



DUSTING OFF THE DEMONS

A BI AWAKENING MMMFFMM SHIFTER ROMANCE

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ZOEY INDIANA

DUSTING OFF THE DEMONS

A BI AWAKENING MMMFFMM SHIFTER
ROMANCE

BLACK OPS FATED MATES WHY CHOOSE
POLYAM ROMANCE

BOOK TWO



ZOEY INDIANA



Dusting Off the Demons

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Also by Zoey Indiana

A special thanks to:

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BLURB

Discovering your fated mates should be where the fairy tale ends, where you bask in the warmth of a happily ever after. But for me, that was just the beginning of a more intricate tale.

Just when the dust of chaos started to settle and I began to dream of a calm life, my mischievous demon father took a step that turned my world upside down. Confusion and despair wrapped around me, making every path seem lost. I had no inkling, no guidance on where to go next.

With our crucial mating bond still incomplete, the shadows of the Hesolga grew darker and more threatening, pressing on us with each passing moment of delay.

So imagine my relief and surprise when Seph, one of my destined mates, arrives seemingly out of nowhere. Her presence was like a beacon in my stormy world, but I knew this was just the calm before an even fiercer storm.

Dusting Off the Demons is the second riveting tale in a series featuring rugged, tattooed, veteran shifter polyam romances. If you're a fan of diverse pairings (MMMFFMM), suspense, spice, and heart-thumping adventure ending in a cliffhanger, dive into this story. Experience my journey as a bi woman venturing into new passionate territories in Dusting Off the Demons today!

JOIN THE RESISTANCE

What does Join the Resistance even mean? You just came here to read a book. Don't worry, I'll let you read it in a bit, but bear with me for a moment.

First of all, welcome to the world of Zoey from wherever you are, whether that's Earth, some other planet, a galaxy far far away, or locked in a bathroom hiding from your family.

Before you jump into this story, I want to make sure you'll enjoy my quirky, laugh out loud, dark humor romances. There's nothing worse for a voracious romance reader than to get excited about a book, read the first few chapters, and then realize this isn't your jam. I know because I've been there. Hence this message.

My sense of humor isn't for everyone, so if you're looking for a cookie cutter, written for PG tv, kind of romance, I think you took a wrong turn somewhere along the way. You're welcome to stay and see if this quirky new world is for you. Here's your warning though. I want you to know what you're getting into before you scroll down and invest your time in one of my alternate realities.

So embrace the weirdness, let a little bit of your quirky side show, and shove reality away. Read a book, because you need a break from your life. Take a moment to practice some self care and laugh until you wet yourself, or cry until you've lost twenty pounds of stress.

^^^^^^

That right there, that's the Resistance. Be you, whether that's a badass bitch, a book reading babe, or you have an odd penchant for dressing up as a bee, I won't judge. I love cosplaying too. In Zoey's world, the only rule is to be yourself.

Join the Resistance and [my weekly email updates](#), and I'll send you an exclusive, can't get anywhere else, Shifter Speed Dating book.

DEDICATION AND CONTENT WARNING

To all the diverse individuals who walk through a less than perfect life and survive hard times, you are worthy. I appreciate all the hard work you've accomplished to be here and read my book.

You are amazing, and don't let anyone else tell you different. To the boyfriend that has learned to cook because I'm writing all night, thanks for the pizza! Lol.

And that critique partner of mine, Dawn's a bit crazy, but all kinds of amazing.

To Ovi. I know, I know. Seph is all yours. I get it. But I still have to share with my readers.

* * *

Trigger Warning.

While my characters are made up, they all have real world issues. For more details, go here: <https://geni.us/ContentWarning>

FATED MATES WORLD TERMINOLOGY



These are terms created for or specifically defined within my Fated Mates World, which means they may or may not be in this specific book.

- Agenati (A-gen-na-tee) - Hunter; usually refers to a shifter or kindred with abilities or training to hunt vampires.
- Agenwi (A-gen-wee) - Shifter, regardless of animal.
- Anila (A-nil-a) - The council of the wolves.
- Asadne (A-sa-d-ne) - Witch wizard; a facilitator; Pandora.
- Ayotaal (A-o-tall) - Ceremony and 24 hour grieving period for murdered shifters.
- Cambion - a widely accepted term in the paranormal community for a demon-human hybrid.
- Didavado (Dee-dah-vah-doe) - Blessed Soul, a term used by shifters to refer to the kindred(blessed vampire) people.
- Guardian - Shifter who lives their life as an animal. Usually domestic, they are sent on missions to protect at-risk humans from vampires. They work independently with a receiver to answer to. They have limited ability to change forms or magick in general, but usually have the ability to heal only their humans.
- Hesolga (He-soul-guah) - Insanity disease that consumes males if they don't finish claiming their Tsigo (fated mate) before the end of the lunar cycle.

- Kindred - Humans murdered by vampires, who were given the venom, but lacked sins in their heart. Blessed to have a second life. Term used by humans and vampires.
- Liwozaq (Lee-whoa-zak) - The banishment hunt. When a pride leader calls for the hunt and execution or banishment of a pride member. They are forever forbidden to return to the pride or associate with any member of the pride. If they do, an instant execution order will be issued.
- Receiver - Shifter who lives most of their time in human form and run teams of guardian shifters. They use their guardians to protect humans who could potentially be at risk of a vampire attack due to status or abilities. Usually magickly strong.
- Retriever - Shifter who works for the council in charge of hunting down and retrieving shifters on council orders. Disliked by most of the shifter population.
- Shaabacho (Sha-bach-oh) - Werewolf, a term used by a shifter to describe a fellow werewolf regardless of gender, mating status, location, clan, or pack.
- Shaabacho/Shaabachan - Referring to shifters and their ancestors.
- Tsiggo (Tuh-sigh-go) - Love Forever, a term used by a shifter to describe being fated for mates by the shifter gods.
- Tsvado (Tes-vaa-doe) - Evil soul; a term used by shifters to refer to cursed vampire people.
- Vampire - The dead beings cursed by a distraught shaman, to live eternity with the sin of their soul. Term used by humans and kindred.
- Wigi (Wee-gee) - Shifter healer who uses a combination of new age medicine and old spells. Usually a gift one is born with.
- Yenayu (Yen-na-you) - Festival/celebration of ancestors and history. Mainly celebrated on the PNW islands.

CHAPTER 1



WE'RE DETAINING YOU AS A POSSIBLE
TERRORIST.

Could someone die of boredom? Seriously... If I made it another lap around this stupid interrogation room, I might cease to exist from sheer boredom. After Ro handed me off to Major General Dickson, his goonies led me through a back hallway, into a garage where I'd climbed into a blacked out SUV. The guys were jacked, and I had a sneaking suspicion they were more than human. Though I wasn't sure how or what flavor of paranormal they were. Hell, I still didn't understand my own flavor of paranormal yet.

After the long car ride, they'd escorted me into this room with four walls with one window I couldn't see through, two chairs, one table, and twelve and a half ceiling tiles counting all the partial pieces combined. I would have counted floor tiles too, but there weren't any. Nope, the floor was a singular piece of concrete without a single scuff, chip, or blemish.

Without a clock or anyway to tell time, I wasn't sure how long I'd been here. The room was too small to really do anything in, so I pulled off my heels and walked in circles.

Lap eighty-three.

Five steps to cover the long wall, then barely four for the short one. Interrogation rooms on TV always looked so much larger than this tiny space.

Lap eighty-four.

My feet were cold from walking barefoot on the concrete, but the thought of sitting in that uncomfortable chair was even worse. I didn't think it was possible for a chair to be so hard.

Where had they gotten it, the uncomfortable-furniture-perfect-for-torture supply store?

Lap eighty-five.

Oh, my god. Seriously, how long were they going to leave me in here without explanation? At this rate, I would wear a path in the concrete. Or I'd walk my feet into little tiny nubs and somebody would have to explain to my tsigos how that happened.

The door clicked open right as I completed lap eighty-six. Two big guys stepped into the room right in front of me, both of them wearing black utility gear that reminded me of six certain someones back home. One of them scowled at me as he shoved his finger in the direction of the chair that I had been sitting in earlier. I rolled my eyes and plopped back down in the seat, not happy to be there.

“Do you know why you're here?” He bluntly grumbled at me.

While I had my suspicions, I didn't plan on giving them any information that they didn't already know. Besides, I was in a no-fucks-left-to-give kind of mood. With everything that had happened recently, I wouldn't ever be able to go back to my normal life. I couldn't be my old self anymore. Somehow, I'd have to find my new inner Parker in this demonically infused new world. Right here and now, I promised myself I'd speak up instead of being reserved and letting things happen around me. And I'd start now. They'd wasted hours of my time today, so now it was time for a bit of petty bitch payback. “Not a clue.”

The other interrogator sat in the chair on the opposite side of the table from me. His fingers interlocked as he sat like he didn't have a care in the world. It pissed me off. The first guard got in my face. “Are you sure about that?”

“I mean, if you wanted to ask me on a date, then you should have just said so before we went through all of this. You're much too grumpy to be my type, so all of this was completely unnecessary. I'm not usually one to set someone down so hard, but really, this tactic has gone way too far.”

The guard sitting down coughed to cover his smile as the one I was speaking to glared at me. Red crept up into his neck and face as veins bulged. He had anger issues. Good to know. “I don’t have to put up with this, do I? It would be so easy to get her to agree to what we want her to do if you let me do things my way.” The grumpy man in my face said like he wasn’t casually discussing my torture.

The more reserved guy opposite the table shook his head. “We already went over the reasons you can’t do that before we came in here. How about you leave and let me take care of this?”

“I don’t think so.” He shook his head as he crossed his arms, then perched half his ass on the small table. While he took a position of power, sitting above me and glaring down, I didn’t let it get to me.

I had a feeling they needed me to do something semi-willingly. Which meant I retained a tiny bit of power in this situation. Though only time would tell. “You know what, I think I would feel a little more cooperative if Mr. Grumpy Britches left.”

“Never gonna happen.”

The reserved guy cleared his throat. “You heard Ms. Hansley.”

“You can’t be fucking serious?” After a long glare at the other guard, the grumpy one stomped out of the room and slammed the door. A soft smile pulled at my lips, which quickly disappeared.

“Don’t think that because I sent him out that you’re in control here. He’s in a bad mood and won’t help the situation, but at no point are you in charge except for the one decision you make at the end of our conversation.” He unlocked his fingers and moved until his arms rested on the table. “You can call me Mr. Smith. Acknowledge that you understand, Ms. Hansley.”

Well shit. So much for that approach. Maybe toning it down would work better? “Okay, Mr. Smith.”

“Very good.” He pulled a folder from his lap I hadn’t noticed him carry in. He opened and splayed out several pictures. I saw Trux’s face, then Rhiot, Ryker, Grayson, Kearan, and Seph. My stomach dropped at the sight of them. While I barely knew them on a personal level, the pictures instantly reminded me of how much I missed them. A deep ache settled in my chest. “Supernatural Team 3 is one of our most prized assets. Aside from being highly trained for a multitude of situations and scenarios, they’re important to our mission.”

I grabbed my shoes like I could walk out of the room anytime I wanted. “And exactly who is holding me and under what authority? Last I checked, the government couldn’t snatch random people off the street and detain them for shits and giggles.”

Mr. Smith held up his index finger. “Ah, that’s where the problem is. You’re not random, not in the slightest. To these six individuals, you represent the greatest weakness and distraction to the Agenti Division of the military. Which makes you a threat to national security, so we’re detaining you as a possible terrorist.”

My mouth dropped open for several long seconds before I began processing everything he said. “Terrorist? I’m sorry, but you must have the wrong person. I’m barely a functional adult with loads of parental issues. In no capacity could I do something that takes the level of planning like being a terrorist. Shit, I have a pest problem at my own house and I can’t even get rid of them. You all have your information scrambled somewhere.”

“You’re the human woman who every member of Supernatural Team 3 seems to think is their Tsigo. While mating with one of them is risky enough, somehow convincing all six of them that they’re your fated mate... well, that’s impossible. Shifters don’t work that way. Or they shouldn’t.” He moved the profiles around until Trux’s emotionless face was closest to me. “And our intel reveals that you’ve already started the mating process with Trux, which puts us in a tricky position. Having power over the alpha of the team is

something we can't allow. If we stop the bond from forming, then we'll lose one of our most valuable assets when the Hesolga overtakes him. The team will be useless for quite some time if we ever salvage them. Often times, we have to cancel them."

I waved my hand to cut him off. "I'm sorry, what does that word mean... Hesolga?"

He let out a long breath. "Once a fated couple starts the bonding ritual, they have a full lunar cycle to complete it. A slow form of insanity builds up in the male shifter called Hesolga as the couple gets closer to the deadline. If they don't finish mating in time, then he goes rabid and must be put down before harming anyone. Once they're overtaken by the madness, they're difficult to catch and unpredictable with who they'll attack."

My stomach twisted in my gut as the pieces fell into place from a conversation with Trux early on. A lunar cycle... I'd have to claim all of them at least once, if not three times, before it was up. I'd been too distracted to ask what happened if we didn't. Dammit Trux, why had he risked all of them? I felt the building need to claim them, but I thought that was the bond pulling us closer. Well, I guess it was, in a way, but the horrible outcome for them was something I couldn't let happen.

Mr. Smith cleared his throat. "So you see, we have to decide if we let the team's delusion continue, permit you to finish mating Trux, or if we decide to cut our losses."

Cut their losses... like my mates were some inanimate object to take out like a bag of trash. Fury bubbled in my chest at this cool threat. Who was he to decide if my Tsigos lived or died? No. Fuck this guy. I wouldn't let him or anyone else hurt them. Heat infused my veins until I felt like I'd explode from the pressure.

No one threatened my mates. I'd protect them and eliminate anyone who intended to harm them. The hair on my arms stood straight up as if the room was statically charged.

When the pressure became too much, I imagined it bursting out of my body.

The room swirled around me, a ring of fire bursting into existence around the two of us. It reminded me of the trap Ro used on me when I accidentally released him from the hell realm where he'd been trapped.

Mr. Smith clapped his hands in a slow, appreciative manner. "Or we have option two."

"What's that?" The flames died down a bit, but didn't go away completely.

He crossed his arms with a smug smile, like he wasn't the least bit fazed by my display of demonic power. "We expand Supernatural Team 3 with a recruit... you."

CHAPTER 2



TOMORROW WILL START YOUR OFFICIAL
FIRST DAY OF TRAINING.

*M*y brain skipped several times like a scratched record before it gave up processing the man's words. "I'm sorry, what?"

"You heard me." Mr. Smith's lips pulled into a smile for a fraction of a second before he relaxed his face. I couldn't decipher his emotions. "Join the team. It would solve most of our problems."

I waved my hand between us, dismissing him. "I don't know the first thing about a special ops team. Besides, I'm rather accident prone. I'm guessing in all your intel you didn't hear how the team found me? Of course not, because if you had, you wouldn't be offering me a spot on a team."

"Skills can be learned through training. It's your natural ability that we're after."

His words sent a chill through me. I had no natural ability... not as a human. He had to be referring to my demonic abilities. I glanced around the room, taking in the strange realization that the fake fire climbing the walls was nothing more than a demonic illusion. One I'd accidentally used in a moment of elevated emotions... just like the same ability Ro had intentionally used against the team and me.

They didn't care about me. All they wanted was access to my abilities. I was the perfect tool to keep the team in line and vice versa. Which meant this had been their goal all along. My gaze darted to the door where the surly guard had left through. Regardless of what they'd said earlier or how they planned

everything, me joining the team had been their only motivation. So what was their back up plan? “And what if I refuse?”

The smile returned to Mr. Smith’s face. “You won’t.”

“But what if I do?” The hair on the back of my neck prickled as a bad feeling settled in my gut.

“You. Won’t.” He slid the pictures of my Tsigos toward me one at a time, in a painstaking slow movement that shouted an implied threat. If I didn’t agree, they’d use my mates against me. Even though Mr. Smith didn’t say the words, I knew them to be true.

At that moment, I knew it was a matter of when and how I’d give into their demands. I refused to risk the lives of my mates over pride. They’d chosen a life of serving on the team, so why couldn’t? Every newbie had to start somewhere, and I had a knack of jumping into things without planning. Could this be so much worse?

Besides, if I made this smooth, maybe I could push to have one of my mates brought here. A little old fashioned give and take as it were. Which one should I ask for? No way would they let me have Trux. Aside from leading the team, he was the only one I’d bonded with so far. That and they believed he was my only Tsigo mate and the rest were under a delusion.

I thought about everything I knew about each of them and settled on Rhiot. He was the demonologist and the one I needed the most information from at the moment. My gaze returned to Mr. Smith. “If I accept, I want to see Rhiot. In person and privately.”

His gaze darted to the side for a brief moment as if he was listening to something I couldn’t hear. “We’ll determine which team member comes. Then you have a deal.”

“Fine.” I should have known they wouldn’t let me have access to the demon expert.

“Very well then. Let’s get you settled.” Mr. Smith stood up and opened the door, then gestured for me to go through first.

Still barefoot while wearing my gala dress and carrying the tortuous shoes, I stepped through the door into a long corridor. It was completely free of personality. The walls were a dull grey, which almost matched the cement floor. The ceiling was the exact same white tile as the interrogation room.

Mr. Smith cleared his throat. “Five doors down and on the left is your private room.”

“Should I be concerned why you had a random room ready for me?” I counted the doors as I walked, not sure how I’d ever find my room again.

“Because we were certain of success. You’re a very intelligent woman, Ms. Hansley. We had no doubt that you’d make the right decision for everyone involved.” He maintained a perfectly spaced distance from me.

In other words, they knew they’d win with or without a fight. Which meant I’d probably picked the easiest option of just giving in from the start. Besides, I knew my mates would find a way to save me... or somehow fix the situation. It might take time and playing nice, but they always found a way. It was more a matter of time and trying things out, which I couldn’t do until we were all back together.

“Here we are Ms. Hansley. Your room is fully stocked with anything you’ll need. If by chance we missed something, please let us know. There is a tablet next to your bedside you can use to communicate with us in off hours. It’s locked into our system, so please don’t bother with trying to contact anyone outside of our compound. You’ll just irritate the IT team and you really don’t want to do that.” He reached forward and pressed his hand against a faintly outline box on the wall I hadn’t seen until he pointed it out. The box lit up as it scanned his palm, then the door clicked and swung open.

“Let me guess, all the doors are like that so I can’t wander into a place where I’m not allowed?” I stepped inside when it became apparent he wouldn’t be joining me.

“Exactly. It’s four in the evening. Please select your meal for the night from the options provided on the tablet. We know you have no food allergies or intolerances, so please let us

know immediately if one develops.” He started to let the door swing shut before he put his hand in the way. “Might I recommend you shower and relax for the night? Tomorrow will start your official first day of training and we wouldn’t want you exhausted. Your point of contact will be here soon. Good night Ms. Hansley.”

The door shut on his words. I pushed on the door, trying to ask him what he meant about my point of contact, but the damn thing didn’t budge. With the palm of my hand, I pressed it against the faintly outlined box on the wall, but it flashed red and made a rather angry beep. Looked like I wasn’t able to come and go from my own room. At this rate, it felt more like a prison than anything else.

I dropped on the edge of the bed, sighing at my life in general. So many changes in such little time. I didn’t think I could handle much more. The room was utilitarian, with each and every space having a purpose. On one wall was a desk built out from the wall with a metal chair. Above the countertop was a mirror with a button on one side. To the right of the desk were drawers that started at waist length and went to the floor. Above the drawers was a rod holding what appeared to be several black outfits.

The bed I sat on was moderately stiff, with a military green blanket perfectly tucked in and a pillow sitting on top. To my right was a small nightstand with a lamp and tablet plugged into an outlet. The screen brightened and then dimmed; the pattern repeating. When it was bright enough to read, the words prompted me to order my meal. A message below indicated it would take twenty minutes for the meal to arrive at my door.

Prison with room service. Great. I gave in and swiped a finger over the screen, which brought up three pre planned meals. The options were well balanced with protein, carbs, and veggies with the main difference being the source of protein. Beef, chicken, or vegetarian. I selected the beef, then the screen flashed a success message, then dimmed again. After a quick stop at the drawers to pick out a set of black cotton

pajamas from a completely identical selection, I went to the only other doorway in the room.

Inside was a small shower, toilet, and sink with minimal counter space. There was another mirror that opened to reveal generic hygiene items. More were sitting on a shelf in the shower. Two black towels and a washcloth were hanging from two hooks on the wall. After a quick shower, I dressed and returned to the bedroom, leaving the discarded gala outfit draped over the sink.

My feet froze mid step at the sight that awaited me there. On the desk was a food tray with a covered plate, a cup, and utensils. Except that wasn't what grabbed my attention. It was the sight of my gorgeous mate Seph lying on the bed with one knee in the air. She leaned back against the wall with her gaze focused on me.

CHAPTER 3



THEY THOUGHT I WAS THE SAFE OPTION.

I wanted to leap across the room and snuggle into her arms, but I wasn't sure if there were cameras in the room. Hell, there were probably cameras in the bathroom, but I didn't want to think about that. "How did you get here?"

"I'll tell you while you eat." Seph waved at me to go to her.

The moment I got close, she pulled me on top of her. My hips settled between her thighs as she guided my head to rest on her chest. She turned until her cheek rested on my head, snuggly holding me against her breasts. Her arms wrapped around me like a vice grip, holding me tightly until I didn't want to move. With each breath she took, my head bobbed slightly. Boobs were wonderfully comfy. Who knew?

"I'm so glad you're okay. Trux lost his mind when Grayson called him and told us you'd disappeared. I mean, we were all beside ourselves, but the bond is wearing on him since it isn't complete." She moved, placing a kiss on the top of my head. "Come on, Parker, you need to eat dinner."

Seph coaxed me off of her. Before I slid off the bed, she leaned forward and cupped my cheeks, giving me the longest, sweetest kiss I'd ever had. I never wanted it to end.

Unfortunately, she pulled back too soon and left me frustrated at everything but her. Especially Mr. Smith and the group he worked for. "How did you get here so quickly? I agreed to this not that long ago."

“They played you.” She pulled the chair out and uncovered the food, then pressed the button on the wall next to the mirror. I watched, partially fascinated, as the reflected image of me disappeared into a strange crest I’d never seen before. “Eat real quick, and I’ll explain as much as I can.”

I turned the chair until it was at an angle where I could see her and still eat without making a mess. The food barely registered as I listened to Seph explain everything that happened after Ro had poofed me away from Grayson. “I’m pretty sure Rhiot burned a few bridges with demons in his attempts to locate you. Ryker almost found you when our handler reached out to Trux. I’ve seen Trux pissed before, which is terrifying on a good day, but I was certain he would tear through high command like a superstorm. I’ve never seen anything like it before. How did you end up here, anyway? Last place Ryker pinged your phone was in Canada.”

I finished chewing my bite before taking a sip of the water that didn’t taste quite right. Probably just not the brand I was used to. “I don’t even know where I am right now.”

“That makes sense. They like to do things first, then avoid answers later. We’re currently sitting in a military compound that doesn’t legally exist in a cornfield in Kansas.” Seph settled back on the bed, resting against the wall. “Tell me what happened. We were all very worried when you disappeared.”

I sighed, but it rumbled in my throat, coming out more as a growl than anything else. “Ro happened. He just poofed me right out of there. Next thing I knew, I was lying on a hard kitchen floor, trying to not spew my guts everywhere. Apparently, he needed me for something, but I still don’t have a fucking clue since it all went by so fast. After the strange dream with Trux, Ro woke me up and then he poofed us into a limo. He magickally manifested the most uncomfortable fancy outfit I’ve ever felt and when we got out of the limo, we were at some kind of charity gala. We were only there a few minutes before he walked up to a Dickens something or other and revealed exactly who I was. Then guards swarmed me and brought me here.”

Angrily stabbing another bite, I chewed in silence as Seph sat there with her mouth slightly agape. “Trux is going to kill Ro. Which won’t be easy since he’s a demon, but Rhiot will find a way to help him. I can’t believe he handed you over like that.”

I nodded while haphazardly waving an empty fork in the air while I chewed. “I fucking hope he does. Ro was on my last nerve two asshole moves ago.”

Seph chuckled at my vehemence. “It’s nice to see you mostly safe.”

“Mostly? I don’t think I like the sound of that.” I finished off my meal and put everything back on the tray.

Seph patted the bed next to her. I joined her, turning my body to the side so we both fit on the small bed. “This is a supernatural training facility. Same one the team went through years ago. There will be lots of pain, but they won’t let you die.”

I propped my head on my hand. “Wow, don’t sugarcoat it for me.”

“Nothing about what happens next will be easy. They’ll push you to your limit, trying to break you both physically and mentally. Though who knows exactly what they’ll do, since your acquisition was different from our own. We had to prove ourselves. Maybe they’ll take it easier on you since they sought you out. That, and they’ll have a team of raging supernaturals empowered by the Hesolga, ready to rip them to shreds if they mess with you too much.” Seph turned on her side, mirroring my pose. Her free hand slid into mine, our fingers tangling together.

“Oh goody. What I always wanted.” Silence stretched between us as we held hands.

I had so many regrets so far, but accepting the team as my Tsigos wasn’t one of them. Yes, by doing so I’d unleashed a chain reaction of massive changes that I never could have predicted, but even now that I was in the thick of things, I

wouldn't change it. Even though the rest of them were unreachable, I had one of them with me.

Just her presence and touch soothed the ragged need shredding my insides ever since Ro separated us. I needed all of them, but one of them soothed me in a way I'd never experienced before. Even my deep burning flame of anger, which had been burning ever since Ro's first betrayal seemed to simmer down until it was just hot coals.

For the first time since I saw her in my room, I noticed she wore the exact same black pajamas as I did. "Don't get me wrong, I'm happy to see you, but why are you here?"

Seph took a deep breath before she answered my question. "When our handler called Trux, they arranged for one of us to join you. As soon as you were in custody, we knew we wouldn't have much choice in regards to them recruiting you. Which is the main reason we were trying to keep you away from them. Human demon hybrids are rare and we knew they would jump at the chance to recruit you."

"Sonofabitch! No wonder they agreed to my demand so quickly and why they wouldn't let me choose who they sent." Seph released my hand and cupped the back of my neck as she pulled me into a quick kiss. "Wait, a minute. Why did they choose you?"

"Because I'm the only female on the team." She gave me a wicked wink before she rolled us until she was on top of me, looking down with a mischievous grin. "They thought I was the safe option."

CHAPTER 4



JUST TO CLEAR THINGS UP... I'M NEVER THE
SAFE OPTION.

Seph slid her knee between mine, pressing her thigh against my core. A gasp escaped a moment before she captured my lips with hers. They were soft. Nothing like any of the guys. The sensation of her supple lips perfectly matched mine with their intensity and curves.

Her fingers slid between mine, guiding both of my hands over my head and holding them there. She didn't use any force... any strength. I could move my hands from her grasp if I wanted to, but I didn't want to.

The world could be ending around us right now, and I wouldn't want to stop this.

Seph broke the kiss before I did. My stomach twisted in nervous anticipation. I wanted this, but didn't know the first thing about being with another woman. To be fair, I wasn't much better off with men. Either way, I had almost no experience. Maybe a few fantasies over the years with my vibrators, but that wasn't anything like the real thing. My toys had never sent my demon powers into overdrive like being with Trux had.

Her head tilted as she trailed kisses along my jaw to my ear. I tilted my hips, grinding against her knee. She nibbled on my ear lobe before trailing soft kisses along the shell.

"Just to clear things up... I'm never the safe option." Seph's breath tickled my ear and neck. "You'd have better luck with Kearan if that's what you're looking for."

It was like a live wire, burning me all the way to my core. I needed more. “Heh, there’s a time to be careful and overthink, and then there’s a time to feel.”

“Which one do you want right now?” Seph’s kisses trailed down my neck until she teased the valley between my breasts.

Not wanting to break the hold she had on me, I arched my back until I’d pressed my breasts against her face. “You.”

“That’s my girl. Such a little temptress.” Seph growled as she used her chin to slide the fabric of my pajama top out of the way. Her tongue slid over my areola, leaving a trail of fire on my skin. When her lips wrapped around my hardening nub, I saw stars. My hips bucked in response, eliciting a chuckle from Seph. “I haven’t been able to get the taste of you out of my mind. The memory has taken over my dreams, leaving me distracted when I should be focused.”

Before I realized what she was doing, she’d rearranged both of my arms until they were pinned behind my back. Her hips settled on mine, leaving me unable to slip from her hold. “That’s not fair.” It was more of a whimper than a protest.

“Hmm...” Seph took the opportunity to unbutton my shirt. Kisses resumed along the valley between my breasts, driving me to new heights of need. She cupped my breasts, taking her time teasing each of them. Her cheek nuzzled my belly as she trailed kisses all the way to the waistband of my pants. “What you do to me is unfair.”

When her index finger hooked on the elastic, my thighs clenched together in anticipation. She wasn’t the only one who hadn’t been able to forget. The way Trux had held me in place as Seph and Ryker knelt at my feet, pleasuring me on Trux’s command. It was the hottest fucking thing I’d ever done. Except, I wanted to switch places this time.

Then I remembered the preexisting relationship that Seph and Ryker seemed to have. “Wait, Seph. We need to talk first.”

My words didn’t distract Seph from her agonizingly slow trek down my body. “Nothing in the world is more important than hearing you moan my name.”

When her tongue flicked against my flesh, I almost forgot my protest. Almost. “I know there’s something going on between you and Ryker, which doesn’t bother me, but I don’t want to interrupt anything.”

Seph let out a long sigh before she tilted her head to rest on my belly. She glanced up at me from her spot, agonizingly close to where we both wanted her face to be. “Parker, like I said before, Ryker and I are not Tsigos. We never claimed each other in any kind of ritual.”

“But you’re together, right?” Aside from clearing the air, I wasn’t sure what good this conversation would be. I’d already started the mating bond with the team, which meant I had to go through with it or risk all their lives. I knew that before I’d been with Trux, but I couldn’t risk any kind of resentment growing in the group because of me. Maybe it was just my insecurity driving me to push the conversation.

She pressed soft kisses to the tender skin just below my belly button. “Yes, and no. Being on this team is alienating. It’s hard to make friends or have any kind of a relationship outside of the team since we never know where we will be or for how long. Ryker and I...” She grew quiet for a long time as she rubbed her cheek against my belly. “We’re friends with benefits. When it first started, we agreed that if either of us met our Tsigo—however unlikely that might be—we’d break things off and be happy for the other. Kinda like Grayson and Kearan.”

My mind wandered with curiosity of what she meant by ‘like Grayson and Kearan’, but I didn’t want to detract from our current conversation. Silence filled the space between our words. It wasn’t awkward or painful, but it was heavy.

Seph looked up at me. There was a deep emotion in her eyes that I wanted to console. I wanted to kiss away the wrinkles in her forehead... soothe any worry she might feel about our conversation and relationship. I only wanted to add to her life, not take anything from her.

“When you fell into our lives, we thought it was an opportunity to have each other and our Tsigo, but if it bothers

you, then we can go back to being friends without benefits.”

I thought about her words. Did I want them to stop being together just because I was in the picture? Immediately, my gut said no. If anything, I wanted to be sandwiched between—enough dirty thoughts! “Seph, I want you to listen to what I have to say. Without a doubt, I want you and Ryker to continue what you have. It’s beautiful in the kind of love you two have for each other. I don’t think it’s fair to drop into your lives and demand a fidelity that I can’t return with being fated to all of you. This supernatural world of yours is more than I can even comprehend, and yet I have six fated mates. However that works... Maybe Ryker is meant to be your other mate... you know, in addition to me.”

Seph’s gaze burrowed into mine, piercing my soul. Her other knee joined the first, separating my thighs more. When her hips rocked forward, bumping into my core, I groaned. Her mouth claimed mine for a quick, needy kiss. Then she was right back at my waistband. A breathy gasp escaped me as her hand trailed under the fabric. Her fingers slid along my seam, gently parting me as she found my wetness. I couldn’t hold back the hiss as my head fell back.

Seph’s lips trailed along the shell of my ear as one of her fingers dipped inside of me. Her thumb slid through my slick until she found my clit. My hips bucked, giving me over to the pleasure of everything she wanted to give me. “Good, because right before I left, I told Ryker I planned to make you come against my mouth when I saw you next.”

CHAPTER 5



PLEASE, PLEASE LET ME TOUCH YOU.

My gaze was drawn back to Seph's face, her full lips slightly parted and her eyes closed in pleasure. I wanted nothing more than to feel her body against mine, to touch her in all the ways I had already imagined and more.

"Please, please let me touch you," I murmured, barely able to form the words. The mating bond surged, demanding I do more... to do anything to bond us together.

I couldn't hide my need to feel her. My body shuddered at her touch and ached for her to be closer. The bond demanded I claim her first, but I wanted to know everything about her. There was no denying that I was already addicted.

When her gaze met mine, there was a glint of promise I'd never forget. "What my mate wants, she gets," she murmured, her voice low and husky.

Seph shifted so that I could press my body against her, leaning into her curves. With that opportunity, I freed my arms from where she'd pinned them behind my back. She kissed my chin, and I shuddered in anticipation. Her fingertips teased my core, setting fire to my veins and driving me even closer to her.

I felt a wave of pleasure crash over me as her lips traced a path down my neck.

Seph's curves were soft and inviting. Her body fit mine perfectly. Despite her strength and battle training, her skin was as soft as silk while still firm with muscle.

She shivered under my fingertips. I traced the soft skin of her shoulders, the curve of her breasts, and the tender flesh along her collarbone. It was too much. All I could think of was the velvety smooth skin of her naked body, a body that made my mouth water.

“Parker.” Seph moaned, her voice low and sultry. I could listen to the sound of her voice for hours.

With that one word uttered from her delectable lips, I felt lost in a sea of desire. Everything about her sent shock waves through my body.

I kissed her hard and deep, exploring her with my tongue. The sensation was like nothing I’d ever felt before; it was intoxicating and overwhelming.

Seph’s hand slid along my core, thrusting deep before slowly sliding out. Her touch set me ablaze. Every neuron in my body overloaded until she was all I could think about. She moved her hips against me, sending a wave of pleasure coursing through my core. I could feel the heat radiating from her body, and I wanted nothing more than to be closer, to never let her go.

Unable to wait any longer, I unbuttoned her shirt. Her breasts spilled out, begging to be touched and kissed. I couldn’t resist. My tongue traced around her nipples.

Seph moaned again. I could feel the vibration of her voice reverberate throughout my entire body. Her free hand grasped the back of my neck as she leaned into me. She didn’t stop playing with me as I feasted on her breasts. It felt like I was in a dream, and I never wanted to wake up. The pleasure of her touch was too intense, too consuming.

I wanted to make her scream with pleasure. With a sudden surge, I wrapped one of my legs around hers, flipping us over on the bed. We settled with one of my thighs between hers.

Without missing a beat, she pulled me back to her breasts. I worshipped them even as I copied her move from earlier and traced a hand down her body. Her sides hitched with a breath as I teased my way down to her core.

My hands traveled lower, exploring every inch of her. I wanted to know every curve... to fill my memory with the taste and feel of her. Seph responded eagerly, her body pressed against mine as she opened herself up to me.

When my fingers parted her, I groaned. Unable to focus on anything else, I rested my forehead against her body as my fingers explored her pussy. She was warm and wet. Completely intoxicating.

My hips rocked, riding her hand as she showed me exactly what to do. Without words, I followed her direction, using my thumb to play with her clit even as I filled her core with my fingers. Something metal bumped against my thumb as I moved. Was she pierced?

Her head dropped back on the pillow as her hips met my hand, thrust for thrust. When she fisted her hand in my hair, I knew I wasn't ready for her to come yet.

I slid down her body, causing her hand to slide from my pussy. My wetness coated her fingers. She met my gaze, then slowly and deliberately slid her fingers into her mouth, savoring my essence.

Not wanting to be outdone, I copied her. Our gazes were locked as I flicked my tongue out and licked her slick from my fingers. Seph's breath hitched as I licked her essence from my fingers.

"Touché." Seph murmured with a thickness to her voice I'd never heard before.

"Don't think I'm going to stop there." It was a threat and a promise, one that brought a sultry smile to her lips and a burning passion to her eyes.

The scent of sex filled the air, the musky-sweet aroma of two women mingled together. My fingers were salty while her flavor was sweet, like honey and musk. Her scent was intoxicating, making me dizzy with desire and lust. I licked them clean, never taking my eyes from her.

The muscles in her thighs tensed and strained as she slid her legs open and closed, rubbing the fabric of her pajamas

together. They needed to disappear, now.

Our eyes were locked and filled with lust as I trailed kisses down her body. Her chest rose and fell rapidly, her nipples hardening as I pulled her pants off.

Seph watched me shamelessly, her eyes heavy-lidded without a hint of bashfulness. When her thighs parted, opening herself to me, I knew she was completely confident in her own skin. It was hotter than hell.

That was when my attention refocused on the one thing I wanted to explore more than anything else on her body. Seph's pubic hair was a smattering of black hair, lighter around the edges, thinner in some spots but still covering her mound. Her pussy was trimmed, a small silver barbell piercing her hood making her outer lips appear darker.

I dipped my head down, sliding my tongue between her pussy lips. Her essence covered my tongue, permeating my senses. Seph wriggled as my tongue slid up and down her slit, avoiding her clit. Her thighs quivered with each lick, her hips bucking against my face.

Her moan as I licked her core and then finally trailed my tongue over her clit and piercing was music to my ears. As I focused on driving her closer to orgasm, her ragged panting filled the room. She ground her hips against my mouth as she neared orgasm. Seph cried out with each flick to her clit, the tendons in her thighs going taut.

Her hand grasped my chin, forcing me to look up at her instead of chasing her orgasm. "I won't last much longer if you keep on. Besides, it's best if we come together for the mating ritual. I don't know of any same sex matings, but I can feel the mating bond wants to form. So best to stick with the rules as much as possible."

In a fluid motion, she flipped us over, settling her thighs over mine after pulling my pants off. Our eyes were still locked, our connection strong and powerful. I could feel my own arousal coating my inner thighs. Seph lowered her body onto mine, grinding her pussy against mine as she kissed me deeply.

The sensation of her soft skin against mine was enough to make my head spin. As she moved on top of me, our pussies rubbed together in a way that was both intimate and sensual. Her piercing only enhanced the sensations burning through me. The pleasure was too much for me to contain, and I moaned loudly with each delicious thrust of Seph's hips.

Seph gasped as the waves of pleasure rolled over through us. My hands clutched at her waist as I tried to hold back my own orgasm, but it was impossible with Seph writhing so passionately. Her piercing found the perfect spot stimulating my clit.

We moved together in a desperate, sensual rhythm, our bodies meshing together perfectly. Every thrust, every touch, ignited another wave of pleasure throughout my body. I moved faster and harder, unable to control the fire that was consuming me.

My orgasm finally hit like a freight train, sending shockwaves through my entire body and pushing Seph over the edge with me. We cried out in blissful unison as our bodies shook uncontrollably with pleasure. Our bodies quivered as we clung to each other for support until finally exhaustion overcame us both.

We lay there panting, savoring the afterglow of our mating and feeling the new bond surge between us. No words were necessary. We'd discovered something unique in each other. It was reminiscent of my bond with Trux, yet different and new, revealing that all bonds are not alike.

A satisfied grin spread across my face as Seph laid in my arms. Thankfully, my demonic powers hadn't surged with my orgasm.

In my lower back, an electric pain shot through my muscles. Seph seemed to notice something was happening through our bond because she sat up the same time as I pitched forward on the bed. We fell to the floor as absolute horror washed over me. No, not right now.

CHAPTER 6



HE'S A HELLHOUND, NOT A GOLDEN
RETRIEVER.

A sonic boom filled the room, echoing through the small space until my eardrums felt like they were going to explode. All over my back, an electric burning sensation scorched my flesh. I should have known something would happen when I bonded with Seph, but I hadn't expected this. Fur brushed along my back, confirming my horror.

"What the fuck?" Seph gasped as she scrambled to push me behind her.

I fumbled with my pajamas, trying to get them back on. "Wait! I can explain."

Seph shouldered me back, keeping herself between me, and the giant three headed hellhound. "That thing will eat you and not even think twice. You wouldn't even count as an appetizer. I don't understand how you summoned it."

Protective urges surged through the bond from Seph, wrapping around me like a cocoon of love and loyalty. She genuinely wanted to protect me from the giant hellhound. I loved her for that, but I didn't want him to hurt her or the opposite. "Please, let me explain before you attack Cerbie."

She didn't move other than to turn her head far enough to glance at me from the corner of her eye. "You nicknamed him Cerbie?" The incredulous sound of her voice only exacerbated my frustration.

"What? He looks like Cerberus. What else should I have named him?" I shrank back like a scolded child.

Cerbie let out a deep growl that shook the entire room. I wasn't sure how he didn't destroy the room. Now that I looked him over, he was smaller than he'd been before, but not by much. Both of his left legs perched on the bed, while the right ones were on the floor. His three heads craned down, taking up most of the space in the room. Long ropes of dog drool dripped from the middle head's jowls.

"That is disgusting." Seph groaned.

"Oh, shit." Before he could react to her negative tone, I jumped out from behind Seph. "You're a good boy. Ignore her, she didn't mean it."

"What are—" Her voice died when I waved my hand to shush.

In the happiest voice I could manage, I looked at Seph from the corner of my eye. "Cerbie is such a good boy. Tends to be a bit sensitive when you insult him or call his slime disgusting, so we don't do that." I turned my attention back to the hellhound, despite the outraged look Seph gave me. "Isn't that right, Cerbie? You're just the sweetest boy. Not hungry or looking for a midnight snack... right?"

Now I had the attention of two heads, but the third one seemed to be more suspicious than the others. It was the same head that had watched Ro in the cavern. It made sense that each head would have its own personality, but that also made it more difficult for me to figure out.

"You can't be serious, Parker."

I cut her off with a noise deep in my throat at the same time the suspicious head pulled its lips back, showing off its long, sharp teeth.

Seph altered her tone, using what I could only describe as a customer service voice. Everything about it screamed calm, cool, collected, polite, and sarcastic as fuck. "That creature thinks demons are chew toys. What do you think he'll do to you? Look, I'm not the demonologist, but even I know you shouldn't have been able to summon this thing." Her tone of voice and words clashed in a way that would be comical if

there wasn't a massive three headed hellhound drooling all over my secret government compound bedroom.

The door to my room opened unannounced. I didn't have a chance to see who'd witnessed a bizarre and probably terrifying sight because there was a squeak and then rapidly disappearing footsteps.

Cerbie snarled as he somehow fit through a doorway more narrow than his shoulders.

"No. Bad boy! Come back here!" I darted into the hallway after him, but he'd focused on his prey. I jumped back in my room and grabbed my shoes before I took off after him. "Wait here, I'll be right back."

As I took off after the three headed hellhound, I barely registered Seph grabbing her pajamas and taking off after us. Right now, my only focus was protecting Cerbie and whoever the poor soul was that caught his attention.

I hadn't even been in their program for a full day and I was already destroying things. I'd never pass. Then a darker thought ran through my mind. If I fucked this up bad enough, I wouldn't just screw up my own life... My entire team would be at the mercy of the general or whoever he was.

With renewed focus, I bolted down the hallway, frantically following the Erie howling that sent shivers down my spine. He was distraught over something. As I turned the final corner, my feet failed to compensate for what my brain couldn't process in time.

I'd run into some kind of obstacle course. It was at least two stories tall, with several stations set up. They seemed to cover most every physical challenge there was. On the far side of the gymnasium, was a floor to ceiling pole.

Cerbie let out another bone chilling howl. Two of the heads focused on the human screaming for help while desperately clutching the pole, and the third head announced their displeasure to anyone within hearing distance.

"This isn't good." I groaned as I did an embarrassed, nothing-to-see-here jog over to the hellhound.

“Parker! Seriously, we need to call for help. And what are the shoes for?”

Thankfully, Cerbie didn't focus on Seph's less than pleasant tone. It gave me a moment to try to catch his attention. “Cerbie!” I waved both of my shoes through the air. “Come on boy, let's play!”

The room shook as two of the heads tried to fight for control of the body. His feet turned in contrasting directions, causing him to lose balance. A boom echoed through the room as he fell to the ground. He let out a whine, then two of the heads snarled at each other. Glistening white teeth flashed at each other as they dove for the other.

Shit. Shit. Shit. I had to do something quick, but aside from tossing a show, I didn't know how to tame or even begin to recall him. Where was Rhiot when I needed him? Oh right, being held by an ominous dark agency... or at least withheld from me. My mate bond surged, outraged I hadn't claimed him yet, but I couldn't do anything about that right now.

My next move could only be described as desperately stupid. Seph screamed my name the moment I moved, but my entire focus was on protecting Cerbie. The last thing I wanted was for them to kill... end... I wasn't sure what it was called, but I didn't want him to be gone permanently. My feet jumped into motion. I sprinted across the room, my hands landing on his belly the moment I reached him. In long soothing strokes, I pet his belly while murmuring every variation of who's-a-good-boy.

“I can't fucking believe this. Parker, he's a hellhound, not a golden retriever.” Seph protested as she neared me.

Cerbie's middle head chomped onto the back of my pajama shirt, lifting me off the floor as his body rolled into a crouch. He deposited me on his back as he stood to his full height. The head on the left leaned down close to Seph, who stood completely motionless with a look of fear on her face.

“Hey, leave her alone. That's my mate, so you need to be nice to her.” I tapped the middle head's nose since that face still craned around to watch me.

As if the hellhound understood me, one of the other heads leaned down and scooped her up. Instead of depositing her on his back like he'd done to me, he held her in his jowls as he burst into a run. He didn't slow down as the wall quickly came closer.

“Cerbie, wait!”

He didn't heed my command, nor did he hesitate. The hellhound charged the wall at full speed. I clutched onto his fur, holding on for dear life, hoping Seph would be okay. Even though I braced myself for the impact, I couldn't keep my eyes open. Any second now, we'd crash full force into the wall, and it would hurt like hell.

One breath.

Any time now.

Two breaths.

Please don't hurt Seph. A strange tingling sensation flowed through me.

Three breaths.

Literally any second now, we'd hit the wall. Shouldn't my life be flashing before my eyes?

Four breaths.

We should have hit the wall by now, but I didn't want to open my eyes just in time to see the impact. Maybe it seemed like a long time when, in reality, my adrenaline surging caused it to feel like time was slowing down.

Five breaths.

“Parker! Tell this beast to put me down!” Seph shouted.

Something was wrong. Now I was certain we should have hit the wall. We'd been too close for Cerbie to run this long and fast without hitting it. When I opened my eyes, a chill slid down my spine. We weren't in the gymnasium, on the verge of splatting into a wall. We weren't even in a different part of the compound. Hell, I didn't even think we were in the human realm anymore.

Cerbie slowed down, taking a moment to drop Seph on the ground after he stopped walking. An acrid scent burned my nostrils as weight dropped into my gut. Black pools of oozing liquid bubbled in the rocky cavern we stood in. The hellhound laid on his belly, letting me slide off his back. Without Ro, I had no idea how to get us out of this demon realm.

CHAPTER 7



IT'S A GOOD THING YOU'RE CUTE.

*P*anic seized my lungs as every minute passed, my chest caving in with anxiety. Seph and I had been desperately searching for a way out of the hell realm we were trapped in for what felt like centuries, but all our efforts seemed in vain. Every way we went just reconnected to the labyrinth of tunnels which always routed us back to the main cavern where I'd first met Cerbie.

The hell realm was a rocky cavern, and the only light came from black pools of slime that contained damned souls and a few sparse torches protruding from the rocky walls. It was suffocating, and I felt like I couldn't breathe. The longer we stayed there, the more hopeless I felt.

The air was hot and humid, like a rainforest in the middle of summer, with a stale scent of decay. The place sang with the cacophony of anguished groans and soft sobbing. It was a chorus of suffering from the doomed and damned souls, always repeating the same notes of misery and despair from within their black, oozing pools.

How we had gotten there and how to escape were now buried beneath a fog of terror and frustration. Nothing was certain except that we could never be parted from one another, no matter what happened, no matter where we were. The moment I lost Seph would be the moment I lost all hope of escaping. My legs burned from the constant walking. The ground was hot and dry. I couldn't seem to avoid tripping over the endless jagged floor and rocks of the cavern.

“I can’t believe we’re stuck here,” Seph said, her words dripping with despair and disbelief.

“We’ve been trying to find a way out of this realm for hours, but I don’t think there is one. When I was here before, Ro brought us in and he was the only reason I left.” I glanced around us, the cavern an endless tunnel of hopelessness. My voice lost the rest of its bravado. “I have no clue how he did it.”

Seph looked at me in surprise. “You were here before? When?”

I sighed, knowing that I had to explain the truth. “After Ro took me from Grayson, this was one of the places he made me go. Or one just like this. I’m not sure why Cerbie brought us here, of all places.”

Cerberus, or Cerbie as I had started calling him, was still in the form of my giant three-headed hell hound. He had been relatively quiet and staying out of mischief, which was unusual for him. I guessed he was just as frustrated as we were. Or disinterested. I hadn’t quite figured him out yet.

“Well, no matter why he brought us here, we have to get out of here soon. We can’t stay here forever.” Seph’s lips pressed into a thin line as she thought about it. “The guys are probably catching hell from our handler since they’ll be blamed for the disappearance.”

I hated the thought that they might be punished for my disappearance when they’d had nothing to do with it. I couldn’t bear the thought of something bad happening to them because of me, so I had to find a way out of this place. “We have to keep looking.”

Seph and I continued on, searching every nook and cranny of the cavern for any sign of a way out. We tested every wall with our hands and feet, sometimes causing small rockslides that seemed to echo throughout the entire realm. The despair in the air seemed even stronger now as we disturbed whatever peace remained in this hellhole.

Still anxious, I scanned the area for any possible escape route, but there was none. It seemed like we were truly stuck in purgatory and would remain so until someone came to our rescue. Just when I was about to give up hope entirely, Seph gasped and pointed towards something in the distance.

“Look!” her voice shook with excitement. “It’s an opening. Maybe that’s our way out.”

Suddenly filled with a burst of energy, I sprinted toward where Seph had pointed... an opening at the end of the tunnel that looked like an exit point from this realm of darkness and torment. We ran faster than ever before, not wanting to waste even a second looking back on what could have been our prison for eternity. When we reached the exit point, it seemed too good to be true.

And it was. As soon as we stepped through the opening, a group of demons waited for us with cruel smiles on their ugly faces. As fearful as I was, I couldn’t look away from their imposing figures. They were hideous and every bit as frightful as the stories I’d been told as a child.

The demon’s red glowing eyes and thick black horns made it seem more animal than humanoid. The yellow fangs embedded in its black lips gave it away as a predator with absolutely bloodthirsty intentions. Their black wings were jagged and caked with dried blood from their past victims. Their hands were rough and calloused as they gripped their weapons of choice.

The leader stepped forward, glowering down at us with eyes full of malice and hatred. He spoke in a deep, gravelly voice that sent chills down my spine. “Look at this, right where he said she would be.”

I glanced at Seph nervously before speaking up, terrified but determined to face whatever danger we were in head on. “What are you talking about? Who sent you?”

The leader snarled before gesturing towards the tunnel behind us. “Your father did. Ro sent us here to capture both of you.”

Cerberus growled and took a step forward, ready to fight. Seph waved her hand, magickally producing a bow, quiver, and two daggers strapped to her body. A sai appeared in both of her hands as she took a battle stance.

“No one is taking us anywhere,” Seph snarled, her voice steady and determined. There wasn’t a hint of fear in her eyes. Cerberus barked ferociously, as if to add emphasis to Seph’s words.

The leader of the demons smirked before gesturing to his minions with a wave of his hand. His lips parted, and it sounded like the grating of metal against metal mixed with the screech of a bird of prey that signals the death of small animals and their progeny. Instantly, the group attacked with weapons drawn and spells flying through the air.

I ducked for cover behind some rubble while Seph fought with whatever magick she could muster up. Occasionally, I found a rock and chucked it at the head of a demon to distract him. Cerberus leapt around them like an excited puppy, barking and snarling at their attackers as he dodged each strike that was sent his way. One of its head’s bit a demon in half, tossing it in the air before he swallowed it.

In the battle’s chaos, a demon knocked Seph to the ground. I fought off a demon that found my hiding spot and came at me from the side. I was about to be hit when Cerbie jumped in and took the hit for me. An explosion rocked the cavern, sending both of us to our knees.

Cerberus howled in pain, and I felt like my heart was breaking. Seph and I rushed to his side. She took up a defensive position to protect us both as I tried to comfort the hell hound. The wound had burned through his flesh and exposed his ribs in several places.

“You might as well give up now, demon. I won’t let you take her alive.” Seph snarled as she sliced through a demon’s side. Blood splattered everywhere. “I don’t care what Ro has ordered you to do.”

I frantically reassured my beast he would be okay as tears streamed down my cheeks. I didn’t know if he would be or

not. Hell, I didn't know what I was doing on a good day... and this was anything but.

The leader of the demons made a noise that would haunt me for the rest of my life. The attacking demons froze mid strike. "Now that we've eliminated the only threat in the room, we can talk."

I turned on the demon snarling, "what the fuck makes you think I want to talk to you after what you've done?"

The demon raised an eyebrow. His teeth flashed as he spoke. "It's a demon. Once it returns to its master, it will heal."

"Of course." I grumbled as I turned my attention back to Cerbie. "Come on boy, back into a tattoo. I'll take care of you."

The large hell hound's body contorted as it shrank, then returned to me as a tattoo on my flesh. Colors oozed into the black ink, and the pattern shifted, as if alive. Sudden and intense pain plagued my chest as he settled between my sternum and neck. I wanted to tell him to move because I wasn't sure I could bear his pain, but I somehow knew he'd done it on purpose, reminding the demon leader that he hadn't actually left yet.

When I stood next to Seph, she glanced at me before I heard her voice in my mind. *You know we can't trust them, right?*

I responded to her in the same way, hoping she could hear me through the mate bond. *We don't have a choice unless you've got an interdimensional realm portal tucked away somewhere.*

Smart ass. It's a good thing you're cute.

It's a good thing you're a badass. I mentally retorted.

Seph snorted.

The demon leader motioned for us to follow them and soon we were walking down a path lined with hostile looking trees and strange creatures scurrying around in the shadows. Behind us were demons that were previously frozen, silently

following us. The air seemed to thicken as we walked further along the path, and it felt like something sinister was watching us from the darkness.

Chills ran down my spine as I realized we were in an eerily beautiful yet dangerous realm filled with endless secrets and unknown horrors lurking around every corner.

We eventually reached a clearing where a tall black stone tower stood surrounded by flaming pits of fire and curved bridges leading up to the entrance high above our heads. Pure terror slid through my veins like liquid ice. This tower was powerful and foreboding. Cerbie paced around on my chest, letting me know even he was uncomfortable from where we were.

Suddenly, the demon leader stopped and turned towards us. “You have a choice. You can stay here forever, bound by powerful magick, or I can make you a bargain.” He stepped closer to me and smiled. “If you complete an errand for me, just retrieving a little talisman from the human realm and then bring it back here to me, then I will free you from this place and grant you access back to your own world.”

“What does the talisman do?”

He waved a dismissive hand. “That is none of your concern. What you should be focused on is not failing me, because if you do, you’ll never leave the torment of this realm again.”

My heart skipped a beat as I processed what he was saying. Without knowing what the talisman did, I wasn’t sure I wanted him to have it, but at least it gave me some hope. On the other hand, if I failed in my mission, then I would be doomed to remain in this realm forever. The thought gave me chills, even though it could also lead to my freedom.

The demon leader continued speaking, his voice dripping with malicious glee. “I’ll send Mephistral with you on your journey. He’ll take the same form as your pet. He’ll be a reminder of your fate should you fail. If he returns here with the talisman safely in his possession, then your freedom is

guaranteed. Otherwise...” he paused ominously before continuing. “...you will remain here with us forever.”

CHAPTER 8



HE'LL BE IN FOR A SURPRISE WHEN HE
SEES HER.

*M*y heart raced, every beat a terrible reminder of the mistake I'd made. I'd broken the first rule of dealing with a demon: never make a bargain. I could feel the consequences of my mistake already, but knowing I'd have to do it a second time... the dread that came with it was unbearable. My infernal demon gene donor had tricked me and I was damned to suffer for eternity.

"You expect us to just trust you?" Seph snarled, her fangs bared. The sight of her ready to throw down was terrifying while hot as hell. She was a force to be reckoned with. The fangs made me pause. They hadn't been there earlier. Sometimes it was easy to forget she wasn't human... None of my mates were.

I glanced at Seph, hoping the demons couldn't actually hear our communication through the mating bond. *What do you think?*

Babe, we can't trust him. We have no idea what the talisman does. Her gaze didn't flicker away from the demon leader or his followers.

She was right, but at the same time, I couldn't see any other way to get out of here. Maybe there was a way we could get out of it later that Rhiot could help us with once we were free.

His low chuckle echoed in the air like a rumble of thunder and reverberated off the surrounding walls. It was filled with malice and amusement that sent chills down my spine. "Trust

is a funny thing, isn't it? You have no choice but to trust me if you ever want to leave this realm."

"You still haven't told us anything about the talisman."

The demon leader, who hadn't introduced himself, huffed in amusement. He grinned, his eyes glowing with malicious intent. "The talisman is an ancient artifact of immense power. Our kind created it long ago and kept it in an uncharted realm of our own. It's rumored to have unrivaled power."

Seph cut her hand through the air. "More reason for us to not retrieve it for you."

He paused, his expression growing darker. "Some power-hungry vampire stole it from us. The bastard trapped us here when he escaped. That's why I'm offering you a chance to retrieve it."

"So, wait." My thoughts raced to put the pieces together. "You had it and claimed it has untold power, but you don't know for sure?"

My heart raced as I tried to decide the best course of action. Seph wouldn't agree to the terms, and if I refused, we would never escape this place. Taking the risk and trying to retrieve the talisman was a gamble, but staying here with no way out felt like a death sentence. Was I willing to gamble our lives on one chance?

"Fine," I said, my voice low and menacing. "I'll do it."

"But if you hurt Parker, or any of her mates, the deal is off." Seph stepped forward with an air of menace, her eyes dark and unyielding as she advanced. Her lips pulled back in a snarl, revealing clenched teeth and dangerous looking fangs that somehow seemed longer than before in a warning of retribution. "Then you'll realize hell is nothing compared to what I'll do to you."

A shiver ran down my back at her threat. Beautiful and terrifying... Seph was definitely someone I never wanted to truly piss off. Though, I might be the one person safe from her wrath.

My attention returned to the demon. “We’ve agreed to your terms. Now release us.”

The demon leader smiled. “All in due time. Mephistral will accompany you on your journey. It will make sure that you don’t try anything foolish.”

Mephistral stepped forward, his fiery eyes gleaming. “Don’t worry. I’ll make sure they complete the task.”

“How long—”

The demon leader snapped his fingers, the surrounding air darkened and swirled, a maelstrom of evil and death tinged with silver light. The walls of the room seemed to bend and warp, and the screams of tortured souls filled the abyss. All of this centered around the demon leader’s outstretched hand, a hand that seemed to pull us into oblivion.

A pungent acrid scent of sulfur burned in my nose and throat like acid as it engulfed Seph and me. It was a stench so foul it was almost unbearable. Behind it was an odor of something rotten and unclean, sulfuric and acrid, mixed with decay and death that made my stomach churn and my skin crawl.

Before the darkness engulfed us, I saw Seph open her mouth while reaching out her hand, but the abyss swallowed her words. Ice shards sliced through my skin, piercing me with their eternal frigidness.

When it felt like an eternity had passed and I couldn’t stand anymore, a blinding light appeared. The darkness dumped us into the warmth of the light, leaving me chilled to my core as tears poured down my cheeks. Pain exploded in my shoulders and hips as something slammed into me, but I couldn’t stand to open my eyes to see what hit me.

“Parker? Please come back to us.” A voice soft as a cloud wrapped around me, reassuring me I was safe. “Turn off the lights!”

“Ryker?” My voice sounded like glass shards grinding as I tried to speak. Felt like it too.

My eyes fluttered open to find Ryker's concerned face looking down at me. I was lying on a couch in an unfamiliar living room. It took several attempts to scan the room, but the lights being off really helped. Then I remembered the demon lord, and I was suddenly wide awake.

"Where's Ro?" I asked, struggling to get up. "And Mephistral?"

Seph pushed me back down. "It's okay. Ro's not here. The team is still trying to find out where he is."

Ryker spoke up. "Who's Mephistral?"

"I am." An inhuman hiss filled the room. The demon snarled, emitting a sound that sent dread washing over me.

My eyes finally cooperated, fully adjusting to the darker room. On the edge of the couch, sat a much smaller version of the demon sent to supervise us. He was about four inches tall and more cute than menacing.

"What the hell is that?" Ryker pointed to the miniature creature.

Mephistral jumped off the arm of the couch, then marched up my leg until he stood on my knee. He put his hands on his hips as he glared at Ryker. "Mephistral, the Malevolent Marauder of the Midnight Realm, Bringer of Blight and Betrayal, Harbinger of Hellish Horrors, Devourer of Souls, Cursed Conjuror of Cataclysms and Chaos, Master of the Maleficent and Weaver of Woe."

"You sound like indigestion to me." Ryker reached out to flick the demon, but the creature jumped into the air, diving toward me until he disappeared under my shirt.

Blinding pain scalded my skin as the demon moved down to my belly where he thankfully stayed still. That was when I noticed Cerbie wasn't on my chest anymore. As if he'd heard me think about him, I felt a ripple along my shoulders, reminding me he was still here.

It was a solid minute of deep breathing before I got the pain under control. When my vision returned to normal, I tried to speak, but my voice refused to cooperate.

So much had happened in the last few days that I wasn't sure how I'd cope with it. Emotions welled up inside of me as my frustration overwhelmed my control. I attempted to hold back my emotions with the last of my strength, but it required more than I had left in me.

Resting my arm over my head, I buried my face into the bend of my elbow. Then the rest of my strength collapsed, folding in on itself until the only thing that was left were my raw emotions. A sob wracked my chest as my tears freely ran down my cheeks.

Ryker placed a comforting hand on my shoulder. "It's going to be okay. We'll find Ro."

"It's a little more complicated than that. There's a lot we need to catch up on." Seph grumbled as she lifted my legs, then put them in her lap after she sat on the couch. She squeezed my leg. "Parker, everything will be okay eventually."

I nodded, but wasn't sure I would be okay for a long time. My mind was still trying to process the information that was revealed in the past few days. It was overwhelming, and I didn't know if I'd be able to handle it all.

"Where's Trux?" I murmured from my ridiculous hiding spot. He wasn't close, but other than that, I couldn't feel anything else from him through the mating bond.

"Eh... Last I heard, he was in South Africa." Ryker was obviously unenthused. He lifted my head, then rested it on his lap. His fingers stroked the arm still covering my face. "I was worried about you. Both of you."

Seph responded. "And he's been there for how long?"

"Two days?" Ryker answered, unsure. "After the powers that be recalled us to a training base in Kansas, we got our asses handed to us for helping you all escape."

"What? You didn't—Oh, yeah. I could see where they came to that conclusion." Seph's voice drifted off. "How long were we gone after the prison break?"

"Four days. Thought Trux was going to level the building to the ground trying to find you two. Speaking of Trux, you

should call him.”

“And get my ass chewed? I don’t think so. Just tell him to come here. Then when he tries to yell at me for things I couldn’t control, he’ll see Parker and forget I even exist.” Seph laughed. “Though he’ll be in for a surprise when he sees her.”

My heart sank as I realized just how much time had passed. Four days without knowing where I was must have been unbearable for him and the rest of my mates, especially with the bond we shared. I knew he must be hurting... all of them, and I felt guilty for not figuring out how to return to him sooner.

Ryker’s fingers continued to stroke my arm, trying to soothe me. “We’ll figure it out. Together.”

Seph was the first to stand up. “Let’s go find something to eat. Parker needs to rest, and we need to catch up properly.”

I nodded, grateful for the distraction. The pain in my belly from the demon had subsided, but my mind was still reeling from everything that had happened. As Seph stood, I couldn’t help but wonder what other surprises awaited us on this new journey.

“No.”

I pulled my arm from my face and looked up at Ryker.

“Why not?” Seph turned to face us with confusion on her face.

Ryker wiped away my tears as he looked down at me. “Because I can’t bear to be away from you.”

It was a sweet sentiment, but I couldn’t help but notice the underlying uncertainty in his voice. It was clear that he was still processing everything that had happened and wasn’t quite sure where he stood in all of it.

Seph rolled her eyes, but there was a fondness in her tone. “Oh, come on. We’ll be back in no time. And she needs the rest. It’s been a long few days for her.”

Ryker’s head shook with a firm defiance, and his hands moved to encircle my face. His lips moved closer, the intensity

of his gaze burning into me like an inferno. His voice quivered with intensity as he said, “I won’t do it. I won’t leave you. The thought of it rends my heart. You’re my everything now. There’s no way I can bear us being separated.”

He loomed over me, his mouth a hair’s breadth away from mine, and I could sense the boiling passion that surged through him. His voice was a desperate whisper, urging me to bind my soul to his. “It will drive me insane if you’re apart from me again. If we’re bonded, then I’ll at least know you’re okay.”

I closed my eyes, my heart pounding in my chest as I felt his passion radiating from him. Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes and looked into Ryker’s. His eyes were burning with a fiery passion, and I knew in that moment that he truly was one of my mates.

Ryker’s kiss was electric, and every sensation ran through my body like a livewire. His lips tasted sweet, and his kiss was full of need. I felt my heart swell. The bond demanded us to mate as he pulled away, our eyes still locked.

“I claim you as my mate.” I whispered, needing more of his touch... his kisses... his everything.

Ryker grinned, his face brightening as he leaned down to kiss me again.

Seph cleared her throat, “fuck, that was hot as hell.”

CHAPTER 9



YOU ARE WELCOME TO DO THAT AGAIN.
ANY TIME. ACTUALLY, I INSIST.

Ryker pulled away and chuckled, and then his gaze turned serious. His gaze bore into my soul. “Are you sure you’re okay? I can wait if you need to heal... No matter how badly I need you, your wellbeing will always come first.”

I nodded, not trusting my voice as emotion clogged my throat. Ever since I’d seen Ryker and Seph kneeling at my feet, silently begging for me to choose them... I knew I needed them both. Trux had demanded Seph taste me, ordering her to stop when I’d gotten too close to orgasm. Ryker had desperately tried to taste me by kissing Seph after she stopped.

Aside from a twinge of parental guilt instilled by my late judgmental mother, it had been one of the hottest moments of my life. When I’d finally relented and called Trux my alpha, I hadn’t been able to choose between them... and I never would. I needed each of them for the mate bond, but I wanted them at the same time.

I reached up and ran my fingers through Ryker’s hair, drawing him down for another deep, passionate kiss.

In that moment, I felt the mate bond surge between us, demanding that we take each other. Claim each other’s bodies... and souls.

Seph watched us, and in a quiet voice she said, “I think you two should be alone for the bonding.” She smiled kindly and then excused herself, her footsteps fading down the hallway.

Ryker pulled away, transfixed, as Seph left us. He watched her leave, but I saw the concern in his eyes when he glanced at me. I put my hand on his wrist. “It’s okay. She’s happy for us, but she wants us to focus on this.”

Ryker’s gaze was heavy and intense as he leaned back and ran his hand through his hair. There was a long pause before he spoke, his voice soft and uncertain. “Are you sure?”

I smiled as my arms slipped around his shoulders, pulling him in close. His breath was warm against my cheek. I felt the electricity of his skin as I pressed a kiss to his lips. His hands came up to cup my face, and he looked into my eyes.

“Yes,” I reassured him, “I’m sure. You’re mine.”

Ryker’s eyes burned with passion as he scooped me up in his arms. I felt surrounded by his strength as I clung to him, my breath catching in anticipation. He kicked the bedroom door open and raced to the bed, gently depositing me in a cloud of blankets and pillows. His gaze smoldered with desire as he hungrily looked into my eyes, the surrounding air alive with passion.

“Want to know something?” He kissed down my neck and then my chest, his hands working their way up to my nipples, teasing and playing with them as I moaned in pleasure. I felt my desire rise with each touch.

I was too foggy with passion to use actual words. “Hmm?”

“Ever since the first time we met...” The second his lips touched mine, I felt electricity course through my veins. His hands moved down my body, barely grazing my skin, leaving behind goosebumps in their wake. “I haven’t been able to get you out of my mind.”

“A lot has happened since then.”

“True, but there is one thing that hasn’t changed.”

Then his fingertips found my inner thighs and paused there briefly. My heart fluttered as my breath quickened.

“What’s that?”

“How badly I wanted to taste you.” Ryker leaned down and licked the hollow of my neck, sending a shock of heat all the way to my core.

“Damn.” It was barely a guttural moan. The man did wicked things to me, and we weren’t even naked yet.

Ryker slid down my body, slowly caressing and kissing as he peeled my clothes off at a torturous rate. “Sure, I got a taste when I licked your essence off Seph’s lips. It was heavenly, but I haven’t been able to stop wondering what you’d taste like without her. Seph makes everything taste better, but you’re my Tsigo.”

His tongue circled my stomach, just above my belly button, and then flicked to my left nipple, circling it as well.

“So you want me... without Seph.”

He chuckled, his breath warming my sensitive breast. “I love her, but I want to taste you, too. I want to taste you together. Hell, I want to taste both of you as you do wicked things to each other. I’ve dreamed of it since I first saw you.” His lips closed around my nipple and he inhaled deeply. Then he sucked, sending sparks across my body. Ryker lapped at my breast, his tongue laving over the nipple, teasing and tasting my skin.

My fingers found his hair, and I gently combed through his length. It was just long enough to hold... and pull. “Mm.” I sighed. With each stroke of his tongue, it seemed like he pushed my every worry away.

“The entire time you two were gone, I couldn’t stop thinking about how I couldn’t lose you. Either of you.”

I gasped as he latched onto my other nipple. My hips rose off the mattress, nestling him between my thighs as I rocked against him. “I’m sorry.”

“Never be sorry. None of this has been your fault. You didn’t choose to be part of our fucked up world.” He ceased his exploration of my breasts, sliding down my body with a trail of kisses. “You’re innocent.”

My fingers latched onto one of his hands. I pulled his palm to my lips, kissing and nuzzling it as he teased his way down my body. I wouldn't call myself innocent, but I saw his point.

The warmth of his breath against my skin sent shivers of anticipation through my body. His eyes never left mine as his lips moved closer until I felt the softness of his lips brush against my inner thigh. His tongue darted out, and the sensation caused me to gasp, my back arching as his mouth explored my sensitive flesh.

Ryker's hand moved up my legs, slowly teasing and caressing my skin until they cupped my hips, his fingers digging into my flesh. He shifted his position, and I felt his breath against my center, doubling my anticipation.

His tongue flicked out, tracing circles around my swelling clit and then dipping lower, exploring and tasting me until I was consumed by pleasure. Then I felt him thrust inside of me, his tongue filling my core. My hips moved of their own volition, pushing my body further into his mouth as he continued to lavish me with his skillful tongue.

My hands found his hair, and I clutched it tightly as my orgasm began to build. He moved faster, his tongue working my clit and then sucking it into his mouth as he increased his speed. I felt like I was on the edge, the pleasure so intense that I thought I might burst.

"Please," I begged as I rocked my hips. "Please give me more."

Ryker's mouth moved with skill and precision, knowing just the right amount of pressure and intensity to bring me to the edge. He teased me, pulling back just as I was on the brink of orgasm and then starting again, his tongue and lips making my entire body quiver with pleasure.

My hips bucked wildly against his face, trying to give me the little bit extra I needed to find my orgasm. "Ryker, fuck. Please let me come."

Then he bit down, ever so gently, and I let out a soft cry as my body convulsed in pleasure. I felt my orgasm crash over

me, my body shaking as the intensity of it took my breath away.

“Ryker...” I moaned, as I shattered into a million pieces as an orgasm tore through my body.

My back arched off the bed, my fingers clenching the sheets as Ryker licked my pussy until I was on the verge of another orgasm. He kept going, pushing me further and further as I fell deeper and deeper into a state of pure bliss. Every stroke of his tongue seemed to amplify my pleasure until I was lost in a sea of sensation.

Ryker slowly pulled away, his lips glistening with my arousal. His eyes were dark and passionate as he looked up at me, a satisfied smirk on his face.

“Well,” he said, his voice low and husky. “I guess that answers my question.” Ryker found his way back up to my lips, kissed me softly and whispered. “You taste as good as I knew you would.”

“You,” I panted while trying to regain my breath, “are welcome to do that again. Any time. Actually, I insist.”

He nipped my chin. “As you wish, mate, but I’d like Seph to join me next time.”

The groan escaped before I could stop his words from creating a rather clear image in my mind. “I’d be an idiot to protest.”

“It’s a deal.” Ryker’s fingers expertly worked over my body, coaxing forth more moans of pleasure as his lips clashed against mine. When I reached between our bodies to grab his cock, he pulled his hips away. “Touch me like that, and I’ll forget to be gentle with you.”

A part of me was tempted to push him like I had Trux, but I decided against it. I wanted to see what he’d do on his own. Next time I’d push him.

Ryker pressed his cock against my core, slowly pushing deep inside of me. I gasped as I felt myself stretch around him, my body trembling with sensations. His thrusts were slow and

steady at first, his size filling me completely and pushing me further than before.

Every movement he made came with a deep, animalistic growl that only heightened the intensity of the moment. My heart raced as the pleasure mounted inside. After my body adjusted, he pressed my legs together, then hooked them over one of his shoulders.

I had never felt so good. Ryker's every touch sent shivers of pleasure down my spine, and I felt myself getting closer and closer to the edge. He leaned forward until my knees were next to my face. I bit my lip to keep from screaming out as he drove me past reason.

Ryker's body was like a work of art, every muscle straining and flexing as he moved. Dark lines from tattoos scrawled across his skin and I wanted to lick every bit of them. His skin was slick with sweat, and I felt his heart pounding against my legs as he continued to ravage me. His breath was hot on my neck, and I felt him growing harder and harder with every thrust.

One hand dug into my hips while the other caressed my neck. It was possessive and delicious. With every thrust, my pleasure increased until I was screaming out in pure ecstasy. He increased his speed, his thrusts becoming harder and faster until I could barely keep up.

Ryker moved faster, his thrusts becoming more intense. He was relentless, pushing me over the edge and then pulling back just in time for me to catch my breath before pushing me back over again.

The sensation of my orgasm grew with an intensity that I had never felt before. I gasped and shuddered, letting out a primal scream that echoed off the walls, reverberating through the entire room, until I collapsed in a euphoric release. Wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me, leaving me shuddering and panting beneath Ryker as he continued to send aftershocks of orgasms through me.

Ryker's body went rigid with pleasure and he tensed against me as he shuddered with delight. My muscles

contracted around him and I felt my heart pounding out of my chest. He released my legs, gently setting them on the bed, since I was too relaxed to even move a muscle.

He pulled me against his chest as we lay in a tangle of limbs, spent from our exertions. We lay like that for a long moment, our breathing in sync and slowing down.

“Parker?”

There was a thread in his voice that pulled me from the bliss I floated in. “Yes, mate?”

“I don’t... I don’t feel the mate bond.”

CHAPTER 10



HE NEEDS HIS SCENT ON YOU.

This wasn't right... no way could this be happening. Everything I learned about this new paranormal world was on the verge of shattering.

"Seph!" Ryker yelled, his voice hoarse with panic and fear. He clutched me to his chest. It felt like if he let go of me, we'd never have another chance.

Suddenly, Seph was there. I could feel her tension from across the room, and a chill went down my spine. This was bad... oh so bad. Through our mating bond, I left her shock and confusion before the connection between us shut down, leaving me feeling more alone than before.

No one moved or even breathed as we stared at each other while the realization sank in. The atmosphere in the room became tense and heavy, weighing down on us as we all tried to reject what the new reality was.

The mating bond had not formed... I just needed to know if we'd done something wrong, or if Ryker wasn't one of my mates.

"It's been 24 hours in both dimensions, right?" Ryker questioned, his voice strained. "It's been days on this side. I know that for sure."

Seph shrugged a shoulder. "There was no way to tell. We were underground for most of it. With the way time warps in those dimensions, it's impossible to tell. I'm not even sure Rhio would be able to figure it out."

“What if...?” I finally found my voice, but Seph picked up where I left off.

“No, don’t think like that.” She crossed her arms but didn’t move toward us. “He’s your mate. I’m certain of it. Besides, if he wasn’t, then he wouldn’t have gotten a boner.”

I turned and looked up at Ryker’s face, but he didn’t acknowledge my movement. His actions felt intentional as he ignored my attention. “Unless—”

“Shut your fucking mouth.” Seph snarled as she pointed a finger toward him aggressively. “Don’t you dare say that. Don’t you even fucking think it.”

There was a meaning behind his words I hadn’t caught, and Seph wouldn’t even entertain explaining the idea. When we were alone, I’d ask Ryker. Though I doubted he would tell me, since he refused to even look at me. At least he hadn’t recoiled from me.

Silence filled the room, bringing back the sober atmosphere. I couldn’t stand it. This wasn’t normal for them. Usually Ryker and Seph rified off each other, working in tandem to take on the rest of the team or even each other.

I’d caused this rift between Seph and Ryker... Except it wouldn’t stop at them. No, this would affect the entire team.

“Maybe,” I finally found my voice, “we’ll just wait twenty-four hours from now and try again?”

Seph furrowed her brows, her eyes filled with concern. “Have you tried calling Trux?”

Ryker shook his head. He didn’t let go as he reached over onto the nightstand and grabbed his cell phone. After dialing, he pressed it to his ear. It rang several times then went to voicemail. Ryker tried a second time, but it also went to voicemail. He returned his phone to the nightstand but didn’t comment.

“Fine. While we wait for him to arrive, let’s start searching for the talisman.” Seph tossed clothes at Ryker. “Come on, Hoss, let’s keep your mind busy before you drive yourself insane with worry.”

He didn't move as the clothes landed on the bed. His gaze locked on me again and a long, heavy silence filled the space.

"Come on, Parker, let's get you dressed." Seph guided me off the bed, then helped me dress. Ryker grabbed his clothes and stomped out of the room. Tears welled up as uncertainty overwhelmed me. Seph stopped dressing me and pulled me against her chest. "Don't do that. There's no reason to cry. I know it's hard, but we'll get through this. Just wait and see. It will be something simple and easily fixed, then you'll bond with Ryker and everything will be right in the world."

Despite her words, something inside of me snapped. If this didn't work with Ryker, then there was no telling how much of the recent events were wrong. It was too much. My heart was ragged and bleeding from the hurt and rejection I'd seen on Ryker's face.

"Oh, Parker."

Seph kissed both of my cheeks, but that wasn't enough. I needed more. I gripped the back of her neck as I leaned down and claimed her lips. My actions must have surprised her because she didn't kiss me back right away. It wasn't until I'd backed her against the wall and desperate for breath that she took over.

When I broke the kiss, she seized control. Seph spun us around, pressing my back to the wall and pressed her knee between my thighs. Her fingers slid into my still open pants and pushed my panties aside. With her other hand, she pushed my shirt up and buried her face in my breasts.

I clutched her head as she licked the valley between my breasts. Her finger dipped inside, plenty lubricated by Ryker's semen. Once she'd spread his come throughout my wetness, she slid one finger in, then two, her thumb working my clit in small circles. I bucked against her as ripples of pleasure coursed through my body.

Every time I felt like I found the edge of pleasure, she'd move in a different direction, taking me higher than before. My hips moved in time with her fingers as my hands explored

her body. When I was almost finished, she added a third finger and readjusted her grip to really hit all the right places.

The feeling of her soft lips, gentle touches, and words whispered against my skin stirred something deep inside of me. I'd needed her reassurance and comfort, just as Ryker did. With one last touch, Seph sent me over the edge of pleasure. My orgasm rocked through my body as a thousand sparks of delight washed over me like an electric current.

When my body relaxed, Seph pulled away and kissed my forehead before helping me refasten my pants and shirt. "I know you're both taking this hard, but do Ryker a favor and don't shower. He needs his scent on you. You both do." She said breathlessly. "It's the closest he can get to marking you for now."

Seph guided me to the living room, where Ryker sat furiously typing on a computer. His fingers stabbed at the keyboard so hard that I was amazed it didn't break. He didn't even acknowledge me as I dropped onto the couch. Seph disappeared for a few minutes, then returned with a cold soda in her hand. Her gaze darted to Ryker, then me before she shook her head and joined me on the couch.

Seph clapped her hands together and declared, "we need to start researching for the talisman now."

Ryker and I exchanged a glance but said nothing. We had yet to come to terms with our unfulfilled bond. The air between us thickened as we searched in silence, both of us desperately trying to push away the awkwardness that hung over us.

He sat at the computer while Seph and I huddled on the couch with books spread around us. I picked one up and read through it, looking for any clue that might help us find the talisman. The painful silence wore me down until my nerves were frayed.

Suddenly, Ryker jumped up from his computer and stomped upstairs. Seph looked at where he'd disappeared, clearly torn between whether she should stay for me or go after him.

“I’m fine. Go make sure he’s okay.” I murmured as I glared at the book I held.

“Hmm.” She started to move, but a door slamming gave her pause.

Ryker stomped back down to us and handed me a leather-bound notebook with metal accents. He stared off into space, refusing to even look at me. His cold shoulder was hard to bear, but I knew it was out of his control right now.

“Thank you.”

He grunted, then returned to his laptop. The hours passed slowly as we looked for more information about the talisman.

My eyelids grew heavy, daring me to fall asleep from the sheer exhaustion of my life and the rollercoaster it had become. Maybe things would be easier in my dreams.

“I found it,” Ryker said suddenly, his voice a reverent whisper.

My eyes snapped open, and I jolted to attention. Seph and I waited with bated breath as he read through the historical mention of the talisman. His eyes lit up with excitement as he shared what he’d found.

“It’s an relic from an ancient kingdom that was decimated by powerful magic.” Ryker’s voice somber, he continued. “There’s a reference to who was the last known person to possess the talisman, but if it’s who I think it is, we’re fucked.”

Pain seared my belly as Mephistral appeared in the room. “You will go for the talisman now! No more waiting!” he growled, menace ringing through his words.

“We need to wait for Trux and the others,” I argued back. “The three of us shouldn’t do this alone.”

He stepped forward, his eyes blazing with fury. “Do it now or I’ll expose your betrayal to my leader!”

Mephistral’s eyes glittered with all the threat he intended. His tiny body grew until his presence dominated the space, forcing Ryker and Seph to stand between the demon and me. This form was intimidating as he stood there with his piercing

red eyes and huge wingspan that seemed to fill up the whole room.

Finally, Ryker stepped forward with a determined look on his face. “We can’t go without proper protection first,” he said firmly. “If you want us to succeed, then you must give us time to prepare ourselves accordingly. That means taking the entire team.”

The surrounding air grew thick as Mephistral stared at Ryker with a mixture of rage and desperation.

“As I was saying,” Ryker moved to address all of us. “Silas the Sinister is—”

Mephistral cut him off with a loud snarl, and I jumped in surprise. I could feel the tension rising in the air as the demon seemed to be struggling to control his anger.

As a last-ditch effort, Mephistral snapped his fingers, and all four of us vanished, only to reappear at what I assumed was the location Ryker had referred to. We found ourselves standing on an ancient stone platform surrounded by ruins crumbling into time. The wind howled around us, threatening to tear us down if our new foe Silas didn’t. The moonlight shone down upon us from above.

“—a vampire.” Ryker snarled at the demon. “It’s a damn good thing none of us are wolf shifters, or we’d be cursed to stay here for the rest of our lives.”

I blinked several times as his words processed in my mind. They weren’t wolf shifters? Then what the hell kind of shifters were they? “You’re not?”

“No, we’re—”

“Oh look, some vermin showed up to steal my talisman. Guess it’s time for an extermination.”

CHAPTER 11



I HAVE QUITE THE COLLECTION OF
SUPERNATURAL BEINGS, BUT I DON'T HAVE
ONE OF YOU... YET.

Silas was the embodiment of evil, a twisted entity that had walked the earth for centuries. His tall, slender frame was made of steel, although his skin was oddly smooth and ashen, like deathly smoke draped over his body. He wore clothing made from endless night, swathed in darkness that wrapped around him like devouring shadows. Every inch of his frame spoke of danger and dread, a dark force to be reckoned with.

It was his eyes that were the most striking... a piercing, icy blue that seemed to penetrate my very soul. My internal organs turned to ice from his presence. The gaze held an ageless wisdom and cruelty, betraying the centuries of darkness he had lived through.

Silas stood confidently amidst the ruins, a sinister smile playing on his lips. "Do you think you'll really steal my talisman?" His voice dripped with arrogance as he taunted us. "I will show you just how futile your efforts are."

Silas recited an incantation, his voice resonating with ancient power as he spoke unfamiliar words. With a casual flick of his wrist, the ruins began to shift and transform, rising like a phoenix from the ashes. In mere moments, an imposing, old gothic mansion stood where the wreckage had been. It gave off its own dark and foreboding presence while it loomed over us.

"I invite you inside," Silas said mockingly, a wicked gleam in his eyes. I briefly wondered if TV had gotten it right that

vampires needed to be invited in. “Come, see the talisman you so desperately and futilely seek.”

Seph, Riker, and I looked at each other in dread, but it seemed we had no choice. As we stepped through the grand entrance, the atmosphere within the mansion was oppressive, suffocating, as if the very air was tainted by Silas’s malevolence.

He led us through a maze of dimly lit corridors, our footsteps echoing ominously through the silence. Sneaking a glance at Mephistral, even the demon looked unsettled by our current host.

Every move Silas made was deliberate and graceful, each step fluid and predatory like a panther stalking its prey. There was an air of danger that surrounded him, an aura of malevolence that clung to him like a shroud. It was clear that this was a being who had lived through countless lifetimes, his very existence a testament to the darkness that lurked within the world.

When we stopped, I almost forgot to breathe. I wasn’t sure if he was about to deliver us to our demise. Then a strange urge pulled my attention to an ornate door. The scrolling designs fit perfectly with the rest of the mansion’s ambiance.

We stepped into a grand room. Flickering light illuminated the layout and further highlighted the talisman at its center, perched on top of a pedestal. Our quest was complete; we had found what we were searching for.

“There it is,” Silas announced, gesturing towards the talisman with a flourish. “The object of your desires. But I assure you, even though you know where it is, you will never take it from me.”

The talisman was a captivating, ominous artifact. Its surface was so smooth it reflected the room’s lamplight back like a polished mirror. It seemed to be forged from the very essence of darkness itself, leaving me shivering from an otherworldly chill that emanated from it. The hourglass figure flared outward into two streams at opposing angles.

At the center, a blood-red gemstone pulsed with an inner fire as if it contained the heart of a raging inferno. Its crimson light cast flickering shadows on the walls of the chamber. Upon closer inspection, the metalwork revealed incredibly fine, almost imperceptible engravings, depicting scenes of long-forgotten battles and obscure demonic rituals.

As we gazed upon the talisman, I knew my mates felt the same immense power it radiated as I did. It vibrated in the air around us. It was a power that held the potential for great destruction, yet also the promise of untold strength, should we manage to wrest it from Silas's control. The talisman seemed to call out to me, a siren's song that both tempted and repelled. If something this powerful fell into the wrong hands, it could be devastating and I planned to hand deliver it to a bunch of scheming demons.

Seph urged me to step behind her as Ryker moved next to her. They separated me from Silas, their bodies a physical barrier.

Silas loomed over us in a threatening stance with his eyes filled with malice as his voice slid out as a chilling whisper. "You won't survive trying to steal my talisman."

I glanced at Seph and Ryker, who both looked as uneasy as I felt. Even Mephistral appeared perturbed by the vampire. My heart pounded at the dire situation Mephistral had put us in. My demonic tattoo of Cerberus squirmed on my back. Even though he was too injured to help, he was very much aware of the danger we were in and wanted to help.

I tried to muster up some courage, but my voice wavered as I spoke. "So there's nothing in the world that would make you reconsider giving us that talisman?"

Silas ignored me, his eyes fixated on Mephistral. There was a knowing glint in his gaze, and I knew that he recognized the demon. With a sinister smile, Silas shifted his attention to me. "You're half demon," he said, a shiver running down my spine as if he'd seen straight into my soul. "I have quite the collection of supernatural beings, but I don't have one of you... yet."

I clenched my fists, trying to ignore the fear coursing through me. “You won’t be adding me to your collection.” Thankfully my voice was stronger this time. Silas merely laughed, the sound cold and cruel.

“Oh, I believe I will. After I deal with your friends, of course.” His eyes narrowed at Seph and Ryker.

They exchanged worried glances, but there was a defiant spark in their eyes. It gave me a bit of hope we weren’t doomed from Mephistral’s rushed actions.

Seph clenched her fists, determination etched on her face. “You’ll have to get through us first.” She bared her teeth, her stance ready for a fight.

Silas smirked, unfazed by her bravado. “I expected as much.” His voice dripped with disdain. “But don’t think your efforts will save you or your precious half-blooded mate.”

As the tension in the air grew thicker, Cerberus moved along my body, leaving a tingling sensation trailing behind him and letting out a low growl from my arm. I knew he was displeased with the situation, but there was little he could do.

Silas approached us, the malice in his eyes intensifying. It was clear he intended to make good on his threat. But as he took a step forward, I felt a sudden surge of power course through me fueled by my fear and anger.

My demonic powers were unpredictable and unreliable on a good day, and this was anything but. The best thing I could do at this point was actively stay out of their way.

Seph, however, seemed more than ready to take on Silas. She stepped forward, her eyes narrowed in determination. Black light sparked from her fingertips as her fingers flexed. I hadn’t had much time to get to know the team, but all of a sudden I realized Rhiot wasn’t the only one with a supernatural specialty. Soon I’d find out what Seph excelled at.

“Obey me,” Seph commanded, her voice laced with power as she attempted to take control of Silas. The air crackled with supernatural energy, and for a brief moment, I could see the

struggle in Silas's eyes as he fought against her will. Her hand flung out as she made a fist in Silas's direction. Black sparks continued to flare out from her hands with tendrils of black smoke curled around her arms.

"That's it Seph, keep him busy while I figure out what to do next." Ryker murmured as his brow furrowed in thought. His gaze swept across the terrain, scrutinizing Silas's defenses. He bit his lip, running through potential strategies in his head and looking for any weaknesses that could be exploited.

Silas snarled, his face contorting in fury as he resisted Seph's control. "You dare to try to bend my will, little necromancer?" he hissed, his voice dripping with venom. "You will pay for your insolence with your life."

Seph was a fucking necromancer? My jaw dropped as my brain tried to get right with the idea. It made sense that they existed, but even in my wildest dreams hadn't thought it was possible. Shifters were already a bit much, but vampires and necromancers? I already needed a damn vacation from my life.

With a powerful, primal roar Silas broke free from Seph's grip and leapt at her with blinding speed. His razor sharp fangs glinted in the moonlight as they lunged towards her exposed neck. But Seph was faster, gracefully leaping away from Silas' attack and narrowly avoiding his deadly strike.

CHAPTER 12



THE TALISMAN HAS BEEN OBLITERATED,
AND THERE'S NOTHING LEFT.

Ryker's gaze darted around the room, and he clenched his jaw as he quickly formulated a plan. With a sharp bark, he issued instructions. "Seph, keep his attention! Mephistral, stick to the shadows and see if you can find an opening. Parker, stay back and be ready to jump in if it all goes south."

As Seph continued to engage Silas, darting in and out and using her necromancy to try to weaken him, Mephistral circled around, searching for an opening to strike. I stood back, my heart pounding in my chest, feeling helpless but ready to act if the opportunity presented itself. Not that I could do anything helpful since my demon powers only seemed to manifest when I orgasmed... Nope, not going there. That would be a weird way to win a fight.

Despite our efforts, we were no match for Silas. His strength and cunning were superior, and his expertise was unmatched. Our feeble efforts were in vain; he was too powerful to be defeated. But despite the odds, we managed to withstand his attack and showed that we weren't simply easy targets as he had assumed.

As Silas and Seph continued their dangerous dance, Ryker urgently waved Mephistral and me over. His eyes were alight with excitement, a plan seemingly formed in his mind. "We need to portal Silas into a hell realm," Ryker whispered, glancing at Seph to make sure she was holding her own. "Parker, Mephistral, you both have the demon powers necessary to do it. You just need to focus and work together."

My heart raced, and my hands trembled. I was all too aware of the stakes if I failed, but I knew I had no choice. To hesitate would be disastrous. My power had been unreliable in the past, and it terrified me to think of what might happen if it didn't work this time. But Seph couldn't keep this up, so with a deep breath, I nodded, trying to ignore the nagging voice in my head that told me I was making a mistake.

Mephistral's eyes were dark and flat, his thick brows arched down over them. His sharp teeth clenched in a wicked grin as he slowly advanced toward me. I could almost feel the heat from his breath on my face. Goosebumps rose on my arms. The power within me made me shudder. I felt it pitching and rearing, uncooperative and barely controllable. A dry, bitter taste filled my mouth; that was fear.

Seeing my struggle, Ryker pulled me close, his voice soft and reassuring. "Parker, I know you can do this. Just take a deep breath and focus on the image of Silas being banished to a hell realm. Let your powers flow naturally."

I nodded, trying to follow his advice. Mephistral raised his hands, palms to me. I mimicked his movements, but no matter how hard I tried, my powers remained stubbornly unresponsive, refusing to bend to my will.

Ryker's expression grew more desperate as the battle between Silas and Seph intensified. It was clear we were running out of time.

In a sudden and bold move, Mephistral reached out and grabbed my hands. His claws dug into the back of my hands as his fingers crushed mine. A sob of pain and surprise escaped before I could hold it back. My powers surged with demonic energy as he began to draw them out, forcibly channeling them into the portal spell.

Together, our combined powers roared to life, and a swirling vortex of darkness opened up before us. As Seph narrowly dodged another attack from Silas, Ryker seized the opportunity and shoved him, sending him hurtling into the portal. There was a deafening roar, and then the portal snapped shut, leaving an eerie silence in its wake.

For a moment, we all stood there, panting and exhausted, relief washing over us. But our victory was short-lived. As soon as I let go of the power, our combined force began reacting in ways we never intended. Like a bomb about to go off, it began building pressure in its core.

The walls of Silas's mansion began to shake and crack, the structure groaning under the strain of the unleashed demonic energy. Furniture and priceless artifacts shattered and disintegrated around us as the entire building started to crumble.

"Run!" Ryker shouted, grabbing my hand and pulling me towards the exit. Seph and Mephistral followed closely behind, their faces etched with fear.

We stumbled out of the collapsing mansion just in time, watching in horror as the ancient structure collapsed in on itself. But the destruction didn't end there.

A shockwave of energy radiated out from the epicenter of our spell, tearing through the surrounding landscape. Trees were uprooted, and the earth itself cracked and split open, leaving a five-acre circle of utter devastation in its wake. It flung us off our feet, sending us smashing into the ground some distance away.

"What the actual fuck just happened?" Ryker lay flat on his back, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath.

"Demonic whiplash?" Seph held her hands to her ribs as she coughed. "Shit, that hurts."

Mephistral stood, shorter than before, with his hands on his hips as he glared at me. "What is wrong with you?"

I'd landed face down, the impact stealing all my breath. My body shook as I desperately tried to inhale air in, but I couldn't seem to find any oxygen.

Ryker crawled over to me. "Are you okay?"

I nodded even as a tear slid down my cheek. Stupid emotions were trying to overwhelm me. I pointed to Seph.

Ryker nodded and moved to check her over. His hiss let me know she hadn't made it through the fight unscathed. "Dammit. Seph, we need Kearan to look at you."

She shook her head. "I'll be fine. We need to get that talisman and get out of here before that asshole finds a way back."

Ryker helped Seph to her feet. Once she was steady, he did the same for me now that I'd caught my breath.

"Look at all this," I said in disbelief, my eyes scanning the wreckage.

"It worked," Mephistral replied, a hint of relief in its voice. "But for how long?"

As the dust settled and we took in the scale of the destruction, we couldn't help but feel a mixture of relief and dread. We had managed to banish Silas, at least for now, but we had no idea which hell realm he had been sent to or how long he would be trapped there.

And then there was the terrible price we had paid for our victory—the destruction of Silas's mansion and the surrounding area, a testament to the raw, uncontrollable power that Mephistral and I had unleashed.

As we stood there, amidst the ruins, we knew that our battle with Silas the Sinister was far from over. I hoped he never escaped the realm we sent him to, but I didn't think I was that lucky.

The three of us, Ryker, Seph, and I, combed through the ruins with determination, searching for any trace of the talisman we'd been seeking. Despite the chaos and destruction surrounding us, we couldn't help but hold onto a glimmer of hope that the talisman had somehow survived the explosive backlash of demonic power.

Mephistral, however, seemed convinced that all was lost. "It's gone," he insisted, his voice tinged with despair. "The talisman has been obliterated, and there's nothing left."

His words stung like a slap to the face, but we refused to give up so easily. And then, something entirely unexpected

happened... Mephistral threw himself on the ground and began to have what could only be described as a full-blown tantrum.

I stared at the spectacle in disbelief, my jaw dropping as the small demon flailed about, kicking up dust and debris as he howled in frustration. Even Seph and Ryker, who had been diligently searching through the wreckage, couldn't help but stop and watch the bizarre scene unfolding before us.

Mephistral's tantrum seemed to go on for an eternity, though in reality it was probably no more than a minute or two. Eventually, he grew tired and lay panting on the ground, his face red and his eyes filled with a curious mix of anger and desperation.

As we stood there, trying to process what we'd just witnessed, Mephistral pulled himself together and sat up, wiping the dirt from his face. "I can't go back empty-handed." His voice trembled through his confession. "This was my one last chance to prove myself... to gain the respect and recognition I've needed for so long."

He looked at us, his eyes pleading for understanding. It was a strange sight, this demon who had once been so menacing, now reduced to a pitiful creature desperately seeking validation. Seemed all types of supernatural creatures wanted to fit in with their peers.

Seph crossed her arms and went back to searching. Ryker stared at me for a long time before he rejoined Seph. I knelt down beside Mephistral, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "We're doing everything in our power to find the talisman... or at least what's left of it."

CHAPTER 13



I'VE FAILED US ALL.

I kicked a charred board, not hopeful the talisman we'd come for would be behind it. I'd felt it earlier, so why couldn't I feel it now? The sun raced across the sky, daring us to catch up as our desperate search intensified.

"Wait a minute."

Everyone froze, only their gazes snapped to me, hopeful I'd found the talisman.

"You said Silas was a vampire, right?"

Ryker gave me a frustrated look. "Yeah, so?"

I waved my hand around, vaguely gesturing to the sky. "It was daylight when we got here. If he was a vampire, then how could he be in daylight?"

"Doesn't work like that." Seph answered. "TV doesn't get all the facts right. Besides, powerful vampires have ways around limitations like that. Especially someone as evil as Silas is. Though, not all vampires are bad."

My mouth remained shut as I thought over her words. Whenever things calmed down a bit, I needed to bunker down with the journal my mother left me and read up on this new world.

The fading light cast a sad spell over the broken landscape, as if it were mocking our futility. Time was against us and we knew that with every minute that passed, we moved further away from finding the talisman. We felt our hope slipping away like grains of sand between our fingers.

Our search for the talisman yielded nothing, and with each passing moment, our hearts sank further into despair. We were out of options. The impending doom of failure loomed over us like a malevolent shroud, crushing any remaining hope we had left.

The sun slowly set on the horizon, and we circled around in the dimming light, meticulously searching through the rubble of the mansion. Ash covered everything, blanketing the ruins in a fine black dust. Each of us wearied by the battle, I wasn't sure we could search much longer. Even though we had put forth our best effort, it seemed as if our quest to find the ancient talisman had ended in failure. The thought was disheartening and brought a deep sadness that seemed to linger in the air.

The demon leader wouldn't forgive me if we didn't find it. The only way out of this was to find the talisman or find something better and renegotiate. Or maybe Rhiot had a trick up his sleeve, but we had to reach him to find out.

Mephistral looked at each of us in turn, his eyes filled with an emotion I couldn't quite decipher. "I've failed us all." He whispered, his voice barely audible.

Seph shook her head, a determined glint in her eyes. "No, we don't give up... We'll find another way. We always do. No one will steal our mate."

I glanced at her, seeing the weariness in her gaze as she looked me over. Then her emotions brushed over me, reminding me we were forever connected. I almost glanced at Ryker, but couldn't stand to see his disappointment. We'd make the bond work... somehow.

As the small demon continued to fret, I couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for him. For all his cruelty, it seemed that Mephistral had a softer side that was struggling to break through. It was a side that intrigued me.

Finally, Mephistral stopped pacing and looked at me, his eyes filled with a desperate sadness. "I'm just a minor demon," he admitted, his voice barely more than a whisper. "I

have very little purpose. This was supposed to be my big job, the one where I proved my worth, but I couldn't even do that."

Maybe it was my own demonic nature that made me feel closer to him than I should, or maybe I needed to prove something to myself, but there had to be more to the little creature.

As Mephistral finally calmed down, Ryker rolled his eyes and returned to the wreckage, determined to continue the search. Meanwhile, I decided to have a heart-to-heart with the distraught demon.

"Mephistral," I coaxed, "the demon leader will only know we failed if you report back to him, right?"

He looked at me with wide eyes, seemingly processing my words. Slowly, realization began to dawn on his face, and he seemed to find solace in the idea that perhaps all was not lost. "You're right," he murmured, a hint of hope creeping back into his voice. "If I don't go back and tell him, he'll never know."

I reached out and placed a comforting hand on Mephistral's shoulder. "You know, there's more to you than just your power level. You could be a good person if you chose to be."

Ryker snorted from where he stood several feet away. "Demons are demons, Parker. They don't change."

"I'm half-demon, Ryker," I reminded him, "and I'm not a bad person." Ryker fell silent, his expression a mixture of discomfort and frustration. I shot him a glare before turning back to Mephistral.

"If you want to, you could be a part of my group, just like Cerberus," I offered. "All you have to do is promise to be good."

"You can't be fucking serious." Ryker protested. "Trux won't allow this."

"Then Trux will just have to deal with it, won't he?" I snapped back, my temper getting the better of me.

Mephistral paused for an eternity, a fire of purpose burning in his eyes. His voice boomed out like thunder, echoing off the destruction as he declared, "I swear to be good." A silence so profound and oppressive filled the air that even the wind seemed to cease its blowing as he made his vow.

The demon collected ash from the debris, drawing a complex pattern on the ground. Once the sigil was complete, Mephistral knelt in its center, his eyes glowing a deep crimson as he chanted in the ancient demonic tongue. The words were harsh and guttural, each syllable crackling with a dark energy that seemed to fill the surrounding air. Oddly, it seemed familiar, and yet foreign, as if it called only to my demonic side.

As the chant continued, I felt a prickling sensation on the palm of my hand. Glancing down, I saw a small droplet of blood welling up from a tiny cut that hadn't been there before. Mephistral motioned for me to step forward, and I hesitated for only a moment before placing my hand over his, allowing the blood to fall onto his waiting palm.

Mephistral closed his eyes and continued to chant, his voice growing louder and more intense. The surrounding air began to hum with power, and I could feel the connection between us growing stronger, like an invisible thread being woven tighter and tighter.

With a final, thunderous word, Mephistral slammed his bloodied hand onto the sigil, causing a brilliant flash of crimson light to erupt from the pattern. The force of the energy sent me staggering backward, my ears ringing from the sudden explosion of sound. Seph covered her face with an arm while Ryker turned away from the blast.

As the light faded and the ringing subsided, I looked at Mephistral, now standing within the now-smoldering sigil. The bond between us was complete, a connection forged through blood and ancient magic that would bind the demon to me as long as we both lived.

"Trux is going to rip us both a new one for letting her do that." Ryker grumbled as he slapped dust off his clothes, then

went back to searching.

Seph sighed as she ran her fingers through her hair. With Mephistral somewhat calmer, we rejoined Ryker in sifting through the debris.

“I found it! The talisman!” Ryker’s voice boomed through the quiet clearing. We rushed to his side. There, on the ground under a scorched wooden board lay the talisman, miraculously intact despite the devastation that had befallen the mansion.

The moment I looked at it, I felt that something seemed off. Ryker furrowed his brow as he held the artifact, his expression turning to confusion. “It’s not giving off any power. It feels...empty.”

Mephistral nodded in agreement. “You’re right. Before, the talisman pulsed with energy. Now, it’s as if all that power has vanished.”

Unsure of what was happening, Ryker handed the talisman to me, his gaze intent on my face as if he hoped I might have some answers. I took the talisman, feeling the cold, lifeless metal in my hands. The once-powerful artifact now felt like nothing more than a beautiful, yet hollow, trinket. Except there was a whisper of intuition that told me to keep it. Despite its dormant state, I needed to protect it.

I glanced at Mephistral, who appeared just as mystified as the rest of us. “Well, we have the talisman, even if it’s not quite what we expected. Mephistral, can you teleport us home?”

The demon hesitated for a moment, then nodded. “Yes,” he agreed, his voice still tinged with uncertainty. “I can do that.”

We gathered close together. The air around us seemed to shimmer and warp.

Except when I opened my eyes, we were in the exact same spot.

“I must have used the last of my powers to banish Silas. Until I recharge, I can’t even take tattoo form.”

I sighed as I hugged myself. “Now what?”

CHAPTER 14



YOU TWO ARE NEVER GOING TO GET
ALONG.

Seph sighed and crossed her arms, clearly unimpressed by this new information. Ryker, meanwhile, took out his phone and tried to call Trux, hoping that our team leader could help us figure out what to do next. Ryker couldn't get through to Trux. Each call went straight to voicemail, leaving us feeling even more isolated and uncertain.

Eventually, Ryker gave up on trying to reach Trux and turned to us with a resigned expression. "We'll have to walk to the nearby town." His voice remained firm despite the weariness in his eyes. "I have friends there who can help us get home."

And so, with no other options, we began our trek to the town, our spirits dampened by the recent events and the daunting journey ahead of us.

As we walked, the tension between Ryker and me seemed to grow, our earlier closeness now replaced by an awkward silence that hung heavy in the air. Seph, for her part, remained mostly silent, her thoughts seemingly turned inward as she mulled over everything that had happened.

Mephistral, on the other hand, had no qualms about making his displeasure known. The small demon whined almost constantly as we trudged along, complaining about his lack of power, the distance we had to walk, and just about anything else he could think of. His incessant grumbling only added to the strain of our journey, but there was little any of us could do to placate him.

We finally neared the outskirts of the tiny town, the warm glow of the occasional streetlight and the distant murmur of voices offering a welcome reprieve from the desolate landscape we had traversed. Ryker's pace quickened as we approached, his steps fueled by the promise of assistance and a chance to regroup.

As we walked down the town's main street, I glanced over at Ryker, his face illuminated by the streetlights. Despite the challenges we faced, I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude for his presence, his determination and resourcefulness, a beacon of hope in these uncertain times. But the awkwardness between us still lingered, a barrier that neither of us seemed to know how to break. I vowed to do everything I could to fix this fissure between us.

"This bar is neutral ground, which means there may be humans not in the know in there. So err on the side of caution until we know for sure." Ryker gestured to Mephistral. "Which means you need to look human or disappear. I vote for disappearing."

Mephistral glared at him before he lunged toward me. The demon flattened to a three inch long 2d image in the air before he plastered himself to me. His wings flared out, effectively covering the entire space of my upper chest, right where Ryker would have to look at him.

Seph chuckled. "You two are never going to get along."

"Nope." I muttered as I rubbed the spot, trying to get the tingling sensation to go away. Cerberus trudged along my arm, over my shoulder, until he splayed over my back.

Upon our arrival, the door to The Wolf's Den swung open, revealing a tall, muscular man with a warm, yet guarded smile. "Ryker!" he called out, clasping my mate's hand in a firm handshake. "It's been a while."

"Roger," Ryker replied, returning the smile as he greeted his old friend. "It's good to see you again." He then gestured toward us, beginning the introductions. "This is Seph and Parker. We're in a bit of a bind and could use your help."

Roger's eyes scanned our group, his expression a blend of curiosity and caution. But before he could respond, a new voice piped up from behind him.

"I know you," a woman accused, her eyes locked on me. She was slender and graceful, with an air of confidence that seemed to fill the room.

"I don't think we've met," I replied, feeling strangely uneasy under her piercing gaze.

She took a step closer, her eyes never leaving mine. "No, I'm certain I know you, Parker. There's something about you that feels... familiar."

I racked my brain for any possible connection, but came up empty. "I'm sorry, but I really don't think we've met before." I insisted, growing more uncomfortable by the second because she did feel familiar, but I was certain I'd never met her.

The tension in the room was palpable as we all exchanged uneasy glances. A shifter stepped in, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Aryn, mate, maybe we should focus on helping Roger's friends," he suggested gently. "My name's Jo by the way."

Aryn seemed to snap out of her trance, offering a tight smile. "Of course," she agreed, stepping back. "My apologies, Parker. It's just... you remind me of someone I once knew."

Ryker and Seph made eye contact, seemingly conveying a message, but I had no idea what. Seph wrapped her arm around my waist as she guided me to follow Roger, Ryker, Aryn, and Jo deeper into The Wolf's Den.

Our footsteps echoed through the dimly lit hall. As we walked, I couldn't shake the feeling that Aryn's words held a deeper meaning... a hidden truth that, for reasons I couldn't yet fathom, seemed to connect us in some mysterious way. She said out loud the same feeling I had.

Before long, Roger took us into a private area of the bar where we could speak freely without worry an unknowing human would stumble into our world.

During the walk, the tension between Aryn and me had become unbearable. Our gazes locked in an unspoken battle of wills that seemed to draw the attention of everyone in the room. The low murmur of conversation gradually faded as all eyes turned to us. The air was heavy with anticipation.

Seph and Ryker tried to coax me into a seat. Jo, Aryn's mate, wrapped his arms protectively around her as he tried to make sense of the strange connection that had taken hold of both of us. "What's going on? I thought we established you didn't know each other?" Jo asked, his voice a mixture of concern and suspicion.

Neither Aryn nor I could offer an answer, our focus entirely consumed by the inexplicable force that surged, trying to bind us together.

An invisible force reverberated in the air, shaking the walls and rattling the windows. Aryn and I were engulfed in a blinding flash of ephemeral power as sudden as it was unexpected. The room filled with a chorus of gasps; a mix of shock and fear as the bystanders grappled to comprehend the surreal sight before them.

Strangely, the power that coursed between us didn't feel threatening... Instead, it felt almost familiar, as if it were an integral part of our very being. But neither Aryn nor I had any idea what it meant, or why it had chosen this moment to manifest.

As the initial shock subsided, the energy between us began to ebb, settling into a gentle, pulsating hum that seemed to serve as a constant reminder of our mysterious connection.

As if nothing had happened, I suddenly felt okay with Aryn's presence. She appeared more relaxed as well. We took our seats, completely at ease with each other. Jo watched Aryn as he sat next to her, waiting for something to change. The chairs were spread haphazardly into a small circle.

Seph claimed the spot on my right while Ryker took the one on the left. Roger glanced between the two parties before he spoke up. "So now that whatever that was is out of the way, how do we get you all home?"

Ryker practically leaned away from me, giving me as much room as he could while still in the seat next to mine. He didn't want to be next to me, but also refused to have someone else this close. "We're looking for a ride home."

"As in to the airport?" Roger took a deep breath. "No, of course not. You know about our curse."

"What curse?" I couldn't help myself.

"Long story short, no one from our pack can leave our lands without causing harm to the rest of our pack." Roger spoke with a deep pain in his voice that left me feeling heavy from the weight of his predicament. "We've worked together enough for Ryker to know that. While we have friends on the other side of the border, we could arrange for a ride. Except, if it was that simple, Ryker would have called the team's handler."

"Why isn't it that simple?" Sometimes I hated being so oblivious to everything else involved.

"We're avoiding our handler right now." Ryker bit out. "If we call them, then they find you."

"Ah, right. Forgot about that." I didn't feel like going back to the compound right now... or ever, but I had to deal with the talisman first before I could even contemplate the consequences of Cerbie's little jailbreak.

"We should summon Jericho." Roger spoke to Aryn. "I'll have to get Archer and explain what's going on."

"Don't bother him right now." Aryn patted Jo's knee as she spoke. "I'll summon him."

Exhaustion impeded my thought-to-mouth filter. "Who's Jericho?"

Roger took over the explanation. "He's a demon who helps the pack with anything we need outside of pack lands... or if we need a demon expert."

"Jericho, I summon you to me." Aryn's voice was steady and strong. A sudden gust of wind swept through the room,

and in a flash of light and purple smoke, the demon appeared before us.

Jericho was an imposing figure, his muscular frame towering over the assembled group. “Always a pleasure to see you, Great Dark One. What can I—”

His words cut off suddenly as he dropped to his knees while bowing his head... to me. “Royal blood, forgive my disrespect.”

CHAPTER 15



WE LIE, WE CHEAT, WE BARGAIN.

“Dammit, not again.” Roger grumbled as he threw his arms up in the air. “Demons are supposed to be rare, but now they’re fucking everywhere.”

The room was silent, the sudden shift in Jericho’s demeanor sending a shockwave of curiosity and unease through the gathered crowd. Aryn and Parker exchanged puzzled glances, unsure of how to react to the demon’s display of reverence.

“Jericho, you swore your fealty to me. Why are you kneeling to Parker?” Aryn spoke, but everyone watched Jericho for a response.

“You don’t know?” Jericho looked toward Aryn’s feet, but didn’t stand or raise his head. The demon seemed reluctant to reveal the truth, as if he were guarding a secret.

“No, so you should enlighten me.”

“This is where I remind you... again. I’m a demon. We’re intentionally vague, unhelpful, and enjoy inciting chaos whenever possible. Being helpful is against everything that I stand for. Well, unless you command me to do so.”

Something inside of me snapped. I wasn’t sure if it was everything that had happened today, since the team showed up, or a compilation of all of it, but my patience was gone. Zero. Zilch. Maybe even negative. “Jericho, just fucking tell us.”

Everyone’s attention snapped to me, including a startled Aryn.

“I bow to you both,” he said without raising his head, “because you share a bond far deeper than you could ever imagine. You are sisters.”

The words hung in the air, their impact reverberating through The Wolf’s Den like a thunderclap. Everyone went silent, struggling to process the astonishing revelation. Aryn and Parker stared at each other, their expressions a mixture of shock, disbelief, and wonder.

“What the hell kind of demon collecting fuckery is going on today?” Ryker snarled as he crossed his arms. “I can’t handle anymore today... or ever.”

Aryn stared at me. “That must be why it feels like I’ve met you before.”

“Nope. All the nope. I barely learned that I’m part demon with a super annoying, soul-bartering gene donor. There’s no way I have a sister I don’t know about. Besides, I’m my mother’s only kid.”

Jericho shook his head. “Different mothers, but same father. Demon genes dominate human ones, so that makes you sisters as far as demons are concerned.”

“Of course he answers her questions without sarcasm and actually provides information.” Aryn huffed. Jo laughed until she glared at him. His face sobered instantly, but his chest and shoulders shook. “Fricken demons.”

I felt the truth of Jericho’s words resonating within me, as if a dormant part of my soul had been awakened by the knowledge of our shared lineage. The revelation seemed to cast a new light on the strange bond that had formed between us. Next time I ran into one of Ro’s spawn, I’d remember the feeling.

“But we don’t know for sure.” The protest escaped my lips, refusing to accept this most recent change in my perception of my reality. My world had shattered... many times since my night of drunken texting. I wasn’t sure why this was the last straw.

Aryn shifted her weight, leaning forward and pointing an accusing finger as she spoke. Her tone cut through the air like a sharp blade, slicing through the tension to reach her point. “Jericho can’t lie. He might deliberately bend the truth or omit things, but he can’t directly lie.”

Seph and Roger quickly jumped in, trying to quell the rising animosity between us. “We need to find out who your fathers are.” Seph declared, a clear resolution in her voice. Her words hung in the air for a few moments.

With a mix of reluctance and defiance, I spoke first. “My father is Ro.”

Aryn’s expression darkened, and she countered, “My father is Malthus.”

At that moment, Jericho couldn’t help but laugh, his deep chuckle cutting through the heated atmosphere like a knife. Everyone fell silent, their eyes narrowing at him in confusion and annoyance.

Ryker’s patience had reached its limit, and he snapped at the demon, “What’s so funny, Jericho? This is serious.”

Jericho’s laughter subsided, and he looked at us with a knowing smirk. “There’s only one way to truly know the truth. You must summon both of them here. A demon often takes on many names and appearances, but summoning them will reveal their true nature.”

Seph and I exchanged wary glances, our anger toward Ro still fresh in our minds. We were hesitant to bring him back into our lives, even for a moment.

“You should call Ro,” Ryker insisted. “This is something we have to know regardless of how much of a pain in the ass he is.”

Aryn looked to Jo for guidance, and he offered her a supportive nod. “Do it,” he encouraged, “even if it causes drama. We need to know the truth.”

Taking a deep breath, Aryn steeled herself. “Malthus, I summon you to me.”

The air crackled with energy as the demon appeared before them, his form imposing and sinister. “You better have a good reason to bother me, daughter.”

Not wanting to wait any longer, I immediately followed. “Ro, you pain in my ass, I summon you to me.”

As I finished my words, a strange transformation occurred. Malthus’s body seemed to dissolve, his features shifting and contorting until the familiar figure of Ro stood in his place. The room fell silent, every pair of eyes wide with shock and disbelief as the truth of our shared parentage was confirmed.

“Well, hell.” Seph grumbled.

“Sonofabitch.” Ryker bit out. “Just what we need.”

“Told you.” Jericho crossed his arms. “Mmm, I love the acrid smell of anger.”

Roger pinched the bridge of his nose as he sighed. “Because why the hell not?”

Ro’s face showed disinterest. I was fuming with anger. The urge to punch him in his asshole face surged up inside of me. My heart thumped in my chest, the echo pounding in my ears. I tried to wrap my head around the recent revelation. The fact that I had a sister... and Ro had deliberately kept this secret from me was almost too much to bear. What else was he hiding from me?

“Why?” I demanded, my voice shaking with rage. “Why didn’t you tell me about Aryn? Why did you keep this from me? How many half-demon siblings do I have? How many more outrageous things are you going to inflict on me?”

Ro’s eyes met mine, his expression remaining infuriatingly calm. “I did what demons do, Parker.” He smirked, as though this explanation was enough. “We lie, we cheat, we bargain. This situation is no different. You... are no different.”

My blood boiled at his nonchalance. How could he be so dismissive of something so important to me? I opened my mouth to scream at him, to unleash all the pent-up frustration and hurt that had been building inside me since he came crashing back into my life.

Before I could utter a single word, Ro snapped his fingers. In an instant, the world seemed to twist and bend around us. Suddenly, Trux, Rhiot, Grayson, and Kearan appeared in The Wolf's Den, looking as confused and disoriented as I felt.

Ro smirked at me, his dark eyes gleaming with amusement. "You're welcome for the free demon service." Without another word he vanished.

I stood there, my mouth hanging open in shock. My mates slowly took in their surroundings. Trux was the first to speak, his brown eyes wide with astonishment. "What the hell just happened?"

I quickly surveyed everyone in the room who was still trying to process the recent events; Aryn, who was still trying to cope with the fact that we were related; Seph, whose eyes kept darting to the new arrivals; and Ryker, who still avoided looking at me.

"I... I don't know." I admitted, feeling my voice crack. "Ro just... can't stop fucking up my life. He brought you all here, but I don't know why he can't make things easy for just a bit."

Trux stepped forward, concern etched on his face. "Parker, what's going on? Why are we here... Actually, why aren't we at Ryker's place?"

My eyes flicked to Aryn, who was standing off to the side with Jo, her mate. She looked as lost and confused as I felt. I took a deep breath, trying to steady myself before I explained the situation.

"We found out that Aryn and I are sisters... eh, demonic half sisters." My voice was barely more than a whisper. "Ro is our father. He's been keeping it a secret from both of us. Well, more omitted than a lie."

The room went silent as everyone absorbed the information. I could see the shock on Trux's face, the disbelief in Kearan's eyes, the anger that flickered in Grayson's expression. Rhiot, however, looked thoughtful, as though he was piecing together a puzzle in his mind.

Ryker finally broke the silence, his voice tense and strained. “We should go home before anything else happens or anyone shows up.”

Anger roiled inside of me until it threatened to spill over. I was tired of people pushing me around and using me for their benefit. Not again. I would be the one to make the demands.

In a fit of rage, I raised my hand, ready to summon Ro once more. I couldn't let him get away with this, with treating me and Aryn so callously. I needed answers, and I needed them now.

“Ro!” I shouted, and just like that, he reappeared in front of me, a look of pure annoyance on his face.

“Don't do that again, Parker.” He growled, his eyes narrowing dangerously. Before I could respond, he disappeared again, leaving me seething with frustration.

CHAPTER 16



DEMONS DON'T MAKE IDLE THREATS.

“Ro!” I yelled, summoning him again. This time, as he materialized before me, I could see his anger boiling just below the surface. His dark eyes burned with a cold fury that sent a shiver down my spine.

“You’ll regret it if you do that again.” He snarled, his voice low and menacing. And with those words hanging in the air, he vanished once more.

My hand trembled as I prepared to summon him yet again, my rage blinding me to reason.

“Parker, stop!” Before I could complete the gesture, Trux’s voice cut through the tension. His power as Alpha put a power behind his words that I couldn’t resist.

I whipped my head in his direction, leveling a glare at him I hoped would convey the depth of my anger. But before I could say anything, Seph stepped in, placing a gentle hand on my arm.

“Parker, don’t waste time on him. He’s not worth it.” Seph’s voice was soft but firm, her eyes filled with concern. “We have other things to worry about right now.”

My anger still simmered just beneath the surface, but I heard the truth in her words. Ro was a demon, and demons were unpredictable at the best of times. Pushing him further might only lead to more trouble for us. We had enough on our plates as it was.

Something dark and powerful reared up inside of me, craving the fight summoning him would bring. Part of me wanted to stop, but I couldn't seem to stop myself. My demonic anger and determination to confront him overpowered my sense of self-preservation. I raised my hand and screamed, "Ro!"

A sudden deafening roar filled the room. Ro appeared before me, his fury palpable. The surrounding air crackled with tension and fear rose in my chest. I'd pushed him too far. That was clear to everyone present, but there was no going back now.

As Ro towered over me. I steeled myself for whatever was coming, trying to swallow my fear. He smirked, a cruel glint in his eyes. "You never learn, do you, Parker?"

Before I could respond, a powerful gust of wind erupted from Ro's hand, hurtling me backward. I slammed into the wall with a bone-jarring impact. Pain radiating through my body as he knocked the breath from my lungs.

My mates rushed to my side, their faces etched with concern and fear. Seph helped me to my feet, her eyes locked on Ro, who was still smirking cruelly.

"Enough, Ro!" Seph shouted, her voice shaking with anger. "She's your daughter! How can you treat her like this?"

Ro scoffed. "I warned her. Demons don't make idle threats."

As I struggled to catch my breath, a fresh wave of anger and determination washed over me. Ro needed to be stopped... It was up to me to do it. Despite the pain coursing through my body, I pushed myself to confront him, my eyes locked on my father's.

"You may have power over me now, but I swear, I'll find a way to make you pay for what you've done." I hissed, my voice full of venom.

Ro's eyes narrowed, his smirk fading into a scowl. "You're welcome to try, Parker. But remember, you're playing with fire, and fire has a way of consuming everything in its path."

With that ominous warning, he snapped his fingers and disappeared.

After Ro disappeared again, I clenched my fists and prepared to summon him once more. He needed to pay for the pain he had caused.

“Dammit, Parker.” Seph grabbed my shirt and pulled me against her for a punishing kiss.

It was pain, and pleasure mixed together. Her emotions surged through the mate bond, wrapping around me until I couldn’t think or feel anything other than Seph. When she broke our kiss, I sucked in a breath of air.

Her hands sank into my hair as she pressed her forehead against mine. “I care about you too much to let you start a fight with him that you can’t win. Not yet. I promise, someday we’ll take him down, but this is not that day.”

I cupped her cheeks as I grounded myself through her touch. My lips found hers for a few quick kisses before I felt calm enough to let go. “Thank you.”

“Any time, babe.” Seph ran her thumb over my bottom lip, then gripped my chin as she gave me a brief kiss.

Trux closed the distance between us, his eyes full of worry. Without a word, he scooped me up into his arms and cradled me protectively against his chest. “Are you okay?” he murmured, his voice laced with concern.

I nodded, swallowing the lump that had formed in my throat. “That was so unlike me... I’m not sure why I couldn’t seem to stop.”

“It’s the demon side.” Rhiot joined us, taking up a spot opposite of Trux. With both of them on either side of me like this, I felt safe. “The more your demonic side awakes, the more it will influence your thoughts and behaviors.”

“She needs to get a hold of herself. The last thing we need right now is a pissed off demon.” Ryker bit out.

Trux leveled a glare on him, but it was Rhiot who replied. “It’s no different from a shifter learning how to shift for the

first time. It's not something she can control. Practice and discipline take time."

"We don't have time for this." Ryker's frustration was palpable.

Finally, Seph snapped at him. "Enough, Ryker! We're all upset, but taking it out on each other won't help."

"Jericho, we need to get home. Can you transport us there?" Rhiot asked without looking away from me.

"Oh, of course, because I'm just dying to be at your beck and call." Jericho drawled, rolling his eyes. "Why don't you summon a cab like other fragile mortals?"

As Jericho's words hung in the air, the tension in the room grew palpable. It seemed as though time stopped while everyone waited with bated breath for his next move. Would he help us, or would he leave us stranded?

Rhiot turned to face him. When he opened his mouth, Jericho's lips curled into a wicked grin. He raised his hand, and a crackling energy surged through the air. The room darkened, and a sinister aura washed over us.

My patience wearing thin, I turned to the demon with a hard glare. I kept my voice firm and commanding. "Jericho, send us home. Now."

To everyone's surprise, Jericho's expression softened. He bowed his head, and with a tone of genuine supplication, he replied. "As you wish, Royal Blooded One."

Within a fraction of a second, a swirling vortex of darkness engulfed us and transported back to the house we'd found Ryker in.

We'd landed in the living room. Trux sat on the couch, cradling me in his lap. He held me close, his warm embrace providing a small measure of comfort. Everyone congregated around us, needing to be closer to me now that we were safe. All, that is, except for Ryker, who sat in the furthest seat possible. His expression was inscrutable as he made his distance from me obvious.

Trux didn't break eye contact with me as he demanded an update. "Seph, give me an update."

Seph took a deep breath before beginning her summary. She recounted how Ro had bartered me to Major General Dickson, causing them to take me to their training facility. She then went on to describe Cerberus's daring escape, which had ultimately landed us in a hell realm, trapped and desperate. I twirled the yellow soul ring around my finger, desperate to fidget with something.

I broke eye contact with Trux when I curled against his chest. Exhausted. I was exhausted unlike anything I'd ever experienced. My cheek rested against his shoulder as I closed my eyes. Despite the anger seeping through the mate bond, Trux's presence calmed me.

Rhio sat next to us. I slipped my hand into his, craving more of the peacefulness I felt when touching them.

"We made a deal with the demon leader to get out." She continued, her voice steady despite the weight of the memories. "We had to fight Silas the Sinister to obtain a powerful talisman. The battle was intense, but we managed to banish him to another realm, though we're not sure which one."

I shivered at the thought of our confrontation with Silas, and the destruction that had followed. Seph went on, detailing our journey to The Wolf's Den, where we had finally encountered Roger, Aryn, Jo, and Jericho.

As Seph spoke, I noticed that Ryker's body language became increasingly tense. It was clear that he was struggling with the reality of the situation. Somehow, it seemed worse because our bond hadn't formed. I couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for him, even as his distance from the group left me feeling hurt and vulnerable.

The story Seph shared left disbelief and shock painting their faces. Except for Trux, he was absolutely furious. His hands clenched into tight fists behind my back and his body tensed under mine. "What do we need to deal with first?"

Before anyone could respond, a sudden commotion outside the house drew our attention. Loud footsteps pounded on the wooden porch on the other side of the door.

As the noise grew louder, I braced for the unknown. Tension reached a fever pitch as I waited for some new obstacle to crash into my life, ruining the semblance of peace I had.

The door to the safe house burst open, revealing a figure that I hadn't expected to see. From the muttered voices through the room, I didn't think I was the only one surprised.

CHAPTER 17



I WOULD NEVER JEOPARDIZE THE SAFETY
OF THIS PACK.

I could sense the tension in the air as Aryn stepped forward, her eyes locked on me. I felt the weight of my demonic side straining against the fragile human part of me. My hand instinctively raised to my left shoulder where the tattoo of Cerberus lay dormant, a reminder of my dual nature.

“Listen, Parker,” Aryn said, her voice calm yet firm. “I know you’re scared and unsure of yourself. But I can help you.”

“Help me?” I asked, skepticism creeping into my voice. “How? Last time I checked, you weren’t some magical demon whisperer.”

Aryn smirked at my sarcasm. “No, but I have the ability to teach you how to create a glamour that will hide your true nature from the demons we’ll encounter.”

At her words, my heart raced with a mixture of hope and dread. Could I really learn to control the darkness within me? Or would attempting to do so only unleash more chaos upon our already precarious mission? My powers never did what they were supposed to.

“Are you sure?” I questioned. “What if I screw up? You know how unpredictable my powers can be.”

Aryn’s eyes held mine, unwavering in her confidence. “Trust me, Parker. I was like you once. I was able to learn, and so can you.”

I hesitated, my thoughts consumed by the fear of losing control once more. My powers had put my mates in harm. I would be able to bear hurting them if I lashed out again. “Alright,” I sighed, finally giving in. “But I think we should do this somewhere. It’s only the two of us.”

“Agreed,” Aryn nodded.

“Wait just a minute,” a gruff voice interjected. Trux looked down at me, his eyes narrowed and he tightened his grasp on me. “You two are not going off alone to practice this. Parker has been alone enough. She doesn’t do anything without us around.”

I bristled at Trux’s overprotectiveness, my inner demon itching to snap back. But I knew he was only trying to keep me safe, in his own bossy way. “Trux, I appreciate your concern, but I can handle this,” I told him, attempting to sound more confident than I really felt.

“Absolutely not,” he growled, his shifter instincts showing through. “You’re part of this team, and you’re our Tsigi.”

“Trux, please.” I pleaded, my voice barely above a whisper. “Aryn knows what she’s doing. I need to learn how to control this, and if it means doing it alone with her, then that’s what I have to do. I can’t stand the thought of harming one of you again.”

“No.” He was an immovable force as he held my gaze. “All of us or nothing.”

I tried to resist, but I felt his power as Alpha weighed on me. There was one way this would happen... and it would be his way. “Fine.” I muttered, my frustration mounting as my demonic nature roiled beneath the surface.

“Good. We’ll all be there to support you and make sure everything goes smoothly,” Trux declared, his eyes never leaving mine.

Someone knocked on the door, interrupting our conversation. “Who could that be?” I wondered aloud, my gaze shifting from Trux to the door.

“You can’t be serious.” Aryn moved gracefully across the room and opened the door. “Jo, why are you here?”

“Hey, Aryn.” Jo greeted her like he belonged here... like he hadn’t had to manipulate a demon just to get here. Jo crossed his arms. “You didn’t think I’d let you go off on this dangerous mission without me, did you?”

Aryn sighed, rolling her eyes with a fond smile. “Honestly, Jo, I was just trying to keep you safe.”

“Well, I’m here now.” He said, stepping into the room and wrapping his arms around Aryn. She leaned into his embrace, and they shared a quick, tender kiss. “You know us shifters. We’re a protective bunch.”

Aryn laughed softly, glancing around the room. “That’s an understatement.”

“Alright, let’s get down to business.” Seph interjected, her tone all business as she eyed us all. “We need a plan of action to return the talisman to the demons.”

“Simple.” Ryker tapped away at his tablet. “We just hand it over and hope for the best, right? I mean, we’ve got the talisman, they want it back. Easy peasy.”

“Ryker,” Seph’s voice was laced with skepticism, “I appreciate your optimism, but we’re dealing with demons here. We should be prepared for a fight. They’re not known for being reasonable. Besides, the talisman has lost its power.”

Aryn nodded in agreement, her gaze locked on Jo’s. “Seph’s right. We can’t risk just handing it over without a backup plan. Demons are tricky and unpredictable.”

My heart raced at the thought of returning to the hell realm and facing the demons, but I knew they were right. We couldn’t go into this blindly.

“Okay.” I swallowed hard, feeling the weight of responsibility on my shoulders.

Trux spoke up. “Let’s brainstorm some backup plans in case things go wrong.”

“We can force our way out if we have the right spell.” Rhiot’s fingers were still intertwined with mine. “If we end up not needing, it’s easy to negate.”

“Good idea.” Seph narrowed her eyes as she contemplated the possibilities. “We should also be prepared for any traps they might set for us. I won’t put it past the demons to attempt to take advantage of our vulnerabilities.”

I yawned, the exhaustion from the last few days catching up with me. Trux settled me against his chest. “We’ll discuss all of this tomorrow, unless there’s something else I need to know about.”

“Nope, I’ll be in my room if anyone needs me.” Ryker gave a dismissive wave as he turned his back to the group.

“Wait.” Seph said, her voice hesitant. “There’s... something you should know, Trux.”

“Ryker, stop.” Trux’s command covered the room with a power that sent chills through me. He’d infused his words with his power as the alpha of the pack.

Ryker visibly tensed, but his feet halted immediately.

“What is it?”

Seph glanced at Ryker, her eyes filled with a mix of apology and determination. “Parker and Ryker... they tried to mate. But the bond didn’t form.”

“Damn it, Seph! That’s not relevant right now.” Ryker’s protest was sharp, his usually playful demeanor replaced with frustration.

“Ryker, if it’s true, then it is relevant.” Trux growled, his voice laced with authority. “We need to know everything that can affect this pack.”

Tension slid down my spine at the emotions I felt coming from Trux. I sat up so I could see both him and Ryker. Riot’s fingers tightened around mine, trying to reassure me.

“Fine, it’s true. But it doesn’t change anything,” Ryker spat out, his eyes flashing with anger.

“Doesn’t it?” Trux challenged, his gaze locked onto Ryker. “What’s holding you back? Are you willing to put us all in danger because of it?”

“Of course not!” Ryker snapped, taking a step forward, fists clenched. “I would never jeopardize the safety of this pack.”

“Enough.” The word left my lips before I could stop it. My heart raced as I stared at the two men, tension thickening the surrounding air.

Seph stepped toward Ryker, but he moved out of her reach when she tried to touch him. They shared a look of betrayal and hurt.

I spoke up to draw attention to myself. “Our working theory is that since Seph and I were in the hell realm not too long after I claimed Seph, that maybe it messed with the timeline.”

Ryker crossed his arms but didn’t speak up. Seph elaborated for me. “Despite how much time passed on this side after I bonded with Parker, we don’t know which realm we went to or how it would affect the time on this side.”

“Exactly,” Rhiot added, his grip on my hand still secure. “Hell realms are notorious for distorting time. Once twenty-four hours have passed since Parker returned, then we should try again. That will solve any doubts we have.”

“See?” Ryker said with a humorless laugh. “It wasn’t an issue. We just needed time.”

Seph nodded in agreement, her eyes softening as she looked at Ryker. “Let’s wait before we consider any other options.”

“No, don’t act like you’re not the one making this a problem.” Ryker rebuked her, anger flaring once more. “I fully consented to the bond, Persephone. The problem wasn’t on my side. But you felt the need to throw me to the wolves, anyway.”

All of my other mates hissed at Ryker using Seph’s full name. I’d only heard it once before when she’d first

introduced herself to me... but not since. Hell, Trux hadn't even used it when he was being stern. The hurt was obvious in her eyes.

“Neither was it on ours!” Trux interjected, pointing a finger at me. “Parker bonded both me and Seph without a hitch. It's not her fault that whatever happened between you two didn't work.”

Tensions rose in the room, the air becoming thick with animosity. I slid off Trux, letting go of Rhiot's hand as I stepped into the middle of the room. I tried to stop the argument from escalating further. “Can we all just calm down? We're a team—” I started.

“Stay out of this, Parker.” Trux snapped, his eyes narrowed at me. “You aren't in question here.”

“Excuse me?” I shot back, anger bubbling inside me. “I'm part of this team, too. Just because you're the alpha of the pack doesn't mean you can dismiss me when I want to talk.”

Trux crossed his arms as his gaze bore into me. “You're right Parker. I'm the alpha. Theirs and yours. I absolutely can tell you to stay out of something when it has nothing to do with you. That's what you agreed to when you decided to bond with this pack.”

“Enough!” Seph shouted, her voice a sharp crack in the heated atmosphere. She stepped between Trux and me, her eyes blazing with a determination I admired. “We're not getting anywhere like this.”

As she spoke, my tattoo of Cerberus came alive on my skin from the tension in the room. The sensation of their tiny paws skittering across my flesh gave me an eerie chill, reminding me of just how easily things could spiral out of control. If Cerbie felt I was in danger, he'd appear, which would make things much worse. I had to control my feelings.

“Fine,” Trux growled, his gaze never leaving mine. “But we'll settle this later.”

“Sure thing, Alpha.” My voice dripped with sarcasm. I locked eyes with him, daring him to challenge me further.

“Enough!” Seph repeated, her tone brooking no argument. She grabbed my arm, pulling me away from Trux as her protective instincts kicked in. “Parker, let’s go take that shower we talked about earlier. They always make me feel better. Besides, it will give everyone the time they need to cool off before we can discuss this rationally.”

“Fine,” I huffed, allowing Seph to lead me away from the brewing storm. As we walked away, I glanced back at Ryker, whose happy demeanor had been replaced by a dark, brooding expression. I missed his playful side. It was my fault he was like this... that they were all fighting. A shiver ran down my spine as I wondered what the future held for our team.

CHAPTER 18



COME ON, LET'S GO DOWNSTAIRS BEFORE
THE BIG BOSSY ALPHA COMES UP HERE
AFTER US.

I stared at the bathroom, its pristine white tiles and gleaming silver fixtures reflecting off the steam-filled mirrors. Seph's warm hand on my shoulder guided me inside, her presence a comforting anchor amidst the chaos in my mind.

"Let's get you cleaned up, Parker." She breathed, her eyes filled with genuine concern.

I nodded silently, feeling numb as I allowed her to help me undress. My body felt heavy with unshed tears, every movement slow and deliberate. Seph gently lifted my arms to remove my shirt, revealing the Cerberus tattoo that snaked around my side. It seemed to growl menacingly at Seph, but she ignored it, focusing solely on me.

"Once you're in the shower, I'll be right outside if you need anything, okay?" Seph told me, offering a small reassuring smile as she turned on the water, adjusting the temperature until the room was enveloped in a cloud of steam.

"Thank you." I whispered as I stepped into the warm embrace of the cascading water. As it poured over my skin, I stood there motionless, letting it wash away the grime and sweat from my body, but not the turmoil within. Lost in my thoughts, I barely registered the sound of the door opening again.

"Hey, you okay? You've been in here for twenty minutes." Seph's voice floated through the steam. Her brow furrowed when she noticed I hadn't moved, still standing under the

showerhead with my hair plastered to my face. “Parker, you need to wash up. It will make you feel better, I promise.”

I didn’t respond, my hands hanging limply at my sides. The world felt distant, like I was trapped inside a fog that refused to lift. My thoughts were an overwhelming storm, drowning out the sound of Seph’s voice.

The only thing I felt was the drops of water as they hit my skin, beating away the barrage of emotions that came with thinking of the outside world. I knew tears were running down my cheeks, but I couldn’t feel them through the water dripping down my face. The water washed them away, as it washed away everything I couldn’t handle. Just for a moment, anyway.

“Alright, I’m coming in.” Seph declared after she decided I wasn’t going to move.

I couldn’t. My arms felt like lead weights. She undressed quickly, her movements efficient as she shed her clothing and stepped into the shower with me. The warmth of her presence filled the small space, grounding me as she stood beside me, concerned with etching her features.

“Let me help you.” She reached for the body wash and a sponge. Lathering it up, she began to gently scrub my skin, her touch soothing and tender. I couldn’t help but lean into her ministrations, feeling a fragile sense of security in her care.

“Talk to me, Parker.” Seph prompted softly, her fingers massaging the tension from my shoulders. “You’ve been through so much, carrying this weight alone. You can share it with me. I want to help, even if it’s holding you as you cry.”

I closed my eyes, trembling under the onslaught of emotions that threatened to consume me. Her concern and desire to help slid through the bond wrapping around me. My breath hitched as I tried to find the words, to give voice to the fears that haunted me.

“Everything’s just... too much.” I whispered finally, my voice breaking with the weight of my fears. “I feel like I ruined the team, Seph. If I hadn’t drunk messaged you all that

night... if I hadn't brought my chaos into your lives, you wouldn't be out of sorts right now."

Seph paused in her gentle scrubbing, turning to face me head-on. Her eyes held a fierce determination that both challenged and comforted me. "Parker, you have to understand something," she began, her voice strong and unwavering. "Finding you... it was the best day of our lives. When we first got the chat alert on the website, we didn't think anything of it. But then Ryker responded. He was so insistent that we needed to talk to you. That's when we realized you needed help. You needed not just a cleaning service, but a friend."

"I still don't remember much from that night." I admitted, my voice barely audible. "But I do know that I've made your lives worse since I came into them."

Seph shook her head, her hands cupping my face as she forced me to look into her eyes. "You listen to me, Parker. You haven't ruined anything. If anything, you've shown us what it means to be resilient, to keep fighting even when everything seems lost. We're a team, and that means we're here for each other. No matter what."

I bit my lip, failing to hold back the new tears spilling over at her words. My self-esteem had never been great, but when she said stuff that made me feel like I mattered... I just couldn't deal with it.

Seph's hands slid down from my face to my shoulders, her touch firm yet tender as she guided me to lean my head back.

"Sometimes it takes a while for people to find their place in this world, Parker. But I believe you've found yours with us. You're not a burden; you're a blessing." Seph's hands moved to my hair, gently massaging shampoo into my scalp as she continued to speak. "A Tsigo... of the rarest kind. Not only were you fated to be with one of us, you are the one person who can unite us like no other. A Tsigo that bonds a group... it's impossible, but here you are."

Her words were like a balm to my wounded soul, and I couldn't help but lean into her touch. As she rinsed the shampoo from my hair, her fingers traced patterns on my wet

skin, leaving goosebumps in their wake. Her touch was careful and deliberate, every movement conveying a sense of reassurance and safety that I hadn't felt in a long time.

Even Cerbie relaxed when Seph's fingers traced over him. Somehow, she tamed him as much as she did me. "Ryker adores you, Parker. I can feel it." She murmured as her fingertips continued to trace over Cerbie. "He may be a prankster and a flirt, but his feelings for you run deep. The bond might not have taken, but that doesn't mean his love for you isn't real. Besides, it will work next time."

I felt my heart flutter in my chest at her words, but the doubts still lingered. "How can I be sure, Seph? I'm a liability to the team. My powers are out of control, and Cerbie is unpredictable at best." The thoughts weighed heavily on my mind, the insecurities eating away at me.

Seph gently cupped my face in her hands, forcing me to look into her eyes. Her gaze was unwavering and full of conviction. "I know you're scared, Parker. But remember, we are a family, bound together by more than just our paranormal abilities. We accept you for who you are, strengths and weaknesses alike. And despite everything that's happened, we've always had each other's backs."

"Everyone on the team is devoted to you, Parker. You've earned your place among us," she continued, her voice determined. "You've shown time and again that you're willing to do whatever it takes to protect those you care about. Your heart, your courage... that's what makes you one of us."

Her words settled over me like a warm blanket, giving me the strength I needed to push past my doubts. As I gazed into her eyes, I knew deep down that she was right. No matter the obstacles we faced, I was part of this team, bonded to them by an unbreakable connection.

"Besides, your control over your powers will come with time and practice. I know mine did."

"Yours did?" I asked, raising an eyebrow in curiosity.

“Absolutely,” Seph chuckled, a mischievous glint in her eyes. “You think being a Necromancer was easy to get the hang of? Let me tell you, I had my fair share of embarrassing incidents when I first discovered my abilities.”

“Like what?” I couldn’t help but smile at the thought of Seph making mistakes. She was always so strong and composed; it was hard to imagine her fumbling around like I did.

“Okay, there was this one time when I accidentally raised a whole cemetery full of dead squirrels during a training exercise. It was... chaotic, to say the least.” She laughed, remembering the incident with amusement. “The team was completely overrun by these little undead rodents, and I couldn’t figure out how to put them back to rest.”

“Seriously?” My laughter joined hers as I tried to picture the scene. It seemed ridiculous, but also strangely comforting to know that even someone as skilled as Seph had struggled in the beginning.

“Yep, seriously. Never did figure out why there were so many dead squirrels nearby. But I learned from my mistakes, just like you will. And the team supported me every step of the way, just like they’ll support you. The important thing is that you don’t give up on yourself, and trust that we’re here for you no matter what.”

I took a deep breath, letting her words sink in. She was right—I needed to trust not only in myself but also in the support of my mates. We were in this together, and they wouldn’t let me face my demons alone.

“Thank you, Seph. I really needed to hear that,” I murmured.

“Anytime, Parker.” She gave me a warm smile before turning off the water. Steam enveloped us as she grabbed a towel and wrapped it around my shoulders. The warmth of the towel felt like an extension of her embrace, comforting and reassuring.

Seph proceeded to gently dry me off with another towel, her touch tender and soothing. She was treating me as though I were made of glass, taking care not to break me. After drying herself, she guided me towards the bed, where she'd laid out some clothes for me. As I dressed in the soft fabric, I felt a sense of normalcy returning. Maybe everything was going to be okay after all.

“Hey, I almost forgot,” Seph said, reaching into a corner of the room. She pulled out a backpack, its worn leather familiar and filled with memories. “Rhiot grabbed this before they went looking for us. Thought it might provide some answers, or at least offer some solace.”

My heart leaped at the sight of the backpack. It had belonged to my mother, and I hadn't seen it since that fateful day when everything changed. My fingers closed on the dark green fabric as I pulled it to me.

“Thank you for bringing this back.” I whispered, holding it close. Seph nodded, her eyes filled with understanding and encouragement.

As I unzipped the backpack, an array of emotions washed over me—fear, hope, sadness, and longing. Inside, I found my mother's journal. I needed to read it this time around. It hopefully had answers from the perspective of one human to another.

Flipping through the worn pages, I felt my mother's presence as if she were in the room with me. Her handwriting was graceful and familiar, each word a testament to the love she held for me. I hadn't known then, but I understood now. The constant threat against our lives led her to risk herself to learn and help teach me. I hadn't always understood her motives or methods, but now I needed answers more than ever.

I settled on the section about vampires, intent on learning as much as possible. My demonic powers had caused enough chaos. There was so much in the paranormal world that I needed to learn, so I'd start with one of the most common: vampires. Cerbie moved around my side until he settled on my

ribs, just under my breasts. Then he laid dormant on my skin, waiting for its next chance to protect or destroy.

“Vampires have long been feared and respected throughout history,” my mother’s words began, detailing their strengths, weaknesses, and the various myths surrounding them. Nothing like the media portrayed them.

“There are two classifications: the cursed and the blessed. Media and popular culture seems to reference the cursed, but the blessed, or kindred, as they’re sometimes called, are vastly different than what you imagine.” I murmured, engrossed in the journal. Seph peered over my shoulder, her interest piqued by the information before us.

“Think any of this can help you?” she asked, her fingers tracing the edges of the page.

“Maybe.” I mused. “If it doesn’t help me control my demon side, I’ll at least learn more about the world.”

Knock knock. The sound echoed through the room, making us both jump. My tattoo tingled, Cerberus was ready to pounce at the perceived threat. I placed a calming hand on the design, willing it to stay quiet.

“Hey, you two.” Rhiot called from behind the door, chuckling sheepishly. “Sorry to interrupt you, but Trux insists we all gather downstairs.”

“Of course,” Seph replied, rolling her eyes playfully. “Can’t have one quiet moment without Trux and his orders?”

“Tell me about it.” Rhiot laughed. “Such a bossy alpha. So, you guys coming?”

“Give us a minute.” My voice steadier than I thought it would be.

“Alright, see you downstairs.” Rhiot called as his footsteps faded down the hallway.

I looked back at the journal, determination surging through me. Whatever new information awaited us, I knew I needed to be prepared. My thumb traced the edge of the pages before I

closed it. Trux could order me downstairs, but I'd bring it with me.

Seph held her hand out for me. I took it, giving her a soft smile. "Come on, let's go downstairs before the big bossy alpha comes up here after us."

CHAPTER 19



CAN'T YOU TWO EVER BEHAVE?

Seph led me by the hand, her touch sending shivers down my spine. We descended a narrow staircase that opened into a warm, inviting kitchen. Trux and Rhiot were strategizing with Aryn and Jo. Jericho had arrived at some point because the demon sat next to Aryn, answering their questions. Ryker sat at the end of the table, tapping away at a laptop.

Gray and Kearan stood side by side, the steam from the pots on the stove swirling around them like a mystical aura. I could feel the heat emanating from the oven and the savory scent of herbs tickling my nose.

“Grayson, Kearan, look who decided to join us.” Rhiot announced, grinning at the two of them. “Is dinner almost ready?”

“Thanks for joining us, mate.” Grayson said softly, his eyes never leaving the pot he stirred with practiced ease. “Rhiot, stop trying to rush a culinary genius.”

Kearan turned his head slightly, acknowledging my presence with a small, barely there smile, but remained silent.

Seph pulled me to the table, sitting me next to Rhiot. She took the spot next to me, putting herself between Ryker and me. I set my mother’s journal on the table, intent on reading it until dinner was ready.

Except I couldn’t stop watching the duo work together in perfect harmony. Their movements were fluid and synchronized, as if they had been dancing this culinary waltz

for years. The soft voices between them, the gentle touches as one handed the other a utensil or stepped aside to let the other maneuver, and the way their bodies seemed to gravitate towards each other—it all made me remember Seph’s comment about Grayson and Kearan being an item.

“Gray, add a bit more salt.” Kearan murmured, taking a spoonful of the sauce to taste. Grayson complied without hesitation, sprinkling the salt into the simmering pot.

“Kearan, the garlic bread is ready.” Grayson said softly, his voice barely audible above the sizzle of the pan. Kearan nodded and opened the oven, pulling out a tray of perfectly golden-brown garlic bread.

As I watched them, it was impossible not to feel a little envious of their connection. It was so rare that I found myself tethered to someone, be it through friendship or love.

The aroma of sizzling meat and spices filled the air as Grayson and Kearan skillfully prepared a feast for all of us. I watched their synchronicity, the way Kearan’s quiet efficiency complemented Grayson’s outgoing nature. Their intimacy was palpable, and I couldn’t help but think there was something more between them.

“Earth to Parker.” Seph whispered in my ear, breaking my focus on the two in the kitchen. I blinked and looked at her, feeling a rush of embarrassment heat my cheeks. “Just making sure you’re still with us.”

“Sorry, I just... they’re really like you and Ryker, aren’t they?” I murmured, looking back at Grayson and Kearan as they plated up the meal, their movements still utterly in sync.

Seph chuckled quietly. “Yeah, they are. Just not as obvious. Once you watch them closely, then it’s pretty obvious.”

“Everyone, dinner is served!” Grayson called out to the room, his voice warm and inviting. Kearan followed behind him, carrying a plate of steaming vegetables.

“Come on, Parker.” Trux said gruffly, grabbing my hand and guiding me to switch places with Rhiot. Trux sat next to

me, giving me a stern look that dared me to move. It made me feel a mix of loved, protected, and errant child he needed to watch..

“Nice to have you here, Parker.” Rhiot grinned, offering his hand under the table. I hesitated for a split-second before placing my hand in his, feeling the warmth of his touch seep into my skin, as if he felt the tension between Trux and I and wanted to calm me.

“Thanks, Rhiot.” I smiled weakly, focusing on the food as Grayson and Kearan served everyone. The aroma of roasted meat and vegetables filled the air, making my mouth water.

“Trux,” Rhiot began, a mischievous glint in his eyes, “do you ever take a day off from being a hard-ass?”

“Only when you stop being a pain in mine.” Trux grumbled, but there was a hint of amusement in his voice. I couldn’t help but smile at their banter, feeling a little more at ease.

Down the table, Ryker and Seph exchanged playful glances, clearly enjoying each other’s company. Ryker tried stealing a piece of food from Seph’s plate, only for her to swat his hand away with a laugh. Their earlier hostility was gone as their relationship returned to normal. It made me envious of the bond they shared.

As I continued to eat, I couldn’t help but watch Grayson and Kearan out of the corner of my eye. There was an intimacy between them... the way Grayson reached over to brush a stray hair from Kearan’s face, or how Kearan leaned into Grayson’s touch when he handed him a napkin. It was all so tender and affectionate.

My eyes settled on Aryn, who sat between Jo and Jericho. The trio seemed to have their own unique dynamic—playful and light-hearted. Jo snatched a roll from Jericho’s plate, his wolfish grin daring him to try to take it back. As he reached for it, Aryn intercepted his hand, shaking her head with mock disapproval.

“Enough, you two,” she chided, though I could see the laughter in her eyes. “There are plenty of other rolls.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” Jericho asked, his voice filled with mischief as he leaned back in his chair.

“Fun? You mean the fun of antagonizing my mate?” Aryn raised an eyebrow, amusement sparkling in her eyes.

“Exactly,” Jo chimed in, a smirk playing on his lips as he took a bite of the stolen roll.

“Can’t you two ever behave?” Aryn sighed dramatically, but I could tell she enjoyed their banter. It gave her a sense of belonging, something I craved more than anything.

“Can you blame me for wanting to tease your wolfish mate?” Jericho replied, winking at Jo before directing his attention back to Aryn. “Besides, he stole my food!”

“Maybe you should be quicker next time.” Jo teased, finishing the roll and licking his fingers clean with a satisfied grin.

Aryn rolled her eyes, but I could tell she was fighting back a smile. “Fine, have it your way. But don’t come crying to me when dinner devolves into food fights.”

Watching them, I wasn’t sure if I was craving affection, or affection while my life wasn’t in a constant state of upheaval. Yeah, definitely the latter. What I needed was a taste of normal. My gaze drifted around the table, taking in the family-like bonds between everyone. They weren’t blood family, but that wasn’t needed. They’d found each other, and formed the connections they needed.

“Hey, Parker,” Trux’s gruff voice pulled me from my thoughts. I looked up at the Alpha, his serious expression a stark contrast to the playful banter that had just occurred.

“Trux, what’s going on?” I asked, my heart rate picking up as I wondered if there was another problem we needed to deal with.

“Relax.” He must have sensed my unease, because his voice softened. “We’ve got a plan in place.”

“Really?” I tried not to sound too eager, but the idea of having some control over my life was intoxicating.

“Yep. Aryn and Jericho are going to help you learn the glamor that’ll help you hide your powers.” Trux explained, crossing his arms as he looked me over. “Once we’ve got that down, Mephistral will take us all to the hell realm.”

I nodded, feeling a strange mix of relief and apprehension. The thought of having control over my own powers was exciting, but the idea of venturing into the hell realm sent shivers down my spine.

Before I could say anything, however, I felt a tingling sensation running through my body. It was as if an electric current had suddenly been activated beneath my skin. A foot-tall, winged demon appeared before us—Mephistral. His low voice rumbled in the air, belying his small size.

“I didn’t agree to this!” he protested, glaring at Trux and me.

Trux opened his mouth to retort, but Rhiot beat him to it. “Mephistral,” he stated calmly, “you made a pact with the demon leader. Eventually, they will call for you. There’s no way to hide. Better if we go on our own terms than risk getting recalled.”

I looked at the little demon, feeling compelled to calm him down. “It’ll be okay, Mephistral,” I murmured. “We’re all in this together, right?”

His dark eyes bore into mine, searching for any signs of insincerity. I held his gaze, trying to convey my genuine concern for his well-being. After a moment, the tension in his shoulders eased.

“Is Mephistral permanently bonded to me?” I asked Rhiot, needing to ensure the depth of our connection.

“Unfortunately, yes,” Rhiot replied, a sad smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Mephistral grumbled. “I did the ritual correctly. I might be a weak demon, but I’m not bad at it.”

“Alright,” I said with determination, “I promise you, Mephistral, that I’ll make sure you aren’t left behind. I’ll make sure we get out together.”

Mephistral hesitated for a moment, his wings fluttering nervously. Then, finally, he nodded in agreement. “Fine,” he muttered, crossing his tiny arms over his chest. “But don’t expect me to be all cheerful about it.”

I smiled, feeling a strange warmth towards the little demon. “Wouldn’t dream of it.”

Trux grunted, clearly not as enamored with Mephistral as I was. “We should finish going over the plan.”

“Okay,” I agreed, trying to keep my voice steady. “And once we’re done in the hell realm, we come back here and Ryker and I can try again, right?”

“Right,” Trux nodded, his eyes narrowing slightly. “And by then it’ll be more than twenty-four hours since the last attempt, so there shouldn’t be any issues.”

“Sounds like a plan,” I said, feeling a mix of relief and apprehension at what lay ahead. I couldn’t help but wonder if I was strong enough to face the challenges that awaited us, or if I would crumble under the pressure.

“Good.” Trux’s gaze lingered on me for a moment longer before he turned his attention back to his food. We ate for a few minutes before someone else spoke up.

“Hey, um... can I ask a question?” Jo’s timid voice broke through the tension in the room. His eyes darted between Aryn and Trux, as if seeking permission to speak.

“Since when do you ask for permission?” Aryn shot back with a raised eyebrow, her tone dripping with sarcasm. “Go on then, spit it out.”

“Right,” Jo hesitated. “It’s just that, how does this whole group dynamic work? With the bonding thing and all?”

“None of your business.” Aryn scolded, but Trux held up a hand to silence her.

“Actually, it’s fine.” Trux said, his voice gravelly yet patient. “Parker is our Tsigo, all six of us. We didn’t know it was possible either, but two of us have already bonded with Parker, so it can actually happen.”

Aryn glanced at me, then back at Jo. “Satisfied?” she asked, her tone edging on annoyance.

“Almost,” Jo sighed, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly. “Are any of you able to... uh... keep your preexisting dynamics?”

“Jo!” Aryn protested.

“What? I was curious because of someone we know.” He admitted, looking slightly abashed.

Seph spoke up. “It appears so, but we haven’t proven that yet.”

“Are you talking about Remington and Lyall?” Aryn questioned, her face softening as understanding dawned on her.

Jo nodded, and Aryn let out a long “oh” before apologizing. “Sorry for our nosiness. It’s just... complicated.”

‘Complicated’ seemed to be an understatement for the ever-evolving dynamics within our group. As we continued to navigate through the supernatural world, we were confronted with more surprises and challenges than we’d ever anticipated. But one thing was certain—we had each other’s backs, and that bond was only growing stronger.

As I sat there, surrounded by my newfound family, I knew one thing for certain: I wasn’t going to let them down. I would face whatever trials were thrown my way, no matter how terrifying, and emerge victorious. For their sake, and for my own.

But despite my resolve, as the room grew quiet and my thoughts turned to the hell realm, a shiver ran down my spine. The tattoo on my arm itched, and I could almost hear Cerberus’s growl echoing in my ears.

What horrors awaited us in that dark place? And would we all make it back alive?

CHAPTER 20



IT'S TORTURE TO WAIT ANY LONGER, SO
YOU'LL SLEEP WITH US.

Grayson stood to clear the dishes, but Aryn grabbed her plate. She glanced at Jo, who nodded in agreement. “We’ll clean up.”

“Thank you.” Grayson murmured. Kearan nodded, then went upstairs. Grayson excused himself, then followed Kearan.

Ryker spoke up. “I’ll show you where you can bunk down if you want to stay the night. Then you can clean up.”

Aryn hesitated, her brow furrowing as she turned to Jo. “Can we stay? Or will being away from the pack for that long cause problems?” The concern in her voice made me tense.

Jo sighed heavily, running a hand through his hair. “The curse activated the moment you left the pack’s territory, but Archer gave me permission for two days.” He glanced at Aryn with a mixture of determination and vulnerability. “We should be fine.”

“Alright then, let’s get these cleaned up.” Aryn took charge as she began gathering dishes. Jo followed suit, and together they quickly cleared the table.

“Room first.” Ryker led them upstairs.

As they disappeared from sight, Rhiot leaned against the wall, arms folded. “This house only has four rooms.” His gaze wandered around the space.

“With Grayson and Kearan in one and Aryn and Jo in a second, that leaves two rooms for the rest of us.” Seph

announced, waiting to see what everyone would do.

“Who wants to sleep where?” Rhiot looked pointedly at Seph and me.

Seph pursed her lips, thinking. “I’ll stay with Ryker and ___”

“Actually,” Trux interrupted before she could finish. His voice was firm but held an undercurrent of desire, making my heart race. He leaned closer, his eyes locked on mine. “Parker will sleep with Rhiot and me.”

My breath hitched, and I struggled to keep my mind focused on anything other than Trux and how he’d felt... damn lust demon tendencies. I stammered, heat flooding my cheeks. “Uh, what?”

“Trux,” Rhiot warned, his voice low and dangerous. “Don’t push her. She’s been through a lot.”

“We all have. Besides, being with her alpha will help.” Trux’s gaze never left mine, his eyes darkening with desire. “I’ve been patient since we were reunited. The bond demands I mark you with my scent. It’s torture to wait any longer, so you’ll sleep with us.”

I swallowed hard, my pulse quickening in response to the intensity of his stare. Part of me wanted to protest, to put some distance between us, but another part, a larger part, craved the closeness he offered.

“Fine.” I whispered, unable to resist the magnetic pull between us. In the last few days, I’d gotten used to being with Seph, and being with her felt different than Trux... and I craved that at the moment. “Only because I feel the bond pushing me. I’m still mad at you for your bossy tendencies.”

“Fine with me as long as you’re in my bed.” A triumphant grin spread across Trux’s face as he reached for my hand.

I grabbed it, still annoyed at his domineering.

“Not so bad, huh?” Trux murmured, his eyes still holding mine captive. The room seemed to heat up several degrees, and my pulse thundered in my ears.

“Then let’s get some rest.” Rhiot tried to break the tension.

Taking a moment, I waved at Seph. “Good night, babe.”

I’d used the pet name she’d started calling me. The soft grin tugging at her lips told me she knew exactly why I’d said it. She nodded, then grabbed my journal. No way would Trux let me stay up and read some of it tonight. Seph knew that too. She’d make sure I got it back.

As we reached the top of the stairs, the door to the room where Aryn and Jo were staying creaked open. Aryn peeked out, a mischievous glint in her eye. “Sleep well,” she whispered before disappearing down the hallway to clean up the kitchen with Jo.

Trux led me to a different room than I’d been in before. Rhiot followed closely behind, his expression unreadable. The moment the door closed behind us, Trux pressed me against the wall, his lips crashing into mine with a hunger that threatened to consume us both. My hands tangled in his hair, pulling him closer as our bodies melded together.

“Wait.” Rhiot’s voice interrupted our fiery embrace, and we broke apart, breathless.

Trux lifted me up, carrying me over to the bed. He set me on the bed, then stripped his shirt and pants off. Trux stood there naked, absolutely magnificent. My mouth went dry at the sight of him.

Rhiot stood by the door, his eyes blazing with a mixture of protectiveness and desire. “We need to be careful, Trux. We can’t let our desires control us, especially not now.”

Trux grabbed a pair of loose, flannel pants and pulled them on. “I’m marking her with my scent, not mating her.”

“Good.” Rhiot grunted as he undressed and pulled on a similar pair of pants.

Surprise drifted through me. “You’re not?”

Trux shook his head. “Any other time, yes. But you’re exhausted and need rest. The mating bond will have to suffice

with holding you as you sleep.” He pulled the blankets back and waited for me to crawl underneath.

When I was settled, Trux slid into bed on one side of me, his muscular chest pressing against mine. Rhiot followed suit, sliding in on my other side, spooning me from behind. Their warm bodies enveloped me, their scents surrounding me like a protective shield.

“Trux, Rhiot,” I whispered, feeling the weight of our situation settle over me. “What happens next?”

“First,” Rhiot’s chest pressed firm against my back as he inhaled, “we have to deal with the demon leader. He’s the main threat right now.”

“Then,” Trux’s cheek rested on top of my head, “you need to go back to the training center with us. It’s not safe for you out here anymore.”

“Go back?” I tensed. “No, I can’t. I won’t.” The thought of returning to that place filled me with dread.

“Listen,” Trux insisted, his voice firm but gentle. “The handlers already know about you. They won’t allow you to remain free for long. If you don’t come with us willingly, they’ll punish the entire team.”

My heart sank. I didn’t want to be the reason my mates and newfound family suffered. Tears welled up in my eyes as I considered the consequences. I was so fucking tired of everyone forcing me to do things I didn’t want to be a part of.

“Hey,” Rhiot whispered, his breath tickling my ear. “It won’t be like before. We’ll be with you this time. We won’t let anything happen to you. Trust us.”

I couldn’t help but shudder at the idea of being caged again, even if Trux and Rhiot were by my side. Desperation clawed at my chest, and an idea formed. “I have other identities,” I said, almost pleading. “I could go on the run... become Jennifer McDowell.”

“An alias won’t stop them, Parker.” Rhiot explained. “You might be able to run, but the team can’t. We’d never let you leave without us... you’d be unprotected.”

“Damn it!” I muttered, my fists clenched at my sides. My body trembled with a mix of fear and anger. “I can’t go back there. I just... I can’t.”

Trux grabbed my chin gently but firmly, forcing me to look up at him. His brown eyes bore into mine, full of determination. “You can’t avoid this.” His voice was soft but filled with regret. “When Ro told the handlers about you, he really fucked us over. Now all we can do is deal with the consequences.”

“Trux is right.” Rhiot added, rubbing my shoulder gently in an attempt to calm me down. “The training program isn’t that bad, not really. We’ll be able to help you while protecting you from harm.” His touch was warm and comforting, and I found myself leaning into it.

“Everything will be okay.” Trux reassured me, his voice a soothing balm on my frayed nerves.

But the thought of returning to the sterile training compound and giving up control left me restless, haunted by thoughts of the unknown. “I can’t sleep like this.” I grumbled, attempting to shift away from him. Which didn’t work. I was basically a Parker sandwich. It should have felt amazing, but I was too upset. Any other time, I would enjoy this more... a lot more.

“Maybe this will help.” Rhiot murmured, his hand continuing to gently caress my shoulder as he began to sing quietly. His deep, melodic voice washed over me, weaving a tapestry of safety and comfort around us. The tension in my body slowly ebbed away, replaced by a sense of tranquility I hadn’t experienced in a long time.

“Let go, Parker.” Trux whispered, his hand still holding my chin gently, but now with a tender touch. “We’ve got you. Nothing will happen to you.”

And for the first time since my world had been turned upside down, I allowed myself to believe their words. To trust them. Vulnerability coursed through me, raw and liberating.

As Rhiot's song continued to lull me, my eyelids grew heavy as I surrendered to the pull of sleep. And even though uncertainty loomed in our future, in that moment, I felt safe, cradled between two of my mates. Some day, I'd have them all. Not sure they made a bed big enough for that. I'd have to ask.

But just as sleep claimed me, a bad feeling settled in my gut. It wouldn't be as easy as they said. Nothing with me was. I just hoped we all made it through alive.

CHAPTER 21



YOUR MUTT IS NO MATCH FOR ME, HALF-BREED.

“Come on, let’s get you back on your feet.” Trux’s voice echoed through the dimly lit cavern. His gruff tone matched the roughness of the rocky walls that surrounded us. I groaned as my body ached from the impact with the ground.

“Ugh, I hate hell realms.” I muttered under my breath as I felt Trux’s strong arms lifted me up and set me back on my feet. I glanced down at my leg, now covered in a thick layer of black slime. The disgusting substance clung to my skin like tar, its consistency viscous and repulsive. The fetid stench of sulfur and decay assaulted my nostrils, making me gag. “If I never came back, it would be too soon.”

“Not a fan?” Rhiot asked, his gaze curious. “I wondered if you’d feel differently since you’re part demon.”

“Not in the slightest... Dammit.” I hissed, trying to scrape the black slime off with the edge of my hand, only to have it smear further across my skin. As the substance continued to stick to my flesh, an uncomfortable sensation spread across my leg and hand... a prickling, pins and needles feeling that set every nerve on edge. It hadn’t seemed to affect me last time I stepped in it, but curiosity got the better of me. “Is it poisonous?”

“Doesn’t seem to be. Not for you anyway.” Rhiot replied.

Trux spoke up before Rhiot could say anything else. “We need to keep moving.”

“Right.” I sighed, attempting to ignore the discomfort as best as I could. There was too much at stake for me to let this

disgusting ooze slow us down. We had a demon leader to find and a talisman to return. Then we could go home and not deal with demons and hell realms for a moment.

As we continued deeper into the hell realm, I couldn't help but feel a cold chill run down my spine. The rocky caverns twisted and turned like a labyrinth, and the faint sound of demonic whispers echoed through the tunnels. My heart raced in my chest, each beat a reminder of just how out of place I felt here. My human half wanted nothing more than to turn back, to flee from this nightmarish realm and never return. But I couldn't. We had a job to do, and running away wasn't an option.

So I steeled my nerves and followed behind Trux, trying my best to ignore the black slime coating my leg. Demonic whispers echoed through the tunnels, each one a premonition of something sinister lurking in the shadows. We walked for what seemed like ages before the cavern opened up into a massive chamber.

And there, on a throne of bones, sat the demon leader we had come to see. His crimson eyes gleamed with malice as he gazed upon our group, a cruel smirk twisting his hideous features.

"Well, well," he purred, leaning forward in interest. "What have we here? It seems the talisman bearer has finally arrived."

My heart nearly leapt out of my chest at the sound of his smug voice. I hesitated, unsure of how to proceed, when Rhiot gave me a nudge forward. "Just like we talked about."

Right. The talisman. I fumbled for the ancient relic hanging around my neck and held it up for the demon to see. His eyes lit up with greed and anticipation. My hand trembled as I removed the talisman, the only reason I was facing this vile creature again, and held it out to him.

But to my shock, the demon leader recoiled from the talisman as if it were poison. His cruel smirk melted into a snarl of rage as he leapt from his throne. He reached out, and his hands started to change, becoming more like paws and

claws than fingers. I could feel something in the air shift, a hum that rose in pitch.

“You dare mock me?” he roared, eyes glowing like hot coals. “Did you think I wouldn’t notice your pathetic trickery?”

My heart pounded in my chest. Trickery? This was the right talisman... it was just devoid of the power he wanted. Why wasn’t this working? I glanced at the others in confusion, but they looked just as lost and frustrated as I was.

The demon leader hissed, baring razor-sharp teeth. “You think you can back out of our deal now? You will give me what I want, one way or another.”

He raised a clawed hand and green fire sparked at his fingertips. The team fell into battle stances, ready to fight. Jo grabbed Aryn and yanked her behind him, shielding her from the coming attack.

Panic rose in my chest like bile. This wasn’t how things were supposed to go. The demon leader was supposed to accept the talisman, not try to roast us alive.

The demon leader flung a blast of emerald fire at us. Rhiot countered with a burst of blue energy from his hands, deflecting the attack.

The cavern erupted into chaos. Demons streamed from the shadows, claws, and teeth bared.

A demon lunged, claws outstretched, as Rhiot threw up a magical barrier. Dark energy crackled against the shimmering shield as the creature hissed in fury.

Rhiot gritted his teeth, struggling to maintain the spell. Sweat beaded on his brow. If his concentration slipped for even a second... We’d be in trouble.

I reached inside myself, forcing my demonic powers to emerge, and joined Rhiot in sustaining the shield. The creature snarled as we held it at bay. For a second, I felt invincible.

But the feeling didn’t last. A wave of energy crashed against me and I stumbled to my knees, unable to maintain my

focus as the demon leader unleashed another blast of hellfire at us.

The magical barrier shattered. Rhiot opened his eyes and shouted something in an ancient tongue, summoning a powerful gust of wind that scattered the demons around us.

The demon leader began chanting in a guttural, ancient demonic tongue. Power thrummed through the air, raising the hairs on the back of my neck.

Cerberus erupted from my chest in a burst of pain, fur bristling as he shook off his two-dimensional state. Mephistral popped into existence beside me with a disappointed frown. “Well, this isn’t good.”

“Dammit.” I growled at the demon leader. He’d revealed Cerberus to Rhiot, Trux, and the rest of my mates who hadn’t known yet. I hadn’t planned to change that until things calmed down. Especially since I’d somehow become some kind of lesser demon collector.

Cerberus lunged at the chanting demon, but he waved a hand and a blast of energy sent my protective hellhound tumbling back with a pained yelp.

My heart twisted at the sound. The demon leader cackled, black eyes gleaming with malice. “Your mutt is no match for me, half-breed. Now, if you’d be so kind as to hand over the real talisman...”

I gritted my teeth, hands clenching into fists. Over my dead body. This was far from over. The demon had another thing coming if he thought he’d get the talisman he expected. It was powerless and there was nothing I could do to restore it.

The tension in the dimly lit room was suffocating as Trux, Rhiot, Greyson, Kearan, Aryn, Jo, and I stood there, staring at each other with a mixture of anger and disbelief. The shadows flickered on the walls, mimicking my erratic heartbeat.

“Forgot to share something, Parker?” Trux demanded, his voice gruff and authoritative. “Why the hell didn’t you tell us about the three headed hell hound?”

“Would you have believed me?” I shot back, feeling defensive. “I barely understand it myself.”

“To be fair, it’s been a chaotic few days.” Seph spoke up.

Trux glared at her, letting her know now wasn’t the time to defend me.

“Still, you should have said something.” Rhiot chimed in, trying to lighten the mood with a teasing grin aimed at Trux. “We could’ve had a puppy playdate or something.”

“Rhiot, this isn’t funny.” Trux grumbled. “Tell us what is going on, Parker.” He insisted, his eyes boring into mine. I opened my mouth, ready to spill everything about Cerberus and Mephistral, when a low growl rumbled through the room. Cerberus, his three heads snarling and snapping, saliva dripping from his fangs... except he faced us instead of the demon leader.

My heart leaped in my chest at the sight of my hellhound. But something was wrong. His eyes were glazed over, as if he wasn’t really seeing us.

“Cerberus, who’s a good boy?” I shouted, taking a step towards him. But Rhiot yanked me back, his grip like steel on my arm.

“He’s being controlled, Parker. We have to get out of here, now!” Rhiot yelled.

Mephistral caught my attention, a worried frown stretching across his face. “While I am bound to you, your pet is not. And he is very, very hungry.”

Cerberus let out a bone chilling howl and lunged straight for us, his paws pounding on the floor, drool flying from his jaws.

My heart rammed against my ribs, and I screamed. We were about to become dog food.

CHAPTER 22



WHY CAN'T SOMEONE JUST TELL ME WHAT
I NEED TO KNOW BEFORE I SCREW THINGS
UP?

“Anyone can invoke control of Cerberus, you know.”
Rhiot said, his voice cutting through the chaos in the room like a knife. “Cerberus is unbound and has only been choosing to stay with you, Parker.”

My heart hammered against my ribcage as I looked at the hellhound, its black fur bristling and red eyes narrowing. Fear, mixed with a strange sense of betrayal, gripped me. Rhiot was right... I had no real control over this creature. Which explained what happened at the training facility. I'd just been lucky so far.

“Any demon lord would have bound that thing to it by now. How about it Trux? Want a dog?” Rhiot added, smirking at Trux.

“Rhiot, not helping!” I snapped at him. Panic rose like a tidal wave as I stared at Cerberus. He snapped at me, its razor-sharp teeth only inches from my face. My breath caught in my throat, and I stumbled back.

“Rhiot,” I whispered, feeling like I was drowning in fear. “What the hell do we do now?”

“Sorry, Parker, but we're wading deep in this mess. There's only so much I can do to protect us.” Rhiot replied, his eyes locked on Cerberus. “I warned you about messing with demons.”

“Yeah, well the next time Ro screws with my life I'll politely decline.” I yelled, my voice cracking under the weight

of my terror. “I didn’t choose this! It’s not like I wanted anything to do with demons!”

“Enough!” Aryn shouted, her eyes blazing with determination. She stepped forward and raised her hands, murmuring an incantation under her breath. The air crackled with energy as she summoned Jericho.

In a burst of purple smoke, Jericho appeared before us, his muscular form exuding raw power. His dark, piercing gaze swept across the room before settling on Cerberus. “Who let loose an unbound hellhound join the party?” he growled menacingly.

“Hey, we didn’t know about it until recently either.” Rhiot shot back.

Jericho huffed. “Then someone should have bound it to them before someone else invoked its power.”

“Yeah, it’s on the to do list.” Rhiot bit out.

“Rhiot, please!” I begged, my voice trembling more than I cared to admit. “Can we focus on getting out of this alive?”

“Of course, royally blooded one.” Jericho said, stepping between me and the snarling Cerberus. He met the hellhound’s gaze with a steely glare of his own. “Be gone from this place, foul beast, lest I banish you to the depths of Hell once more.”

Cerberus let out an angry howl, but Jericho stood firm. After a tense moment, purple smoke swirled around the hellhound. It turned into a stormy vortex of black and purple smoke. Then the smoke exploded out from Cerberus, revealing the hellhound was still there... and he looked pissed.

“As soon as we leave here.” Jericho turned to face me, his expression unreadable. “You must bind Cerberus to your will before it causes real damage, Parker. I won’t always be around to save you.”

“Save me?” I scoffed, trying to ignore the heat rising in my cheeks. “Maybe I wouldn’t need saving if someone, anyone told me shit before I fucked it up.”

“Really?” Jericho raised an eyebrow, his gaze flicking back to Cerberus as the hellhound snarled and snapped at us. “Demons... We’re all demons. It’s part of our nature to mislead and omit things to wreak havoc and chaos. Even the nicest demons can’t help themselves.”

“Jericho,” Rhiot warned, his voice strained. “Now’s not the time.”

“Fine, beastie.” He sighed, then turned to me with a hint of remorse in his eyes. “My apologies for my brusqueness. Nonetheless, that was an ill-advised move.” He gestured toward Cerberus, now straining against the invisible force holding him back. “You can’t just adopt a hellhound without knowing how to control it... Not the same as getting a puppy from the pound.”

“Apology accepted,” I muttered, staring at the ground in embarrassment. “I’m sorry, okay? I didn’t know what I was doing. But seriously, why can’t someone just tell me what I need to know before I screw things up?”

“Sometimes we learn best from our mistakes,” Jericho replied, his voice softening. “Besides, you won’t always have someone around to guide you.”

“Enough of this!” The demon leader’s voice echoed through the room, filled with rage. “Cerberus, attack!”

The hellhound lunged forward, finally breaking free from Jericho’s control. It snarled viciously, its three sets of razor-sharp teeth snapping as it charged toward us.

“Get back!” Jericho shouted, pushing me behind him as he expertly twirled his glaive, ready for the attack. “Rhiot, take Parker and go! I’ll handle Cerberus.”

“Jericho, no!” I cried out, my heart pounding in my chest. I didn’t want to leave them to fight each other. They’d kill each other, and I couldn’t live with that.

“Go!” Jericho growled, his eyes never leaving the advancing Cerberus. “Now!”

I felt Rhiot’s strong hand wrap around my arm, pulling me away from the impending battle. As we retreated, I couldn’t

tear my gaze away from Jericho, who skillfully dodged Cerberus's snapping jaws, countering each ferocious attack with swift, powerful strikes of his glaive. Blood splattered the floor as the blade of Jericho's glaive sliced through Cerberus' ribs.

"Don't hurt him!" My voice trembled as fear and worry overwhelmed me. Would he be able to defeat Cerberus without hurting the hellhound I'd grown so attached to? And what would happen to us if he didn't? As the sounds of snarls and clashing metal filled the air, my heart felt like it was being ripped apart.

"Aw, does someone care for their little demon pet?" Jericho's voice dripped with sarcasm, but as he spoke, I saw him twist his glaive in mid-air, striking Cerberus with the flat side of the blade. The hellhound yelped and staggered back, momentarily stunned by the impact.

"Get ready, Parker," Rhiot whispered urgently beside me. His grip on my arm tightened as he began to recite an incantation, his voice low and steady.

As the words left Rhiot's lips, a sudden gust of wind whipped through the room, extinguishing the flickering torches that lined the walls. Darkness enveloped us, leaving only the sounds of snarls and clashing blades to echo through the void.

"No!" I gasped, tears streaming down my face as I fought against Rhiot's hold. "Cerberus!"

"Stay still." Rhiot's voice was firm, but I could hear the strain behind it. Whatever he'd just done, he already regretted it.

"Please!" I begged, my voice breaking. "Bring him back."

"Trust me." He whispered, his voice heavy.

Slowly, I could feel Cerberus' rage dissipate, replaced by an overwhelming sensation of pain. A searing heat spread across my skin, like molten lava coursing through my veins. I still couldn't see them, but the sounds of fighting dissipated.

Pain scorched over my chest. I looked down, seeing the tattoo of Cerberus writhing and twisting on my skin.

Pain radiated through me as my legs gave out. Rhiot held me in place, whispering apologies to me as I tried to hold back the screams of pain. What the hell was happening? My head spun and my chest heaved as I rode the verge of hyperventilating.

Then, as quickly as it came, the pain vanished. I blinked, noticing dim light filtering through the room once more. The torches were relit, Cerberus's tattoo settled back into stillness on my skin.

I looked up at Rhiot, eyes narrowed. "What did you do?"

His gaze was hooded, expression unreadable. "I overpowered the hellhound's commands from the invocation."

"Why did it hurt so much?" My hand slid over my skin, the memory of the pain too fresh.

Rhiot's jaw clenched. "He was too strong to overpower without sending him back to his previous form. Once he returned to you, you shared his pain. I'm so sorry. I didn't want to hurt you, but it was our only option if you wanted to keep him."

I swallowed hard, trying to push back the ache in my throat. Rhiot had hurt me to carry out my wishes. He hated himself for doing it. It was written all over his face. I stroked the tattoo, trying to reassure my hellhound he was safe. The pain left me feeling raw, but it was worth it if I got to keep Cerberus.

Jericho slammed the end of his glaive on the cavern floor. "Enough!" he bellowed. His voice echoed through the cavern, causing the demon leader to flinch in surprise. I could sense the powerful energy radiating off of him, and it sent shivers down my spine.

"Listen carefully." Jericho growled, his eyes fixed on the demon leader, who seemed to be shrinking under his intimidating gaze. "Parker has fulfilled her end of the bargain.

She brought the talisman to you, and you refused it. The deal is done.”

The demon leader hesitated, then shook his head, clearly still in shock. “No... you can’t just—”

“Enough games.” Jericho snapped, cutting him off mid-sentence. The air around us began to crackle with energy, and I felt a familiar tingling sensation at the tips of my fingers. Before I could even register what was happening, the world around us seemed to fold in on itself, and we were suddenly back at the house.

My heart raced as I staggered, disoriented from the sudden shift in location. The team looked around in confusion, trying to comprehend what had just happened. The atmosphere was heavy with uncertainty, everyone’s nerves frayed from our encounter with the demon leader.

“Where’s Jericho?” Aryn asked, her voice barely above a whisper. Her eyes scanned the room, searching for any sign of him.

I frowned, feeling a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach. Jericho hadn’t returned with us. My mind raced, trying to process this new development. What had he sacrificed to get us out of that situation?

CHAPTER 23



ARE YOU QUITE FINISHED WITH YOUR
TANTRUM NOW?

The air crackled with tension, a storm brewing between us. Ryker leaned against the wall, his arms crossed, a playful smirk dancing on his lips. “So let me get this straight,” he drawled, “we needed a demon to save us from a demon? Isn’t that like fighting fire with fire?”

“Enough.” Trux growled, his eyes flashing amber. “Parker, now that we’re back, you need to mate with Ryker.”

I shook my head violently, panic rising in my chest. “No. I can’t. Please don’t make me go through that again right now.”

The memory of our failed mating still haunted me. I still felt a deep-seated pain from Ryker’s rejection, driving me away from repeating the experience. But despite that, I couldn’t help but notice the intensity of the moment and feel a strange pull toward him. I stepped back, my heart desperate to stay yet my mating bond telling me it was time to go.

Ryker’s smirk faded. “Look, Parker, I didn’t mean to—”

“We’re done for now.” Seph stepped between us, her voice brooking no argument. “This isn’t productive.”

“Productive?” Trux hissed as he took a step toward Seph. “You’re talking about the fate of the entire team.”

Seph crossed her arms. “Yeah, the entire team includes me too.”

“Enough, please.” I whispered, my voice ragged with emotion. “I can’t handle any more heartbreak.” My eyes

darted between Trux and Ryker, feeling the weight of their stares. “Please.”

“Fine,” Trux snapped, his protective instincts kicking in. “But we’re not done discussing this.”

“Thank you.” I struggled to find some semblance of strength amidst the soap opera that had become my life.

“Let’s all just take a break.” Seph’s gaze softened as she looked at me. “Why don’t we go to our cabin in the mountains? We could use some time to regroup and figure out our next move.”

Ryker shifted from his position, uncertainty replacing his earlier playfulness. He opened his mouth, but no words came out. He knew just as well as I did that as soon as we got to the cabin, we’d have to try again.

“We don’t have time for a vacation. We need to get back to the training facility.” Trux reminded us, his voice firm but not unkind. I knew he was right, but the thought of facing another day in that hellish place made my chest tighten with anxiety.

“Who said anything about a vacation?” I snapped, suddenly irate. “I’m exhausted, Trux. I’ve been through hell and back, literally. And you want to throw me right back into the lion’s den? How can I be any good to anyone if I’m this broken?”

“Control yourself, Parker,” Trux growled, his eyes narrowing. “We all need to be at our best if we’re going to succeed.”

“Control myself?” I spat, feeling my anger boiling over. “That’s rich coming from you! You’re always so in control, so bossy and alpha-like that you can’t see when someone is struggling!” My breathing became heavy. I felt the telltale burning sensation in my tattoo, warning me of the imminent chaos.

“Look,” Rhiot tried to interject, his voice calm as he attempted to diffuse the situation. “Parker, we understand you’re going through a lot, but—”

“Save it, Rhiot!” I cut him off, unable to contain my outburst. “You don’t understand! None of you do! I’m not as strong as you guys—I never have been!”

I choked back a sob, knowing that they were all watching me, but I couldn’t bring myself to care anymore. I was too tired, too overwhelmed by everything that had happened.

“Enough.” Seph stepped forward, her eyes locking onto mine. Before I could react, she pulled me into a tight embrace, one of her arms wrapping around me like a vice. I felt her lips crash against mine, stealing my breath away as the world spun around us. Her fingers sank into my hair, clutching me to her.

It took a moment for me to register what was happening, but as her tongue slid against mine, a wave of calm washed over me. Her emotions soothed me through the mate bond. My anger dissipated, the burning in my tattoo fading away until there was nothing but Seph—her scent, her taste, the feel of her body pressed against mine.

Seph was my rock, my salvation. I wasn’t sure when she’d become the polarizing mate, but I loved her for it. It didn’t take me long to clutch onto her, deepening the embrace.

When she finally pulled away, I could only stare at her in a daze. My lips tingled, and I lifted a hand to touch them, still feeling the ghost of her kiss.

Seph regarded me with a smug little smile. “Are you quite finished with your tantrum now?”

I blinked, my cheeks flushing with embarrassment. Trust Seph to be so blunt about it. “I—”

“Good.” She nodded, sliding her arm back around my waist. “Because we have a mini retreat to plan, and your little meltdown isn’t good for your stress levels.”

My eyes narrowed at her teasing tone, but I couldn’t stop the smile tugging at my lips. Leave it to Seph to know exactly how to distract me, even if her methods were completely unorthodox.

“Are we done here?” Trux interrupted. I turned to find him watching us with a scowl.

Rhioth elbowed him in the side, smirking. “Oh come on, even you have to admit that was pretty effective.”

Trux growled under his breath, but didn’t argue. I hid my amusement, catching Seph’s eye. She winked at me, and I felt a rush of gratitude for my mates—even if they were infuriating.

“Alright,” I said, taking a deep breath. “Let’s get back to the trip.”

We were still debating the details when a rush of air stirred my hair. I turned to find Jericho standing behind us, his expression grim as a vortex of purple smoke swirled around him.

“It’s done,” he said abruptly. “The demon leader refused the talisman, so the bargain is fulfilled.” Jericho knelt on the ground, then used his arms and hands to make a few gestures in an intricate pattern—a sign of offering and loyalty. I wasn’t sure how I knew, but I did. His tattoos glowed brightly against his dark skin, the symbols dancing before us in a dazzling display.

“I swear my allegiance to you,” he said solemnly. “To protect you until my dying breath.”

A moment of silence hung in the air as I regarded Jericho with awe and admiration. I gasped, unable to contain my surprise at the enormity of his vow. Everyone else tried to process what just happened.

“I have to go.”

“Jericho, wait!” I started forward, but he disappeared in a burst of light before I could say more. I stared at the empty space where he’d stood, a lump forming in my throat.

Seph squeezed my arm gently. “He’ll be back, Parker. He’d come back if you need him.”

I swallowed hard and nodded. She was right—Jericho had proven that much over the short time I’d known him. Ryker’s harsh words earlier rang through my ears. He was right, I somehow collected demons everywhere I went.

Rhiot's gaze softened with understanding. "Come on, let's finish the planning. The faster we get this trip underway, the faster we can have everything settled again."

Trux grunted his agreement, folding his arms over his chest. "Best get to it, then. The sooner we deal with this, the better."

I took a deep breath and nodded. My mates were right... we had a job to do, and standing around worrying wouldn't accomplish anything. Pushing thoughts of Jericho aside for now, I focused on the task at hand. The demon threat might have been neutralized for the moment, but there were still plenty of dangers in the world.

Aryn stepped between Seph and me, wrapping me in a hug. "I'm here for you, sister. Whenever you need anything, just call." She squeezed me tight, then pulled back with a determined look on her face. "I'll do some research on demonic bloodlines and get back to you on any tricks we can use."

"Thank you." I hugged her back.

"And you—" Aryn marched over to Trux, crossing her arms with a scowl. "Take it easy on her, would you? Not all of us knew we were anything but human. Being part demon or the mate of a shifter... uh, shifters takes time for us to adjust. This is a lot to take in, even for those of us accustomed to the weird and unexplained."

Trux held up his hands in surrender, grimacing. "Wasn't saying anything."

"You didn't have to." Aryn sniffed, then grabbed Jo's hand. "We'll be back soon to help in any way we can. Try not to do anything too dangerous before we return, all right?"

And with that, they disappeared in a burst of purple flames, leaving behind a sense of loss deep in my chest. I hadn't realized how nice it was to have a sister... even if I hadn't known about her. I sighed, scrubbing a hand over my face. My mates meant well, but all the fussing was starting to wear on my nerves.

Trux opened his mouth, but Kearan spoke up, leaving everyone speechless. “It won’t hurt to give Parker a day or two to rest.” After a long silence, he spoke again. “Mental health is just as important as physical.”

They realized the challenges we’d faced had taken a toll on our interpersonal dynamics. The secrets revealed and tensions that arose had left us feeling vulnerable and fractured.

I stared at the floor, guilt gnawing my insides. If I’d had better control of my powers, none of this would have happened. My mates were suffering because of me. Because I was a half demon freak.

Kearan crouched before me, forcing me to meet his gaze. Concern and understanding shone in his amber eyes. “This isn’t your fault, Parker. We knew the risks when we bonded with you, and we don’t regret our decision for a second.” He cupped my cheek, his touch warm and comforting. “Whatever bad thoughts that are spiraling through your mind right now... they’re wrong. You’re a strong, caring woman, and together we will overcome any challenge.”

My heart swelled at his words, tears pricking my eyes. How did I get so lucky to find a mate like him? I threw my arms around Kearan, breathing in his woodsy scent. “Thank you. I don’t know what I’d do without you... all of you.”

Despite Kearan’s usually stoic and avoidant nature, he’d put himself out there to make me feel better. I appreciated his vulnerable moment.

Grayson wrapped us in a hug, nuzzling the top of my head. “You’ll never have to find out.” His deep voice rumbled through me, chasing away the last of my doubts and fears.

One by one, all of them joined us until we were a giant bear hug... a hugging cuddle puddle of mates. My mates loved me, demonic powers and all. And together, we could face anything.

CHAPTER 24



TRUE, I SWEAR I'LL USE MY DEMON POWER
TO RUN YOU OFF IF YOU DON'T LEAVE ME
ALONE.

The moment my feet crossed the threshold of the cabin, I ran into the first bedroom, slamming the door behind me. My heart pounded in my chest as I locked it, my pulse quickening. The room seemed to close in on me, but I knew I had to find solace somewhere. I couldn't face Ryker right now. Not yet.

“Okay, Parker, breathe,” I whispered to myself, the air catching in my throat. My fingers traced over the demonic tattoo of Cerberus that adorned my arm, now a constant reminder of the chaos that resided within me. It felt warm, almost alive, yet I couldn't be sure if it was due to my heightened emotions or a warning.

Desperate for any means to ground myself, I slid my backpack off my shoulder and onto the wooden floor, its contents spilling out. My hands trembled as I rifled through the items, searching for something, anything, to distract me from the whirlwind of thoughts threatening to consume me.

And then I found it... The journal my mom had written for me. A pang of longing hit me like a ton of bricks, and I clutched the worn leather cover to my chest. Every word inside was a testament to her love for me, despite what I was. She'd sacrificed so much for me, and I hadn't realized it. I wished she was alive again... I had so many questions for her.

“Mom, I need you now more than ever.” I murmured, tears threatening to stream down my face.

As I opened the journal, my eyes scanned the pages, hoping for the answer. To what? I wasn't sure. Just anything that would help me right now.

A knock on the door interrupted me. "Unlock the door and let me in, Parker." Trux's voice demanded, making me jump. My heart raced like a wild stallion, his sudden presence only adding to my feeling of vulnerability.

"Really? Can't I have just one moment of peace?" I muttered under my breath, clenching the journal tightly to my chest. Gathering my courage, I responded defiantly as I stood, ready to run. "If you want in, Trux, you'll have to do it yourself. I don't care if you break it down or take it off the hinges, but I'm not opening it."

Silence, followed by the sound of metal hitting metal as he fiddled with the doorknob. His gruff determination both irritated and unsettled me. It was clear that this Alpha shifter didn't know the meaning of the word 'relax.'

"Trux, I swear I'll use my demon power to run you off if you don't leave me alone," I warned, my voice trembling. The truth was, I had no idea what would happen if I unleashed that power. My demonic tattoo of Cerberus stirred, as if sensing my rising fear and anxiety.

"Is that a threat, Parker?" Trux challenged from the other side of the door. I could picture his muscular frame towering over everything in his path, his eyes narrowed with focus.

"Consider it a warning," I replied, my voice firm despite the trembling inside me. "I don't know what will happen if I use my power, and neither do you. So, I recommend you leave me alone."

The sound of metal scraping against metal stopped. "Fine," he growled, the word heavy with frustration. "But this isn't over."

His footsteps retreated down the hall, and I allowed myself to breathe a sigh of relief. My heart was pounding like a jackhammer in my chest, and I could feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins.

As I leaned against the wall, the tattoo on my arm began to burn—a familiar sensation that both frightened and intrigued me. Cerberus never failed to emerge at precisely the right... or wrong... moment.

“Come on out, Cerbie.” I whispered, knowing that I couldn’t keep him contained for much longer. The burning intensified, and before I knew it, the demonic hound had emerged from the depths of my skin.

“Hey there, big guy,” I murmured, running my hand along one of his ebony heads. His eyes glowed a sinister red, but I knew they held no malice toward me. He was here to comfort and protect me, just as he had always done in times of need. Thankfully, he manifested smaller than before.

Cerberus nudged me gently with one massive head, urging me to sit on the floor next to the bed. I complied, allowing myself to sink into the cuddle puddle created by the massive, warm presence of my three-headed beast as he wrapped himself around me. One of his heads lowered and licked the top of my foot, the sensation both ticklish and strange.

“Knock it off,” I mumbled, trying to push his snout away. In response, Cerbie shifted and licked my head instead, his coarse tongue rough against my hair. “Ew, gross! I preferred it when you were licking my foot.”

Cerberus let out a breath that almost sounded like a low chuckle that rumbled deep within his chest, and I couldn’t help but laugh, too. He leaned down and resumed licking the top of my foot like a common house dog. It was weird.

Then, a knock on the door broke the moment. “Parker, it’s me, Seph. Can I come in?” her voice muffled by the thick wood.

“Sure.” I called out, reluctantly untangling myself from Cerberus’s warm embrace. I unlocked the door and pushed it open. Seph stepped inside, her eyes widening at the sight of my living tattoo lounging on the floor. The last few times she’d seen him, things hadn’t gone so well.

“Wow, he looks even more badass up close.” She said, her gaze locked on Cerberus. He growled softly in response, protective instincts flaring, but I placed a calming hand on his snout to ease him.

“Could you lock the door again, please?” I asked, trying to avoid any confrontations with Trux or Ryker. They were the last people I wanted to deal with right now. Seph obliged, clicking the lock back into place.

Seph slowly joined me, taking a seat next to me on the floor. Cerbie disappeared. His tattoo form tingled along my back as he went dormant.

“I don’t think your hellhound likes me.” Seph muttered before she leaned over and handed me the notebook I’d been using to keep track of my mates. I hadn’t seen this since we’d left my mom’s house. “Here, I thought you might need this,” she said, her eyes filled with understanding.

As I flipped through the pages, I noticed some new notes written in Seph’s neat handwriting. “Did you... write these?” I asked, running my fingers over the notes about each of my mates. She had carefully listed their likes and dislikes, along with small snippets of information that would help me navigate our relationships better.

Seph nodded, a hint of embarrassment tinting her cheeks. “I may have given away a few small secrets, but I thought it could help you deal with them without betraying anyone’s trust.”

“Thank you, Seph.” I whispered, touched by her efforts to support me. The weight of having multiple mates sometimes felt too heavy to bear, but knowing I had her as an ally eased some of that burden.

“Of course, Parker.”

I leaned in and kissed Seph, unable to contain my gratitude. Her lips were soft against mine, parting easily to allow my tongue entrance. A spark of desire ignited in my belly, flames licking through my veins as I deepened the kiss.

Seph's hands tangled in my hair, pulling me closer as she kissed me back with equal fervor. I crawled into her lap, straddling her thighs as I stripped off her shirt and bra. My mouth trailed hot, desperate kisses down the column of her throat to the valley between her breasts.

She arched into my touch, guiding my hands to her pants. I made quick work of removing the rest of her clothes, settling between her spread thighs. Her arousal filled my senses, the scent of her desire thick in the air. I slid two fingers into her slick pussy, curling them to find the spot that made her cry out.

I felt the tension build in Seph's body as I continued to thrust into her. My tongue flicked against her clit as I pumped my fingers, matching the rhythm of her grinding hips. Her moans echoed through the room, spurring me on as I lavished attention on her most sensitive places. It didn't take long for her to teeter on the edge of orgasm. Her thighs trembled and her inner walls clenched around my fingers. I pulled back before she fell over the cliff.

"Not yet, babe." I murmured against her belly, loving the slightly outraged look she gave me when I used her pet name for me. My thumb slid between her folds, teasing her clit.

Seph made a sound that was half groan and whimper.

A smile pulled at my lips as I kissed the sensitive flesh of her belly. Her muscles rippled as I teased her. When I continued to hold back, she tried to ride my hand, but I countered her movements. Seph let out a needy growl of frustration as she threw her head back against the side of the mattress.

"What, are you trying to say you're ready to come?"

She nodded vigorously. "Please, Parker."

I grinned in response and shifted to bury myself between her legs once more. This time my tongue replaced my fingers, lapping at her slick flesh as I explored every inch of her pleasure center with painstaking attention. Seph gasped and

clawed at the carpet with abandon, unable to contain the pleasure coursing through her.

Finally, I felt Seph's body tensing again, signaling that she was on the brink of orgasm again. I wanted... needed to taste her orgasm. My fingers from one hand sank into the flesh of her hips as I latched on to her, pulling her closer as I buried my face deeper. Her moans turned into loud, mewling cries as she found the release she'd been chasing. I smiled as her thighs clenched around my head as she ground herself against me.

I gentled my touch, lapping at her until the tremors subsided. Seph's breath hitched as she rode her orgasm, and I slid my fingers from her warmth, bringing them to my lips to suck clean. Seph watched through half-lidded eyes, a soft moan escaping at the sight. "Funny how you somehow escaped to my bedroom," she teased, a satisfied grin curling her mouth. Seph dragged me up her body, kissing the taste of herself from my lips.

"Why is that?"

"I always keep a few toys at all our properties." Seph said, reaching for the nightstand drawer. She withdrew a thick rainbow dildo that spiraled from the base to the tip.

My eyes widened at the sight of the unicorn-inspired toy. Arousal and amusement warred within me as Seph smirked, giving the dildo an experimental stroke.

She patted her thigh in invitation. "What do you say, babe? Want to go for a ride?"

CHAPTER 25



EVERY SINGLE DAY, I FALL DEEPER IN LOVE
WITH YOU.

Seph held out the rainbow unicorn dildo, her thigh muscles flexing under the smooth, tanned skin as she waited for me to straddle her.

My heart pounded. I stared at the dildo, then up at Seph. Her eyes gleamed with mischief and desire, lips curled in a teasing smirk. I bit my lip, heat pooling low in my belly at the thought of Seph using that toy on me.

I hesitated, my mind racing with thoughts of Seph. Our relationship had grown deeper than I ever imagined it could. I'd fallen hard for her, my heart aching with the knowledge that she held it in her hands. What if this was just another moment of passion? What if she didn't feel the same way I did? Since we were mate bonded, she should, but a little voice in my mind whispered doubts. Sometimes, in the silence of the night, I doubted everything.

"Hey, Parker," Seph said softly, sensing my hesitation. "If you're not comfortable with this, we don't have to do it. It's just an idea, not a requirement."

She started to lower the dildo, but I stopped her. I didn't want her to think I didn't want her just because I'd gotten caught up in my mind.

"Wait." I breathed, placing my hand on her forearm. "I want this, Seph," I whispered, my voice thick with emotion. "I want you. It's just... I'm falling in love with you, and I need to know this means something more than just sex."

Seph's eyes widened at my confession, a flicker of surprise and vulnerability flashing across her features. For a moment, she was silent, studying my face as if searching for the truth in my words.

"Parker," she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper. "You're my mate... my Tsigo. I love you more than anything in the world. From the first time I saw you, you stole my breath away. I knew at that moment I would die to protect you even before I knew we could bond. Now, every single day, I fall deeper in love with you."

Her free hand sank into my hair, pulling me in for a deep kiss. Our lips met in a passionate, burning embrace that set my entire body on fire. I could feel the love and devotion emanating from her with each tender caress of her lips against mine. As we broke apart, I stared into her eyes, and for the first time in my life, I felt truly grounded.

"Thank you," I whispered, overcome with emotion. "You're my rock, Seph. You're sweet, strong, and the calm that I need in my chaotic life."

We shared another lingering kiss before I stripped and moved to straddle her thigh. My heart raced as I looked into her eyes, the vulnerability still present but now mixed with desire.

"Please," I murmured, my voice thick with eagerness. "I still want to try it."

A wicked grin spread across Seph's face as she complied, sliding the toy into her own slickness. I loved the soft moan she made as she slid the toy in and out of her own body. For a moment, it tempted me to take over and fuck her with it. Then she returned it to her thigh. Seph's grin turned wicked as she guided me onto the toy, the tip breaching my entrance with a delicious stretch. I gasped at the sensation, bracing my hands on her shoulders as she slowly worked the dildo inside.

"Ride me, babe." Seph commanded, gripping the back of my neck.

I did as she asked, rocking my hips back and forth, the dildo sliding in and out of me with each movement. Seph used her thigh to thrust deeper, causing me to moan uncontrollably. As I rode her leg, she held the back of my neck, pulling me in for another scorching, fervent kiss. Our tongues danced together, adding to the already intoxicating sensations coursing through my body.

When we broke the kiss, Seph leaned forward and used her free hand to tease my breasts. My nipples hardened at her touch, sending shivers down my spine. She sucked a nipple into her mouth, her tongue tracing circles around it.

I clung to Seph, my fingers digging into her flesh as I continued to ride her thigh, feeling the pressure build within me. Seph, ever attentive to my needs, moved her thumb so that my clit pressed against it every time she thrust into me. The added stimulation was almost too much, and I whimpered in pleasure, knowing that my release was near.

“Please... don’t stop.” I begged, my voice barely a whisper.

“Never.” Seph promised, her eyes darkening with determination. She increased the force behind her movements, driving the dildo even deeper inside me. It filled me, stretching me as I finally took in the full length. The base pressed against me, leaving me feeling full.

“That’s it, take all of it. So damn hot.” Her thumb slid over my clit as she held the toy’s base against me. “You’re so fucking wet. You’re dripping all over my thigh. I wish it was my face.”

“Fuck.” It was too much. I needed to focus on something else or I’d come any second.

I reached down, my fingers finding her pussy and dipping inside. Seph made a guttural noise as rolled me onto my back. She positioned us so she could use her knee to fuck me with the dildo. Her thigh slapped against my clit on each thrust, heightening the sensation. When I opened my mouth to say something, she slid her fingers wet with my essence in. I

licked and sucked on them like I'd been wandering in the desert on the verge of dying from dehydration.

“Parker, listen to me.” Seph’s gaze burned into me. “I want to hold you.” She slid her fingers from my mouth, trailing them down until they wrapped around my neck. “Like this. With a little bit of pressure, but not enough to prevent you from breathing.”

My body responded to her words with a wildfire of pleasure that burned through me and made everything she was doing to me more intense. I moaned and bucked my hips, trying to feel more of everything.

“I should have asked before we started, but I didn’t think about it until I rolled you onto your back. But you’re so fucking hot, begging and writhing under me like this.” Her thumb caressed my neck. “I’d never do anything you didn’t want me to do. So tell me, can I hold you like this?” Seph tightened her grip.

It almost made me come right there. I slammed my eyelids shut as I tried to hold my orgasm back. Once I was in control again, I spoke, loving the way her grip felt. “Yes. Please don’t stop.”

The growl that rumbled through Seph’s chest excited me even more. I found Seph’s pussy, frantically finger fucking her. She needed to come with me. I wanted her to join me when I leapt off the cliff into completely mindless bliss.

She leaned down, claiming my mouth. Her hand was a brand, one I’d feel for the rest of my life even if no one saw it. I sank my free hand into her short hair, fisting it as I deepened the kiss. Seph hissed as she became frantic. The mating bond surged, sending my pleasure to Seph and her bliss into me.

Her inner walls clenched my fingers as she rode my hand. “Fuck, Parker.” Seph growled as she buried her face against my shoulder. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”

The world exploded around me. My body evaporated as my orgasm destroyed me. Everything I was... everything I would be... disappeared as my orgasm wrecked me.

As the waves of pleasure began to recede, I felt Seph gently pull the dildo from my body. The sensation left me sensitive but satisfied. She pulled me against her soft curves, holding me close as our breathing slowly returned to normal.

“I love you Parker. So fucking much.” Seph whispered in my ear, and I couldn’t help but nod in agreement. With one smooth motion, Seph reached over and grabbed a blanket from the edge of the bed, wrapping it around us both. It felt like a cocoon, shielding us from the world outside.

As we lay there, intertwined and basking in the afterglow of our passion, I felt an unexpected sense of peace. Seph’s arms were strong, providing a sense of security that I hadn’t felt much in years. For a moment, I could almost forget about my demonic powers and the chaos they caused.

“Listen,” Seph whispered softly, her breath warm against my cheek. “You have twenty-four hours before you need to worry about Trux or Ryker. They won’t risk us messing up the mating timeline. So try not to worry. Right now, you’re all mine.”

“Thank you,” I murmured, grateful for the time she was giving us. My eyelids grew heavy, sleep beckoning me towards its sweet embrace. As I started to drift off, lulled by Seph’s steady heartbeat, a sudden knock at the door jolted me back to reality.

CHAPTER 26



PUT ME DOWN, YOU OVERGROWN,
MUSCULAR BEAST!

I lay there, my body tingling from the intensity of Seph's touch. Our scents mingled together, a heady blend that made me feel dizzy with desire. The taste of her lips still lingered on mine as she held me close. I could feel the heat of her skin against my own; it was a feeling I never wanted to lose.

"Everything alright in there?" Rhiot's voice broke through our post-orgasmic haze, his knock startling us both.

"Come back later," Seph growled.

"Sorry, but this can't wait. Parker needs to bind Cerberus to her if she wants to keep him around. The longer we wait, the more dangerous it becomes for all of us if he turns against us." Rhiot insisted. His tone left no room for argument, and I felt a shiver of fear run down my spine at the thought of my tattoo coming to life and wreaking havoc.

"Everything will be alright." Seph murmured into my ear, her breath warm and soothing. She had an uncanny ability to calm the storm inside me... a storm that seemed to rage constantly since discovering my demonic heritage. I nodded, trusting her entirely.

"Waiting until tomorrow won't harm anyone." Seph called out, her voice firm yet respectful. "We'll deal with it then."

"Seph, you can't—"

"Goodnight, Rhiot." Her tone left no room for argument. I heard his frustrated growl from the other side of the door

before his retreating footsteps echoed down the hall.

Seph turned back to me, her eyes glowing with warmth and affection. “Where were we?”

A breathy laugh escaped me as I pulled her close once more, our bodies fitting together as if made for one another. We had been through so much together in such a short time. She was my rock. All my mates were important to me, but as I learned more about each of them... bonded with each of them, they became different. Somehow, each of them helped me in a different way.

I drifted to sleep, right there on the floor in Seph’s arms. At some point, Seph moved us, because when I woke up the next morning, we were tangled up together on the bed. My thigh nestled between hers and she’d wrapped her arms around me. Her breasts pressed against mine. It was wonderful.

Seph kissed my forehead. “There’s nothing more in the world I want to do right now...” She rolled until she was pressing me against the bed, her thigh pressed against my pussy. “Than make love to you again, but if we wait any longer to get up and get moving, Rhiot might just break in and drag you out.”

She gave me a deep kiss, leaving me breathless when she pulled away. “Oh?”

“Yeah, he’s been pacing the hallway for the last two hours.” Seph slid off me, helping me off the bed.

We showered and dressed. When I finally opened the bedroom door, Rhiot stood on the other side of the door, his broad shoulders taking up the entire doorway as he glared at us with crossed arms. “Finally.” Rhiot grumbled, his gaze shifting from me to Seph. “We need to bind Cerberus to Parker now.”

“Give her a break, Rhiot,” Seph shot back, her protective side flaring up. “She just woke up, and she’s been through a lot these past few days.”

“Breakfast first,” I chimed in, my stomach growling as if on cue. “Or maybe brunch, considering how late it is.”

“Food can wait until after we don’t have to worry about a rampaging demon.” Rhiot argued, the impatience was clear in his voice.

Trux called from somewhere in the cabin. “Rhiot, you need to lighten up, man. Let Parker eat something. It’s not likely Cerberus will become a problem in the next hour or two.”

“Fine.” Rhiot conceded, his jaw clenched as he stepped back to let us pass. Then he raised his voice. “Thanks, Trux.” Rhiot replied sarcastically, rolling his eyes. “I’ll make sure to consult you next time I’m dealing with a demon-related issue.”

“Anytime, buddy,” Trux’s voice echoed back, amusement coloring his tone.

Rhiot shook his head and led Seph and me through the dimly lit hallway towards the dining room. The scent of sizzling bacon and freshly brewed coffee wafted through the air, awakening my senses and making my mouth water in anticipation. It was hard to focus on the fact that we were about to bind a demonic entity to me when the only thing I could think about was sinking my teeth into something delicious.

As we entered the dining room, I saw Grayson and Kearan standing side by side at the stove, their concentration focused on flipping pancakes and scrambling eggs. Their quiet camaraderie was palpable, even though they rarely spoke to one another. It was as if they communicated through some unspoken connection.

“Morning.” Grayson greeted us, his voice soft but steady. Kearan nodded in our direction, remaining silent as usual.

“Good morning.” I replied, taking a seat at the table. Seph joined me, her eyes scanning the array of food spread out before us.

“Dig in, everyone.” Grayson gestured toward the feast he and Kearan had prepared. My stomach rumbled again, and I eagerly filled my plate with a bit of everything.

While I savored every bite, I noticed the tension in the room. Rhiot was grumpy, his brows furrowed as he stabbed at his food with a fork. Trux, on the other hand, was uncharacteristically quiet, eating methodically without engaging in conversation.

“Rhiot, you look like you’re trying to murder your breakfast.” Seph commented, while flashing me a smile.

He grunted, not looking up from his plate.

Seph leaned closer to me, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Someone woke up in the wrong bed this morning.”

I giggled, trying to not choke on the bite of bacon.

“Just shut up and eat your food.” Rhiot grumbled at Seph.

“Touchy, touchy.” Seph took a long drink of orange juice, her gaze sliding to where Trux sat. “And what’s going on with you?” she asked, staring pointedly at Trux.

He glanced up, meeting her gaze. “Nothing.”

“Bullshit,” Seph countered. “Spill.”

Trux set his fork down, leveling a glare at her. “It’s none of your damn business.”

The tension in the room was suffocating. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat, my gaze scanning the table. Where was Ryker? He was never late to meals and his absence only added to the strange dynamic. I frowned, wondering if I should ask after him, but thought better of it.

Once breakfast was over, Rhiot stood abruptly, his chair scraping loudly against the wood floor. He strode over to me, grabbing me beneath my arms and hauling me up and over his shoulder.

“Hey!” I shrieked, pounding my fists against his back. “Put me down, you overgrown, muscular, sexy beast!”

Rhiot ignored my protests, stalking toward the back door and pushing through it. The rest of the team trailed after us, Seph smothering a laugh behind her hand.

We entered the clearing behind the cabin, the tall grass swaying in the breeze. Rhiot set me on my feet, grabbing my chin and forcing me to meet his gaze.

“It’s time.” Rhiot said gruffly.

My stomach dropped. “What if it changes Cerbie?”

Rhiot’s mouth dropped open for several seconds before he composed himself. “You gave Cerberus, a renowned, vicious hellhound, a nickname like a puppy?”

“What? He likes it.”

Rhiot growled as he shook his head. “Call him forth.”

I rolled my eyes. Always right down to business. Running my fingers over the tattoo, I murmured to Cerbie to join us. A telltale sensation of pins and needles covered my skin as he manifested.

The hellhound appeared larger than I’d seen before. So he could also change his size as he wanted. It hadn’t been my imagination before. His eyes were gleaming black orbs, reflecting the dim morning light that filtered through the trees.

I swallowed hard, moving away from Rhiot when he stepped closer to Cerberus. He began to chant under his breath, his hands moving in a series of complex gestures. The surrounding air seemed to shimmer and warp, the tall grass bending away from us as though pressed back by an invisible force.

Rhiot’s chanting grew in volume and intensity until I felt a strange tingle run along my skin and the ground beneath us started to tremble slightly. Trux stepped closer to me, protectively placing one hand on my shoulder as we watched in awe at what was happening before us.

With one resounding command, Rhiot stopped and with that command came a wave of power, so strong it made me stagger backwards into Trux’s arms for balance. When I managed to stand upright again, I gasped.

Each of Cerbie’s heads had a purple rhinestone collar with thick metal spikes around their necks. The collars seemed to fit

perfectly, as if the magic binding him to me knew exactly how to size them.

Rhio stepped forward, his voice low and firm as he spoke in a demonic language. Cerberus whimpered softly, but didn't move.

"It's ok." I murmured. "It is for your own protection. Besides, I'll be right here for you."

I went up to Cerbie, all three of the heads bowing to me reverently. As I stroked each head, they responded by nuzzling me. Unlike before, none of them appeared hostile to my mates. Cerbie howled, all three heads filling the sky with their vows of loyalty before lunging into me, his tattoo form plastering to my chest and neck.

When Cerbie disappeared, it revealed Ryker. He stood with his gaze burning through me. My stomach flip-flopped as the mating bond surged between us, demanding we claim each other.

CHAPTER 27



I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME.

The space seemed to shrink as everyone slipped away, leaving me alone with Ryker. His intense gaze held mine, the air between us crackling with electricity. My heart thundered in my chest, and I couldn't help but feel drawn to him.

"Parker." He whispered, his voice like a caress against my skin, "I love you. More than anything. I want us to be bonded."

My breath caught in my throat, and my conflicting emotions surged within me. I wanted this bond with Ryker, but the memory of our failed mating still haunted me.

"Ryker, we can't." I protested, my voice barely a whisper. "It hasn't been twenty-four hours."

He let out a low chuckle, his eyes never leaving mine. "Actually, it has." A grin played on his lips as he continued. "You slept through dinner last night. It's been twenty-six hours since you mated with Seph."

My cheeks flushed with embarrassment at having slept for so long, but also at the mention of my mating with Seph. The memory of her touch still lingered on my skin, and I couldn't help the ache that formed deep within me. But this was about Ryker and me now... our chance to bond.

"Are you sure?" My voice quivered, betraying my uncertainty.

“Positive.” he said confidently, closing the distance between us.

I could feel the heat radiating off him, and my demonic powers stirred beneath my skin. The first two times I’d bonded with one of my mates led to my demon side causing chaos. I wasn’t sure what would happen this time, but I couldn’t resist the mating bond surging between us.

Ryker gripped my chin, guiding me to look up at him. His gaze seared into mine, molten silver meeting emerald green. My breath hitched as he ran his thumb over my bottom lip, hesitating for a moment.

“Parker,” he whispered, his voice gravelly with desire. “I need you.”

Those three words shattered any remaining resistance I had. I surged forward, claiming his lips in a searing kiss. Ryker growled low in his chest, grabbing my hips and lifting me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist, deepening the kiss.

Our tongues danced as Ryker carried me to his bedroom, my fingers tangling in his hair. He pressed me against the wall, his body covering mine as our kiss continued. I could feel his erection pressing into me, and I arched into him with a moan.

Ryker broke the kiss, trailing his lips down my neck. I tilted my head to the side, giving him better access. His hands slid under my shirt, fingertips dancing across my skin and leaving a trail of fire in their wake.

He pulled my shirt off, tossing it aside before capturing my lips again. His hands slid down to my pants, hastily shredding the fabric. I loosened my grip around his waist, allowing him to slide the fragments of fabric off.

The love and desire in Ryker’s eyes as he gazed at me melted away any insecurities. I tugged on his shirt. He instantly complied and pulled his shirt over his head, discarding the garment by tossing it blindly behind him. I took in the sight of his muscular body, my core clenching with need.

“You’re so beautiful,” he murmured, burying his face in my neck. His fingers slid between my legs, teasing my pussy. I gasped, rolling my hips forward for more friction. Ryker grinned, sliding two fingers into me.

“So wet for me already.” He purred, pumping his fingers slowly. I moaned, fisting my hands in his hair and bringing his lips back to mine. Ryker continued his ministrations, adding another finger and steadily increasing the pace.

The coil of pleasure in my core tightened. Just as I was about to tumble over the edge, Ryker withdrew his fingers. I whimpered in protest, gazing at him through half-lidded eyes.

“Not yet.” He murmured. “I want to be inside you when you come.”

“Please.” I whispered, urging him on, needing him to fill me completely.

“I love you, Parker.” Ryker said with a ferocity that sent shivers down my spine. Then, without another word, Ryker shoved his pants down and pushed his cock deep inside of me. I gasped at the sudden fullness, my fingers digging into his back.

Ryker didn’t give me time to adjust; he started pounding into me relentlessly, the sound of our bodies colliding echoing through the room. He moved my hands to the wall above my head, where Ryker pinned them in place. I strained against his grip, desperately wanting to touch him, but he held fast.

He increased his pace, driving deep into me with each thrust. His mouth found mine again, tongues tangling and panting breaths mingling together. I closed my eyes and let go of my inhibitions as pleasure built within me.

With each hard thrust, Ryker’s grip on my wrists tightened until finally I was at the brink of orgasm.

“Ryker, please. I need you... Make me come.” I begged. I needed to feel his skin under my hands. He leaned down, kissing me deeply as he continued to thrust into me. I moaned into his mouth, writhing in ecstasy and frustration.

Finally, Ryker released my hands. I immediately ran them over his chest, nails raking down his abs. Ryker groaned, fucking me harder in response. The coil in my core tightened almost painfully, pleasure and tension building with each thrust.

He leaned down and kissed me fiercely as he drove into me faster and faster. The wall behind me creaked. I clung to him, rolling my hips to meet his every stroke. The surrounding air was thick with our shared desire as we moved together in perfect harmony.

My orgasm came hard and fast, taking both of us by surprise. I screamed out his name as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me. Ryker followed soon after as he let out a guttural groan as his release came quickly and fiercely. My orgasm went on, leaving me screaming out his name as fiery tingles ran up and down my spine.

We both collapsed onto the floor in a tangled mess of limbs and satisfaction. We lay there for several moments before Ryker pulled away. "I love you." Ryker whispered against my hairline before planting a tender kiss against it.

"I love you too." I replied with a contented sigh as I snuggled closer to him.

The heat of our mating dissipated, leaving a chilling calm in the room. As we waited for the mate bond to form, my heart raced with anticipation of the connection we would share. But as each second ticked by, it became clear that something was wrong. Again.

I felt Ryker withdraw, first emotionally, then physically. His strong arms loosened around me as confusion and devastation washed over his face. My heart ached with the pain I saw etched across his features.

"Ryker?" I whispered, reaching up to touch his cheek, but he pulled away from my touch. A single tear rolled down his cheek as his eyes filled with anguish.

"Damn it!" he snarled, snapping at the injustice of our failed bonding. Careful not to harm me, he tossed me on the

bed, then knelt beside the bed, his head resting on my thigh. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I fucking love you, Parker. What the hell is wrong with me?”

“There’s nothing wrong with you.” I ran my fingers through his beard. I put my other hand on his shoulder and gently squeezed, trying to soothe the pain he was feeling. We sat in silence for a few moments before I spoke again.

“Ryker, look at me.” He obeyed, lifting his head to meet my gaze. His eyes were glassy with unshed tears and his jaw clenched tight with emotion. “I don’t know what is wrong, but it’s not you. There’s something else going on, and we’ll figure it out together.”

He shook his head slowly but didn’t speak. It was clear that he didn’t believe me. I understood his pain and frustration better than anyone else ever could.

“No Parker. I can’t believe that. You mated both Trux and Seph without issue. It’s me. It’s all my fucking fault!” Ryker’s voice started quietly but rose until he was shouting.

His rage plowed through the room, snapping back and forth like a whip of pure hatred. With a roar, he heaved furniture and threw it against the walls. It splintered under his fists, sending shards of wood in all directions. His muscles strained against his skin, blood dripped from his fingernails, and his eyes were solid with fury. He tore curtains from the hooks and hurled them into the air, where they fluttered like giant birds before settling in heaps on top of the surrounding wreckage.

“Ryker! Parker!” Seph’s voice pierced through the destruction as she and Trux threw the door open. Their eyes widened in shock at the scene before them. The room had been destroyed. Nothing remained intact except for the bed where I sat huddled.

“Ryker!” Seph called out, attempting to reach him, but he stormed past them, ignoring her plea.

“Ryker, wait!” I cried out as I struggled to sit up. Trux grabbed me, holding me back from going after him. The last

thing I heard was the front door slamming shut, leaving behind the wreckage of our failed mating.

* * *

THANK you so much for reading *Dusting Off the Demons*

Ro isn't finished causing havoc and chaos for Parker and her tsigos. Continue the story in *Sweeping Away the Syndicate*.

If you loved [*Dusting Off the Demons*](#), please take a moment to leave a review to help other readers find their new favorite book.

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To my family that encouraged me:

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In Memory of Leslie K. Sanchez. I hope you have all the books you could ever want in your afterlife.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking your precious time to read *Dusting Off the Demons*. I hope the adventures were daring, expectations were defied, and all the liaisons were dazzling. I never expected this story to grow into what it's become.

Ro isn't finished causing havoc and chaos for Parker and her tsigos. Continue the story in *Sweeping Away the Syndicate*.

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I appreciate you.

~Z

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zoey tosses made up characters with real damage into off the wall humor to shove reality away in her dark humor romances. In addition to writing, she listens to eclectic music, practices Krav Maga, and takes on home improvement projects just for the fun of it.

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