly.

“No.” He moves right up to me. “More like fucking turned on.”

He slams his lips to mine, showing me just how much he isn’t afraid, and kisses me like he can’t get enough, like he’s *hungry* for me, and I’m all he wants to consume. It’s wild and reckless, with so much passion and love. It’s everything that makes Jax the boy I became friends with and the man that made me fall in love.

He sees the world differently, sees it the way *he* chooses, and doesn’t hold back when he wants something. And it’s something that makes me love him even more.

My mind slows, the doubts and fears slowly drift away as my senses envelop him whole. With the thought of wanting him closer, wanting to absorb the feel of him against my body, my dark shadows swirl around him, pulling him into me. I feel his deep chuckle as he runs his hands up my back.

“Damn,” a whispered groan sounds out just before a knock on the door breaks us apart.

Luka adjusts himself before opening it. I look over at the rest of them, finding their heated stares on me.

“Talk about bad fucking timing,” Jax mumbles, narrowing his eyes on Jazmyn as she storms in, a wild look in her eyes as she searches the room.

Finding me, she stops. “What the—”

“Don’t even think about finishing that sentence,” Jax warns her.

Jazmyn rolls her eyes. “I wasn’t going to say anything bad. She looks fucking badass.”

She gives me a tentative smile, unsure of where to go from here. She wasn’t exactly the hugging type, and even though she was the closest thing I had to a friend back in King’s tower, I didn’t know if I could call us that either. But she looked out for me, and that’s not something I’ll ever forget.

She opens her mouth to speak, but Kane walks in, scanning the room before his eyes finally land on me.

“Kiarra...” He moves to take a step toward me, but Axel steps in, blocking his way.

“I just wanted to see if she’s all right.” Kane frowns, trying to look around Axel.

Axel scoffs. “You can see well enough from where you are.”

“Axel, it’s fine,” I tell him, trying to step past Jax. He takes my hand, pulling me back to his side.

“Nope. Not happening, baby. Kane is included in the *‘no looking or touching rule.’*”

“Guys, come on. It’s Kane.” I give them a baffled look. It should be damn obvious I see him as nothing but a friend.

“I wouldn’t try to make sense of their crazy if I were you. They only seem to make sense of the sound of their own voices.” Jazmyn shakes her head at them.

Jax scoffs. “You’re one to talk.”

She narrows her eyes on him, opening her mouth to reply to him when Kane moves around Axel. He only gets so far before he's blocked again.

"Look, I know it's never going to be enough, but I'm sorry, Kiarra."

I don't understand why he is apologizing to me. It wasn't his fault. "You don't have to—"

"I do... I should've looked closer at everything, instead of focusing on my own mess."

"No. It wasn't your job to look out for me."

He shakes his head, not hearing me. "You were just a fucking kid when he took you there. I should've done something. Paid closer attention."

"We all should have," Kai tells him, glancing over at me.

The guilt and sadness choke the room as it spreads out among the guys.

No. We aren't doing this. We are moving forward, and King isn't getting another minute of our time. Not until I put the nail in his coffin, and I fucking bury him.

"Can we drop the guilt stuff, *please*? I don't want to be focusing on *him* when I just got you all back. I want to focus on us and building our home."

"That might not be an option."

The guys whip their heads to Kane, each glaring at him with nothing but violence in their eyes.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Jax looks about two seconds away from losing it.

"We might have a problem." Kane sighs. "Scratch that. We definitely have a problem."

"What do you know?" Rion asks, his body turning stiff as his eyes narrow on Kane.

"News travels fast. There were a few demons at the club you were at earlier." Kane looks at me, his eyes turning sad.

“They saw what you did with Malik and made sure to report back to their superiors.”

Kane gives Kai a sharp look. “It doesn’t look good. From what I’ve heard, Kiarra has just become a hot commodity in the supe world, with those in the Underworld eager to get their hands on her.”

“Fuck,” Axels spits out, a look of violence in his eyes aimed straight at Kane as if it’s all his fault.

“The rumor mill has already started making its rounds. Some think she’s going to destroy us all, while others want to use her for her power. Either way, she’s got an open target on her head.” His eyes find mine, softening, before a frown appears. The longer he stares, the more uncomfortable I start to feel.

Realizing that I still have my abilities showing, I release my hold on them and look away.

“What can we do?” Luka asks the others.

“Draven,” Rion tells us. “He’ll be able to keep the demons and Underworld at bay. At least until we figure out what we’re working with.”

“I’ll call him and arrange a meeting,” Kai says, turning to organize it, but Kane calls out, stopping him.

“No need. He’s already on his way.”

Kai raises a brow at him.

“As I said, news travels fast. Draven’s been made aware of this new... development.”

“She’s not a *development*. She’s our mate and deserves some damn respect.” Luka narrows his eyes at Kane.

“I’m sorry, that’s not what I meant.” Kane glances over at me, looking apologetic.

Jazmyn cuts him a sharp look. “What he means is... we’d like to help in whatever way we can.”

A quiet tap sounds out before Malik walks in.

“Oh, thank the Gods.” Jazmyn turns, moving to him. “Are you... okay?”

“I’m fine, Jaz,” he tells her, shoving his hands in his pockets. He nods at Kane before looking around.

“Draven’s coming,” Kane tells him.

Malik clenches his jaw, looking away. “For me?”

“No. You’re staying with us,” Jazmyn says.

He whips his head to her, narrowing his eyes before looking over her head at Kane.

Kane nods his head. “What she said.”

Malik swallows hard, dropping his shoulder. He nods his head to himself. “Why is he coming then?”

“For me,” I tell him.

Malik glances at me, his frown back in place. “Because of what you can do?”

I shrug, not having an answer for him. “I guess.”

“He’ll want to take you back with him.” Kane huffs in agreement.

The guys tense up, their gazes veering straight to Kane. Each looks absolutely furious at the idea.

“No one is taking her anywhere,” Kai growls out, his eyes pulsing red.

Kane raises his hands. “He may want to, but I didn’t think for one minute you’d allow that.”

Kai steps up behind me, wrapping his arms around me. I lean back into him, letting his warmth seep into me.

“There’s more, isn’t there?” Rion asks, narrowing his eyes on Kane.

Kane sighs loudly. “Draven thinks Kiarra might be the answer to our new Underworld problem. He knows something but won’t tell me anything until he shares whatever he knows with you first.”

Jax shrugs, looking unbothered by this new information. “Then we’ll meet with him to see what he knows. But if he thinks he’s going anywhere with our mate, he’s got another fucking thing coming.”

CHAPTER 24



KIARRA

AFTER I GET CHANGED, I follow Luka and Jax down a floor and into one of the large meeting rooms. There's a long table surrounded by leather chairs in the middle of the room and a large tv screen on the back wall. I walk over to the wide window and lean against it.

Jazmyn, Kane, and Malik are already there talking to Kai, Axel, and Rion at the end of the table. Jazmyn sees me and walks over to me while Jax and Luka join the others.

Leaning beside me, she bumps my shoulder. The lightness around her and smile on her face is not something I'm used to seeing on her.

“Don't worry, everything will work out.”

“Yeah?” I stare back at the guys.

Their worried gazes slide over to me every couple of minutes. I smile to myself when I catch Kane and Malik do the same to Jazmyn.

“Yeah. Those men of yours are batshit crazy, but they'd move the world for you if you asked them. Shit, they'd probably do it anyway, just to see if you like it.”

I watch their determined faces as they drill Kane for more information.

Moments later, a tall man arrives with four guards trailing behind him. His dark hair is a similar shade to Malik's, and his build and skin tone match Kane's.

“Is that—?”

“Draven... Yep.” Jazmyn clenches her jaw, staring right at him.

Draven orders his men to wait outside the room, leaving me to believe that whatever he’s about to say is important enough that he doesn’t even trust his own men with. His gaze finds Jazmyn as soon as the door shuts behind him. It lingers a moment before Jazmyn shifts, making him snap out of it. He moves down to the end of the table where the guys are.

Standing in front of Malik, he looks right at him. Malik is as stiff as a board; his hands are clenched at his side as he stares right back. A moment passes before Draven pulls him into a hug, shocking him.

He murmurs something in his ear, too quiet for me to hear before pulling back. Clearing his throat, he takes a seat while Malik stares at him like he doesn’t know what the hell just happened.

Draven leans forward, clasping his hands in front of him. He looks at the guys and Kane before landing on me, then he stares, unblinkingly.

“Keep staring at my mate like that and you won’t have to worry about the Underworld and old demons ending you,” Jax tells him, being the over possessive ass he is. But Axel grunts in agreement, backing him up.

“Calm down, I’m not interested in your mate. At least not like that,” Draven tells them. Which only makes it worse.

“You better not be interested in *any* way.” Axel steps forward, but Rion puts a hand out, stopping him from moving any closer.

Draven gives Axel an exasperated look just as Kai cuts in. “Tell us what you know.”

“I’ll get to that, but I need you to know that plenty of different supes have already made contact with me regarding what they witnessed or heard. Some want to know if they can use her, while others are looking for her to be... *destroyed*.”

The temperature in the room plummets. Each of the guys barely hold back their beasts upon hearing Draven's words.

"They come anywhere near her, and they're already dead." Kai growls before continuing. "Not one of us will hold back when it comes to her. We'll annihilate every last one of them before razing the ground they stepped on. Worry about your own family, Draven. You have no idea what we're capable of or the lengths we'll go to keep her safe."

The guys grunt in agreement.

"There's no doubt that you take care of yourselves, but what happens when more come? When hundreds attack from all angles? All they need is one opening and your mate is gone."

A crack breaks the silence as Luka snaps the small table behind him. A burning smell permeates the air as smoke seeps from Axel's hands. The metal on the chair he's holding has begun to melt.

"You're an idiot," Kane mutters, looking at Draven.

Draven gives him a sharp look before watching each of the guys warily.

Jax and Rion aren't fairing too well either. Rion's eyes shift, and his body is taut as a bow, ready to attack. Jax's eyes are glowing, and his hands turn into claws and back again as he tries to pull back a full shift.

I move to go to them, but Jazmyn grabs my arm, stopping me. "Not yet."

"What do you want?" Kai asks, glancing at me before glaring at Draven like he's a bug that needs to be squashed.

"I have a proposition for you," Draven tells him.

Jax's chuckle is dark, his voice full of promised violence. "Of course you do."

"I can send word that Kiarra is under my protection and not to be harmed. Along with your power as alphas, they should back off until we can figure out something more permanent."

“And in return?” Kai snaps, his voice like quiet thunder.

“Kiarra helps me with our... demon problem.”

Of course, I was going to help. This was affecting the guys as well. But Draven coming in here and blackmailing us was not the way to go about asking for it.

“We already agreed to help you,” Kai tells him.

“Yes, but since then, that little problem has grown out of control. Staten Island won’t be able to hold them at bay for much longer.” Draven looks at me. “But now that Kiarra has potentially awakened, she may be able to help us.”

“What do you mean by *awakened*?” Kai asks, mirroring what I was thinking.

Draven sighs, still looking at me. “You’re not a supe.”

“What are you talking about?” What else can I be? I’m not human; my healing ability affirms that.

“You’re... *more*.”

“More, what?” I ask him, having no idea where he is going with this.

“More than what you are... what we are.”

“You’re making no sense right now,” I tell him.

“Get used to that. He likes to talk in circles. I think it’s an alpha thing. They all like to hear the sound of their own voices.” Jazmyn smirks at me, ignoring the glares aimed at her.

“Okay, she can stay.” Jax nods, sending me a wink.

“I wasn’t going anywhere, but thanks for reaffirming what I already know.” She scoffs, folding her arms.

“What I was *trying* to say was that you’re not a supe, human, or anything that has ever existed before.”

Everyone freezes and looks at Draven like he’s lost his damn mind.

“You can’t just drop a bomb like that without backing it the fuck up. What the hell are you talking about?” Jax gives

him a murderous glare.

Draven sighs, cracking his neck. “When I took on the position of Demon Leader of Staten Island, I was made aware of the rules we had to abide by while we lived alongside the Underworld. I had to get up to speed on the history between both worlds and how I could ensure we coexisted among each other.”

“So you greased a few palms and climbed the power ladder. What does that have to do with what Kiarra is?” Axel asks, glaring at him.

“One of the rules I was to follow was to keep an eye on Reyna Erehouse and her daughter,” Draven tells him before focusing back on me.

“Why would you have to keep an eye on my mother and me?”

Mom wasn’t even a supe. Not that I knew of. We both thought I just got my abilities from my father’s side. Whoever that was.

Draven shifts in his chair, looking uncomfortable. “I thought the same thing. But when I inquired about it, I was told that if I wanted to find the truth, I’d have to go to the Underworld to find out.”

“That makes no sense. My mom was never in the Underworld,” I tell him. He must be confusing her with someone else.

Draven frowns. “Your mother was from there, Kiarra.”

“What?” I shake my head, “No. Do you know how crazy you sound right now? My mom wasn’t from the Underworld. I would have known something like that.”

Draven sighs, his frown deepening. “She wasn’t only from there; she was a Guardian as well. One of the good ones, from what I hear.”

“No.”

Jazmyn takes my hand, giving it a squeeze, but all I can focus on is Draven as he tries to make me believe something

that can't possibly be true. She would have said something to me... Right?

"I'm sorry, Kiarra, but I wouldn't have told you this unless I was absolutely positive."

Jax and Luka walk over to me. I hear Jazmyn sigh as they take her place by my sides.

"Say I believe you... Then why was she here instead of the Underworld? Why didn't she ever visit it if it was her *home*?"

"She grew tired of her duties and role. She wanted more and went to her *superiors* for change, a new life. She wanted the chance to bring another life into this world. She wanted to experience what mortals had: love and a mortal life with its fragility."

No. Draven is wrong. My mom never talked about anything to do with the Underworld. Surely if she was this *Guardian*, she would have had powers, abilities of some kind.

I saw her bleed from a paper cut, and she complained about getting gray hair, so I know she was ageing. So how can any of what he is saying be possible?

"I doubt her request was met with approval," Kai says, his soft eyes meeting mine.

"It wasn't. Her request was denied. But she found another way." The tone in his voice fills my stomach with dread.

"How?" Rion asks, briefly glancing down at me before focusing back on Draven.

"She went to the deepest part of the Underworld. The very bottom level of hell itself and sought out someone or something that could help her."

"Shit," Jazmyn whispers.

Jax narrows his eyes on her and she winces.

"She went missing from the Underworld soon after and eventually showed up pregnant with you on earth. She was no longer immortal, nor did she remember anything from her life before that."

“How are you so sure it was her?” There’s no proof that any of this is real.

“Our father was one of the demons who looked into it.” He sighs, sharing a look with Kane. “He found out everything I told you and more.”

“What *more*?” Kai demands.

But Draven looks right at me, and I can tell from the look in his eyes that whatever he’s about to tell me isn’t anything good.

“You weren’t *born* Kiarra. Not in the normal sense.”

“What the hell are you talking about now?” Jax inches closer, ready to gut the lunatic.

“You were created... *made*.”

Made? That’s not possible. I had a mother. He said it himself. She gave birth to me.

“My mom—”

“Was a vessel who contributed to your birth.”

“Fuck,” someone whispers, but I can’t tell who. My brain is overloaded with Draven’s words.

I shake my head, trying to hold on to anything I know is true. “I look like her.” My green eyes and dark hair are a mirror of hers.

“She helped create you, but your birth did not come from a *union* of any kind. It came from the product of power and the source of the Underworld itself.”

But she was still my mother... wasn’t she?

Kai, Rion, and Axel start drilling Draven with questions, but I can’t hear anything past the loud ringing in my ears.

You were created.

Draven’s words play over and over in my head.

Created, not born. Like an object. A soulless... thing. Did I even have a soul?

My eyes widen as I glance at each of my guys. Jax and Luka and their matching scowls as they stare down Draven. Rion as he stands involved but stays quiet, listening to everything around him, absorbing it all. Axel as he tries to start a fight with Kane and Kai... Kai as he forces Draven to tell him everything he knows.

If I don't have a soul, then how can we...

My chest gets tight at the thought of not truly being theirs. The room closes in on me, the guys too focused on Draven and shouting at him to notice I need out.

I take a step back and another and another until I'm heading out of the room. Luka finally notices, calling out to me, but I can't hear him past the loud thrumming in my ears.

I head out of there and back upstairs. I'm not foolish enough to try to run away, but I need time. Time alone to think, to try to figure out all this mess inside my head.

I find my room, closing the door behind me. Walking to my bed, I sink to the floor. Everything runs through my head, but it's like a fog is blocking it from processing. I can't think or focus on one thing.

Why didn't I know? Were there signs that I should've seen? My mom's smiling faces flashes before me. Image after image of us spending time together. She always had time for me. She even sang me to sleep when I was afraid of the dark. Me, someone who is supposedly created from that very thing.

I glance down at my hands, thinking I'll see something different, but they look the same. What if I really didn't have a soul?

I rub my chest as the band around it squeezes tighter.

The door thrusts open, slamming into the wall as Kai and Rion stalk in. Releasing a harsh breath, I push myself up, standing in front of the bed.

"You're not doing this. You're not pulling away from us again. I won't let you," Kai tells me, his voice resolute.

“I wasn’t...” I shake my head, the knot in my throat growing. “I just need some time alone to digest all this.”

“As a family, we work as one, meaning we solve our problems *together*. We help one another. You don’t get to hide from us and take that on by yourself. That’s not how this works.”

“That’s not...” I squeeze my eye shut.

I open my eyes just as Kai moves in front of me, reaching a hand out to the side of my face. He looks down at me with a frantic energy in his eyes.

“Stop trying to fight everything alone. We’re here now.”

“Kai... I’m not... whole,” I beg him to understand. “How can I be when I was... *created*? My mother wasn’t...”

She wasn’t a supe, and this other side of me... “I’m...”

Kai’s eyes flash with resolve. “*Ours*. You’re ours, Kiarra. Created. Made. Whatever you want to call it, but *you are ours*, and *every* part of you was made for us.”

Made... That the problem. I was made not born. I was created, so how can something molded by hell itself have a soul?

“Kai...”

Rion steps up to my side. “He’s right, Kiarra, and I think deep down you know that, too. You’re letting your fears and doubts get in the way right now, but you know that if anything makes sense, *we* do.”

“You don’t understand,” I plead with them.

“Then tell us,” Kai says.

“I’m not whole. How can I be if I was *created*? How can I have a soul, Kai? And if I don’t have a soul, how can our bond—or any of *this*—be real?”

CHAPTER 25



KIARRA

KAI'S whole body turns stiff. It starts to expand as his eyes pulse a deep red. "You. Are. *Mine*," he growls out, his voice more beast than man.

"Kai..."

He squeezes his eyes shut, hissing out a harsh breath as he tries to push back a shift. "Do you want to leave us, Kiarra?"

"Of course not." I step closer to him, reaching a hand up to his face. His body releases some of the tension as he leans into it.

"Then what does it matter if you were born or created? Because it sure as hell doesn't matter to me."

"Or any of us." Rion steps up my side. His whole body is taut, like he's seconds away from reaching out and grabbing me.

I drop my hand to Kai's chest and look at them both. "But I was created from *hell*. How does that not bother either of you?" Hearing it from my lips makes it sound crazy.

Kai takes my hand, holding it to his chest. "I'm a descendant of hell. Does that change how you see me?"

My eyes soften as I look up at him. "You know it doesn't."

"Then why does it matter what you are? None of this changes anything between us."

"I don't know," I tell them both as my stomach continues to twist and turn. "Nothing makes sense...My mom—"

“*Loved* you, Kiarra.” Kai’s grip tightens on my hand. His eyes plead with me to trust what he’s saying. “She loved you *so* much that she sacrificed everything to have you. She gave up her memories, her immortality and more, all because she wanted someone to love. If you were *created*, then you were created from her *love*.”

I swallow hard against the lump in my throat. She loved me...Deep down; I *know* she did. She’s never showed me anything but that. But the other side of me...

Kai takes my chin. “None of this matters, because *you* belong with *us*.”

But do I really? I was created, after all, and even if a big part of that was from my mother, my other side and the abilities that came along with it are unknown. Maybe I accidentally did something to form the bond with them. The thought alone sends a sharp spear through my heart.

“What if I did something to...form the bond when we were kids? What if I’m not—”

Kai slams his lips to mine, pulling me against his hard body. His lips move against mine, drawing a moan from my throat. I melt into him as my panicked thoughts come to a shuttering stop.

Fire and ash invade my senses. His scent, intoxicating as ever, pulls me under.

Hands slide around my waist as Rion’s warmth seeps in from behind me. I gasp into Kai’s mouth as Rion places soft kisses along my shoulder.

Kai pulls back, his eyes dark as they gaze down at me. He takes my hands in his, placing them above his heart. “Do you feel that Kiarra?” I feel the hard thump beneath my fingers.

“Look deeper. Can you feel the bond? Our bond? It’s right there. And no matter what way you look at it, that’s not going to change.” Kai is determined as he stares down at me.

The bond pulses between us, making me feel stupid for even questioning it.

Kai runs a hand down my chest and over the curve of my breast, making me gasp. His trail continues to my lower stomach just as Rion continues his trail up my neck.

“Does this feel *real*, Kiarra?” Kai asks.

A rush of heat floods my body with each of their touches. “Yes.”

“No one stands in our way, not even you. I won’t let you.” His words turn sharp, his alpha power behind them. It seeps out around us, making my core slick with heat.

Kai notices the change in me, in my body, and his eyes darken.

“Tell us what you want.” Kai moves a hand to my chin, making me look at him.

What I want...I want to feel everything *except* what I’m thinking right now.

“I want to...let go...to just...*feel* and not think of everything inside my head right now.” I gasp as more alpha power seeps around me, shooting straight to my core.

Kai’s lips tilt up. The lust in his eyes is nearly my undoing. “You need someone to take control.”

“Yes.” I breathe, melting under his heated gaze.

Rion runs a hand down my back, making me shiver. “Who do you want right now? It can be either of us or—”

“Both.” My eyes find Rion’s as he tries to pull back. “Stay.” I breathe out before glancing back at Kai.

Rion looks to Kai in question.

Kai’s answering smile is wicked, his eyes never leaving mine. “You heard her...*Stay*.” Kai runs a hand up through the side of my head, bunching my hair in his hand before gently pulling it to the side. Sharp heated jolts slide down my head and back as I lean into his touch.

I feel his warm breath as it slides along my ear and neck, making me shiver. “I’m not playing it safe anymore. You’re going to find out just how *real* this bond is between us when I

mark every inch of your body, and you're never going to question it again."

"Yes." I moan, needing him to take away all my fears and doubts.

"You were made for us Kiarra," Kai says before stepping back, taking his warmth with him. His dark eyes fix on me as he unbuttons the top of his shirt.

"Strip." He demands as Rion moves to the other side of the bed.

"Wh—"

"Strip. I want to see every inch of you." Kai says. I glance between them both, and the heated look in their eyes spurs me on.

Slowly pulling off my top, I throw it to the side of me before unbuttoning my jeans. Bending over, I hear a low groan just as I slide them down my legs and kick them off.

Standing in just my bra and panties, I bite my bottom lip and stare between them both.

"Take them off...*slowly*," Kai demands, his voice a husky growl making me shiver.

Maintaining eye contact with them both, I slide my hands up my body. Their eyes blaze with heat as I slowly peel off my bra.

Sliding my hands back down my body, I hear a deep growl followed by a sharp intake of breath as I slowly bend and drag my panties down.

"*Fuck.*"

Smiling to myself and basking in their heated looks, I step out of them before raising a brow, wondering which of them will give me my next command.

"I can smell your arousal from here, but I want you to *tell* us. Tell us how wet you are, beautiful." Kai smirks at me, giving me a challenging look.

I narrow my eyes on him before giving him my own wicked smirk. Placing my hands on my neck, I slide them slowly down my chest. Licking my bottom lip, I make a show of dragging my hands over my breasts, squeezing them before moving down my stomach. I add a few gasps and moans and watch their heated stares become molten lava.

Kai takes a step forward before stopping himself. Clenching his fist, he narrows his eyes on me, like he's just figured out what I'm doing.

He opens his mouth, probably to try to reprimand me and tell me he's in control, but I wasn't finished yet.

I was only getting started.

I wanted out of my head and to do that, I'm going to focus on feeling...everything. Even if that means teasing two of my mates until one of them breaks.

"Kiarra..." Kai gives me a warning look but all it's doing is spurring me on.

Moving my hand down my center to my core, I slide a finger along my folds. "I'm *soaked*...Is that what you want to hear?" I glance at both of them, knowing my words are provoking them into breaking the little controlling act they have going on.

"Is that what you wanted me to *tell* you? That my core is so slick with heat that I could..." Sliding a finger inside myself, I tilt my head back and release a low moan.

"*Fuck*." Rion sighs. Glancing over, I watch his dark eyes follow my hand. I lick my bottom lip and slowly slide my hand back and forth, watching as his breath quickens.

I smile to myself when he takes a step forward, not thinking Rion would be the first to give in to my little game.

"Enough!" Kai demands. I look at him, about to call him out, when his eyes pulse red just as a shitload of alpha power seeps into the room.

I gasp as it hits me, making my legs tremble from the blast of heat that shoots through me.

Kai smirks, a devilish glint in his eyes. Rolling his shoulders, he raises a brow at me. “I think our girl needs a better use for that smart mouth and hand. Rion. Go, get our girl ready for us.”

Backed with his alpha power, Kai’s order makes me shiver. He gives me a look as if to say, ‘now who’s playing whose game?’

I don’t get a chance to muster up a reply before Rion pulls off his shirt, stepping closer. My eyes drift down his bare torso and each ripple of muscle as he steps in front of me.

“Siren.” One guttural word from Rion as his eyes trail down my body and I completely forget what I was doing.

My fingers itch to reach out to him, to drag him to me. I lift them, not able to stop myself.

Kai’s voice rings out, breaking our spell. “On the bed, beautiful.”

I glance over at him. His eyes are dark, the devilish glint still there but now with a scorching heat that makes me squirm in place.

Maybe I could play along for a bit.

Taking a step back, I keep my eyes on Kai as I lie down on the bed, using my arms to stay slightly up.

“Legs, beautiful...open them,” Kai hums, watching as I pull my knees up and slightly open them.

“Wider,” Kai demands. His voice is deeper, making me shiver in pleasure. He takes a step closer, his dark eyes locking on mine, encouraging me to trust him.

Biting my lip, I open them wider, feeling the cool air against my center as I lie bare and open for them.

Instead of feeling self-conscious, I feel powerful. Even though Kai is giving me commands, I feel like *I’m* the one in control here. Especially with their dark possessive gazes following my every move.

“Good girl.” Kai’s praise slides down my back like warm silk, soothing me.

Rion moves to stand at the end of the bed, his heated stare gazing down at my body leaving a trail of flames in its wake.

I lie back as he bends down, crawling up my body before hovering over me, a hand on each side of my face.

“Siren,” he whispers, before dipping down and kissing me. He teases at first, then deepens it, caressing my lips and tongue with his own.

He drags his lips down my chin to my neck. I feel each brush and lick, and it sends small jolts down my body. He continues down my chest to my stomach before moving to my center.

“Rion...” I reach out to grip something as the heat builds. Fisting the sheets in my hands, I focus back on Rion’s lips just as they brush against my core. One long flick of his tongue and my body is already throbbing. “Oh, gods.”

“No gods here Siren, just beasts who are going to devour you whole.” Rion slides his tongue up and down my core, licking and sucking, making me pant and moan and beg for more.

He keeps up his slow pace, dragging his tongue up and down the length of my core, each stroke making me soar higher with the building sensation.

He speeds up his pace, bringing me to the brink only to slow down again, my searing need turns into a rising torment of pleasure.

“Please,” I beg, needing some form of release.

But he ignores my pleas, keeping his relentless pace, bringing me to the edge, only to pull back and start again.

My whole body trembles as it climbs closer and closer to that delicious edge, only to find another peak.

“Please.” I whimper. My entire body tightens, on the brink of a shattering release.

“That’s enough. Make her come,” Kai commands.

Rion’s tongue changes, I feel it thicken as it slides up me, and growing larger before it enters me.

Fuck. Why the hell did he not tell me he could do this? The thickness and length makes it feel like a cock as it slides in and out of me.

I moan, as the delicious feeling of being full brings me that much closer to the edge. The idea of fucking his face just took on a whole new meaning and something I was definitely trying later on.

I’m so close to reaching my release that the brush of his finger barely touching my clit, makes me explode. I cry out, arching into the surge of pleasure as it ripples over me in tingling waves.

The sensation drags out feeling endless. I slowly come down from my high, still breathless when Kai comes up beside me.

“Good girl.”

My eyes travel the length of him. He’s taken his shirt off, his chest bare with each of his hard defined muscles on display.

I bite my lip, my gaze trailing down to the V between his hips and lower to the large bulge in his pants. Glancing back up at his eyes, I catch his knowing smirk. “Do you want to taste Rion, beautiful?”

I nod a yes, licking my lips. My eyes move to Rion as he stares back at me. His eyes blaze with need.

Licking my lips, I crawl to the edge of the bed to where Rion is standing. He leans down, meeting my lips before sliding his tongue inside my mouth. The kiss becomes a slow, drugging, sensual kiss that makes me want to savour every sip. I taste myself on his lips and, mixed with his heady scent, heat stirs in me once more.

I nip his bottom lip, sucking on it before kissing down his chin and chest. A tremor ripples through his body as I move

down to his stomach.

Glancing up at him, I watch as he briefly closes his eyes. I reach out and slide his pants down. His large erection slips free, making my mouth water.

I bend down, placing a soft kiss on the tip, and watch his eyes darken before I take him in my mouth. He's so big that I can't take him all the way, so I grip the base of his cock and stroke and suck, keeping the same rhythm. Rion grunts as I slow my speed before picking up, just like he did with me.

"Siren," he warns, but he's not the only one who gets to tease.

Keeping my eyes on his, I slide my tongue back up his length before swirling my tongue around his cock.

Rion's mouth drops open on a low groan, his face contorting in ecstasy.

I gently massage and run my fingers over the base of him while licking the tip of his cock.

"Siren," he grunts. He clenches his hands to his sides and I start sucking up and down him, taking him as far as I can before pulling back. I forget about teasing him and lose myself, loving the taste and feel of him in my mouth.

Rion curses. "Right there. Siren...That mouth should be..." He moans, "Damn."

I don't realize how worked up I am until Kai comes up behind me, sliding his hands down my back.

"Stunning," Kai growls. His hands work down my body as if memorizing every inch. He moves around my hips and down my thighs, inching closer and closer to my slick heat.

"I'm going to make you come apart for me."

I moan a yes, and Rion grunts from the vibration. I do it again, giving him a wicked smile with my eyes. His own eyes narrow playfully at me as he starts slowly thrusting into my mouth.

Kai's hands move down to my core. His fingers slide along the length of me before sliding a finger in. I moan around Rion's cock, making him grunt and twitch inside my mouth.

"Fuck. You *are* dripping for us."

Rion groans as Kai leans into me. His hard length brushes against my ass, making a delicious shudder of heat run through my body.

Kai grabs hold of my hips, before slowly pushing into me with short thrusts. His girth is bigger than the others making me feel deliciously full. As he grinds into me, each slight thrust strokes the fire inside me, soaring until my whole body is heated in delicious flames.

With Rion in my mouth and Kai pushing his cock into me from behind, my sense becomes overwhelmed. In the best way.

I can't think of anything else but the feel of them and how much more of them I want.

I moan, dropping my hands to fist the sheets as I pant around Rion's cock. My body becomes overwhelmed with every little movement.

Once Kai is fully sheathed inside me, I push back and clench around him. He grunts as his hands tighten on my hips.

"Kiarra..." Kai groans as he pushes his weight into me, making me take more of Rion's cock.

Rion grunts. I glance up, watching as his eyes pulse gold as they stare right at me.

I'm lost in his heated gaze, in the feel of his silky-smooth cock in my mouth when Kai slides out of me, slamming back in and pushing more of Rion's cock further into my mouth.

I moan, loving Kai take control of my body. Rion's eyes roll to the back of his head the more Kai slams into me.

I know Rion is close when I feel him pulse and throb in my mouth, so I reach a hand up and massage the base of his thick length. My next moan is drawn out, dragging Rion's release as

he comes in my mouth. I continue to suck him, swallowing and savouring every last drop.

I release Rion just as he dips forward, catching himself on the edge of the bed. His eyes follow mine as my mouth drops open. The feel of Kai thrusting into me brings me closer to another shattering release.

I gasp as Kai yanks me back against his body. With my knees barely touching the bed, he holds me there, the new angle deeper, making me feel even fuller.

I lick my lips as his left hand slides around my waist pulling me tighter against him.

“I can control your body...make you feel pleasure like you’ve never known, but you’ll *always* have my fucking heart, Kiarra. Never forget that.” He leans down, placing a soft kiss on my neck, making me shiver. I close my eyes and tilt my head back to him as his right hand slides up to my throat. I moan as the slight pressure holding me in place sends a bolt of desire to my core.

I feel Kai’s grin on my neck.

“Kai...”

I grind down onto to his thick cock just as he starts thrusting into me again, gasping at each jolt of intense pleasure as it shoots through me.

Kai’s alpha power fills the room again, making me gasp at the added pleasure. I whimper as he thrusts into me over and over, his speed relentless. Just when I think I can’t take any more, he tilts his hips. I feel him even deeper, and it pushes me over the edge.

I grab his hand, gripping it tight as I clench around him.

“Fuck.” Kai breathes. He surges into me hard, and I shatter. The world falls away as I give into the orgasm and slip into the heat engulfing my entire body.

“You’re *mine*.” Kai growls as his body stiffens just as he comes inside me, lengthening the pleasure, making it stretch and spread all over me.

He pulls out of me as we fall back onto the bed, both breathless and deliciously sore.

“And *mine*.” Rion gives Kai a look, making him smile before they both look at me.

“*Ours*.”

Rion heads to the bathroom, coming back with a wet cloth. I smile as he gently cleans me. He gets back into bed with me before pulling the covers over me and Kai.

“Get some sleep,” Kai tells us.

“Yes, *Alpha*.” I tell him, biting my lip.

Their bodies stiffen up before I hear matching groans.

“Keep that up and we’ll be here all night,” Kai growls.

I laugh, the weight of my worries feeling a lot lighter with the two of them by my side.

“That’s the plan.”

CHAPTER 26



KIARRA

I KNOW I'm not dreaming anymore when one of my mates slips into the bed behind me. Jax's warm, woody scent full of untamed wildness wraps around me as he pulls me back into his body.

His *naked*, hard body.

I smile to myself, still naked from the night before, and he seems to realize this when his hand runs down the length of my body. He groans low in my ear, sending warm shivers down my back.

Pressing his lips to my shoulder and up my neck, I tilt my head giving him better access.

"Jax." I feel his erection harden against my ass. Warmth unfurls in my lower stomach, spreading to my thighs.

He slides his hard length along my wet folds, and I grind my ass back against him, needing to feel every inch of him.

His thick cock pushes inside me agonizingly slowly, teasing me and setting every inch of my body on fire. It's exquisite torture.

He slides back out and in again, keeping up his punishing slow pace, until my whole body is in flames.

By the time he pushes my leg up for better access, I'm slick with a sheen of sweat, panting and craving his touch and the feel of him.

“That’s it baby.” His voice is rough, husky and sexy as hell, driving me crazy. I reach an arm around and pull his lips to mine needing to taste him.

I want to feel his hard cock as it drives into me...until I’m clenching and coming all over it.

I drag my lips from his. “I want you to fuck me hard.”

As soon as the words leave my lips, Jax loses it. I can feel him grow harder and thicker, and his cock begins to swell and throb inside me. He pulls back and thrusts into me again and again, pushing me closer and closer to the edge, until I’m ready to tip over.

“I’ll never get tired of fucking you.” His ragged breath rushes across my neck, making me shiver.

The pleasurable ache continues to build and spread to the rest of my body.

So close.

I’m nearly there when his thrusts slow down, making me want to strangle the fucker. I must have said it out aloud, as he chuckles, pushing into me and holding himself there.

I grind into him, needing him to move, but he holds me still, his cock growing thicker inside me, filling me and stretching me like nothing I’ve ever felt before.

I try to move again but a surge of pleasure stops me from going too far. I cry out, feeling deliciously full, so damn full. Too full... It’s like he’s...swollen and locked in.

No. He couldn’t have...

“Jax?” I try to move again when he groans behind me.

“Did you just fucking *knot* me?” My voice is breathless, every slight move making me feel like I’m losing my damn mind.

“Did you really think I’d *ever* let you get away from us?” Jax’s harsh whisper slides against my ear.

“I meant it when I said you weren’t leaving us.” Jax growls, his deep voice full of heated promises. He bites down

on my ear, sending a bolt of heat straight to my core.

“Til death do us fucking part.”

“We’re not married.” I gasp as he begins to move behind me. His hard length slides back barely an inch, not able to move any further. Slowly, he pushes back in, grinding against me. The delicious pressure makes my eyes roll to the back of my head.

“No, but we will be. I’ll declare, sign, fuck and tie myself to every inch of you, right up until you realize who you belong to.”

My core clenches each time he grinds into me, over and over as he brings me closer and closer to the brink. But with his knot, it feels so much...*more*. It reaches the peak like last time but keeps building, reaching higher.

“You don’t get to run from me,” he growls out, sounding more beast than man.

“I wasn’t—”

“You were, but never again,” he demands.

“*Never*,” I promise him.

I’d never leave any of them. Kai was right, even if I was created. I was created for them, just like they were for me. We are only whole when we’re together, and I never wanted that to change.

Jax kisses across my shoulders, his hand sliding around my front to my wet folds. A long, drawn out moan sends hot shivers down my body. “Always so fucking wet for me.”

His fingers slide across my folds, as his hot breath trails across my neck, leaving wet kisses behind.

“How is this even possible?” I ask, panting.

“You’re my mate,” he states like that should explain everything.

My nipples peak and grow hard as his fingers rub over my sensitive bundle of nerves. Added with Jax’s relentless pace

and his large, knotted length reaching deep inside me, I start to fall apart.

His thumb circles my clit, and that's all it takes to push me over the edge. Ripples of pleasure assault my body as I completely shatter, screaming out his name.

Wave after wave of pleasure continues to hit me, gripping me hard as I push over the edge and fucking *soar*. It's deliciously relentless, continuing for what feels like ages before slowly coming back down again.

"Damn," Jax breathes.

I come down from my high noticing Jax is still...*attached*, and hard, leaving me so damn full, I moan feeling the heat build once again.

I turn my head around to look at Jax and find him staring back, wearing a smug smirk, still locked in and ready for round two.

Damn, if he keeps this up, I'll never leave this bed...or be able to fucking walk again.

"I don't think I can go again. Can you die from too many orgasms?" I ask, breathless.

Jax chuckles, low and deep.

"We both know you can't die." I can hear the smile in the smug fuckers voice.

Still knotted, he throws his leg over me before getting to his knees behind me. Each slight movement sends small jolts of heat straight to my core.

"What are you—"

Once he's settled behind me, he yanks my body back onto him, grinding his knotted cock into me.

"Fuck." The intense pleasure builds once more spreading across my stomach and down to my thighs.

Jax slowly slides a hand up my stomach to between my breasts, pausing on my neck. He tilts it to the side and dips his head to lick up my neck to my ear.

Just when I melt into him, he bites down hard, sending shivers down my body and straight to my heated core.

I lick my lips as his hot breath slides across my ear. “Tell me baby? Do you want it soft and sweet, or wild and hard?”

Biting my lip, I grind down onto him. “The second option.”

I feel his lips smirk followed by a soft kiss under my ear. “That’s my girl.”

Sliding his hand around to my back, he pushes me towards the bed.

I catch myself with my hands, grabbing the sheets as he tilts my ass up toward him.

Fuck.

Using his knees, he widens my legs apart and settles in behind me.

Pulling back as far as he can with the engorged knot, he thrusts back into me. The jolt slams right to my core, tearing a moan from my lips.

“Hope you’re not tired...because I’m just getting started.”

* * *

“HMM?”

Jax chuckles. “I said I have to go. Luka needs me for something. I’ll be back in a few, but Axel is here.”

“Is Luka okay?”

“He’s fine. Don’t even think about leaving or I’ll hunt your ass down and tie you to the bed.”

I bite my lip, giving him a wicked smile. “In that case, I might just run away.”

Jax leans down on to the bed. “If you want me to chase you, baby, all you have to do is ask. I’ll even give you a ten-

minute head start.” He bites my ass before slapping it, hard, making me moan.

“Don’t miss me too much.” He pauses, narrowing his eyes and shaking his head. “Scratch that. Miss me loads. Fucking pine for me and when I get back, I’ll let you suck my cock until you’re dripping, and then I’ll fuck you nice and hard.”

He leaves before I get a chance to pull him back to me. I frown, feeling beyond frustrated.

How the fuck did I go from barely any sex to craving it constantly from my mates? I wonder what Luka and Axel... No. I push the thought out of my mind and get up and head for the shower...a cold one.

Heading into the bathroom, I step inside the shower, turning it up to cold before finding the right pressure. Stepping under it, I let it flow over me for a few minutes before turning up the heat.

Picking one of the mango-scented bath washes, I lather it up and rub it down my body, thinking over everything that happened the last couple of days.

Draven revealed a few eye-opening truths, but I don’t know where to begin or what it all means for me.

Does it change who I am? I don’t feel different, not in any life-altering way.

But I do need to find answers. Answers to the questions still piling up. About my mother. About what being created from the pits of hell means.

My new powers are still a mystery, something I will need to learn about. But with no one else like me, I’ll have to learn as I go.

Will they continue to grow?

I reach down inside me, slowly dragging my power up and watch as the dark shadows seep from my skin like steam.

I close my eyes and search the power inside me. It reaches out around me sensing a connection nearby. It flickers in my

mind right before the shadow beast appears outside the shower.

It tilts its head. “*Need?*” it asks in my mind.

“No. Leave.” It immediately disappears in a puff of smoke.

How the fuck did I end up with him? At least I think it is a he. Another question to add to my ever-expanding list.

What I do know is that I can’t pull away anymore, unintentionally or not. No more hiding and trying to deal with it myself.

Kai is right. We are a family, and together we will figure it out.

I finish up before getting out and drying off. After getting dressed, I head towards the kitchen, drawn in by the enticing smell of bacon and coffee. Picking up my pace, I find Axel alone.

“Morning, Princess.” Axel has his back to me as I move closer. I glance over at the food he’s making. Bacon, eggs, pancakes with syrup, and coffee.

Axel turns around, his shirt open, revealing his lean torso with an...eight pack. My mouth waters, wondering what it would be like to lick the syrup off each one.

“Do you want to help or are you just going to stare?” Axel smirks at me with a knowing look.

“Hmm, I don’t know. I’ve got a really good view from here.”

Axel’s grin grows, glancing up at me, his eyes darken. “Get that ass over here.”

I move around the long counter, glancing around at what to do.

He raises a brow when I pause. “Have you ever cooked?”

I narrow my eyes on him. “I know the basics...”

He scoffs. “What? Boiling an egg?”

I place my hand on my chest in mock outrage. “It’s a damn skill and you know it.”

His gruff chuckle slides down my back like warm liquid. “You can’t even do that, can do?”

“I never said I was perfect, but let’s not be picky. What can I do that won’t burn the place down?” I glance around at the food, wondering if I can sneak something in my mouth before he catches me.

“How about you flip the bacon? That can’t be too hard, can it?” He looks at me as if expecting an answer, but the hell if I know.

I turn around, ignoring his growing smirk, and flip the bacon slowly. I was not going to burn it, if only to prove to him I could manage this little task.

I’m concentrating so hard on this one little sliver of bacon that I don’t notice the thick piece beside it bubbling up to attack me. The oil spatters across my fingers, making me hiss.

“Let me see.”

“It’s fine, it’ll hea—” Axel takes my finger into his mouth and sucks, cutting off what I was about to say.

Fuck. Now I’m imagining what else that tongue can do.

“You know I can heal.” I tell him, but I’m more focused on his tongue as it slides around the length of my finger.

“True...But that’s not going to stop me.” He sucks my finger one last time before releasing it.

I have to mentally shake myself before speaking, my complete focus still on the sensation and pleasure of his tongue wrapped around my finger. “If you wanted a taste, all you had to do was ask.”

Turning around, he quickly turns off the food before focusing back on me.

Axel’s smile turns smug. “We both know I wouldn’t have to *ask* for anything.”

“Well, I won’t be begging for—” Axel slams his lips to mine, dragging a moan from me and cutting off what I was going to say.

I reach up and wrap my arms around his neck. Without breaking the kiss, he lifts me up and places me on the counter.

Opening my legs, he pulls me to the edge of the counter and grinds into me, making me gasp.

He drags his lips down my neck to my ear as he runs his hands up my thighs. “Tell me, Princess...What did Jax do to make you scream like that? That sound was fucking delicious. I’ve been thinking about it ever since.” His low, husky voice makes me shiver.

“He knotted me,” I breathe, focusing on the way his hands drag up and down my thighs.

“He...” Axel leans back, looking down at me with a stunned look before narrowing his eyes. “That fucker. Of course, he fucking *knotted* you.” He shakes his head, scoffing.

His pissed off expression makes me laugh. “Jealous?” I run my hand down his bare chest and watch as his muscle flex beneath my fingers. I glance back up, seeing a challenge light up his eyes.

“Not even fucking close. By the time I’m finished with you, you won’t even remember what Jax did.”

I could still feel the delicious stretch that only came with his knot. I squirm, thinking about it and how I couldn’t wait to do it again.

“I doubt that. I can still feel—” I gasp as a burst of energy shoots straight to my core, making me instantly wet. Glancing down at my body, I feel a strange tingling sensation similar to a mini orgasm. It disappears seconds later, leaving me aching for more.

“What the fuck was that?” And what can I do to make it happen again?

Axel gives me one of his smug looks. “I’m a dragon, princess. One that can absorb energy and right now, I’ve got a

shitload that's looking for an outlet.”

Energy...My whole body lit up like a firework. I can still feel the heat in my cheeks, and fast beat of my heart from the small tease he gave my body.

“But that was—”

His smirk grows. “I can manipulate that energy and move it where I want...”

I feel a spike of pressure along my neck just before it slowly trails down my body. It feels like he's sliding a hand slowly down the length of me. I close my eyes, leaning into it, feeling the trail of heat that follows.

“Or change it, to do what I want...”

Cool air hits my body, making me open my eyes. Glancing down, I catch the end of my top as it burns away.

I find Axel's eyes as they pulse gold staring at my bare chest, but all I can think about is how he was able to burn my whole top and bra off without leaving any marks.

“It doesn't hurt.” I glance up at him in surprise.

Axel's eyes soften. “I'll piss you off like there's no tomorrow, but I would *never* hurt you.”

I give him a soft smile. “How are you able to control it like that?” I still feel a slight warmth on my skin, but no pain.

“Jax isn't the only one with special talents.”

I clear my throat to cover the laugh bubbling up. I was definitely not telling Jax that Axel accidentally called his knotted dick a talent. He would never hear the end of it.

I give him a wicked smile. “What else can you do?”

His smirk grows before he steps between my legs. He grabs my chin using his thumb and drags it down my bottom lip. “Suck.”

I smirk, watching his eyes darken as I take his thumb into my mouth and suck, nice and hard. I swirl my tongue around

it, licking up and down its length before taking it into my mouth.

“Get it nice and wet, just like I’m going to make you.” I squirm on the table as his smirk grows. “Or should I say...like I already have?”

His chuckle is low and deep. “Are you wet for me, Princess?” He presses into me again, grinding his thick, hard length against my core and pulling a moan from my lips. I move to wrap my legs around him but he pulls back. I go to lift my mouth off his thumb, to demand he move back when his hand tightens under my chin.

“Don’t stop,” he warns, his eyes growing darker.

I narrow my eyes on the demanding fucker and suck his thumb until I start imagining it’s his fucking cock that I can’t get enough of.

“Good girl.” He’s about to pull it out when I bite it, making him grunt.

“Fuck,” he breathes. His pupils dilate, and he licks his bottom lip. Sliding his hand down my neck, a sizzle of heat follows, making my skin tingle with pleasure.

“How does that feel?”

“Good.” I moan.

I hear a husky chuckle as his hand slowly moves down my chest. He cups my breasts and massages them before brushing his thumb over my hardened nipple. A flash of heat slides across it, sending a bolt of desire straight to my core.

Tilting my head back, I arch into the sensations just as Axel dips down and takes my other nipple in his mouth, making me moan.

With Axel’s warm wet tongue sucking and swirling around one nipple, and his heated thumb rubbing and teasing the other, it makes every one of my senses go into overdrive. The heated pleasure becomes the only thing I can think about.

“Are you going to beg, Princess?”

I can't even focus on a reply as more energy slides along the length of my body, pulsing back and forth.

I gasp as the pleasure builds and expands, barely brushing my core before pulling back. He does it again and again, reaching every inch of me *but* my core.

“Axel...” I groan.

I feel his deep chuckle as he continues to work my body to the edge, only to pull back and start again. My entire body is trembling, aching for more by the time he moves down to my stomach.

It gathers there, making me whimper at how intense it grows. Once it reaches a peak, it spreads straight to my core, making me gasp.

A lick of heat brushing against my clit is all it takes to send me spiralling into the scorching pleasure, becoming an all-consuming climax that radiates to every limb in my body.

I've never felt anything like it. Like he's bottled the energy from loads of mini orgasms and just shot them straight into me at once.

I'm panting, my body is trembling with sweat dripping down my back, as I slowly come down from the delicious aftermath.

I find Axel's eyes as he leans over me. The intense look he's giving me is more than just lust. There's a tenderness there too.

I open my mouth to speak when he slams his lips to mine, dragging a moan from my lips. His body presses into mine, making me want to absorb the feel of him. His raw, smokey scent hits my senses, making me want to melt into him.

We're both breathless by the time he pulls back. Glancing down at me, he licks his lips.

“I could live on those little gasps and moans. They're fucking delicious.” The savage look in his eyes makes me shiver as the heat trails down my back once more.

I reach a hand up, and he takes it, leaning into it. “Axel...”

The heat in his eyes changes, if only for a moment, to something more soft. A tenderness that is soon covered by a dark look that scorches me to the spot.

“It’s time for desert. Lie back.” I don’t even question his demand. My body is still too heated to do anything but listen.

I feel his hands on my hips and a rush of heat before my leggings and underwear burn off, leaving me bare and open.

I don’t get a chance to adjust to the change before he leans down and places a soft kiss against my lower stomach, making me gasp. He slides a hand down my body, stopping on my stomach.

He continues kissing down to my center before sliding his tongue along the length of my core, sending a bolt of pleasure up through me.

Sliding a hand down my leg to my core, he gently spreads me open and slowly licks up to my clit, making me whimper. “Axel.”

“Are you going to scream my name, Princess?” The husky growl to his voice sends a delicious shiver of heat through my body.

He doesn’t wait for my answer before continuing with his agonizingly slow rhythm, sliding his tongue up and down my core.

I moan into the ripple of pleasure that slides up my back. His energy swirls around it, intensifying each ripple to expand and grow. I’m lost in every little sensation, when soft feathery strokes of heat start to brush down my stomach, adding to the deep ache coiling in my lower stomach.

“Please,” I whimper. I’d beg at this stage for another release and the fucker knows it.

I hear a husky chuckle as his tongue continues to work my body. Sensations gradually build inside me, and each swipe and swirl gets me closer and closer to that edge.

I gasp as he presses the tip of his tongue along my clit, making me lose my mind. I arch into it, grinding into his

mouth.

“Fuck,” he groans. The delicious vibration shoots straight to my throbbing core. I grind harder into his mouth, getting closer to that edge. I hear him grunt and moan just before he picks up speed.

“Please,” I beg, needing a release.

He squeezes my thighs, running his hands up and down my legs.

“Are you going to scream for me?” His warm breath blows against my core, sending a ripple of pleasure through me.

“Yes.” I whimper against the onslaught of overwhelming sensations.

Axel moves his thumb to my clit. The swelling pressure builds just before a bolt of heat shoots straight through me, making me gasp. Fuck. He just used his ability straight on my clit.

“Again,” I moan.

I hear a throaty chuckle just as he does it again and again until I’m begging, pleading and cussing him out.

“Axel... You better—”

My demand falls flat as my body becomes overwhelmed with a surge of energy flooding it. Axel swipes his tongue once more along the length of me and it’s all it takes to make me explode.

And I fucking *explode*. I shatter, coming apart piece by piece. I arch into his mouth as wave after wave of pleasure continues to pulse throughout my body.

I’m panting, breathless and still tingling from head to toe when I finally come down from my high. Opening my eyes, I find Axel’s as he stares right at me.

“Fuck,” he breathes.

“What the *hell* was that?”

Axel's smirk turns smug as fuck. "Well, princess, if you don't know what an orgasm is, I think I need to have a talk with your other mates."

My eyes widen on the smart-ass. "That wasn't a fucking orgasm. I think I left my body."

Axel's smile grows the more nonsense that spews from my mouth, his eyes sparkling in delight.

Shakily, I slightly lean up, narrowing my eyes on him. "Don't even think about getting a bigger head than you already have."

Axel leans in, grinding his thick erection against my core, making me gasp. "Too late."

"Fuck." I tilt my head back as the heat slowly builds once more. "Axel..."

"I've got you, princess." His eyes darken as he slides his hands up my thigh. I watch a smug smirk spread across his face just as flames lick up my body. Literal flames.

What the—

I glance down at my chest and watch the orange flames glide across my body, leaving nothing but lingering heat behind.

"How?" I gasp.

Axel's smirk grows, his eyes pulsing gold as he skims his hands up my thighs. "Unlike Jax, I'm not a one-trick pony."

I don't get a chance to reply before he enters me in one swift thrust, his cock stretching and filling me completely, drawing a moan from my lips.

"Fuck, you feel so good," he grunts, his eyes pulsing gold as more flames follow his trail.

"You, too. Don't stop." I'd castrate the fucker if he tried.

His possessive gaze finds mine, sending a delicious shudder through my body. He pulls nearly all the way out, a carnal look in his eyes raking down my body, before he thrusts back in, making me gasp and moan his name.

His possessive gaze gets darker, the more I unravel in front of him. Reaching back, I grab the counter and arch up into the pleasure as he surges into me again and again, not stopping his punishing pace.

His eyes pulse gold, staying that way just as more licking flames caress my heated body, making my senses spin.

I know I'm close when I start to clench around him. "Axel..."

So close.

But just as I'm about to shatter, Axel pulls out of me, making me whimper. I'm about to reach out and grab hold of the dick when he shifts, grabbing my waist and lifting my hips so my legs are resting on his shoulders.

Keeping hold of my legs, he thrusts back in, making us both moan at the delicious feeling. The new angle making him feel so much deeper.

"Fuck." Axel grunts as he rolls his hips. Slowly pulling out all the way before driving back into me, making me gasp and cry out for more.

I gasp as he thrusts back into me again and again. The heat builds and builds, getting higher again with no end in sight. I whimper, biting my lip as my throbbing core gets closer and closer to that edge.

But instead of tipping over into that shattering orgasm, he pushes me higher and higher. I whimper as the intensity becomes too much, reaching that fine line between pleasure and pain.

Just when I think I can't take any more, I shatter, screaming out his name as I explode around him once more.

My core clenches as Axel thrusts one last time before spilling into me. I can hear my pulse pound like a hammer in my ears as the haze of pleasure continues to ripple over me in waves.

The flames across my body slowly die out with the spasms, leaving a caress of heat behind.

Axel drops over me, catching himself before he falls on me. Still out of breath, he looks down at me, a devilish glint in his eyes.

“You screamed louder for me.”

A bubble of laughter rises up and spills out around us, making him smile. Sliding out of me, he cleans himself up before putting his pants and shirt back on. Shakily, I sit up and squirm, cringing at how wet I feel.

Axel turns around. I hear the water turn on and off before he’s in front of me with a warm cloth. I smile down at his thoughtfulness as he gently washes down my core. He places a soft kiss on my lips before drying me.

His eyes trail down my body, darkening the longer he stares.

“Feed me first.” I plead with a chuckle.

His eyes meet mine. “Fine, but put this on.” Taking off his shirt, he hands it to me with a smirk. “I can’t focus if you’re sitting there like that.” I throw it on as he turns the cooker back on and finishes off the food.

My hands are shaking as I button up the shirt. I get three done before I give up.

“Fuck.” I glance up, watching Axel’s heated eyes trail down my body. “That’s even worse.”

His serious tone and frown that follows, makes me laugh.

“How is it worse? I’m covered.” I glance down at the shirt. It’s long enough to cover my ass, but it’s wide open, revealing the curves of my breasts. I shrug. He’s literally seen me naked. This is way more covered.

“Yes, but you’re covered in *my* shirt. You look sexy as hell, and my scent is all over you.” I dip my head, moaning when I smell the smokey scent that is all Axel.

“Princess...round two—”

“*After* food...” I plead, smothering a laugh. I knew I could heal from anything, but the fucker was pushing my limits.

Axel's grip tightens on the plate of food in his hand. Swallowing hard, he nods his head, still looking so serious.

Grabbing a fork, he spears a piece of fruit and places it in front of my mouth. Just as I dip forward to take a bite, he pulls back, chuckling when I narrow my eyes on him.

"I will eat you." I growl at him. I needed food, damn it.

Axel's smile turns savage. "Nothing about that is a threat. Just make sure you fucking swallow."

My eyes widen on the fucker. I open my mouth to put the dick in his place when he shoves the piece of fruit in it instead, a glint of laughter in his eyes.

"Uckker." I mumble around my food before moaning at how delicious it tastes.

Axel's gruff chuckle slides down my back, making me shiver. He gives me a knowing look before picking up a piece of bacon. His eyes pulse gold as flames swirl around it.

A moment passes before a perfectly cooked piece of bacon appears.

"If you can do that, then why bother cooking?" I'd do all my cooking that way if I could. That or I'd burn the place down trying.

"I enjoy cooking. It helps me relax." He shrugs.

I bite my lip, trailing my hands down his chest. "You're not *relaxed* after that?"

His dark eyes find mine. "I could go *days* and still crave your body."

Fuck. Maybe I only needed that small piece of fruit. I couldn't exactly die from too many orgasms. Maybe he could feed me bacon in between.

I glance down at the growing bulge in his pants and smile. "About round two..." I lean back, biting my lip.

His smirk grows as he steps forward, leaning into me. I wrap my legs around him, pulling him closer.

“Princess,” he growls. He dips down, his eyes on my lips, when a bang breaks us apart. Glancing over, I catch the guys come in. My smile drops when I see the worried look on their faces.

“A large demon just showed up downtown. We need to head out—” Kai tells Axel but stops when he sees us and what I’m wearing.

“Damn.” Jax breathes.

“A demon?” I ask, trying to get them to focus. It’s not like they haven’t seen me naked. Well, except for Luka...

Luka clears his throat. “Yeah, another...attack.”

Jumping down off the counter, I ignore their groans as I head straight to the bedroom and throw on a pair of dark jeans and a top.

Coming back out, I hear Kai talk to the guys. “There’s a portal being opened on the ground floor.”

“Let’s go.” They all turn to me, each of their expressions ranging from worry to panic. But there was no way I was letting them leave without me.

CHAPTER 27



KIARRA

“YOU’RE NOT COMING WITH US.”

“Watch me.” I look around, find my boots in the corner, and throw them on. Glancing around, I look for where I put my jacket.

“I will fucking tie you to the bed if I have to.” Axel glares at me. But he should know better than now that his words are not a threat to me.

I give him a slow smirk and see his eyes start to dilate. “Keep the kinky shit for later. We’ve got hell to deal with first.”

“Damn it, Kiarra. We just want you to be safe.” He must be serious if he’s using my real name.

“I’m not useless. I’m different. You’ve all told me to accept that, so I’m trying to, but I won’t be locked up by anyone. Not again.”

Axel runs a hand down his face. “That’s not what I’m trying to do. I just want you safe. You’ve been through enough.”

“And you all haven’t?”

They’ve all been through just as much hell as I have been, with scars just as large and deep, but they still keep fighting.

“Besides, I can’t die. I don’t know how many times I have to tell you all this.” He opens his mouth, but I cut him off.

“Yes, I know it can still hurt, but the end result is still the same.”

“We don’t give a shit. I don’t want you down there with those demons.”

This is not how this is going to go. I am not going to sit back and let them fight alone. Not when I can help. If these creatures escaped from the Underworld just to cause havoc in our home, then I sure as hell am going to help send them back.

Finding my jacket, I grab it and head for the door, ignoring their glares. “I’m not asking.”

“I guess she’s coming with us,” Luka says just as I leave.

I’m down the hall and in the lift by the time they catch up to me.

Kai stalks into the lift, caging me in. “Stay close and don’t do anything stupid, or next time we play, I’ll bend you over and teach that ass a lesson you won’t forget.”

I bite my lip, giving him a wicked smirk. “Looking forward to it... *Alpha*.”

Kai’s eyes darken. “Good girl.”

“Fuck.” Axel groans, stepping in behind us. The others follow.

Jax raises his hand, waiting for everyone to look his way.

“Yes, Jax.” Kai sighs, his gaze briefly flicking upwards, waiting for his reply.

“Well, if we’re going with new nicknames, I think mine should be *hubby*.”

Luka chokes on air, giving him a wide-eyed expression. Rion finds it amusing.

Jax looks at me expectedly. “What do you think?”

“I think...” The lift pings opening on the ground floor. I turn, walking backwards out of the lift. “You should talk to my other mates about that.”

“We unanimously vote no,” Luka says without missing a beat.

Smiling to myself, I head for the large portal, smack in the middle of the lounge. There are a couple of men and women around it, talking. As soon as they see us, they go quiet and stand up straighter.

“Alphas. We’ll be here for when you need the portal reopened.”

“Thank you, Celina,” Kai says.

Luka takes my hand as we step through the portal and walk straight out into chaos. Complete and utter chaos.

“What the...” Luka says, looking around at the destruction.

The air is thick with fog. Black smoke billows from every surface. Buildings are up in flames, with most of them already crumbling or completely destroyed. The road is no longer visible, with chunks missing and long, jagged cracks breaking it into nothing but rubble.

Cars are overturned, their shape nearly unrecognizable as the flames eat away at them. The smell of burning rubber assaults my senses as we pass them.

“Damn,” Jax whispers as we spot the demon beast in action.

A cold shiver runs down my back at my first look of one of the demons. It is something not even my nightmares could come up with to terrorize me.

Four long, sharp, jagged horns sit on the side and on top of its head, with more running down the length of its back. Its entire body is covered in a hard black leathery hide with razor-edged spikes running along its shoulders and arms.

It’s huge, towering over us all and matching the size of the buildings around it, but it’s the face that creeps me out the most. It has two lines of dark, sharply pointed teeth on the top and bottom of its wide-open mouth and two sets of sinister yellow eyes.

“That’s the biggest one yet,” Luka tells us.

Good to know they aren’t all this huge and terrifying.

Hunching down, it uses its arms to destroy everything around it, clawing the ground and scraping it up like clay. People are screaming and shouting, some running toward it in their shifter form to fight, but most are running away.

There are smaller beasts that look like some sort of hybrid mix between a hyena and lion, but their tails are spiked, and they use them like a weapon to slash out at people around it. Fog spills from the large demon and blankets the smaller hybrid beasts as they move about.

Jax glances over at me, his face pale. “Baby... maybe you should—”

“No. I’m staying.” I give him a hard look, telling him this isn’t something they can sway me on. I’m not leaving them. This is my fight as much as it is theirs.

“Fuck,” Axel breathes, his eyes wide as he glances around him. “Princess... I’ll give you anything you want if you go back to the penthouse and lock yourself inside it.”

The other guys look at me, their eyes pleading with me to take Axel up on his offer. But they have to know after everything that happened, I won’t leave them.

I know they are scared. I am too. But I also know this won’t be the end of us. We are going to have years of beautiful memories ahead of us. I know that deep within me, because I am going to fight like hell to get it and keep it.

I look at them all. “You said we’re a family.”

“We are.” Kai steps in front of me. His eyes flash with conviction.

“And that families stick together.”

“We do, but—”

I shake my head, stopping him. “No buts. I’m not leaving any of you, just like none of you would leave each other.

We're going to fight this thing and beat it, and then we're all going to head home together."

Kai pulls me into him. "You mean everything to us. I know you can heal, but these aren't normal supes. They're from the pits of hell itself. What if—"

I place my finger on his lips. "You can't do that. You can't think about what ifs every time something new or different comes along to threaten us. We'll learn and adapt and keep moving forward."

Kai kisses my fingers before nodding. "We keep moving forward."

I glance around at the others. "Okay, what's the plan?"

Jax steps forward, his eyes narrowed on the destruction in front of him. "What you said before: destroy the big ugly fucker, kill off the little shits wreaking havoc, and then head home so we can destroy our mate in a whole other way."

His blasé attitude makes me laugh, easing some of the tension around me.

I give him a smile. "Sounds good."

Savage smirks surround me as Jax rubs his hands. "Well, then, what are we waiting for? Let's get this over with so we can get home."

Luka smiles, shaking his head at Jax.

Axel walks up to me. "No heroics, Princess. Anything happens and you get out of there."

I salute him, giving him a smile. He shakes his head, but I catch the small tilt of his lips.

He gives me a quick kiss and turns to the guys. "I'll take to the skies and see if I can injure the demon enough to take it down. Watch out for the small beasts. They're sly fuckers." Axel turns and transforms. His crimson scales glisten against the burning destruction around us. Within seconds, he's flying above the buildings, heading straight for the large demon.

My heart squeezes inside my chest as he gets closer to it, but I have to trust in him, just like they have to trust in me.

Closing my eyes, I reach down inside me and call up my ability. It flows through me like water, no longer too thick and heavy to drag up. It slides across my body like a second skin, and the air around me turns static with energy as the power thrums throughout my veins. The strength beneath it makes me feel like I can take on the world.

I open my eyes, seeing everything more vividly and clearly.

“That’s never going to get old.” Jax moves in front of me and slams his lips to mine, pouring everything he wants to say into the kiss. All the worries he never says, all the fears he never shows. I grip him hungrily, pushing my mouth against his and showing him with every thrust and swipe of my tongue and lips, how much I love him, how much I need him to come back to me too.

Pulling back, he leans his forehead against mine while catching his breath. “Be careful and leave the crazy stunts to me.”

Giving me a wicked smile, he turns to the guys, giving them each a look, telling them to be careful. Taking off into a run, he leaps into the air, twisting his body while he shifts, and lands on all fours. His beautiful dark mane mixed with his blue flames stand out among the destruction, making him easier to keep an eye on.

“Go. Help them. I’ve got this,” I tell Luka as he steps up beside me.

“I’m not leaving you. Don’t ask me to. *Please.*”

I glance up, finding his shadows swirling around his face, a sad look in his eyes.

I take his hand, giving it a squeeze, letting him know I understand.

Kai moves in front of me. Glancing at Luka and over at Rion, he gives them both a look before turning to me.

“Stay where Rion and Luka can see you. If you get separated, take this and ring the last number.” He hands me his phone. “The portal will open at your location and get the hell out of here.”

“Kai—”

Kai takes my face in his hands. “Please, just listen to me this once.”

I won’t leave them unless I have to, then I would come back with help. But I nod my head, knowing he needs this right now. The tension in his body eases.

“I love you.” He walks backwards. “Be careful.” He looks at Luka and Rion. “All of you.”

Turning around, he heads straight into the chaos. Just before one of the small hybrid beast attacks, he transforms. His body erupts into flames, engulfing him whole as he expands and grows. A large dark body comes into view, the flames slowly disappearing to reveal a hound with two heads. Nearly the size of Axel’s dragon, his body is laced in flames. They run down his back, mirroring the orbs of fire that light his eyes. He’s magnificent.

A Descendant of Cerberus.

I can feel his power from here. It pulses out around us, much stronger than in his human form.

I glance at Luka. “Has he always been this...”

“Huge? Two-headed?” Luka smiles at my shocked expression. “Wait until his upgrade is unleashed.”

“That’s not the upgrade?”

He slices through the hybrid beasts like they’re nothing, viciously attacking anything that gets in his way as he moves toward the large demon.

“No. He’s always had two sides, one more vicious than the other. He doesn’t usually like to unleash *that* side, but I guess he’s not holding back anymore.”

A glint of silver distracts me as Rion slides two long black swords out from his back.

How did I not notice he had them?

“We can’t let them have all the fun now, can we?” Rion smiles before looking around for a target.

With my ability brimming inside me, I pull it to the surface, hoping this works. With a thought and the power behind it, I call the shadow beast to me. A couple of seconds pass before it appears beside me, making me smile.

Luka pulls me behind him, thinking it’s a threat. I pat him on the chest, walking back around him. “It’s okay. It’s with me.”

Looking at the shadow beast, I focus on that connection and tell it what I want it to do. As soon as the thought leaves me, it moves, slipping into the shadows and out to the crowd where a pack of hybrid beasts are backing a group of supes into a corner.

I hear a slash of metal and turn to find Rion taking on three of the hybrid beasts. I step forward to help, but Luka stops me. “He’s got this. Watch.”

Rion slices one in half, turns to catch another by the throat, then rips it out. He drops its body to the ground just as a third tries to jump off the wall beside it and spring at him.

Just as the beast is over Rion, he kneels, twisting around, and thrusts the sword up into its stomach. Rion swiftly moves to the side, allowing the beast to drop to the ground beside him. He looks up, catching us watching, and winks before turning to another beast heading straight for him.

“See.” Luka bumps my shoulder. “We can take care of ourselves. We’re not that useless.”

“You’re far from useless.”

A loud shriek blares out, making me cringe. Luka flinches at the sound, reaching a hand up to cover his ears. He pulls one hand away, glancing down at it and finding blood.

What the hell?

I move to inspect his injuries when his eyes widen, staring at something in front of us.

Turning around, I watch as more and more hybrid beasts appear. It's as if they're climbing out from the large demon itself. They head straight for us.

I turn back to Luka, reaching up to check his ears, now dripping blood, but he stops me.

"I'm fine. They'll heal. Let's focus on them." He nods his head to the beasts.

He'll heal, I remind myself, giving him once last quick check before stepping back.

Turning around, I feel my powers take over as I let go. My dark inky shadows slide over my skin, growing and expanding before they encase my entire body. They reach out like long sharp limbs, striking down the small beasts coming for us. Slicing through them like blades, the shadows pick them off one by one.

Just as we think we're gaining on them, another loud shriek sounds out, but this time it's much louder. Luka grabs his ears, squeezing his eyes shut in pain.

I move toward him when the sound cuts off, followed by a loud crash that quakes the ground beneath me.

My eyes veer toward the source, finding the large demon head-to-head with Kai's hounds. Axel is above them, shooting flames down around them, hitting the demon whenever an opening appears.

I release a harsh breath, the tightness in my chest easing slightly, seeing them hold their own against it.

I check for Luka and Rion, seeing them both back to fighting now that the shrieking has stopped.

Knowing both are safe, I glance around, looking out for a familiar blue flame when I spot it in front of a half-destroyed I.

Jax is holding his own against a half a dozen hybrid beasts while protecting a group of young shifters. He rips through them, burning them with his blue flames.

Focusing back on the beasts in front of me, I hear a loud rumble, like thunder distracting me. I feel the air shift as if it's being pulled into a vacuum.

Seconds later, a loud boom comes from the skies and the vacuum pops. It strikes, hitting the large demon, slightly tipping it forward. The energy from the vacuum keeps going, sending a rippling effect around it, destroying everything it touches.

The demon catches itself, sending out another loud shriek, but this time it doesn't stop. Luka and Rion grab their heads, trying to cover their ears.

The hybrid beasts move forward, unaffected by the sound. I frown, only noticing that neither am I. Pushing the thought to the back of my mind; I focus on the beasts gaining ground on my mates.

I pull up more power, ready to strike when more and more beasts appear. They keep coming the longer the shriek blares out. Quickly glancing around, I find the tables also turned on Jax. He becomes inundated by a large pack of the beasts.

I go to move toward him when a slash of metal sounds out. Turning back, I find Rion using both weapons to hold them off.

Why isn't he shifting? I glance around for Luka but can't see him in the chaos.

Panic and dread sets in the longer I don't find him. My dark shadows curls around me as I keep searching, waiting for my command.

A rush of breath leaves me spotting him kneeling and bleeding from multiple claws marks across his stomach. His face is in pain as he covers his ears, wincing against the loud shrieking. His hands are drenched in blood, making the panic inside me build once more.

Terror strikes me frozen as two beasts sneak up behind him. I glance at the distance between us, knowing I'll never make it to him in time, nor will he hear me shout out to him.

Not knowing what else to do, I focus on the beast instead.

Reaching deep inside me, I search for a connection similar to the one I have with the shadow beast but find none. Moving quickly, I try to feel for a spark similar to Malik's, but instead of a spark, I find a flicker. It's so small I barely feel it as it brushes up against my senses.

I take hold of it in my mind and pull. I yank on it, feeling my power wrap around it and drag it to me.

Focusing on the beast, I aim everything at it, hoping I can stop it in time.

“STOP!” My command rings out, and it halts its advance... along with every other hybrid beast around us.

Suddenly, the shrieking stops. I glance over to see one of Kai's hounds has its teeth latched onto to the front of the large demon's neck while the other hound's head latches on from behind.

With the shrieking stopped and the hybrid beasts frozen in their spots, Luka and Rion slowly make their way over to me.

They each take a hand and squeeze it tight. I check over them and see them already starting to heal.

We look over at Kai's hound just as the demon starts thrashing, trying to escape Kai's hold. But it's no use. Kai's hounds have latched on tight, and they aren't letting go. The demon's fight is coming to an end.

While Kai holds it in place, Axel creates another vacuum and aims it right at the demon. It gives Kai the extra push he needs to rip the demon's head right off.

It drops to the ground, the loud thump blowing dust everywhere.

The fog starts retreating. I feel a pull from the flicker I connected with and sense it wanting to return.

I hold on to it a minute longer before pulling back and releasing it. The hybrid beasts immediately retreat into the fog, disappearing as if they were never here to begin with. The only evidence is the destruction they left behind.

The adrenaline leaves my body all at once, my powers dropping the connection as soon as the last beast disappears.

Exhaustion settles over me, and I stumble forward, but Luka catches me before I reach the ground, grabbing my arm.

“Are you okay?” Luka’s worried look makes me smile.

“Just tired. You?” I check his injuries, but most of them have already healed. The blood running from his ears has stopped and is starting to dry.

“I’m fine.”

Glancing at Rion, I see him faring better with fewer injuries and already fully healed, the blood from his ears not as much as Luka’s.

Jax is... My stomach drops when I don’t see him by the crumbling cafe.

“What is it?” Luka’s eyes are wide as he checks over me for any injuries.

“Jax. I can’t—”

Arms wrap around me from behind, a woodsy scent that’s all Jax surrounds me. I slump back into him.

“I’m right here, baby.”

Just like he did with me, Luka checks his brother for any serious injuries. I see the look of relief when he finds none, lessening my own worry.

Jax’s grip tightens on me as he nuzzles into my neck. “Well done, baby. You kicked ass.”

I lean into his warmth, too drained to even laugh or reply.

Kai and Axel show up a few minutes later, having shifted back to their human forms. Kai glances at each of the guys as he heads straight for me.

“What happened?”

I shake my head, giving him a small smile. “Nothing, we’re fine.”

Reaching a hand out, he rubs a thumb across my cheek, frowning. "Are you okay?"

I nod, using Jax to hold me up at this stage. "Just tired."

He glances behind me at Jax, doing that silent communication thing he does, before moving onto Luka and Rion.

Once he's satisfied everyone is okay, he leans down and kisses my lips, lingering a moment before pulling slightly back. He gazes down at me, the look in his eyes full of relief and wonder, but there's also a hint of worry that he tries to hide.

With effort, I reach a hand up and brush it down the side of his face. "I promise." Letting him know that we are all okay.

He nods, swallowing hard before taking a step back, just as Axel moves toward me. He wraps his arms around me while Jax still holds me from behind, wrapping us both in his hug.

"This is nice," Jax tells him.

Axel huffs out a laugh, but I feel the tremor work its way through his body as he holds me. I grip him a little tighter, hoping he'll know I was just as worried about him.

Axel pulls back, glancing down at me. "You okay, Princess?"

I smile. "Never better."

Nodding his head, he blows out a harsh breath before stepping back. Dragging a hand down his face, he glances around at the destruction.

Luka steps up beside me, gripping my hand like a lifeline as we look around. The area is nearly empty, with most people already cleared out or are in the process of doing it.

Kai turns to us. "I'll call in some healers and see if I can get a big enough clean-up crew down here to sort this mess out."

He glances down at me, his eyes softening. "Let's head back and get some rest."

CHAPTER 28



KIARRA

HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE SHOWER, I stop short, finding a half-naked Luka in the middle of my room.

Biting my lip, my mind wanders as my eyes trail up his legs to the curve of his backside and up his broad back. But I stutter to a stop at what I see. Any heated thoughts completely leave me as my stomach drops.

There are large, jagged scars running in every direction across his back. Some are a familiar shape or imprint that I can make out, like the edge of a belt or whip. There is also the sharp cut of a blade trailing up the top of his back, with strange shapes hidden behind the long scars and woven into them.

Luka's head whips around as if only noticing I'm here. He twists his body, hiding his back from me, and swallows hard.

"Sorry... Jax normally hogs the bathroom we share, so I slip down here sometimes. I thought I'd be in and out before you got here."

"Luka..." I take a step closer but stop when his eyes drop to the floor.

"Who did that to you?"

Luka looks up, his eyes turning sad. "You caught them, huh?"

His sadness breaks my heart. I want to hunt down whoever did this to him and rip them apart.

“It was... a long time ago.” Luka sighs, shaking his head. “It’s not important.”

“Like hell it isn’t. Who did this? When...”

He looks at me for a minute before nodding his head.

“It was after you were... taken. Remember, I told you we kind of fell apart after that?”

I nod my head, taking a step closer. When he doesn’t step back, I take another and another until I’m beside him.

“Well, we all went our separate ways for a bit and ended up spending less and less time together and more and more time around our families.” He shakes his head, smiling. It was anything but humorous.

“You would think that was a good thing, but no... Our families are all just as fucked up as each other.”

My stomach twists. “Your family did this to you?”

“My uncle. It was no secret that Jax and I were the black sheep of the family. We’re shadow wolves, and to them, there’s nothing worse.”

I frown, not understanding. “But shadow wolves have been around for centuries. Why would they—”

“We were more powerful than them, even at that age. They saw us as a threat to their hierarchy. Even though Jax and I never wanted anything to do with it, they still didn’t care.”

“Luka...”

“My uncle is the Maven of our family. He has a lot of knowledge about supernatural species, and because of that, everyone listened to him when he told them he had a way to... *fix* us.”

“*Fix*? There’s nothing wrong with either of you,” I growl out. My blood boils for each one of his family members that made him think there was.

Luka grows quiet, as if lost in a memory—and not the good kind. I grip the end of my top, twisting it with my fingers, trying to stop myself from imagining all the things that

he and Jax went through. My mind thinks up all the worst possibilities.

“What did he do, Luka?”

Luka grabs a fistful of his hair and pulls. “He tried to beat it out of us first, and when that didn’t work, he used other... *methods.*”

Bile rises up my throat at Luka’s words. I blink back the tears threatening to spill.

That *man* was supposed to be his family, and he hurt him. He hurt them both because they were different.

“Your back?”

“Will never heal, just like my wolf will never be fully part of me.”

“What do you mean?” I’ve seen him in his wolf form.

“When I first shifted, my wolf’s pelt was pure white, my flames this bright orange.” Luka smiles, but it’s not a happy smile. It’s a smile that tells of pain and loss, of memories no one should have to relive.

“My uncle used dark magic to split my shadow wolf from me.”

I open my mouth to speak, but no words form. The sick feeling in my stomach increases at Luka’s confession.

You’d have to be a monstrous person to try to split a shifter from their other half. One can’t exist without the other, and attempting to do something that horrific would end in both of their deaths. The thought sends an icy cold shiver down my back.

“I remember lying on that cold table, my hands and wrist held down by one of his friends. The pain felt like my body was being torn in two. I wasn’t going to last much longer. I remember thinking that even if I had to leave Jax, that at least I’d get to see you again.”

I grab his hand, squeezing it tight. He glances up, sees my face, and frowns. Reaching up with his other hand, he swipes a

tear running down my face.

“He would’ve completed it too, if Jax hadn’t found us and shifted.”

“Luka...”

Luka shakes his head, looking down at our hands. “I’ll never be whole, Kiarra. Those tendrils of black shadows are not the same as your ability. It’s my shadow wolf. He’s not supposed to be like that, but we’re not... balanced. My uncle succeeded, at least partially. My wolf is a separate entity, one I can’t control. I push him away, and he fights me on every little thing. When those tendrils appear, it’s him trying to take over, and sometimes he wins.”

I swallow hard, trying to think of something I can do to help.

“Is there anything we can do? Maybe there’s someone who might know how to help?” A potion or a spell...

Luka shakes his head. “We’ve looked into it and tried everything we can, but it’s no use.”

Then maybe they were looking at it the wrong way.

“Have you ever tried talking to him... your wolf?” I ask.

He’s been fighting his wolf ever since they were nearly split, but I wonder if they’ve ever tried to exist alongside one another. If Luka is right and his wolf is a separate entity, then it might be possible for them to come together in another way. Just not the one Luka expects.

Luka swallows hard. “At the start... but he completely took over and ended up hurting someone. I didn’t try again after that.”

“You were only a kid, Luka. The both of you had been through something horrific. He was probably in as much pain as you and didn’t realize... Would you try again?”

“No.” Luka turns pale, glancing over at the bed.

“Why?”

“Because what if he hurts someone again—someone I care about—I would *never* forgive myself.” His eyes turn haunted as they look at me. “I don’t want to hurt you. The thought of it alone...”

Slowly, I raise my hands to his chest and feel his sharp intake of breath. “You would *never* hurt me.”

“Never,” Luka says vehemently, but his eyes are sad. “But *he* might.”

“Do you really believe that? He’s a part of you. Part of your soul.”

He releases a harsh sigh. “Maybe they’re right. Maybe my uncle—”

“No, Luka!” I place my hand on his cheek, hoping he’ll look at me. He leans into it, briefly closing his eyes before opening them on me.

“*He’s* wrong. *They’re* wrong for what they did to you, for how they made you feel. There’s not one thing wrong about you.”

“But—”

“No, buts. You’re perfect the way you are.”

He shakes his head. “I’m too broken to fix.”

“You are not broken.”

“I am.” He takes my hand from his face and holds it tight against his chest.

“Do you know how many times I’ve wanted to reach out and pull you to me? To sleep next to you, to feel your body against mine. But *every time* I have to stop myself, because I’m so fucking scared that he’ll do something I can never take back.”

“Luka...”

His heart beats fast under my fingers, and a tremble works its way through his body.

“I’m sorry, Kiarra. I can’t—”

I lean forward and press my lips to his, cutting off his doubts. I linger a moment before sliding my tongue along the seam of his lips. I'm about to pull back when I hear him moan, low and deep, sending warm shivers down my back.

Sliding his hand into my hair, he opens his mouth and deepens the kiss. Black tendrils appear, caressing my neck and sliding down my body. Heat unfurls in my lower stomach as his tongue strokes and sucks mine.

I reach up, gripping his shoulders when he pulls back. His eyes are wide with fear as they stare at the tendrils.

“No... He'll—”

I lean in forward, placing a kiss to his chest, watching as his eyes flutter close. I drag my lips across it, feeling the rise and fall of his breaths beneath me.

“Kiarra...”

“Trust me,” I plead with him.

He opens his eyes, looking down at me. Swallowing hard, he nods, his whole body tense as I move around to his back.

I slowly trail my hands down his back, showing him that nothing about him could make me love him less. His scars were a part of him, and anything part of Luka was beautiful.

I feel him shudder beneath my touch. “Luka? Is this okay?”

“Yes.” Luka moans.

Leaning forward, I place my lips on the top of one of his scars, following its jagged line down his back. Dark tendrils slip out from his skin, beckoning me to touch them.

My finger brushes along them, making me shiver at their warmth.

“I don't want to hurt you.” Luka swallows hard, the fear slashed across his face as he keeps his body still.

“You won't,” I promise him.

“You don't know that.”

“I do.” I trust Luka and the others with my life. And if he can’t trust his wolf—the other side of him—then I’ll do it for him.

I run my hands up his back and across his shoulders. More tendrils appear, reaching out to me, gently wrapping around my wrists.

Luka sees this, his eyes widening as he steps back from me.

“No.” He squeezes his eyes shut.

“Stop, Luka,” I beg him.

“He’ll hurt you.”

I shake my head, my heart breaking at seeing him doubt himself.

“I want you. I want *all* of you, Luka. Every side of you. You said you accept every part of me...”

Luka opens his eyes wide as they stare down at me. “I *do*, you know I do.”

“Then let me accept every part of you, too.”

His chest rises and falls with each rapid breath he takes. His face is drenched in his doubts and fears as he continues to hold himself back.

I stay where I am, waiting. This has to be his choice. I can’t make it for him, no matter how much I crave him... Crave his touch and his love. I will wait for however long he needs to heal, even if that takes forever.

Time drags on slowly, but I know it’s only been a couple of minutes. I open my mouth to try to change the subject, to move away from this for now, when a determined spark lights up his eyes and his tendrils disappear.

I see the moment he makes his decision. It’s like something snaps as he rushes forward and pulls me into him. His lips slam against mine, hungrily demanding I give him everything and more.

I push back, answering with each brush, each caress of my lips, telling him just how desperate and lost I am without them... without *him*. And just how much I'll always need him.

Everything Luka kept hidden is in this kiss. His scent is full of dark desires, which swirl around his silent chaos, making my senses run wild.

I gasp as he nips my bottom lip, sending a bolt of lust straight to my core, now slick with heat.

He releases a throaty moan as I run my hands up his chest. I continue my trail up and over his shoulders before slowly dragging my fingertips down the length of his back.

“Kiarra,” he breathes.

His hands slide down my sides, stopping at the hem of my top. Dragging my lips from his, I reach down and pull it off, along with my bra, before slamming my lips back to his. He yanks me closer. The feel of his warm, bare skin against mine makes my body ache for more of him.

He moans as his hands slide up my sides to the curves of my breasts. I feel his body shudder as his thumb brushes the side of them.

I arch into his chest, my hardened nipples sliding against his skin, sending my heated body into overdrive. The more of his body I feel, the more I feel an all-consuming need to have him inside me, to feel his body pressed up against mine as we move as one.

“Towel,” I remind him.

Luka steps back, removing his towel. His long, thick erection springs free, making my mouth water.

“Your turn. Jeans.” He smirks at me.

His smile drops the minute I slide out of my jeans and underwear and kick them away. His hot gaze roams slowly down my body and back up again, leaving a delicious trail of heat in its place.

“Damn,” he breathes.

His eyes meet mine. “You’re beautiful. It’s not enough—will never be enough—those words. But you are the most beautiful person I know, inside and out.”

Before I get a chance to tell him how much he means to me. He steps forward, slamming his lips to mine, dragging a moan from my throat. Small jolts of heat slide across my body as my stomach clenches with need.

“I want to taste you,” I tell him, sliding my tongue along the seam of his lips.

Not breaking the kiss, Luka walks backwards toward the bed. I follow him as he continues to tease me and explore my mouth.

Just as he stops, I give him a slight push. He laughs as he lands, sitting on the bed, but stops when I kneel between his legs. I run my hands up his thighs, hearing the sharp intake of breath.

Giving him a wicked smile, I watch his eyes darken. Leaning forward, I place a soft kiss on the inside of his thigh before continuing a trail up to his bulging erection.

Glancing up at him, I slowly lean in and place a light kiss on the tip before running my tongue across it.

Luka tilts his head back, closing his eyes, fisting the sheets in his hands.

“Kiarra...” He says my name like a plea, spurring me on.

I lean closer, watching each of his expressions, as I run my tongue up the length of him. The minute it slides along him, his eyes pop open, finding mine.

“Fuck, Kiarra.” He moans.

I squirm in place as his raw, husky voice shoots straight to my core, making me wet with need.

Holding his stare, I take the tip of his cock in my mouth and moan, the taste of him driving me crazy. I taste his pre-cum, savoring every drop of it before I swirl my tongue around the head of his cock and suck him into my mouth.

“Your mouth feels incredible.” Luka closes his eyes once more, his mouth dropping open on a long moan.

Fuck. His words are nearly my undoing as I slide a hand down to my core, needing some relief from the throbbing buildup of pleasure.

I run my fingers along my slick folds as I wrap my lips around his thick length. Opening my lips as wide as I can, I take him into my mouth, only making it halfway before pulling back up. He’s thick and long, so I take it slow.

I hear something tear and look up to see Luka’s dark eyes on me as he rips the sheets in his hands.

“You have no idea what you’re doing to me.” He grunts.

Using my free hand, I grip the base of his cock and stroke it while my mouth works down to meet my fist.

“You feel so—” I glance up, watching as his eyes widen when he sees where my other hand is. “Are you touching yourself?”

I give him a sultry smile with my eyes while moaning into his cock.

“Fuck... Are you wet for me?”

I moan a yes. I’m fucking drenched, my fingers slick as they slide over my clit.

“Slide a finger inside that tight core and tell me how wet you are.”

My eyes widen at his words, each one sending a bolt of pleasure straight through me. I feel his alpha power seep out around me, just as his eyes pulse gold.

“Do it. Imagine it’s my cock sliding into you.”

I slide my fingers down and into my core, imagining it’s his thick cock. Keeping the pace of my mouth on his length, I thrust my fingers in and out of my slick heat. Each push and pull makes the pleasure build and spread out and down my thighs.

“That’s it.” His praise and shallow pants make me lose it.

I moan around him, and the vibration from my mouth makes him thrust into me. The thought of his hot cum sliding down the back of my throat as he pumps into me sends me over the top, and I explode.

I come around my fingers, panting and moaning into his cock.

I glance up at him as his eyes stare down at me.

“Now, give me your hand. I want to taste you.”

Stunned by his demand, my mouth releases his cock with a pop.

He reaches down, taking my hand and sucks my fingers into his mouth. “You taste fucking delicious.”

His words make my clit throb, each pull and lick as his tongue swirls around makes the heat build once more.

With my fingers in his mouth, the need to taste him doubles. I move my mouth around him, slowing sliding up and down his length before building a steady rhythm.

I feel his body stiffen. His cock pulses in my mouth, and I know he’s close. I start to pick up speed when he reaches a hand out, gently grabbing my hair to stop me.

“No more. I won’t last much longer if you keep that up, and right now, all I want to do is bury myself inside you.”

But I don’t want to stop. I twirl my tongue around him, taking him deeper before slowly sliding back up.

He grips my hair tighter as more of his alpha power seeps out toward me. “No more.”

I suck the length of him once more, licking the tip before releasing it, and savoring the taste that’s all Luka.

Pulling me up, I meet his lips, straddling his thighs and feeling the throb of his dick against my stomach.

“I want to taste more of you.” He gasps.

“Next time.” I moan into his lips, his cock throbbing beneath me.

I lean into the feel of him, the rise and fall of our warm chests as they slide against one another.

“I need to feel you inside me.” I grind down on him, needing more friction, to be filled by every inch of him until his cock is throbbing and pulsing inside me.

“Fuck.” He trails a hand down the side of my face. “You’re perfect.” His lips brush my cheek. “Every delicious part of you.” He pulls back, his eyes dark, and a wicked smile tilts his lips as he stares right at me. “And I’m going to make sure every inch of you knows it.”

Lifting me slightly, he runs the head of his cock along the length of my slit before pressing the tip at my entrance.

Slowly sliding into me, I feel a delicious stretch, dragging a moan from my lips. Once I’m fully seated on him, I absorb the feeling of fullness. It’s so much better than I imagined.

Luka leans forward, pressing his forehead against mine. “You feel amazing.” His shuddering, warm breath mingles with mine.

“Ride me, Kiarra. Let yourself go and take me with you.” Leaning back, he takes hold of my hips, briefly glancing down at where we’re joined.

He licks his lips as his eyes darken. I grind down into him, making him grunt.

Little sparks of heat shoot straight to my clit as I grind down onto him. I lean slightly back, and the angle makes his cock touch just the right spot. I lose my fucking mind.

“That’s it.” He moans, spurring me on. I start to really move, twirling my hips and sliding up and down on his thick length.

Luka places his palm on my lower stomach and with his thumb, he starts rubbing my clit.

The hot build of pleasurable heat becomes too much, overwhelming all of my senses. I slip into it, letting it spread to every part of my body until it’s all I can see and feel.

I arch into him as he thrusts up, meeting my pace.

“Kiarra,” he moans. His deep raspy voice sends me over the edge, and I explode around him, clenching his cock as waves of pleasure radiate to every part of my body.

He grunts, thrusting into me once more before joining me. The feel of his pulse and throb inside me, drags out the lingering sensation until I’m crying out his name.

We fall back onto the bed, catching our breaths as I land on top of him. I run my hand up his chest and he catches it, bringing it to his lips to kiss.

I look up at him, and he leans down, brushing his lips with mine. I surrender into the soft kiss, letting Luka take the lead as I melt into him. We stay like that for a minute until I move my legs, feeling the slick wetness between them.

I pull back, cringing as Luka chuckles.

“Shower?” he asks, looking at me like I’m his whole world. My heart races at that look, my body becoming sensitive as desire builds once more.

“Only if you join me.”

Luka’s smile spreads as he gets up and pulls me with him. Bending down, he lifts me up and heads straight for the bathroom.

Once we’re in the shower, he slides me to the floor, letting every inch of my body drag down his, spurring me on for round two.

I twist around and reach for the shower head and turn it on, finding the right pressure and temperature. Turning back around, I find Luka frozen and staring at the shower wall behind me, a pained expression on his face. I glance around, but apart from a small crack, there’s nothing there.

“What is it?” I ask, but he doesn’t answer, still staring at that crack.

“Luka?” I walk around to his front and take hold of his clenched fists. He relaxes them, looking down at our hands. “It’s him. My wolf, he wants...”

His body tenses up as a fine tremor works its way through his body. I grip his hands tighter.

“What?”

My heart pounds as I wait for his reply. Lifting his head up, he stares right at me. The look he gives me is filled with dread.

“*You.*”

The knot in my stomach eases at his word with a shiver of excited anticipation following it.

“Kiarra...”

I give him smile and take his hand. “I want you too. All of you. Let go and don’t hold back.”

As if it’s all the permission he needs, he lets go, releasing the hold on his doubts and fears.

Luka’s body grows, his build expanding, making room for his shadow wolf. His eyes glow, and dark tendrils appear as his shadow wolf comes to the front.

“My turn.” His voice is low and deep as he stalks forward, backing me further into the shower.

A thrill of excitement rushes through me at the dark look in his eyes. A look that tells me all my dark desires are about to reach new heights.

My back hits the wall as he looms over me. His tendrils snap out and wrap around my wrists, yanking them above me and pinning them there. My body arches, trying to reach him, but he stays where he is, drinking every inch of me in.

“*Mate,*” he growls.

More tendrils appear, sliding over my sensitive body and down to my core. They slide along my folds, the warmth a delicious heat that spreads to my thighs.

More and more tendrils appear, sliding down and across my body. Each brush and caress make the ripples of pleasure expand and grow.

“Yes.” I whimper, needing him to touch me, the physical ache to be filled and stretched all consuming. I clench my thighs together, trying to ease the ache.

He slams his hands into the shower wall beside me, caging me in.

“*Mine,*” he growls, leaning into me.

His deep rumble sends hot shivers down my spine. I turn my neck, submitting to him, somehow knowing deep down that it’s what he needs right now. For me to submit to him, mind, body, and soul.

“*Yours.*” I moan, already wet and ready for him.

His hands move to my thighs, gripping them hard as he widens my legs. Each of his fingers leaving behind a delicious imprint.

Without warning, he slams into me, making me gasp. The bolt of desire shoots straight through me.

His hands move to my ass, gripping it hard before pulling me further into his cock. I lift my legs, wrapping them around him as he thrusts into me again and again.

He doesn’t let up. Each thrust brings another wave of rippling pleasure, moving me closer to the edge.

The feel of his punishing grip and hard body as it thrusts into me over and over becomes too much, sending me spiraling into an earth-shattering orgasm.

A moment passes as he stops, his ragged breaths draw along my neck making me shiver. I lick my lips, turning to him, but he pulls out of me, his tendrils quickly releasing my hands as he twists me around to face the wall.

Pushing me down so I’m bending over, he enters me in one swift thrust, making me moan. My hands slap against the wall as he pumps into me over and over, making me dizzy as bliss builds once more. The position feels so much deeper and turns my mind to mush.

His punishing pace pulses throughout my body, my core throbbing as the delicious wave continues to build.

I try to reach a hand down to touch myself and release this relentless build up, but he growls. The tendrils strike out and push my hands back into the wall in front of me.

“*Mine.*” He snarls, pressing his hard body into mine. I feel his cock swell inside me just as he leans down and bites my neck.

My vision goes black, my only focus the pleasure spanning out throughout my body as I come apart again. I feel his muscles tighten as he thrusts once more, his whole body tense as he pulses inside me and comes.

Releasing my neck, he licks the spot he bit before slipping out of me and stepping back. My body becomes limp, my legs trembling, and without Luka as my anchor, I start to fall.

“I’ve got you,” Luka says, his voice back to normal. He twists me around, pulling me onto his lap as we sit in the shower.

Glancing up, I find a look of worry on his face as he stares at my neck.

“What?”

“It’s healed... but it left a mark.”

“Good,” I tell him.

His gaze whips up to my eyes.

“I like the idea of being marked by you.”

His eyes darken as he smiles down at me. “Are you okay?”

“I’m... thoroughly satisfied,” I tell him, feeling like I need a nap or two.

A laugh bursts from Luka’s lips, his tense body relaxing under me. I smile, seeing a lightness in him that wasn’t there before.

His eyes soften as he stares down at me. “How about I help you shower and then we can head to bed?”

“Together?”

“*Together.*”

CHAPTER 29



KIARRA

AXEL THROWS TOGETHER a breakfast spread for everyone. Piles of every type of food line the long island table we're all sitting around. I've only tried his pancakes and these little puff pastry things, and I'm already in fucking heaven.

If the whole alpha thing didn't work out, he could definitely be a chef. His food is *that* good. The flavors explode in my mouth like mini orgasms.

I shove another forkful of food in my mouth when I realize the guys have gone quiet. I look up, finding their heated stares on me. Axel is smirking down at me like he just won a shit ton of money.

“What?”

“You said that aloud.” Axel's gaze dips to my lips.

“What—” Oh. I shrug, too absorbed in my delicious food to give a shit about them hearing my thoughts.

“Don't let it get to your head,” I tell him, but the fucker's smile just grows.

“Too late.” Jax frowns, eyeing Axel and my food.

“Mine.” I scoot my chair and plate closer to Luka in case he gets any stupid ideas.

The guys chuckle around me, but I wasn't kidding. If he came anywhere near my food, I might just accidentally-on-purpose stab the cheeky fucker. It's not like he wouldn't heal.

Jax narrows his eyes, a glint of challenge lighting them.

“Don’t even think ab—”

Before I know it, Jax has me thrown over his shoulder and is heading out of the apartment.

“Jax! Put me down. I want my food.” I lift my head, trying to reach back, but the little traitor already has me out in the hall, heading for the lift.

“No. You’ve given me a challenge. I need to prove myself.”

“How the hell did you come to that conclusion?” I ask him, baffled by how his mind works.

“There’s no way Axel’s food is better than my hands or mouth. I’m going to make you come so many times, you won’t even remember your own name, let alone his shitty food.”

“His food isn’t—Wait.” My brain finally catches up to what he said. “I mean... we could definitely try that theory.” I squirm as his grip tightens. His hand slides up my thigh just as we reach the lift.

“Jax! Let her finish her fucking food.” Axel storms into the hall.

“No. We’re heading off to get hitched. You’re not invited.”

What? “How did we go from orgasms to getting married?” I was down for orgasms, plenty of them, not fucking marriage.

“They come after.” Jax pats my ass, his tone telling me it should be obvious.

My brain must be fried as I start to debate whether it’s worth it. That is, until Axel reaches us, blocking the lift.

“Either put her down or I’m taking her from you,” Axel grits out.

Jax’s grip tightens on me. “You can try.”

“She needs to fucking eat.”

“If she’s still hungry after your shitty food, she can suck on my dick.”

I mean, I wasn't against the idea, but having to get married for it didn't seem like a fair trade.

The blood starts rushing to my head, making me feel like I was spinning. "Jax, put me down."

"Yeah, put her fucking down, *Jax*, before I do it for you."

"In ten minutes, she won't even remember—"

Axel scoffs, cutting Jax off. "Ten? It takes you that long to ___"

"Guys!" I shout, but neither of them listens to me.

Jazmyn was right. They do love the sound of their own voices.

"Jealous that you can't lock yourself inside her tight wet ___"

"How about Axel feeds me while you fuck me from behind?" I say, making them freeze.

The silence grows around me, but without being able to see their facial expressions, I can't tell what they're thinking. "Is that a yes?"

"I'm down," Jax tells me.

I push myself up on Jax's shoulder, twisting around I find Axel's dark eyes looking right at me. "Fine, but you're getting my dick for dessert."

My smile widens as I wet my lips. "Deal. Now put me down. All the blood has gone to my head."

Jax slides my body down the front of his, making sure I feel every one of his hard muscles, including his thick length.

Jax licks his bottom lip, glancing down at me. "Thought you might like a little preview."

Fuck.

I'm already fucking wet, and they haven't even touched me. Clearing my throat, I glance at the two of them. "What the hell are we waiting for?"

Jax and Axel wear matching wicked smiles as we head back to the apartment. We walk into the lounge, finding the guys all standing around looking pale.

“I got a call. More demons and beasts just showed up. A shitload of them and there doesn’t seem to be an end to when they’ll stop.”

“Fuck.” Axel breaths.

The guys share a look between them before landing on me.

“Don’t say it. I’m coming,” I tell them.

Kai sighs but nods his head.

“Guess it’s time for round two.” Jax winks at me, but he can’t hide the worry that flashes across his face.

While Kai heads off to organize a portal, I head back to my room and throw on some warmer clothes. I try not to think about what we’re heading into too much. The dread building in my stomach already tells me it isn’t going to be good.

Luka walks in just as I finish getting dressed. “Hey, what’s up?”

Without saying a word, he walks over to me and pulls me in to his side. “I don’t have a good feeling about this.”

“Me either.” The last time it was bad, and that was only one demon. I can’t imagine what it will be like with dozens of them, if not more.

“If I begged you to stay, would you?” Luka tilts my chin up to him, his eyes pleading.

“If I asked you the same, would *you*?”

I understand their worries. Hell, I more than felt it myself when they headed off anywhere. It was so much worse after thinking I lost them, and even with their new abilities and healing, that fear is still there every time they go off somewhere. But I can’t keep them locked up any more than they can me. We have to trust that once we fight like hell to get back to one another, we will be okay.

Luka sighs. “It’s different. There’s only one of you and five of us.”

I pull back, looking at Luka like he just lost his damn mind. “You are not replaceable, Luka. Not one of you. I will never choose to lose one of you over the other. That’s not how this works. Each of you has a part of me, and I need all of them to be whole.”

“I’m sorry.” Luka shakes his head. “I don’t know what I was saying. I just don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“I get it. You’re worried. I am too. But we’re a family. We’ll do this together, just like everything else from here on out.”

Luka nods his head. “Together.”

* * *

This time, the demons and hybrid beasts are on the other side of the city. The portal brings us near enough to see what’s going on but far enough away that we don’t land straight on top of the chaos.

Everywhere I look, it’s bad. I don’t know what to focus on first.

Just like last time, buildings are completely destroyed; most are leveled with thick black smoke billowing from their base.

Demons of every kind span out across the entire area, with hundreds of hybrid beasts all around them. From large ones, like the one we fought last time, to a couple like the ones Rion, Jax, and Luka described.

It looks like hell on earth, or what I would imagine it to be. Everything is dark, destroyed, and fucking horrifying.

“Just do what you can, but get yourself out of here the minute it gets to be too much,” Kai demands. The others back up Kai’s demand with warning glares.

I nod a reply, knowing now isn't the time to tell them I can handle myself. I am scared as hell for them, too.

Jax salutes him, giving me a wink. "Yes, sir."

Kai shakes his head, walking over to me. Pulling me into him, he takes a deep breath. "Don't you *dare* leave me again."

"Same goes for you."

"Deal." Kai pulls back, his eyes filled with worry and fear, not making the dread in my stomach ease.

Kai gives Axel a nod before heading towards the chaos.

"Princess!" Axel's tone is demanding, making me look at him.

"Axel." I use the same tone but barely get a tilt to his lips. His whole face is drenched in worry. "*Please*, be careful."

"I promise." Axel nods his head before following Kai.

Rion moves in front of me, sharing a look with Luka before nodding. "If anything happens—"

"Get out of here. I know. But you all know—"

"That you would never leave us. I know." Rion pulls me into him, his scent wraps around me. "I'll stay close by."

"Be careful."

Rion nods his head, giving us one last look before turning in the same direction as the guys.

Luka stays near me like before. He takes a step back, giving me a shy smile before closing his eyes.

His shadows appear, trailing down his body, but instead of black like they normally are, they have a tint of red in them. They've also changed shape, looking more like Jax's full flames instead of shredded tendrils. They engulf his entire body, slowly receding to reveal a large wolf.

His dark mane has hints of silver in it that I didn't notice before. His flames are redder, cloaking his entire body.

Luka's wolf comes up beside me as we head toward the nearest group of demons and beasts.

Just as we near them, I reach down and pull up the energy hidden inside me. I feel it as it slides over my body, expanding outward.

Once I've gathered enough of it, I push it out around me.

It shoves most of the demons and hybrid beasts closest to us back long enough for Luka's wolf to rush forward and blanket them in flames.

He travels around them, lighting them up before moving onto the next one. But it's like we've become a beacon, and every beast and demon heads straight for us.

I push more and more power out around me, keeping most of them away from Luka and me, but they keep coming.

It starts to feel endless, with no end in sight. We kill one, only for three more to appear behind it.

I glance over and see Kai's two headed hound take on a large demon that looks like it's made from black rock with eerie yellow eyes. He's holding his own, but there are so many other demons around him, trying to take him down.

Rion is already in his basilisk form, taking on a dark demon with lava running down its body, but just like Kai, he's surrounded by hundreds of hybrid beasts.

I find Axel in the sky, swooping down to attack wherever he can, but there are so many demons and beasts, his flames or power to absorb and amplify energy barely make a difference.

Luka shifts back, coming up beside me panting heavily from constantly fighting. "There are too many of them. We need to get you out of here."

I'm about to reply, to tell him there has to be another way, when I notice something wrong with Kai. Something is happening to his hounds. Shaking their heads, they back up, stomping and scraping their clawed paws against the ground.

"What's wrong with Kai?" I ask Luka.

Luka looks over at Kai, and his brows raise. "I think he's finally unleashing his third hound."

“Third?”

I catch it just in time to see Kai’s hound’s body expand. And by expand, I mean he’s fucking *huge*. Towering over the demon he was fighting.

A third head appears in the middle of the other two but is completely different from either of them.

With long sharp teeth and blood red glowing eyes, this thing was a *beast*. Without stopping, Kai’s large three-headed hound tears through the demons and hybrid beasts around it like they’re nothing but ants.

But even with his relentless energy making his way through the demons, there were still so many more of them taking their place.

It gets a whole lot worse when a mass of them arrives in formed groups. They spread out, heading straight for the guys.

“We need to go help them,” I tell Luka.

“Even if we wanted to, we’re surrounded ourselves,” Luka says.

I glance around and see more and more demons and beasts getting closer to us.

“I need to get you out—” Luka doesn’t get to finish, as he whips around, shifting and pouncing on the demon sneaking up behind us.

Using my powers, I hold back the rest, but I can’t last much longer. My energy is starting to feel depleted.

I push and push, but the more I do, the less energy I feel.

Feeling helpless, I watch all of my guys each fighting off the demons and beasts but slowly getting more and more overwhelmed.

We’re going to lose if we don’t figure something out. But what? My ability is barely hanging on. I drop to my knees, still pushing out my inky mass of shadows that has become nothing more than wisps of smoke.

But I keep pushing, not willing to give up. I just needed to hold them off long enough to think of something.

But my brain can't think past my guys as they get more and more overwhelmed.

I can't lose them. Not again.

I feel a pulse of a connection just before the shadow beast appears. My eyes widen on its dark form.

"Help me," I beg it, but it stays where it is, barely moving an inch.

"Then help them," I order it, but I haven't got enough energy to command it to listen to me. I begin to let fear take over. It grips me hard, choking me with its razor claws.

I start to see dark spots in my vision when I hear a familiar deep voice in my head.

"Let it out."

"I can't," I tell the shadow beast. "I have nothing left. Please, just help them," I beg, but still, it doesn't move.

"Let it out," it says in my head once more.

"I can't." My inky shadows start to let up, dissolving in front of me. Fear slices me with its thick claws.

"No limits. Let. It. Oouutt..." The shadow beast speaks again, its voice darker, more demanding.

No limits... No limits... My body is exhausted... beyond exhausted. It is bone-tired, but I have to at least try.

Reaching down, I search for anything left inside me but find nothing. A chamber of silence and nothing but an empty black end, its barrier so dark I can't see anything beyond it. I try to push past it to see if there's anything more, but it doesn't budge.

I push and push, but it still doesn't give. I feel the sweat drip down my back. My whole body is stiff from trying, but still nothing happens.

I fall to the ground, my hands scraping off the small pieces of rock as I catch myself.

“Kiarra!” Luka screams to me, but I can’t see him, the world around me getting darker as I try to stay conscious.

But I wasn’t ready to give up yet. I couldn’t.

Digging my hands into the ground beneath me, I start pushing through the thick, black barrier. There has to be more. The shadow beast said, *no limits*. But what did that mean?

Did my power have no limits, or did I? But it is the same thing, isn’t it? My power comes from me, and one cannot exist without the other.

A crack forms in the black barrier, revealing a sliver of light. It pulses, trying to seep out toward me.

It’s then that it hits me... The barrier isn’t real, it’s me. I’m what’s stopping myself. The more my mind opens up to the idea, the more the barrier cracks.

There was never an end. The shadow beast is right. My power is limitless.

And it’s time I reach out and take it.

Feeling the cracked barrier with my mind, I reach out and brush against it, and with the slightest rip, it fractures entirely before completely falling away.

I gasp as power like nothing before rushes through me. Every one of my senses comes alive, and power spreads out to every nerve in my body.

This new energy feels endless, with boundless potential, like there’s nothing I can’t do.

I let it fill me, not stopping until I’m brimming with every ounce of that energy, my entire body vibrating with it.

While my power continues to build, I let my mind turn to the demons and beasts around me, pausing when I find a slight pulse of energy inside each one of them.

I grip on to it, letting each one become my new target.

When my power is so full it's almost painful, I let it go, releasing it out around me. It bursts out of me like an explosion, the surge of dark power rippling out of me and slamming right into the mass of demon and beasts heading right for us.

CHAPTER 30



KIARRA

ONCE THE ENERGY touches the demons and hybrid beasts, it blows them backward, raising the ground beneath them and encasing each one in black flames.

Their shrieks bellow out around me as they burn from the inside out.

Moments later, they begin to deteriorate and turn to ash, the only evidence of them left behind as it floats to the ground.

My ability reaches out, searching for my mates, sensing each one of them as they head straight for me. The tightness in my chest eases, knowing they're all okay and on their way here.

Before I pull back, I notice the different energies of other supes around me like small, brightly colored lights. Some are more faded than others, my instincts telling me their injuries are more severe.

The silence stretches out around me as I reach out for any other threats, but I can't find any with all the demons and beasts now destroyed.

The energy inside me doesn't lessen. It burns with untapped power, looking for another outlet.

Destroying the demons had barely touched the surface.

Luka stumbles over to me, making me pull back from my mind to focus on him. His eyes widen when he sees me, but whatever he sees doesn't frighten him. He moves quickly and doesn't stop until I'm wrapped in his arms.

I feel his body shudder as he tightens his grip on me.

“That was close. I couldn’t see you. I thought...” He swallows hard.

“I’m okay. Better than okay,” I tell him, feeling stronger than I ever have.

Luka pulls back, not believing me. He checks me over for any injuries. Once he’s satisfied, he looks around us. “We need to look for the others.”

With that thought, my mind lights up again, sensing each of their warm energies as they get closer. “They’re already on their way here. Jax is closer. He’s hurt but is healing.”

Luka frowns, opening his mouth to speak when Jax limps up behind us.

“Brother.” Luka meets him halfway, helping him over.

“Why is it taking so long to heal?” Luka asks, inspecting his leg. I glance down at it, cringing at the large chunk missing, revealing the bone as it heals.

Jax shrugs. “I guess it takes longer when a chunk is ripped out.”

Luka cringes at his reply, watching it as it slowly heals.

Jax moves over to me, a soft smile on his face. “You just saved us all.”

I shake my head, but he stops me, taking hold of my chin. His eyes search mine, the soft look not leaving his eyes. “You had me worried for a minute. I couldn’t find you.” He shakes his head, chuckling. “And then you stand up and fucking unleash hell on them.” He leans forward, resting his head against mine. “That’s my girl.”

I give him a smile before looking down at his leg. It still hasn’t fully healed yet. A pulse flickers in my mind the more I stare at it.

Jax notices, pulling back. “It’s fine, baby. It’ll heal soon. It doesn’t even hurt.”

I roll my eyes at the idiot. Of course, it hurts. A chunk of his leg is missing. But the pulse grows, and with it, the overwhelming need to touch it.

Stepping forward, I place my hand on his leg and go with my instincts to pour some of the energy into it.

Jax sucks in a sharp breath, and we both watch as his leg heals, the injury disappearing within seconds.

Once it's fully healed, I pull back my powers, feeling a slight shift of energy over my body.

"Show off," Jax says but gives me a look, telling me he's grateful and proud.

Kai, Rion, and Axel find us then, moving effortlessly through the rubble and debris. Kai rushes straight for me and pulls me into him, breathing in deeply. I grab onto him, looking over his shoulder at Rion and Axel.

Even though I knew they were safe, having them here beside me makes me feel more relieved.

"I saw what you did," he tells me, pulling back to look at me.

I tense up, but he shakes his head. "You're amazing."

"Don't let her head get any bigger than it already is." Axel smirks at me.

I narrow my eyes on him. "Dick."

His smirk grows. "Don't worry, Princess, you'll still get that later."

Before I get that chance to reply to the smart ass, Kai moves and Rion takes his place, pulling me tight against him.

"Siren," he breathes.

He holds me a moment, neither of us saying a word, just holding on to one another like we're each a lifeline for the other.

Pulling back, Rion kisses my forehead, looking down at me. Swallowing hard, he takes a step back and walks around,

looking at the wreckage.

We join him, checking out the extent of the damage. The road and sidewalk are no longer distinguishable, blending together to make a mass wreckage of debris. The buildings are lost among the rubble, no distinctive signs left of what they used to be. Fires are still alight, scattered all over the place, and vehicles are broken and overturned, most burned out or still in flames.

“This is going to take more than a clean-up crew.” Jax frowns, surveying the destruction.

“I added to it when I sent out that blast. I—”

“No. You saved us. If it wasn’t for you, we wouldn’t be together right now,” Kai’s says, leaving no room for question.

An icy shiver runs down my back at the tone in his voice, making me wonder how close it was for all of them too.

Jax clears his throat. “I give I.O.U’s in the form of sexual favors.” He gives me an innocent look, his eyes wide. “Just so you know.”

Laughter bubbles up inside me, chasing away some of the guilt and tension around us.

Luka shakes his head at us, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and pulling me into his side.

“We’ll section off this side of the city until we can get it re-built,” Kai says, turning to us.

“We should do a search for any supes lost or still trapped.” Rion sighs, a frown on his face as he glances around.

“Kiarra might be able to help us with that,” Luka says, looking down at me, a smile on his face.

The guys glance back and forth between us wearing puzzled expressions.

“My abilities, they’ve... grown. I can sense people around me and see them like a light in my mind.”

The guys’ expressions turn stunned.

“So what you’re saying is, never try to play hide-and-seek with you?” Jax nods his head. “Got it.” He winks at me.

I shove him playfully, thanking him for breaking the awkward moment.

“If you’re not too tired to try, that is,” Luka says.

“I’m fine.” I didn’t feel an ounce of exhaustion. Whatever power I awakened inside me still feels endless. With just a thought, anyone in the surrounding area lights up inside my mind.

I hear a sharp intake of breath from one of the guys beside me, but I stay focused, searching around me for anyone who might need help. I move from person to person, casting my search farther out, but no other lights are found in our area.

Meaning only one thing... those that were still here, are gone.

Swallowing hard against the lump in my throat, I think about how many lights have faded from this world and into the next tonight. How many families have lost a sister, brother, friend, or partner?

I keep looking for a moment longer before pulling back. Blinking back the burn in my eyes that threatens to spill, I glance up at the guys. They’re all staring at me with awed expressions, making me frown.

Kai steps closer, reaching a hand out to my face. “Your eyes, they’re not just black anymore. It’s like a constellation of stars. They’re beautiful.”

Clearing my throat, I reel back the energy inside me. Opening my mouth, I try to come up with a change of subject, but nothing comes to mind.

Kai gives me a knowing look. “What did you find?”

“Most are making their way in the opposite direction. If there are any supes that were lost or trapped. They didn’t make it.”

“Damn.” Jax exhales.

We stay silent for a minute, the air around us becoming sorrowful with thoughts of those who were lost in the fight.

Our silent moment is broken when we hear movement from behind us. Whipping around to it, we find a portal opening not twenty feet away from us.

The guys are in near shift, still trying to push me behind them when Jazmyn stumbles through.

“Jazmyn?”

The portal closes behind her as she reaches a hand out. I reach her just before she falls forward.

“What happened?” There’s blood all over her. Her hair is matted with it, and there are cuts and bruises all over her.

She opens her mouth to speak but stops, swallowing hard, trying to catch her breath.

I check over her injuries. Some of them are deep, needing stitches. Others are starting to look slightly infected.

I don’t feel the overwhelming need to reach out and heal it like Jax’s leg, but I reach out and push some energy into her. She gasps as I continue to let the energy flow into her. It’s harder than when I healed Jax, and I have to keep pushing, but slowly, all her injuries heal, leaving only the dried blood behind.

Jazmyn glances down at her body before looking back at me. “How did you?” She frowns, stopping herself. “It doesn’t matter.”

“What happened?” Rion asks, coming up beside me. He glances down at me, smiling, but I don’t know what the smile is for until I catch the guys wearing matching ones.

Kai raises a brow, glancing from Jazmyn to me. I forgot they didn’t know about my upgraded healing ability.

I smile, telling him I’ll explain later, and focus back on Jazmyn.

Shaking her head, she blinks back tears. “It was all a distraction.”

I share a frown with the guys. “What was?”

“Manhattan.” One word strikes us silent, hitting me like a punch to the chest. Surely, she couldn’t mean...

“What do you mean? Jazmyn?”

“The Underworld...” she breathes, barely a whisper. “It’s been breached. Demons and creatures from every crevice are slipping into our realm using Staten Island to do it.”

Dread builds inside me, twisting my stomach with knots and making me feel sick to my stomach.

She shakes her head, glancing around. “We couldn’t hold them off.”

“Kane and Malik?” I ask, my stomach dropping.

She swallows hard, sighing. “They’re okay, but... It’s bad, Kiarra. I’ve never seen anything like it. We barely made it out alive.”

She looks over at the guys. “It all happened so fast, but we opened as many portals as we could to here. We didn’t know where else to go.”

I grab her hand, giving it a squeeze.

Kai nods his head. “Everyone is welcome to stay here as long as they need to.”

“Thank you,” she tells him before sharing a worried look with me.

The guys start coming up with where they can place everyone, going back and forth with different ideas.

Jazmyn looks paler the longer she stares at me.

“What is it?” I ask her, knowing whatever it is wasn’t going to be good.

“King was there.”

The guys freeze, whipping their heads to her.

“He showed up right in the middle of it all. The demons and creatures parted for him like he was their fucking master.” She swipes angrily at the tears running down her face.

Rion shares a look with Kai.

“What could he gain from all this?” Luka asks.

“Hell on earth seems like a pretty big one,” Jax replies.

“For what, though? Those types of demons would destroy every bit of life on earth, leaving nothing behind.”

“There’s more...” Jazmyn tells us.

Jax rolls his eyes. “Of course, there is.”

“King... sent a message for you.” Jazmyn stares straight at me.

“I hope you told him to fuck off.” Axel snarls.

She gives him a scathing look that he doesn’t bow down to. “It wasn’t me he told... The demon only lived long enough to pass it on.”

“What did he say?” I ask her, ignoring the guy’s protests.

“He said, ‘It’s time for you to come home. I’ll see you soon.’”

“Like hell are you going anywhere near that fucking psycho,” Jax grits out.

The others agree with him.

But what else are we supposed to do? Just let him destroy the world and everyone I care about along with it?

No.

It is time. Time to take the fight to him.

Kai sees the look in my eyes, the resolve as a plan starts to form.

He shakes his head, moving closer to me, his eyes pulsing red. “No! Not happening. You’re not going anywhere near him.”

“This is the only way. You *know* that.” It was always going to end like this. I knew that from the moment I chose to fight instead of running. It’s never going to end unless he’s dead.

And if I have to go to the pits of hell to make sure the twisted fuck stayed there, I will.

“No. I’m not losing you again.” He swallows hard, a glint of panic flashing in his eyes.

I reach up, placing my hands on his chest, and feel the hard thump of his heart as it beats like crazy.

“I’m not asking to do this alone. I want you all by my side. We’re a family. We do this together, *always*.”

Kai’s eyes soften, losing some of the panic. “I wasn’t lying when I told you I’d follow you to the ends of the world. I just... I *hate* that you’re always in danger... that it follows you around waiting to strike.”

I step into him. He wraps his arms around me immediately, embracing me tight.

Kai sighs. “I know you’re strong, stronger than us all. But I still want to protect you and my brothers. I *need* to keep you all safe.”

“I know, but we can’t sit by and watch when the world is falling around us. We’re not built like that. We need to act, to help. And if it comes down to it... to kill. Because we know that if we want a better world for us and everyone we care about, we’ll have to fight for it.”

Kai rests his head on top of mine. “I love you,” he whispers. “It’ll never be enough... those words. Not for how I feel about you. But know that it will always be true. No matter what happens.”

“We’ll get through this. Just like everything else,” I tell him, meaning every word.

Kai pulls back, nodding to himself before looking around at the guys. Each of them is furious about the new development, but there’s an air of reluctant resolution around them too.

“What’s the plan?” Jax asks, knowing full well what’s about to happen. Kai stares at them a moment before releasing a harsh breath.

“Pack up. It looks like we’re heading to the Underworld.”

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Keep up to date with future releases and teasers by joining her Facebook Group, *Rumer Hale's Reverse Harem Group*, or find her on TikTok and Instagram: @rumerhaleauthor

