



The Undead Detective Agency

Book 4

Forever
Together

Shelby Rhodes



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Blurb

Octavius Evander, here. I suppose you have come to see how it all ends. Well, ‘ends’, as in, we’ve reached the end of this part of my story. It wouldn’t be proper of me to move on until we finish it all off, right?

As this is the last book in this series, I feel it is my duty to end things with a bang! A glittery bang. By bang, I mean, a giant, super cool, Halloween party. And what a party it was... Costumes, decorations, family, frenemies, scares, Turney screaming and clinging on to me—fun times! The not so fun part was the interruption to said party. It really was unfair to me. I was on vacation from real murder and mayhem—case related mayhem only—yet, somehow, someone had the audacity to be murdered. Inconsiderate people all around!

But you didn’t all come here just for the Halloween party. I know that. There is a certain someone you are waiting to hear about, I’m sure. A certain horrible, maggot of a person. Well... you won’t be disappointed. That issue will be solved, once and for all. The question you may be asking yourselves now is, how will it be solved? All I’m willing to say is, it happened in an unusual and extremely unprepared way. While you shouldn’t worry too much, as my story, my precious Turney’s story, has a happy ending...it may be good to keep in mind that happiness sometimes shines brightest right after despair.



Author Note

This is an M/M paranormal romance book. There will be blood, violence, gore, mention of Sexual Assault (no on-page details), and death. Please do not read if you find any of the previous situations triggering.



Dedication

Forever Together is dedicated to Abri and Emma.

Thank you Abri for helping me realize that there is no harm in admitting I need a break. Forever Together wouldn't have been the best it could be without you convincing me to step back.

Emma, thank you for your endless encouragement and understanding with how far I pushed back handing the book over to you. Even with the limited time, and you dealing with your own shit, you still managed to get the book done with time to spare. I will forever be grateful for your help and support!

Chapter One



Octavius!

Turney yawned and stretched, sleep slowly clearing from his mind. Patting the space on the bed next to him, he frowned at finding Octavius gone. Dang Halloween obsessed bat... He was probably already running around decorating—as if there wasn't enough up already.

Sighing, he cracked his eyes open. A scream of abject terror slipped from his mouth at the sight of what was dangling over him. A hideously twisted face of some creature hung down above him, its sharp teeth gashing. The face looked somewhat human, but as if the skin had partly melted off—muscles and blood showing beneath.

Turney tried to sit up to flee, but he found himself literally tied up in the covers—bow and all. He could easily break them. Turney was strong enough... But between one blink and the next, the face disappeared. It just sort of floated away, to be replaced by a terror of a different sort—his boyfriend in bat form.

“OCTAVIUS!” Turney raged.

The bat giggled hysterically and swooped away, his little bat wings flapping.

“You crazy ass bat,” Turney groaned. The bedroom door opened and he heard tiny feet patter across the floor as the bat

ran away down the hallway.

He took a deep breath to calm his pounding heart. The damn thing felt like it was going to burst. Wiggling his arms free, he untied the blankets from around himself. The nut had literally bundled him up like a present.

“Five more days. Just five more days,” he told himself.

Five more days and Turney would no longer have to deal with Octavius’ Halloween obsession... At least, not for another year.

It was exactly four days before Halloween, and before Octavius’ giant ass party. The houses—the mansions, really—were both thoroughly decorated on the inside. Not all the rooms, there were just too many. Though he was sure Octavius would have done just that if Scarlett and Henry hadn’t been able to rein him in some. Octavius was still running around decorating like crazy, but for the most part, the place was decked out.

Not that Turney had gotten to see it all... Octavius had forbidden him and the others from a shit ton of rooms. This, of course, made traversing either of the houses a pain in the ass. Half the time, he had to go around in circles just to get to the room he wanted to be in.

And, unfortunately, Octavius not only wanted the rooms to be a surprise, but he also wanted everyone to *be* surprised... shocked...terrified...

Turney so wished these ‘surprises’ would only happen on the actual day of the party, instead of Octavius sprinkling them throughout the month and randomly scaring the crap out of him each and every day.

The party itself was set for the thirty-first of October. A ton of people were coming. And it was going to be a huge ass spectacular, spanning from Octavius’ mansion to Scarlett’s—a two-house party. Oh joy...

Turney had never been a party type of person, even when he’d been human. College parties... Yeah, no. He’d gone to small get-togethers, but nothing like what he knew Octavius

had planned. Not that he had gone to many get-togethers either. Now that he thought about it, he had sort of been a loner. His friend pool was small and somewhat nonexistent, due to him distancing himself from racing...

In college, he'd kept to himself, besides Alexander. And that was only because he lived with the man. It wasn't like he had any family left. He supposed his friend pool was now bigger due to working at the agency. At least, he was going to assume he could consider most of them friends, after the insanity they'd been through.

The Undead Detective Agency was currently on hiatus...as Octavius had put everyone on paid leave for the rest of the month. Not that Turney didn't still see most of his coworkers, or friends, or whatever, every day anyway. Hard to miss them when you lived with two of them—one who he was dating and the other who sort of was like family now because she saved his life. Then another was half living there too, because she was dating the one who had saved his life. And then the other one lived right next door with his brother who they had rescued... God, had his interpersonal relationships gotten really weird.

Odd relationships aside, they probably deserved a break after everything that had happened. Though, from what Turney gathered, Octavius had only temporarily closed the agency so he could dive fully into his beloved Halloween decorations without interruptions.

Between all the crazy Halloween stuff, their training had also begun about a week and a half ago. Scarlett had ramped up his zombie training, and he had gotten a fighting coach—Bob... Turney didn't like Bob. Bob looked way too long at Octavius for Turney's liking. Fucker needed to keep his eyes to himself before he lost them. And being a zombie now, he felt that threat had more oomph to it. Though, Bob was something, Turney just hadn't figured out what that something was.

Octavius had begun to practice his 'super vamp' mode, often sparring with Henry. Turney had to say, it was a sight to see. They both moved fast and skillfully. Turney would like to

say he too moved with such skill, but he definitely moved much more clumsily than anything. Which Bob loved to point out—the irritating asshole.

At least Cormac had started joining in on the lessons, so now he had a partner in crime to piss Bob off. Scarlett seemed to find his dislike for Bob entertaining, but then again, as she had pointed out multiple times, Octavius was pretty oblivious to the trainers flirting.

She and Min-ji, like Octavius and Henry, sparred together expertly. Though, Turney often thought that Scarlett was holding back as she fought. A point driven home by the differences he'd seen when Scarlett fought Octavius compared to when she fought Min-ji. He wasn't sure if Scarlett held back because the two were dating now, or because a witch couldn't compete against a zombie in hand-to-hand combat without a handicap. Based on what he knew about witches, he was going to guess it was the second reason, as he couldn't imagine Scarlett holding back just because she was dating someone.

Theo... Theo's job right now was to get healthy. His time with the Knights had not been kind to him, leaving the werewolf severely underweight and weak. He was doing better now though, even if he was still on the thinner side.

Turney stared at the cobwebs and fake spiders above the bed and sighed again. The fact that Octavius had been creepily hanging there probably meant it was time to get up.

Stretching, Turney slipped out of bed and walked to the large vanity mirror in front of their bed. Leaning in close, he ran his hand over one of the scars on his neck. The ones he had gotten from the witch. They were faded now, as if they had happened many years ago. What hadn't faded were the scars of his turning. While they weren't pink anymore, they were in no way less noticeable. Maybe less ugly—a big maybe.

Turney hated to admit it, but he was still struggling with them. Mind you, he was doing better... Octavius had worked hard on that part, making sure he knew they didn't detract from his attractiveness. Still...he wouldn't be winning any beauty contests, that's for sure.

Turney straightened up on another sigh and headed to the bathroom.

To be honest, he hated these thoughts. Because of how vain they were... Like, did it matter? He kept telling himself it didn't. In the face of what could be...the scars were nothing.

And, with the thoughts, came guilt. Especially when they tried to pop into his head when Theo was around. Because Turney had survived...Cynthia had not. Theo would no doubt give anything to have her back. How could he be so self-absorbed and worried about scars when they were the very marks that had brought him back to life?



OCTAVIUS GIGGLED as he ran away. His excitement for all that was to come, all that he had planned, was immeasurable. The party was so close! Oh, his grand entrance was going to be breathtaking—the costumes, the scares, **THE SHOWS!**

And for the first time in years, all his fledglings were coming! For the past few decades, it always seemed that at least one of them was missing each year. The absences always saddened him, but he understood that sometimes one gets too busy to party. Though, honestly, it was still shocking, as he thought he had taught them better than to prioritize ‘responsibilities’ over fun... Oh well, they were all coming this time!

He couldn't wait to introduce everyone to Turney. Then again, perhaps Turney was the reason they all were coming. It had been a long time since he had a partner. He was sure Henry had told them more about Turney than Octavius had. Which could be a good and bad thing. But he believed—for the most part—that Henry approved of Turney, so it had to be a good thing, right?

Either way, this year was going to be the Halloween party to beat all other Halloween parties! The party of a lifetime! It would hands down beat out his parties from years past. This year's festivities would span not just one, but two houses! Octavius had miraculously convinced Scarlett to let him use her property. And between their homes, now sat a haunted pathway in the forest.

Octavius had of course forbidden anyone from entering the woods, and a number of rooms throughout both houses, until party time. Well, except for him and Min-ji.

Ahh, Min-ji—his helper in evil. How he appreciated all she had done to help him carry out his nefarious plans. All the spells and tricks. Everything was just for show, of course, but it really elevated the ambiance to another level when one used spells instead of simple props.

Such fun he would have...with all his plans in place. Speaking of plans, what room should he finish today? There weren't too many left. Well...not of the ones he planned to leave open to the partygoers. Maybe one Halloween he'd decorate every room. But that Halloween was not this one. Octavius had started decorating way too late in the month for that to ever be possible.

To add on, there were just not enough people coming to warrant that. And despite what Turney had accused him of, he hadn't decorated the entirety of the two houses. As it was, he had at most decorated about forty rooms in each home so far. Which wasn't too bad, right? Like, he hadn't even touched the third floor, and had barely touched any of the rooms on the second. Same could be said of Scarlett's home—he had mostly stayed on the first floor.

Octavius skidded to a stop and stared up at Scarlett, who was standing in his path. The zombie's large emerald green eyes did not look happy. Scarlett must have been up for a while, as she was dressed and already had her make-up on. As always, she looked flawless. But then again, how could she not, with her pert upturned nose, soft dimpled chin, and delicate features. Her copper curls were perfectly styled and at bob length, her lips a bright red shade, and while her skin was

as pale as always, her freckles were showing across her cheeks and nose. She was currently wearing a navy-blue sweater, paired with a black ankle-length pencil skirt and black slippers.

She was definitely eyeing him with a disapproving frown.

“What?” he asked.

“What did you do?”

Octavius flinched at the accusation in her tone. “Nothing at all? Why do you ask?” he said innocently with his bat eyes wide and full of fake confusion.

“Oh, really?” She snorted.

“Yes, really.” He didn’t sound convincing even to his own ears.

“Is that *‘nothing’* that you did the reason I felt a spark of fear come from my poor neophyte mere moments ago?” she asked with a bright, terrifying smile.

Octavius laughed sheepishly. “It was just a little scare. It’s spooky season. It’s expected, right?”

Scarlett stared down at him, silent for a moment, before shaking her head and saying, “If Turney leaves you, I’m taking his side.”

He gasped in outrage. “HE WOULD NEVER! Turney loves me!”

How could she even say that?! Turney? Leave him?! Never! They loved each other, including all their quirks. Turney wouldn’t leave him... He wouldn’t...

Scarlett snorted. “I don’t know, love can only go so far.”

“SHHH! He wouldn’t leave me just for having fun!”

She tsked. “Poor Turney.”

“Stop it!” he cried, as he turned back into his humanoid form.

She continued to tsk.

“Stop,” Octavius whined. “Turney isn’t going to leave me! He’s happy with me!”

“How long before that happy is scared out of him?”

Octavius glared. “It won’t be. I haven’t scared him that much.”

And he hadn’t. It had only been a few times...maybe ten...or more. Octavius wasn’t that bad, was he?!

“I’ve felt a surge of fear from him literally multiple times a day, every day, for the past week and a half, Octavius. Be kinder to your poor boyfriend, and stop scaring the hell out of him.”

He winced. Had it...been every day? Octavius sort of lost track. He’d never been good at doing things in moderation... Perhaps, he’d been going just a tad bit overboard. “Fine, fine, I’ll cut back. And I’ll make sure in the following years I don’t do too much. He won’t leave me.” Octavius frowned. Turney wouldn’t, would he?

“No, of course, he won’t,” she said, which had him sighing in relief, but then she continued, “I was just trying to make a point. Truth is, Turney is way too foolishly in love, and attached to your crazy ass, to leave you at this point. But that doesn’t mean it gives you leave to take advantage of his easy going nature. I love you, and...I probably am, at this point, feeling love for Turney as well. Even if a lot of it is spurred on by the bond. I want you two to take care of each other. That includes knowing when you are taking things too far. I know you aren’t doing it on purpose. You just get so obsessed and excited about things that you end up overdoing it. So, this is me telling you that you are taking things too far. In this matter, I’d suggest treating Turney as you would me... Would you be scaring me this much?”

Octavius shook his head with a pout. “No...you’d get really mad if I did.”

“I would. I’d definitely make you regret it, if you attempted to scare me every day. But Turney isn’t like me. He

lets you get away with a lot of things, Octavius. You know he does. So don't take advantage of that leniency."

She was right... Turney let him get away with a lot. Mostly, because the zombie loved him, and he tended to brush some of the things he did off as he knew it made Octavius happy. He'd been taking advantage of that.

"Fine, I'll...pull back. And not do it every day." And maybe he'd find a way to apologize to his zombie bun... Turney deserved the world.

Chapter Two



Fire Of Love!

Octavius took a deep breath. His hand shaking as he reached out for one of the knobs on the stove. He flinched at the click it made when he turned it.

Octavius blinked when nothing appeared to happen. Oh! Oh good, Scarlett's stove didn't use actual fire! One less thing to worry about.

"Perfect! No fire means...no fire, right?" Octavius said with a hint of relief.

Were all stoves like this now? He tended to not pay attention to cooking in movies. Octavius didn't feel the need to taunt himself with things he could not consume. Honestly, he just avoided looking at stoves too closely all together, due to the last time he used one...

Like, how was he supposed to know that you had to turn the gas off when done? Well, he'd burned what he'd been cooking...but that was besides the point. Wait...had it been the gas? It had been something... Something that had led to an explosion...

But that was not an issue here, as it was electric. Yay for electricity! He could do this! It was just cooking. What could possibly go wrong? For Turney! He'd do this for Turney!

“Now...oil, right?” He eyed the bacon and eggs he’d gotten out. “Cooking requires oil...yes!” Nodding, he grabbed the bottle of oil and dumped some in. He watched it coat the bottom and then added a bit more.

“Do I wait for it to heat up or...try to start cooking right away?” he asked the air. “Probably heat up.”

He stared at the pan, waiting. Octavius had to say that... cooking was kind of boring without the fire...



TURNEY LET OUT A YAWN. He was slowly making his way to the kitchen. It took a hell of a lot longer to get there now because his path was so blocked. He supposed he’d have to eat alone today. Min-ji and Scarlett had gone out on a date, and the werewolves weren’t usually up at this time. Sadly, he’d gotten used to being woken up at the butcrack of dawn due to Octavius.

Maybe he could drag the vampire away from his Halloween decorations long enough to have a nice meal together. Even if it was just him eating while Octavius drank. The vampire had been so busy lately, they’d hardly had any time together.

Turney stumbled to a stop...frowning. Was...that a heartbeat he heard? The sluggishness of it told him it was Octavius’. Unless Henry had decided to come over for some reason. No—it was only eight—the younger vampire usually wasn’t up until nine.

His frown deepened when he realized where the heartbeat was. What the hell was Octavius doing in the kitchen?

The vampire wouldn’t be trying to decorate it, would he? Oh, he had better stop him. If there was one place Scarlett didn’t like others messing around in, it was her kitchen.

Turney took off, rushing down the hallway towards the kitchen. His eyes widened in horror when he turned the corner to the sound of a woosh followed by a scream, and then the fire alarms started going off.

“Fuck!”

He burst into the room and skidded to a stop, his jaw dropping. Octavius stood there near the sink, his back to Turney, screaming. There was smoke billowing up around him, and he was frantically waving around a flaming pan in one hand, and burning curtains in the other, all while the fire alarm blared loudly as if mocking him.

“Oh. My. God!” Turney blurted.

Octavius spun at his words, eyes wide and full of tears. Turney remained frozen on the spot for a moment, as Octavius continued to wave his arms around like a maniac, before jumping into action. Opening the cabinet with the fire extinguisher inside, he quickly sprayed the fire waving menace.

When the last of the fire was out, Octavius’ arms dropped to his side, the items falling from his grasp. The burnt pan clattered to the ground as what was left of the curtains floated down.

The vampire, frankly, was a mess. He was coated in foam and soot, his sandy blond curls were frizzy and sticking up everywhere. There were black smudges on his face and clothes, and he looked moments away from having a complete breakdown. He eyed the foam coating the vampire’s suit and hair—Turney may have gone overboard with the extinguisher.

Octavius’ bottom lip trembled. “I...I...”

Turney wanted to comfort him...but he also wanted to avoid the fire department showing up. Sitting the fire extinguisher down, he walked over to the panel on the wall and started pushing buttons. He must have hit something right, as the alarm shut off. Taking a deep breath, he slowly turned to face Octavius.

“So...Octavius...what...” He took another deep breath. “What were you doing?”

It wasn't that he was mad...just concerned as hell.

Octavius' bottom lip wobbled some more, his eyes getting glossier by the second. “I-I just wanted to apologize! I wanted to make you something nice for breakfast! So, I got some eggs...and bacon...but then, suddenly the pan was on fire! And I tried to put it out with water, but instead of working, it whooshed.” The vampire made a whooshing gesture with his hands. “And then the curtains caught fire, and the alarm...” Octavius burst into tears.

“Oh...Octavius...” Turney moved in and pulled the sobbing vampire into his arms, rubbing his back. “It's fine... Don't cry. You aren't hurt, are you?” He didn't think he was— just upset.

Octavius sniffled. “No...”

“I have to say, I've never seen someone try to put a fire out by waving their arms before.”

“Probably for the best because it wasn't working,” Octavius whimpered, as he clung tight to him.

“So...it was suddenly...on fire,” Turney mused. “Did you, perhaps, zone out?”

Octavius winced. “I may have...”

“Sounds about right. You didn't happen to have put oil in the pan, did you?”



THERE HAD BEEN a lot of oil in the pan... But didn't one have to grease a pan before using it? Perhaps Octavius had added too much? Maybe that was why there had been a fire? “Maybe a little oil.”

Turney laughed. “Yeah, no more cooking for you.”

Octavius gasped. “What?! Why?!”

The zombie pulled back and kissed him on the forehead. “Because you are too much of a fire hazard. Can you tell me what exactly you were apologizing for?” the zombie asked, as he brushed Octavius’ tears away.

He sniffled and decided to ignore the fire hazard thing, mainly because it was sort of true. “Well...it was for scaring you. Scarlett...made me realize that I was going a bit overboard. So, it was to say sorry for that.”

“I see. Well, thank you for your effort. But, perhaps, next time do it in a way that can’t catch fire.”

Octavius sighed. Eyes going wide as his phone started playing *Friends* by BTS, the song he’d set as his ringtone for Scarlett. Wiping his hands on his already ruined suit jacket, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and answered with fake cheer. “Scarlett!”

“Why did my fire alarm go off?”

“Umm...it’s fine. Nothing major was damaged, but I have to go! BYE!”

“WHAT?!”

Octavius hung up and ignored his phone as it began to ring again. “Oh, I’m in big trouble...”

Turney chuckled. “Maybe, just a little trouble. But it’s something that’s easy to fix. We can head to the store and pick up a new pan...and maybe some curtains. Both will probably be expensive, because as far as I can tell, she doesn’t buy anything cheap. But they should be easy enough to find, as long as we go to the right place.”

Octavius’ phone rang again...but the ringtone this time was *Super Tuna* by Jin...which meant it was Henry. Frowning, he answered. “Yes, Henry? Need something?”

“Why did Scarlett’s fire alarm go off, Master Octavius?”

“Why do you even have a notification for her fire alarm?!”
Octavius gasped in shock.

Henry let out a snort. “Because you are there.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?!” he cried.

“It means you have started too many fires for me to not worry,” Henry drawled, before saying, “Give the phone to Turney.”

Octavius pouted, but held out his phone for Turney. The zombie looked way too amused by all this as he accepted it.

Turney cleared his throat. “Yes, Henry?”

“Is everything okay?” he heard the other vampire ask.

Why was he even asking him?!

“It’s fine. He just burnt a pan and some curtains.”

“He what?!” Henry barked. “What was he doing with a pan?”

“He was cooking.”

“HE WAS WHAT?!”

Octavius sputtered at the horror in his fledgling’s voice.
“HEY! I’m not that bad!”

“Let him know that he *IS* that bad. In fact, I don’t think he has ever cooked without setting a fire.”

“Yeah! Because before now there was no other way to cook!”

“Master Octavius, I banned you from anything stove, fire, and kitchen related at home. How did you think that ban did not extend to Scarlett’s place?”

Octavius let out a whine. “I just wanted to make a meal for my boyfriend, to apologize! Is that so wrong?!”

“Yes!” Henry snapped.

Turney’s eyes turned glassy, his lips trembling.

“You better not laugh!” he whined.

The zombie blinked rapidly and cleared his throat again. “I would never. Anyway, it’s fine, Henry. I told him that while I appreciated the effort, I’d prefer if he apologized in a safer way.”

Henry sighed. “Just make sure he doesn’t do it again...for your sake, if not his. You are very flammable.”

“Right...flammable, thanks for the reminder.”

Henry grunted, and then he must have hung up because Turney closed the phone.

Octavius stuck his bottom lip out. “I’m sorry.”

Turney pulled him back into his arms and gave him a peck on the lips. “It’s the thought that counts. So, thank you. Love you.”

Octavius gave him a kiss back. “Love you, too... I promise to avoid cooking in the future.”

Turney chuckled. “Probably for the best. And next time you want to apologize...just stick to something that helps showcase your strengths, okay?”

He nodded.

The zombie laughed and nipped at his bottom lip. “Why don’t you go shower and change, while I clean up this mess. If you go slow enough, maybe I’ll join you, hmm?” Turney pecked him on the lips again. “And then afterwards, we can head out and find replacements for the pan and curtains.”

“Okay...” Octavius said with a snuffle.



TURNEY PICKED UP A PAN, wincing as he saw the price. A hundred and forty dollars for one pan—how ridiculous. He sat it back down.

“Oh! What about this one?” Octavius said with a giggle of excitement.

He glanced over at the vampire, brow raising at the pan the male was holding. “Octavius...that’s a wok.”

Octavius blinked, head tilting. “Is it? Well, wok or not...it would be a great replacement, wouldn’t it?!”

“Um...not really... The pan you burnt was a medium-sized one. Replacing it with a wok wouldn’t be helpful. As then Scarlett would still be missing a medium-sized pan.”

The vampire frowned. “Oh, I see.” Octavius put the wok back on the shelf.

Humming, Turney faced the shelves again. He looked around a bit before snagging a pan that looked identical to the one Octavius had fried. “This should work!”

Octavius stared at it. “That’s nice...but what about this one?” The vampire picked up a slightly larger pan than the one Turney was holding. “OH! Maybe we can get her two? Two is better than one, right?!”

Seeing the horrifying direction that Octavius’ thoughts were going, Turney quickly said, “No. Scarlett doesn’t need more than one. She has a lot of pans already. We don’t want to clutter up her kitchen. We just need to replace the one you ruined.”

Octavius’ bottom lip popped out as he started to pout. “How boring.”

Turney chuckled as he put the replacement pan into the cart and started to push it down the aisle. “Let’s check out. But maybe while we walk back, you can look around the area on your phone and see if there are any places you think we could get Scarlett some new curtains?”

The vampire started to follow. “I suppose I can do that— OH! LOOK!” Octavius cried out as he skipped in front of him, plucking something from the shelves. Octavius spun, holding up what was in his hand as if it were a prize. “Look at it! It’s perfect! Scarlett needs it!”

He eyed the pan the vampire was holding up. “It’s tiny...”

“I KNOW! It’s perfect. Tiny and cute!”

“Scarlett doesn’t need a tiny pan.”

“How do you know that?! Just think, it will make the perfect egg!”

“I mean...it’s only big enough to hold an egg...”

“She needs it,” Octavius said with a fierce pout.

Turney sighed. “Fine...”

“Yay!” The vampire giggled and set the pan inside their cart.

Shaking his head, Turney followed the giddy, skipping vampire. As they started down a new aisle, he almost ran into him when the male suddenly stopped. Turney’s eyes widened when he realized he was in danger.

They had entered...the Halloween aisle. Why the hell did a kitchenware store even have a Halloween aisle?!

“By the Gods!” Octavius cried in pure joy. “Look at those spatulas!!”

Turney winced. *Oh Scarlett... I’m so sorry for what I am about to inflict on you*, he thought with a sigh as he watched Octavius rush forward.



SCARLETT STORMED THROUGH HER HOUSE, Min-ji following behind her. She couldn’t help but fear the worst.

While Scarlett had gotten through to Turney, and he had assured her there had been no major damage, she knew how

accidentally destructive Octavius could be. So, she was struggling to believe him.

Mostly, she was struggling to understand why Octavius would dare to cook at all, after all the things he'd accidentally destroyed with fire in the past. Had the vampire started to forget all the shit he had burned down?!

She gasped, eyes wide as she reached her kitchen and walked inside. There was a set of new curtains hanging over her stove... While the place looked intact, there was an unconscionable number of Halloween themed kitchen 'things' laid out on top of her island countertops.

Min-ji let out a stifled laugh behind her.

"Turney...you sap of a man..." She walked slowly forward, towards it all. Shoulders sagging in defeat as she eyed a spatula that was orange and shaped like a pumpkin. "You gave into his cuteness again, didn't you?"

Chapter Three



A New Beginning

Cormac did his best to ignore that the formally normal gym looked like a gothic vampire had thrown up all over it. Hanging bats...everything red and black... Some of the equipment was now vaguely coffin-like. It was... such an odd room to decorate.

Pulling his eyes away from the décor, he peered down at Theo who was on the bench press. His brother's features were slightly similar to his, but in truth, the male looked more like their mother. They shared the same deep brown skin tone, and their lips were the same; thick and plush. But while he had a more sculpted jaw, with harder angles, his brother's jawline was gentler and more curved. Theo's nose was also smaller and came to a point. At one time their hair style had been the same—faded on the sides with curls on top. But currently, Theo had a mass of curls that went past his shoulder. It kind of made him look like a rockstar.

Moving closer, he almost snorted when he realized the weights on the bar Theo was lifting were shaped like bats. Cormac would not be surprised if the shapes had fucked with the balance.

Sweat dripped down the wolf's thinner form as he pushed the bar up and down. Sitting near his feet, looking up at him with adoration, was the purple and blue kitten, Sprinkle. She

had grown a little bit, but wasn't too much bigger than what he thought she'd been when Octavius had first gotten her. As far as Cormac knew, her fae blood meant it would be a good year before she reached adulthood.

"It's not exactly safe for her to be in here," Cormac mused.

Theo chuckled. "That is why I have my eyes transformed."

He took in the startling golden color that made up the entirety of his brother's eyes at the moment. While transforming his eyes into his wolf's would allow Theo to see, his brother didn't do it often. Normally, his eyes were a cloudy amber color—the cloudiness had been there from birth, and was not due to his blindness. It was actually rare to see the man with golden eyes, as his brother preferred to stay in his natural state in human form. Of course, the golden color of his transformed eyes was slightly problematic anyway. In public, Theo would have needed something to cover them up with, unless he intended to tell everyone who asked that he had weird contacts.

"Are you sure you are well enough to be doing all this? You've been hitting the gym pretty hard this last week or so. And...the party...are you sure about going? There will be a lot of people. Like, if we judge by how much that crazy bat is decorating...probably hundreds..."

While Theo had been smaller than him by the time Cormac had reached adulthood, he had never seen his brother this thin. Theo had improved in the weeks since being rescued. He'd put on some weight, and possibly regained some muscle, but Theo was still about thirty pounds lighter than he used to be.

As for the party... After what happened with their father, the Knights...and Cynthia...his brother had moments of panic. Cormac was worried that being surrounded by so many people would set him off. Well, he was just worried about his brother, period. So much had changed. A lot for the worst. And they still couldn't get hold of their mother. He wasn't sure what was going on there. She could be hard to contact, but usually not this bad.



THEO SIGHED and pushed the bar up onto the rack. Sitting up, he snatched his towel from the floor. Wiping at his brow, he met his brother's worried gaze and winced. He didn't want Cormac to worry. His little brother had been there for him, and still was here for him, as were Cormac's crazy coworkers slash seemingly adoptive family.

So, while he wanted to say something that would ease those worries, he wasn't sure there was anything he could say. For one thing, what Cormac needed to hear probably wouldn't even have sounded true if he dared to say any of it aloud. He wasn't about to self-destruct...but he really didn't have his shit together either. Theo was hanging on. He was doing what he had to do to remain grounded and present.

Theo sent him a kind smile. "I'm well enough. And I need to get back in shape. I need to get stronger."

"Yes, I get that." Cormac rubbed his face, pushing his glasses firmly up his nose. "But, there's no rush to get there. You need to give yourself time."

"I refuse to be left behind when the time comes to go after that bastard," Theo growled loudly. He winced and tried to draw back the rage. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to snap at you. I need to be there. I need to, Cormac. I can't risk not being ready to go. For Cynthia..." His voice cracked. "I need to be ready."

Cormac gripped his shoulder, eyes going glossy. "We would never leave you behind, Theo."

Theo gripped his hand and smiled, trying to push away the negative feelings—something he had to do a lot lately. "As for the party... I'm going to need to get used to Octavius' craziness anyway, aren't I? Might as well start now."

Cormac frowned, brow pinching. “What do you mean?”

He blinked, releasing his brother’s hand. “Didn’t they tell you? Scarlett and Turney offered me a job. They want me to become the Accountant and Financial Manager for The Undead Detective Agency. From what they told me, they want me to keep tabs on spending, and monitor the company’s finances as a whole.”

His brother’s eyes widened almost comically, his hand slipping from his shoulder. “They want you to what?!” He gasped.

Theo chuckled. “I’ll take that as a no on the knowing part. While it was the zombies who asked me, Octavius apparently approved the offer. Though, my understanding is that the two zombies want me to help control Octavius’ business spendings...and there was a vague mention of preventing the vampire from taking jobs in exchange for goods and services. I don’t have all the exact details on that situation yet.”

Cormac snorted. “Apparently, on the first case they were paid in photocards.”

Theo burst into laughter. “Well then, I guess I will be denying some interesting requests. As I decided that I will be taking the job. The offer is...substantial, and well above average.”

“What about your old work...your clients?”

The smile slipped from his face. “I can’t go back. I don’t want to go back. I want to change my day-to-day. I need to. Maybe to you it seems like I am running away. And maybe I am. But I can’t go back to what, or at least how, I was working before... It reminds me too much of what, and who, I lost. I need change.”

Sadness crept into his brother’s expression again, and he hated that he was the one who put it there. When Cormac had been born, Theo had sworn to himself he’d give him a better childhood than he had ever had. And Theo had succeeded, for the most part. He and their mother had done all they could to keep a smile in place. They’d done what they could to shield

him from Cléas. Mother, less so, once they divorced... and hardly at all once Cormac had turned eighteen... At least their father was no longer an issue now.

Either way, while he hated putting the look there, Theo couldn't hide how he felt. Not about this.

Cormac gave him a sad smile. "If that is what you want, what you need, I'll be supportive."

"Thank you. The offer, as it stands, is enough that I wouldn't need other clients...not that I need to work at all. On top of the money I already have, Octavius has been very generous, to us both. He has assured me that if I don't wish to work, I don't need to." Theo gulped and tried to keep the wavering out of his voice as he spoke next. "I think I will sell the house...including the things inside."

Cormac gasped. "Are you sure? Everything?"

"This isn't me wanting to forget her, Cormac."

"I know that... You loved her. Hell, I loved her too. She was like a sister to me already. Goddess, I think I loved her more than Father. Though now I'm not even sure if I ever loved him... I cared, but her loss hurt so much more. Which is fucked up. But she was around for so long, and a hell of a lot more than he ever had been. She was there for half of my life. And dammit, she cared. He didn't, he never had." Cormac took a deep breath and let it out, his eyes going glassy once more. "I mean, I'd like to think she cared for me."

Theo was the one who reached out this time, sniffing as he held back tears. "She did care. She loved you as much as I do. Cléas was never there. And let's be real, we mostly tried to keep him away from you. Mother tried to make up for his absence. But we both know, as much as Mother tried, she wanted her freedom back. Cynthia may have not been there at the start, but in her heart, you were everything to her. Her child. And I know you loved her too. I am fully aware that I am not the only one who lost someone. And though I realize my decisions may hurt you, I'm not trying to. But I can't live in that place, surrounded by her memories. Memories of what I had, and what we planned to have together. I can't do it. I'm

not strong enough. And when the time comes, I'll need you to gather the pictures. I don't want to throw them away, but I'm not ready to see them all. I need you to keep everything for me until I'm ready."

Cormac pulled him into a tight hug. "It's not about being strong or weak. Even the strongest of people would struggle staying around reminders of what could have been. You do whatever you need to. And I'll do whatever I can to help you. Just let me know when it's time and I'll be there."

He wrapped his arms around the larger werewolf, holding on tight. "I'll let you know... And when the time comes, feel free to take anything you want to hold on to. Again, I know doing this isn't fair to you. You loved her, too. She was a huge part of your life. Which is why you have just as much right to her things as I do."

"I'll do that... I love you, Theo."

"Love you too, pup." He took in his brother's scent, letting it calm him. "Okay," he laughed. "Enough of being sad and sentimental, let go of me so I can shower and get to my costume fitting on time. I think Octavius will do me harm if I dare to miss it."

Cormac pulled away on a chuckle, releasing him and stepping back. "No doubt."

"Well, truthfully, it's not just *my* costume fitting." He bent down and scooped Sprinkle up, who had been winding around their feet cutely. "It's a fitting for me and Sprinkle." She meowed in agreement.

His brother eyed her. "Who ever heard of a werewolf being so close to a cat? It's like a crime against nature, isn't it?"

Theo sniffed. "Sprinkle takes offense at being called a mere cat. She is a princess, don't you know?" Sprinkle meowed again.

They stood there, both with straight faces for a moment before bursting into laughter.

Chapter Four



No Backing Out

Turney eyed the building as he locked his Toyota Supra. It was made of black bricks, and vines were creeping up the walls. There were two windows, and both were blocked by orange curtains that were hiding what was inside. The orange neon sign over the windows and door said *Emporium of Disguises*.

Stepping onto the sidewalk, he opened the door and walked inside. There was the sound of an automatic scream as the door opened. Turney eyed the place... The whole store was painted black with orange accents, pumpkins and skulls all around, and a few fake cobwebs.

To the right were racks and racks of some rather impressive-looking costumes. None even close to the cheap shit you got at those Halloween stores that popped up during the season. But the section he was in had a waiting room and a receptionist desk. He had to say, the place was definitely full of things Octavius would love.

He smiled at the receptionist when she looked up. The woman had a total Morticia vibe going on; black hair, a long black dress with flowing sleeves, and very pale skin with red lips.

“Name?” she asked with a smile.

“Uh, Turney Pimms?”

“Ah, Octavius Evander’s...friend?” she said almost hesitantly.

“Boyfriend,” Turney corrected.

Her smile fell and her lips twisted into a grimace before she regained her composure and her smile returned. Turney could tell that she was a vampire based on the very slight scent of blood coming from her and her slow sluggish heartbeat.

Turney had also picked something up about her emotions. Well...he’d felt a shift. Turney found the less extreme and more subtle emotions a bit hard to make sense of. However, he didn’t need his zombie senses to recognize the flash of jealousy on someone’s face. Not his problem, as far as he was concerned. Besides, he was pretty sure Octavius was gay, so... she was definitely barking up the wrong tree.

The woman waved towards the rows of chairs against the wall. “Please, take a seat. Jack will be with you shortly.

“Right.” Shaking his head, Turney sat down in one of the plush orange waiting chairs.

He glanced towards the door as it screamed again, and smiled at the sight of Theo and Sprinkle. The werewolf’s eyes were a soft stormy amber, telling him that Theo currently couldn’t see anything. The cane he held in his other hand told him that as well. Turney was guessing someone had dropped him off. Though, now that he thought about it, he wasn’t even sure if the wolf had his license.

Theo sniffed the air, head tilting as his face broke out into a smile. “Costume fitting?”

Turney laughed. “Yep!” He stood up as the werewolf approached. “Ahh, Sprinkle, my baby! You are getting so big!”

Sprinkle had grown...maybe an inch? She honestly didn’t look too much bigger compared to when they had first gotten her. Her wide, glowing ocean blue eyes and navy-blue face was the same as always, though the tufts on her ears were looking a little bit wild. In fact, so was the thick purple mane

around her neck. Her blue and purple fur was looking pretty fluffy everywhere, which told him it was probably time for them to get her groomed.

Theo chuckled and held her out. “Don’t think I don’t appreciate the sacrifice you two made letting me horde her.”

Plucking her up, she began to cuddle into Turney’s arms, purring loudly as he ran his fingers through her fur.

“No, no, she really likes you.” And she did like Theo. He could tell she was still happy and having fun. Though there was no denying that the kitten was also aware that Theo needed her more right now than Octavius and Turney did. She always seemed to understand more than the average cat—probably her fae blood’s doing.

“You are looking good, Theo,” he said with a smile as his gaze swept the wolf’s form. “There are seats to your left, by the way.”

Theo was looking stronger, less haggard, less worn down, which was a relief to see.

“Thanks, I’m working on it...and thanks for the heads up. So, this party is going to be something, isn’t it?” Theo asked as he reached down and felt for the seat before sitting down.

Turney sat down next to him. “Knowing Octavius as I do...it’s going to be insane.” He snorted. “And saying that may even be an understatement. Halloween is apparently Octavius’ favorite holiday.”

“I mean, I have seen the decorations...” Theo grimaced and admitted, “And I’ve run into a few of them.”

Turney sighed. “I’m sorry. You are still getting used to a new environment, and Octavius definitely isn’t helping by changing your surroundings so much.”

“Well, Octavius has helped a lot. Even if he keeps messing with my spatial understanding of his home. It is partly my fault.”

“Theo, I really don’t think you can be blamed for a crazy bat putting shit in your path.”

The wolf chuckled and held up his hand. “Let me explain. Octavius purposely left the path from my room to the kitchen, and to the various areas I visit most frequently, void of anything that would impede my path. I, however, in the last week, started to wander around...in ways I usually don’t. So, he has been very considerate of my usual lack of sight, I just switched things up on him. But, no worries, I’ve learned to turn my vision on while I’m wandering now.”

It was good to know Octavius hadn’t cluttered Theo’s pathways on purpose. Then again, as excited as Octavius was, Turney would have a hard time believing the vampire would forget about Theo’s needs. Octavius wanted Theo to be comfortable, and to be well taken care of. Causing him to trip over Halloween decorations would be the opposite of caring. While Theo could see if he wanted to, from what he gathered, the werewolf was most comfortable staying just as he was meant to be.

“I’m glad I bumped into you. Though now that I say that, I would have met up with you at lunch anyway.” The male shook his head with a smile. “Well, as I have you here now, I want to tell you that I accept the job offer.”

“That’s great, Theo! I’ll let Octavius know. Unless you would like to tell him?”

“No, you can tell him.”

Turney had been almost shocked by how easily Octavius had agreed to the suggestion. Of course, Scarlett had spouted off on how it would be good for Theo. How he’d benefit from a new job and a new environment. While that hadn’t been a lie...it wasn’t the real reason they had wanted to hire Theo.

Turney almost felt bad about tricking Octavius—almost. The real reason they wanted Theo working there was to control Octavius’ insane spending habits. At least, the spending when it came to the business. Not to mention stopping him from randomly agreeing to work in exchange for things. Octavius was free to spend his money on things he wanted, as long as he wasn’t trying to pass it off as a business

expense. Not that any of the spending would put a dent in Octavius' fortune, but still...

The plan had formed when Cormac told them his brother was a stickler when it came to reigning in expenses.

“Just know that you can start whenever you are ready. It doesn't have to be right away.”

“I can start as soon as you want me to.” Theo frowned and slowly said, “Though, I do have a favor I want to ask you two...or really, everyone in the agency. I wanted to talk to you about it first, to gauge if it would be okay for me to ask the others to help me with this task.”

Turney frowned. “I'm sure whatever it is, we wouldn't mind helping, Theo.”

“My house... I want to sell it and auction off the stuff inside. Cormac will of course need to gather pictures, and perhaps some mementos he wishes to keep before that. I was wondering if Octavius knew of anyone who could handle the sale and the auction. Things would need to be gone through, and a list made... I can't go back myself to do it. This is something I'm talking about for later, of course. After the party. I'm sure it would be too much to do now with everything going on.”

He smiled gently at the male, his heart breaking just a bit for the wolf. “Whatever you need, Theo. I'm sure Octavius, or even Scarlett, knows someone who can get it done. And believe me, everyone will be more than willing to help, no problem at all.”

Theo smiled. “Thank you.”

“Ah, good. You three are here!” a man cried out.

Turney faced the voice and eyed the male who looked like the cartoon version of Gomez, but somehow even shorter. The guy, like the receptionist, was also a vampire.

“I'm Jack. I'll be helping you with your fitting today! And I am in charge of making sure your costumes fit perfectly on Halloween.” He held out his hands to them, showing three

blindfolds—one very small. “Put on these blindfolds and I’ll guide you back.”

He stared at the blindfolds silently for a moment. Sprinkle’s purring stopped as he felt her lean forward in his arms.

“You can’t be serious,” Turney rasped.

Jack frowned. “I’m very serious. Octavius wants it to be a surprise. And what Octavius wants, Octavius gets,” he said firmly.

“Um...” Theo started hesitantly. “I’m blind. Like complete darkness going on here. Not even a glimpse of light. So not very necessary...”

The male sniffed. “Yes, but that werewolf vision of yours isn’t, so put it on.”

Theo sighed. “How much crazy am I signing up for by accepting this job?”

Turney laughed. “Oh, no, there’s no backing out now. You already said yes!”

The werewolf sighed again, but there was a smile on his face as he held out his hand for a blindfold.

Chapter Five



Absolutely Not

Yes closed, Scarlett sighed contently as the steaming hot water ran through her hair and down her body. Moving back, she let it splash down her face, her eyelids fluttering open.

A scream caught in her throat at the sight of a rather life-like ghoulish inches from her face. It blinked and moved, as if it were real. Its skin was decaying, eyes sagging precariously in their sockets, and patches of skin were missing to reveal muscle and bone.

Staring at the thing, her anger rising, she drew in a big gulp of air. By the time she let it out, the thing was gone. She narrowed her eyes and looked around the shower, her gaze eventually traveling up, which is where she spotted a pumpkin sticker with an evil grinning bat face on it. Octavius' evil grinning bat face. The word *Trick* was carved onto part of the pumpkin.

“MIN-JI!” she bellowed, her anger flaring as the attempt to stay calm fled. “Why in the world would you give Octavius sticky spells?!”

Sticky spells were...they were stickers pre-loaded with simple spells that could be used by magicless individuals. They were very easy to use, just stick them wherever you wanted. And when someone set off the triggers for them,

they'd activate. The trigger could be something small like, saying a certain word, or... probably in this case, motion activated.

The door to the bathroom slowly creaked open, and Min-ji peeked her head in, with a sheepish expression on her face. "Well...he said...they were for the party. And it was just harmless things... You know, simple illusions, spooky noises, and so on..."

Even though the woman had seen her naked multiple times now, Scarlett still gave into the urge to cover her chest, crossing her arms as she turned to face her. Min-ji was... breathtaking. Something she could easily admit to herself now that they were involved. The witch had a delicate oval face, a pert nose, lightly tanned skin, and large dark brown eyes. Her curves were gentle and she was leanly built, standing a few inches taller than Scarlett. Her long bone-straight black hair had grown a bit, and now reached past the middle of her back. She was currently wearing a long-sleeve black sleep shirt and matching pajama pants.

"That generally describes all sticky spells, does it not? The things are mostly used by children for fun," she pointed out with narrowed eyes...before frowning as she noticed the bags under Min-ji's. "You look tired."

Scarlett hadn't had much alone time with the woman as of late. Octavius had been hoarding her time. It had literally been days since they'd last held a conversation for longer than a minute. In fact, over the last four days, she had only seen the woman at night, and by that point, Min-ji was usually already sleeping.

While the witch hadn't officially moved in, Min-ji had been there every night since they started going out. It hadn't been too long, but Scarlett was already feeling a bit safer with her. The doubts she had around Min-ji's reasonings for being with her were starting to fade. The idea that the witch was with Scarlett just because she liked her, and not because of the power she could gain through her, had started to take hold.

Min-ji sagged against the door. “They may have been small spells, but there were a lot.”

Scarlett sighed. “I’ll talk to the Halloween obsessed fiend.”

The woman let out a snort. “No need. They are all done. I just need sleep.”

“Sorry, my best friend is a little crazy.”

Min-ji burst into laughter. “A little is an understatement, don’t you think, Scarlett?”

Scarlett smirked. “You have a point.”

The woman yawned and crossed her arms. “So do we really not get to know what we are wearing until the day of?”

“Octavius loves surprises. About half as much as he loves Halloween. So, the two combined together means...yes, we have to wait. His feathers will be majorly ruffled if we somehow spoil his surprise. Unless you want to deal with a sulky bat, walking around as if the world has ended?”

Min-ji rolled her eyes. “Surprise it is.”



HENRY STARED AT HIS SIRE...AND for the first time in a long while, he found himself firmly saying, “Absolutely not.”

He wanted to scream *hell no*, but he would never be so rude to Octavius. Even in his pirate days, he had never been one to swear much.

“Aww, come on, Henry! It’ll be amazing!” Octavius cried, eyes wide and begging.

The vampire could not be serious right now. Henry was shocked that Octavius was even telling him what his costume

was early. Never once, since the start of these parties, had he known until Halloween...

Perhaps, Octavius figured he needed more time to break him down and get him to agree...because if this had been sprung on him on Halloween, Henry would have refused to wear it. Too bad for Octavius, as he would not break on this.

“I will not dress as a mermaid, Master Octavius,” he stated firmly.

“But it’s not a mermaid costume! You’d be a siren. You know the ones that drag people to their deaths?!” his sire explained, as if that made it any better. “Oh, don’t you think it’s such a pity that mermaids are real, but sirens are not?”

“Yes, because who wouldn’t want one more creature running around trying to kill people?” he asked with a heavy dose of sarcasm. “Either way, this changes nothing. I will not dress as a mermaid, siren, or otherwise.”

“But it’ll be so cool! And you’ll have your own moveable grotto, and a water hole—”

“A water hole!? In the house?!” he barked, his concern rising. “No, surely it’s outside the house, right?”

Had he been too busy taking care of the brothers to notice that Octavius had dug a hole inside?! Where was it? Had he done it at Scarlett’s? No, she’d never allow that.

“Yes, a water hole, in the house!” Octavius replied with excitement as he completely ignored Henry’s tone of voice.

Taking a calming breath, he asked, “Please tell me you did not dig a hole into the floor of either of the houses!”

He would like to say Octavius would never do something so insane...but he knew Octavius way too well to rule it out completely.

The vampire giggled. “Oh, no. I made a hill in the west ballroom of my home, which I then put a water hole into. It’s a see-through water hole.”

He crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes at his sire. “There is dirt in my once perfectly clean house now, isn’t

there?”

Octavius’ eyes widened a bit, and his smile dimmed slightly. “Well, I mean...just a little dirt.” He gestured with his hand. “Just a little.”

The one thing he had absolutely hated about being a pirate...the filth.

“No...”

“BUT IT’S ALREADY MADE! I can’t unmake the hill! I mean, I will when it’s all over, but it’s too late now! And there is a show planned! A show, Henry!”

A show? By the Gods, Octavius’ eccentric tendencies really came out during this time of the year. He eyed the stubborn expression forming on his sire’s face. But he was determined to not lose this fight. There was too much at stake.

“Master Octavius, the other fledglings are coming. I cannot be seen dressed as a mer—”

“Siren,” Octavius corrected.

“Same difference. I cannot.”

“But everything is already prepared!” he whined.

“Sire, please!”

Octavius stared, mouth pressed into a fierce pout for a few moments before saying, “Fine! But only if you agree to this compromise.”

“As long as it isn’t me in a tail and a wig, I’m fine with it.”

His sire’s pout disappeared as a rather evil smile slipped upon his face. “Good of you to say that. So, this is what we will do. Cormac will be my siren. He shall go into the pool and perform the show. BUT you are not off scot-free, Henry. You will have a starring role still.”

Henry grimaced. He felt like he had been tricked, as if this was Octavius’ true plan all along. “And what will that role be?”

“You shall be the pirate he drags into the sea! There will be a kiss! And not only will you be starring in that role, but you also have to stay by Cormac’s side all night while dressed as his pirate. You will cart him around on his grotto as we go to different rooms during the party.”

This...had definitely been a trick. Which was not surprising. But Henry could handle this much, could he not? He could handle a kiss, right? It was just a kiss. It would be fine.

Standing by Cormac’s side did mean he’d have to deal with the werewolf flirting all night. He’d have to be in control of himself, do his best to stop the damned blush that loved to pop up at some of the pup’s more rambunctious comments...

Constant flirting or...be seen in a wig, shirtless, while wearing a fishtail by the other fledglings, who definitely would take an obsessive number of photographs and never let him live it down...

“Fine. I can do that. I can handle a kiss,” Henry said calmly while his head was a mess.

The vampire’s evil smile widened. “Fine, fine. Let me go make some calls, and I’ll have them switch and make the adjustments.”

Henry sighed as his sire walked away looking way too upbeat for this to have been anything other than a well-coordinated trap. Whatever, it would be fine.

It was...just a kiss. He rolled his eyes. *Yes, just a kiss with a young werewolf who was trying to get into his pants*, Henry thought with exasperation.

Chapter Six



Nibble Nibble!

Eyes closed, Turney took a deep breath as the water ran over him. He had already finished cleaning and was just sort of standing there under the spray. While he couldn't fully enjoy the heat of the water anymore, as temperature change didn't really affect him much...it still felt good.

Taking another deep breath, he turned with his eyes still closed and walked forward, reaching out for one of the towels he knew was hanging there on the far wall of the rather large shower.

When his hand came in contact with something that was neither tile nor towel, his eyes shot open. He screamed, arm winding back without thought. He punched into the man standing there covered in blood as he was about to bring down an ax.

His fist went through the 'man' and into the tile, the vision popping into nothing like a balloon. Turney stood there speechless, just staring at his fist that was now embedded into the wall of the shower.



OCTAVIUS HUMMED THE *GHOSTBUSTERS*' theme song as he flew around and pressed fake stringy arterial spray to the sticky substance he had placed on the walls and ceiling moments before. It made it look like the walls were bleeding. Octavius had considered spraying fake liquid blood on the walls...but he had quickly decided against that idea. Wouldn't want Henry to have a meltdown...again...

Though this was Scarlett's house, so it probably would have been her freaking out on him. He grimaced at the thought. Yes, he had made a good decision!

Octavius pressed another piece to the wall when an idea popped into his head. Grinning, he looked around and then started to spin.

"Wheee." He giggled, spinning around in circles, flinging the moldable plastic blood at the walls.

At the sound of the door slamming open, he stopped suddenly with a gasp, almost falling from the air. Some of the fake strings of blood flew from his hands. Octavius winced when the piece smacked Turney in the face.

The zombie flinched as the blood strings bounced off his face before falling to the ground. Turney's expression was a mixture of fury and shock, before the shock fell away to just fury. The zombie's hazel green gaze flicked up to him. "You!" Turney growled.

His eyes widened. "Me?! Wait, you shouldn't be in here!" He landed in front of the zombie.

Turney glared down at him. The zombie's short brown hair looked damp, and like someone had been tugging on it as it stood up in spots—probably Turney himself.

Staring up at his zombie bun, he just barely held back his sigh of appreciation. Turney was so handsome. Pretty oval face, aquiline nose, square jaw, plush lips. Sure, he was pale now, his skin no longer tanned by the sun...but he was all his! All Octavius'. It was a shame his toned body was currently hidden behind baggy black sweats.

“Octavius, are you even listening to me?!” Turney snapped.

Oh, he definitely hadn't been. “Uh...yes?”

“You... UGH!” Turney growled and threw something on the ground in front of him.

Octavius looked down at the crumpled-up piece of paper. He winced when he realized it was one of his sticky spells—uh oh...

“Stop leaving these all about! You are going to give me a heart attack!”

Octavius blinked, head tilting, before pointing out, “But you are a zombie, you can't have a heart attack...”

“I literally broke the shower!” Turney snapped.

Oh no...that...was not good. “Oh, we need to fix that before Scarlett finds out!”

“TOO LATE!” Turney hissed. “I already told her.”

“How could you?!” Octavius cried.

Oh no, he was in big trouble! *Scarlett was probably going to tie him down and lecture him*, he thought with a pout.

“Maybe don't put an illusion of a fucking murderer trying to ax me to death in the bathroom!”

“BUT IT'S HALLOWEEN! It's spooky season! Being scared is the point!”

Octavius wasn't sure why he was arguing, as he had already decided to cut back. And really, he'd taken the rest down...at least, he thought he had. The problem with putting an uncountable number of sticky spells up...is one didn't always remember where one put them. So, Octavius had meant

to remove the one currently crumbled at his feet, but had forgotten he had put it there.

“No, free candy is the point!” Turney snapped.

Octavius gasped, clutching at his heart. “How could you?!” He sniffed. “You know I can’t eat candy! How can I enjoy Halloween without the scares?”

Ah...candy. Sweet, delicious candy, that he would never ever get to eat. He could sniff it...dream about it...but if he wanted any, he’d have to melt it down and drink it. Which you couldn’t really do with some hard candies. Way too hot in liquid form. The mouth burns... He shuddered at the memories.

Turney sighed. “Oh, my God... Can you please just stop trying to scare the hell out of me?”

“I mean...I took them all down. Well, I tried to take them all down. At least, I took down the ones I’d placed for you, and not just for the party. I may have forgotten a few, like...the one in the shower.”

Though it was curious that the one there had taken so long to go off. Hmm, perhaps the water interfered with the spell a bit?

“You did?” Turney slowly asked.

Octavius blinked. “Did what?” he asked, his mind distracted, before he realized what Turney was referring to. “Oh, yes! I did!”

His zombie bun frowned. “Not that I’m not happy to hear that, but why?”

Octavius shifted into his humanoid form and let out a sigh. “Well, like I said during the whole...cooking fiasco. Scarlett said I was going overboard. After talking to her, I realized I was being a bit mean...so I took them down. And I promise now that I’ll try to not do so much next year...maybe only a few scares here and there, and not every day, and certainly not multiple times a day.”

The zombie eyed him. “Could there be no scares?”

He gasped. “Where would the fun in that be?”

Turney looked up and rubbed his face before muttering, “What is my life?”

Octavius giggled and moved in closer to pull the zombie into his arms and snuggle. “Your life is amazing, hehe.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you say, you crazy bat.”

“Anyway, while I’m cutting back on personal scares...it’s still fine for me to go all out for the party, right? I mean, at this point, it’s too late to pull back, as Halloween is tomorrow. I have so much spooky stuff planned. I can’t guarantee that you won’t be scared at times.”

Turney wrapped his arms around him. “I can deal with a few scares each year...and no, you don’t have to hold back during your party. I would never be so mean to smother your fun on your favorite day of the year.”

“Ah, you’re the best boyfriend ever, my precious zombie bunny,” Octavius said with a happy sigh, burrowing his face into the zombie’s neck to breathe in his sweet cookie dough scent.

“So, guess what I did today while you were running around like a mad man?”

Octavius pulled back, pout in place. “What did you do?”

He’d hardly call what he did running around or mad related. Though some of Octavius’ plans in the recent days had come to fruition...traps set and bait taken—hehe. But it meant he had to make some last-minute adjustments. Well, he had to pretend to make last-minute adjustments, as if it hadn’t been his plan all along. And pretending took effort. Without effort, how could it look real?! Otherwise, he’d just been decorating.

Turney smirked. “I had my blood tested.”

Octavius froze for a moment, his heart skipping a beat. “You had it tested?”

“Mmm.” The zombie nudged against him, giving him a peck on the lips.

He licked his lips as his gaze trailed to the zombie's neck, his fangs lengthening. "And?"

"Guess who is now free to be bitten by a certain vampire?"

Octavius let out a squeal as he picked Turney up and spun him around. "FINALLY!"

Turney laughed. "Put me down, you dork."

He held onto him tight and captured his lips in a kiss. Turney groaned, wrapping his arms around his neck as they made out for a few moments before Octavius broke the kiss. "Oh, your hickies are about to have hickies."

Turney snorted. "Nonsense."

"So many bites. Full dangerous vampire mode activated!" Octavius growled, he nipped at Turney's bottom lip as he sat his feet back on the floor. "Strip down or else, my captive!"



TURNEY ROSE A BROW AT OCTAVIUS' voice going deep and 'deadly'. "Here?"

The vampire frowned, head tilting in obvious confusion. "Of course, why not?"

He glanced around. It looked like multiple people had been slaughtered in the room. There was fake blood everywhere... and a lot of bodies...and body parts just lying about.

Well, the fake blood, on closer inspection, didn't appear to be actual liquid. He was pretty sure it was more of whatever had just smacked him in the face earlier. It was oddly realistic. Sort of reminded him of that old factory with the wendigos and all those body parts...but more messy.

"You can't be serious..."

“I’m a dangerous vampire! We can be like, ‘oh this is what happens if you disobey’. It’s perfect!”

He eyed the vampire. Despite them taking the month off from work, Octavius was dressed in a three-piece 1920’s style business suit. This time it was black and gray pinstriped paired with an orange button down and a black tie. Octavius was, as always, looking like a Roman statue, with his short sandy blond curls, strong but not quite square jaw, rounded chin, and high cheekbones. The vampire’s olive skin was glowing, and there was a sparkle in his ocean blue eyes. It was funny how the put togetherness hid so much crazy.

“There is literally a fake dead body like a foot away from me...”

“Yes, so if you don’t want to become the next body, clothes off, human!” Octavius growled, his voice deepening.

“Can’t we move this to the bedroom?” he asked, already knowing what the answer would be.

The vampire’s lips pursed into a pout. “No, here is perfect!”

Turney sighed. Narrowing his eyes at the male, he said, “Nothing too weird.”

Octavius blinked. “Of course!” He nodded, looking so unbelievably innocent that he knew the vampire was just placating him.

“Fine.” He sighed again, but quickly slipped out of his sweats and underwear. What the heck, sex was sex. And he’d been dying for Octavius to bite him for weeks. Sure, the location was questionable, but the results would no doubt be pleasurable.

Octavius let out an evil laugh and Turney found himself splayed out on the floor with a body propping up his lower half. He stared at the blood covered form that his ass was partly laying on.

“Octavius! I know I just said yes, but really? On top of a body?!”

“But the ground is uncomfortable...and the fake blood is hard... shhh, don't worry about it. It's fine!” Octavius said coaxingly. Dropping to his knees, he began to caress Turney's bare thighs. “Now...” He cleared his throat. “Submit, human, or become like the one beneath you!”

Turney rolled his eyes. Dammit... “AHHH! Please don't kill me!”

“I'll think about it... You would look so pretty covered in blood,” Octavius hissed, eyes full of heat. He cupped his hand under Turney's left knee and lifted his leg up. Turney gasped as the vampire dragged his tongue from his knee to his inner thigh. His cock perking up at his lover's touch. “Let's have a taste to see if you are worth keeping alive.”

Octavius placed a gentle kiss on the scar on his thigh, and Turney couldn't help but flinch.

The vampire frowned. “Turney...”

“I'm fine.” He cleared his throat.

Octavius rubbed his face against the claw mark on his inner right thigh. “You aren't... And while I can't force you to love them...I'll do my best to make sure you know how much I do. Because without them, my life would be empty right now. Not even Halloween would have been enough to cheer me up.”

Turney chuckled. “Love me more than Halloween, do you?”

“Yes,” Octavius said with a grin before plunging his fangs into Turney's leg without warning. Pleasure surged through his veins, causing him to cry out.

He clawed at the carpet, his nails slashing through the weird, hard, plasticky blood. His cock fully hardened in an instant. Turney wasn't sure if it was because it had been a while, or if certain senses were just enhanced now that he was a zombie, but he tumbled over the edge with a shout, spraying across his stomach.

Octavius retracted his fangs with a laugh. “So eager, even when in such danger.” Turney shuddered when the vampire

ran his finger through his cum. “For once, I don’t have any hidden lube... Are you okay with me using this to stretch you?”

“Fuck, yes!” Turney groaned, his hole clenching in excitement at the thought of how rough it would be.

“But first, human, it’s time to bleed.” Octavius growled before striking, sinking his fangs into his other thigh.

Turney gasped, body spasming in pleasure, his cock hardening again. He whined in protest when the vampire removed those fangs barely a second later.

Octavius grinned evilly. “You seem to be enjoying this too much, human.” He licked and probed the bite mark.

“I aim to please,” Turney moaned.

“Do you?”

“Whatever I can do to not die.”

Octavius gripped his hips and pulled him across the body, so he was using it more like a pillow. The vampire ran his tongue along the underside of his cock. Turney bit his lip, holding in his moan. He couldn’t contain the noise he made when Octavius swallowed him down. Turney cried out in pain and pleasure, balls tightening as his cock spraying cum down Octavius’ throat when those fangs sank into a much more tender area—his cock.



OCTAVIUS LET OUT A DEEP CHUCKLE, pulling Turney back when the zombie tried to crawl over the body and away from the overstimulation. “Now where do you think you’re going?” He settled the zombie on his knees, bending him over the body.

“Please,” Turney whimpered, body trembling. “I can’t... I need...” Octavius smirked, adding a finger to the male’s hole and stretching him open. There was something so hot about opening Turney up with the zombie’s own cum. And it was just his luck that there was a plethora to use.

He really had messed up earlier. Octavius had been so close to the perfect roleplay. If he had just gotten the blood lube that he’d seen this morning in the Halloween shop this roleplay would have been so much more complete—oh well... there was always next time.

Turney moaned loudly, arching his back.

Octavius ran his hand over the male’s back, caressing the long scratch scar there before brushing over some of the bite marks he’d left behind on his side. Turney shuddered at his touch. The zombie’s body was littered with hickies and bites. Octavius may have not taken much blood with each bite, but it had all added up, leaving him very full and satisfied. He supposed that full feeling wasn’t one he’d get to experience forever. Zombie blood would only stay viable to a vampire for so long.

Turney cried out as he pulled his fingers free, only to start chanting ‘yes’ when Octavius lined up his cock and pushed inside with one hard thrust.

Octavius groaned as Turney clenched around his cock. “By the Gods, you are tight.”

“More,” Turney whined.

“Confusing thing. Trying to get away and now demanding more? You are much more entertaining than the others.”

“Others?!” Turney snapped, looking back at him.

Octavius froze under the accusing glare. “Like...the body under you?”

Turney blinked. “Oh, right...the ‘others’.”

Octavius narrowed his eyes at the zombie. “You forgot we were roleplaying, didn’t you?”

“Well, you can’t blame me. You have your cock in my ass! How am I supposed to think with you doing that?” Turney said with a laugh.

He snorted and then rotated his hips, pegging the zombie’s prostate.

Turney moaned, burrowing his face into the fake body’s stomach.

Chuckling, Octavius began to pound into the zombie, drawing sweet cries from him. “You like that, human? Like being pounded by the cock of a murderer?”

“Yes! Yes!”

“Good, because I’m going to keep you for a long time!” Octavius wrapped an arm around Turney’s waist, dragging him up against him, grinding hard into his hole.

He shuddered as his balls tightened to his body. Octavius had been holding back, so he wouldn’t be lasting much longer.

He let out a hiss, slamming his fangs into Turney’s neck as he continued to grind hard into his hole. The zombie let out a guttural cry, his body spasming against him. Turney sprayed cum over the fake body on the ground.

Octavius’ orgasm slammed into him moments later. He groaned into Turney’s neck as his balls tightened and his cock jerked, filling the zombie’s hole with cum.

“Fuck...I don’t think...I can...cum anymore,” Turney said with a shaky, breathless laugh.

Octavius burst into a fit of giggles. Slowly pulling out, he laid Turney back down. Flopping down beside him, Octavius pulled the zombie into his arms. “Mmm, that was fun.”

Turney laughed. “It was weird, but fun.”

Octavius ran his hands through Turney’s hair—it was damp with sweat. The zombie’s body was still reacting much like a human’s would. And it probably would for a few more years. He turned Turney in his arms, cupping his face as he pressed his lips to his. Turney enthusiastically returned the

kiss. Pulling back after a few minutes of making out, Octavius nuzzled his nose against Turney's. "I love you."

Turney smiled, eyes shining. "I love you, too. And I missed you."

Octavius frowned. "Missed me?"

"Mmm...you've been so busy lately."

"Ah..." He grimaced. "You have a point. I have been preoccupied... Sorry. Maybe next year you can help me with the decorations. As much as I love things being a surprise...I'd much rather spend time with you."

Turney brushed a lock of Octavius' hair out of his face, hand gliding through his curls. "I think I'd like that."

"Then it's a date. Next year, you and I will decorate and keep it a secret together."

Turney chuckled. "I feel like I just signed myself up for a hell of a lot of trouble."

Octavius giggled. "Maybe!" His smile slipped. "You know...now that I'm thinking about it, we haven't actually gone on a date."

"We haven't?"

"Not really. We have gone out a lot together, but it's always been work related."

Turney frowned. "That doesn't sound quite right to me. We have hung out a lot."

"Yes, but they weren't dates!" Octavius whined. "That's it." He sat up. "Get showered and let's head out! We are going on a date!"

Turney stared up at him, brow raised. "Now?"

"NOW!"

Chapter Seven



Date Night!

Octavius smiled as Turney burst into laughter at the scene flashing across the movie screen. He may have wanted to see the new horror movie playing, but he figured Turney would enjoy this more.

Mind you, it wasn't a bad movie. A fun little comedy, just not what he normally watched. So instead, Octavius was watching Turney react to the film. Seeing his zombie smile was more entertaining than whatever was happening on the screen.

So yes, the comedy had been a good choice, even if it wasn't to Octavius' taste. No matter, Octavius had planned things that fit them both. Wasn't that what couples did? Each trying something just because they knew the other would enjoy it?



"THIS WAS NICE," Turney said with a smile as he took a sip from his glass. He wasn't sure the name of the wine he was

drinking, but he knew it was expensive. “Though you know I don’t need fancy.”

He eyed the place. The small Italian restaurant wasn’t huge, but the black tables were spaced far apart, and the atmosphere was quiet and romantic. The lights were dimmed, and each table had a candle lit at its center. The chairs and seating were plush and in various shades of brown.

Octavius smiled. “I know. But it’s technically our first date, so I wanted to impress!”

Turney chuckled. “After thinking about it, I think you are wrong to say we have never dated. Because how could that dinner in front of the fireplace be anything but a date?”

The vampire blinked before letting out a soft laugh. “I suppose it was very date-like. But I feel that could describe most of our outings. They were date-like, but never fully a date. Because every single one was work related. Or at my house. Though...are dates still considered dates if they take place at home?”

“I don’t see why not,” Turney said. He sat his wine glass down and rested his hand on the table. Octavius reached out and brushed his finger lightly against the bite mark on his right wrist. He just barely held back his negative reaction. The vampire didn’t pull his touch away. It was more like he solidified it, laying his hand firmly on Turney’s as his mouth turned down into a frown.

“You’ve been...” Octavius hesitated. “Your reactions to your scars have changed slightly. I know you are self-conscious about them. But lately...it’s been different.”

Turney cleared his throat. “Different, how?”

“You know I’m not always the best at identifying emotions...” the vampire said with a sigh, his frown deepening. “I’m not sure how to explain it. But I know something has changed over the last few weeks, and not for the better... At least not when it pertains to your feelings for your scars.”

Turney turned his hand over in Octavius', gripping on to him. "You...aren't wrong. It hasn't gotten worse...just..."

"Just?" Octavius asked, eyes seeking and slightly worried.

"You are right, there is something else now. Something not so good that comes along with the thoughts. Don't get me wrong, I'm dealing with it all better than when I first woke up. You have helped me a lot. Really, everything you have done has helped me feel better about them. I just...now..."

The vampire's brow pinched. "Yes?"

He rubbed the back of his neck. "I feel guilty."

Octavius blinked. "For what?"

"I don't know... Like, I could be dead... Technically speaking, I was, and then I wasn't. Like how dare I have these thoughts when the alternative is death."

The male's hand gripped his. "Turney...this is about Theo, isn't it? Or, I suppose it would be more correct to say it's about Cynthia..."

Turney's shoulders sagged. "Like I'm sure she'd give anything to be in my shoes. That Theo would give anything for her to be here, scars or not. So having these thoughts just makes me feel like I'm being ungrateful."

"Turney, just because someone has it worse, doesn't mean you don't have a right to feel what you are feeling. You have had an enormous amount of changes in your life lately. You learned about us all. You..." He cleared his throat, his voice dropping lower as he spoke again. "You died. And then you came back. You came back changed, you had to learn—and still are learning—how to live this new life. You have a right to feel." Octavius brought Turney's hand up to his lips and kissed it before laying it down gently.

"I...I suppose I know that, but it's just hard to remember that anytime I see Theo. I feel like I should just suck it up. Like Cynthia died but I'm here. That could have been me... The same person went after us. So why me and not her?"

“You know Theo wouldn’t blame you for feeling off about your changed appearance. He doesn’t fault you for being alive. It is not as if you surviving or not would change what happened. Theo had permission to change Cynthia into a werewolf. She gave that to him. But that is something he could only do if she were still alive. And before you think that she could have been made a zombie too, it is far too late for that. I didn’t tell you this as I didn’t think it was something you would want or need to know. I also didn’t realize you were feeling this way about your survival. We discovered Cynthia’s body had been burned. Even if we wanted to, there would be no way to turn her. Fire is a sure way to avoid becoming a zombie. And this happened before we even knew of Theo’s disappearance, before Dayan got to you. She was dead before Cléas even stepped foot into our office. There was nothing you or I, or any of us, could have done differently that would have resulted in her being alive.”

“She...” Turney leaned back in his chair. “So, there was... no way...no way we could have saved her?”

“No. Dayan made sure of that.”

Turney didn’t know if he had thought him surviving meant she couldn’t. Yet, at the same time, he felt guilty that he had survived and she hadn’t. As if he’d been risen from the grave while she lay somewhere rotting. In his mind, part of him had thought...that there was something they could have done, but for some reason they weren’t doing it.

Turney cleared his throat. “Once burned...a body, it can’t be changed? Are you sure?”

“Yes. The virus can only take if there are bodily fluids, or some sort of tissue remaining. She was cremated. It’s actually a common practice for Knights to burn remains. I suppose, in their mind, it’s better to not leave any evidence behind.”

“I see.”

“Yes, so don’t feel guilty about something you can’t change. And certainly don’t feel guilty for having feelings about some very big changes.” Octavius smiled gently. “I suppose I should have known you’d need to know all this. I,

myself, felt guilt over her death, until finding out there would have been nothing I could have done to help her.”

“It’s...not your fault what happened. You know that. And you know I don’t blame you for dying, right?”

“I know. Just as Theo doesn’t blame you for surviving when Cynthia didn’t.”

Turney let out a soft laugh. “Right...”

“I love you. You know that, right?”

He slowly smiled. “I know. I love you, too.” Turney sighed. “This is supposed to be a date, all fun and happy, and I just made it depressing with my stupid feelings and hang-ups.”

“Hey! None of that. Your feelings are not stupid!” Octavius huffed. “Now, as for fun...”

“Are you finished eating?” Octavius asked, his eyes seemed to oddly brighten at the thought.

“Yes,” he said with a hesitant laugh.

“Good! I’ll pay the bill and then we can get to the next event I planned for tonight!”

Turney brow rose. “Event?” He checked his watch, it was near 8pm. “Are we going to another movie?”

Octavius hummed, his grin widening. “Not exactly...”



TURNEY FROWNED as Octavius directed him to pull into the parking lot of Black Fox Amusement Park. It was decked out for Halloween and the lights were on, yet it appeared to be empty. “An amusement park? Are you sure it’s open?”

“Oh, it’s open! I rented it for the night!” Octavius said with an excited giggle.

“The whole park?!” Turney gasped. “Shouldn’t there be like a Halloween thing going on? Wouldn’t that be a big draw for them?”

“No worries! They actually had to close early today for some repairs, so that they are all ready for Halloween tomorrow. Repairs are done, and they are here for us to play tonight! Oh, it’s going to be so much fun! But first...” Octavius opened the glove box and pulled out a bottle of Zom Nummies. “You should pop a few of these. Like six... Just to be safe.”

“Six?” Turney asked with a brow raised.

“Yes, the activity we will be partaking in is very energy consuming.”

“The ‘activity’? What exactly will we be doing here?” he asked with narrowed eyes as he took the bottle.

“Oh...you know...just going around...having fun.” Octavius’ gaze avoided his.

“Why are you being suspicious?” He opened the bottle and quickly popped six chewables into his mouth.

“Suspicious?! Me?! Nonsense!” Octavius waved his hand. “Come, let’s go!”

Turney let Octavius drag him through the parking lot and up to the ticket booth. The area that would usually be full of people waiting in line to get in was completely empty and open at the moment.

The small booth was decorated in cobwebs and striped orange and black. There was a woman dressed up as a witch standing inside. Her face broke out into a smile when she spotted them.

“Welcome to Black Fox Park! I hope you have an amazing time on your zombie run!” She beamed. “Here are your survivor bracelets, freezer guns, and park map!” She placed two orange and black striped laser guns, and two sort of

transparent black bracelets that looked to have empty settings for some sort of inserts on the counter in front of her. “Now, remember, the goal of the game is to track down the ten fox jack-o-lanterns in the park, and get a fox pumpkin jewel. You will be given two hours to track down the ten jewels. As you can see, there are empty settings on your bracelets for you to put the jewels in to. Once you have collected each of the ten jewels and placed them into your bracelets, to officially win the grand prize and the game, you must take your completed bracelets to the large fox statue at the center of the park. Tap the statue while saying ‘game’ and victory will be yours. This is who you are looking for, by the way.” She held up a picture of someone dressed up as a large, round jack-o-lantern. The face carved on it was that of a fox. It basically looked like a carved pumpkin had grown arms and legs. “Note, if one of the zombies tags you, you are frozen. And the only way to unfreeze is to stand still for two minutes. But don’t worry, you are un-freezable for ten minutes after the two minutes are up. Any questions?”

Turney stared, mind just whirling as Octavius asked, “How do the zombies know we can’t be frozen for ten minutes?”

“Your bracelet will light up green and remain green until the ten minutes are up. On another note, your bracelet will light up blue when you are frozen. As will the zombies’ if you managed to shoot them in one of the target spots on their bodies. Any other questions?”

“No!” Octavius sang happily as he snagged a bracelet and put it on, before grabbing his map and freezer gun.

“A zombie run, Octavius?”

“It’ll be fun!” the vampire cried.

Turney shook his head and picked up his bracelet. Putting it on, he picked up the remaining freezer gun and map. He supposed it was only fair that they do something Octavius enjoyed. He doubted the vampire had found the movie or dinner that much fun, considering the male didn’t really like comedies...and couldn’t eat.

Gun in hand, Turney turned to Octavius and saw how hesitant his smile was. As if he thought Turney was about to say no. He let out a soft chuckle. “Come on, let’s do this.”

Octavius let out an excited squeal, jumping in place. “YAY! Let’s go! Let’s go!”



OCTAVIUS STOOD THERE, his face grim. He and Turney stood side by side, backs pressed against the wall of a nearby building, hidden in the shadows. They had done it. Fought the hoard and found the fox pumpkin jewels. Victory was so close! Within their sights—literally, the fox fountain was right there! Unfortunately, also right there, was a hoard of zombies.

Having chosen to do this without paranormal abilities, they were down to the last five minutes. They had carried out the run...as ‘human’ as possible.

“This doesn’t look good, Turney.”

“No...they have us blocked in on all sides... and are just waiting for us to appear.”

Octavius hummed. “So, what do we do?” He turned to Turney, hoping the young zombie had an answer.

Turney frowned, brow pinching in thought. And then his expression became determined. “There is only one thing to do...” He leaned in and kissed Octavius on the cheek. “I had fun... Now, win for me, Octavius!” Turney cried out as he jumped forward into the open, notifying the zombies of his location. He fired his laser at them, freezing many, and then he took off, drawing them away.

“Turney!” Octavius gasped, as he watched his bunny sacrifice himself and get lost behind a wall of zombies. He sniffled dramatically. “I won’t let your sacrifice be in vain!”

He charged towards the finish, jumping over downed zombies, shooting all those in his way as he sprinted to the statue—at human speed. He heard people cry out behind him, heard their feet as the zombies approached from behind, but it was too late...as he had won!

Leaping up the last few steps, his hand slapped against the statue moments before a zombie caught up to him.

“GAME!” Octavius cried out with a giggle.

The zombie inches from him let out a laugh. “Congrats, you won the Black Fox Park zombie run!” The zombies around him started to clap.

Moments later, Turney was pushing through the crowd and tapping the statue himself. “Game!” Turney laughed as he wrapped an arm around Octavius’ waist. “Turns out five minutes left equals two minutes being frozen, and then three minutes to calmly claim victory.”

Octavius chuckled. “Yes, that would have been the easiest solution.” He leaned into his real zombie, unable to contain his smile. He knew Turney hadn’t been into it at first, but he was sure the male had a lot of fun once he got past the scariness of the rather convincing looking decaying zombies. The actors had done a hell of a job with the make-up and zombie prosthetics—movie quality!

A loud throat cleared nearby. They turned to the right, and standing there was the woman from the entrance holding two bags. “Congrats on winning the zombie run! Here are your prizes!” She held out the bags.

Octavius squealed. Grabbing his bag, he tore into it. First in the bag was a T-shirt with a cartoon version of the park and the costume fox pumpkins. Underneath that, there was a small statue of the fox pumpkin jewels. So, basically, the costumed pumpkins with the fox face minus the arms and legs. There was also a Halloween fox plushie with a witch’s hat and broom.

“Cute!” Turney said with a smile, eyes firmly on the plushie.

Octavius smirked. He was going to assume the prizes were the same...if not, he had a feeling his plushie was about to get stolen.

He looped his arm through Turney's. "Let's head home! We have a long day tomorrow."

Turney smiled and leaned in for a kiss. Octavius giggled and pecked him on the lips. "Love you."

"Love you, too. Thanks for the date."

Chapter Eight



Costumes Revealed

Turney stared in the mirror at his costume. He honestly wasn't sure what he was supposed to be.

Turney eyed the tunic he was wearing. It fastened at his right shoulder and was belted around the waist, so the top part draped a little. Basically, he had on what he'd seen a lot of people wearing in those ancient Roman and Greek vases, paintings and statues...

Except, the color was unusual. If he was asked to describe it...Turney would say it looked to be the color of stone. But not just the gray of stone, it was speckled like it too. As if the material had been carved out of a large boulder and somehow became fabric. He had on a matching pair of sandals as well that were the same color as the tunic.

Turney turned to the make-up artist who was standing there waiting. She looked fully prepared to attack him, tools of her trade in hand.

“It's...a couples costume, right?”

She smiled and nodded.

“What the hell is Octavius then?”

The woman laughed. “It will make sense when you see him.”

Turney sighed. “It feels like it’s my wedding day or something. The crazy bat said I can’t see him until the party starts because it would ruin his grand entrance.”

The make-up artist burst into giggles. “I imagine in his head this is as important as a wedding.”

Turney sighed and held out his arms. “Do your worst.”



“I CAN’T BELIEVE HIM. How could Octavius do this to me?!” Scarlett let out a grunt of pain as Min-ji tightened the bodice.

“I’ll leave it loose, don’t worry.”

“Just help me get the rest on,” Scarlett growled in response.

Min-ji, with an almost alarming amount of speed, helped her into the rest of her horrendous costume; panniers, skirts, and all. Scarlett glared at her reflection in the large mirror. The rococo era dress was dark red with pale cream accents. The pale cream also came about in the form of four bows that ran down the front of her bodice. The color was pretty, but everything else was awful. There was a ridiculous amount of lace, and the flared sleeves were a menace with the overwhelming amount of extra fabric.

“It’s hideous,” she huffed, shaking the skirts a bit in disgust.

Min-ji wrapped her arms around her waist from behind, kissing her cheek. “You look beautiful...though I can’t say I have fond memories of the clothing of this time period.”

“Why do you get to wear pants?!” Scarlett snapped, irritation rising as she eyed the woman. “Your outfit isn’t even period accurate!”

Min-ji was wearing a frilly matching red outer jacket with flared lace sleeves, puffy at the shoulders. The jacket was short in the front, and going down to her ankles in the back. There was a whole line of buttons at her waist, with a triangle opening chest level as it snapped together with two buttons around her neck. Underneath was a black button-down shirt that was low cut, with matching britches, long socks, and dark red frilly heels. The shoes *were* period accurate. Scarlett had a pair of matching ones hidden under her dress.

“I’m guessing he took some liberties with my costume,” Min-ji said with a hum. “At least he didn’t go with larger panniers?”

“Yeah, well, they are still there!”

Panniers, ugh. That fashion trend had been a big pain in the ass—or rather hips. The number of times she had bumped into something and bruised herself. Sitting alone was a nightmare. She shuddered at the memories.

Staring at herself again, she sighed. Her tits were well and truly squashed, cleavage showing above the frilled neckline. The line was perhaps a bit lower than what was normal for the time—quite scandalous, actually. “It’s squishing my tits,” she complained.

Min-ji laughed. “Yes, poor things.” The woman groped her chest.

Scarlett let out a gasp, face flushing.



CORMAC STARED dumbstruck as he took in Henry’s costume. The vampire was dressed like a pirate... a sexy pirate. Well, there was nothing about the outfit that was there to make him sexy, he just looked sexy as fuck.

It was all the vampire himself. Henry may have looked late forties, with a few lines here or there, but he was fit, with deep hazel eyes, sharp features and a sculpted jaw, which was covered in a closely trimmed mustache and beard. His white streaked black hair was longer than it had been when they first met, now reaching past his chin and hanging free. Part of it was currently covered by a dark red bandana, with a brown leather pirate hat on top. The off-white puffy sleeved lace front blouse the vampire had on made Henry's bronze skin look like it was glowing. Over the blouse was a black vest with a golden stitched design on it. He was wearing brown britches paired with knee-high boots that have cuffs at the top. The rest of his costume consisted of a belt, earring, jewelry, holstered gun, a sheathed sword, and a waist sash the same color as his bandana.

The man really had the audacity to just stand there, hands behind his back, as if he didn't look like sex on a stick.

By the Goddess, was he mouthwatering. Wait... No, he couldn't be drawn in... The vampire had just told him the horrible news of what his costume was. Even as Cormac tried to remember what the vampire had just said, his eyes drifted to Henry's cinched waist...

Shaking his head... No, he had to get it together. Cormac forced his libido to get a grip. He eyed the mermaid tail behind Henry. It was laid out on the couch in his room. The thing was...impressive. The tail looked pretty realistic. It was a deep red with V-shaped black stripes going up it. The scales were iridescent, the fin was a mixture of red and black with white speckling, and the tips were pure black.

“What did you say my costume was?”

Henry cleared his throat, seeming nervous. Which...was unusual. “Well...mermaid. Well, man. Wait... No, Octavius said it's a siren. And there is a pool, and then a movable grotto. The grotto, I'll be in charge of pushing to different rooms as the party moves around...”

Cormac narrowed his eyes suspiciously at the vampire. “And why are you pushing me around?”

Henry cleared his throat once again, pulling a bit at the ties of his shirt, the nervousness very clear to see this time.

What was going on? Wait...was that a blush?

“Well, you see...there is also a performance...that you and I have to put on. Octavius likes having costumes that go together, and he paired us. Here.” The male pulled a packet of papers from behind his back and shoved it at him.

Taking it, he read. It wasn't long, only about three pages, back and front. His eyes widened, heart speeding up a bit as he reached the conclusion of the small performance. “I'll do it!” he growled, heatedly.

Henry sighed. “I figured you would.”



THEO LOOKED at himself in the mirror, eyes transformed.

The costume was skin tight, yet pretty fucking amazing. He was a dragon. The outfit was a mixture of shining gold and copper scales that were chainmail-like with the way they laid on the smooth fabric they were sown into.

His costume was a full body suit. While the center was just fabric, showing the underbelly of the dragon, his sides, the outside of his legs and arms, and the whole of his back had physical scales on them. The gloves had the same scales as the rest of the body, but looked to be clawed. Though the tips of his claws were soft and not hard. The boots he had on were similar in style to the gloves.

On top of the scales, on his back, were folded fake wings. They didn't open, but he figured if they had, they'd be way too big and in the way. The face paint and fake scales pasted onto his skin drew it all together. The make-up artist tinted his skin golden, making his lips an almost liquid gold color. Above his eyes were painted on scales forming into a prosthetic ridge.

Pretty much like the ridges one would find on a reptile, or he guessed, a dragon. Further up, large black horns formed out of his forehead.

The only issue...because the center part was only skin tight fabric, it showed the plains of his stomach.

While he couldn't say he hated what he saw, it was a bit startling how thin he had become. Theo was so used to being toned, not big and bulky per say. He had never been as big as Cormac...but part of him felt the person he saw in the mirror was a stranger.

And it wasn't just his body...the eyes he saw staring back at him weren't the same. It was like they had become empty, hollow, soulless... Thoughts of what they used to look like, the joy there...tried to bring back memories he didn't want to think about.

Taking a deep breath, he shoved the darkness aside.

"I will have fun tonight. I will not panic. I will not think of things I shouldn't think of," Theo told himself firmly, before softly adding, "But...I still wish I didn't have to see..."

There would be way too many people there tonight for him to safely get around without his vision. Not to mention, he just didn't know all these rooms that well. Especially those in Scarlett's home. It wouldn't be safe for him. Not unless he had Cormac or someone to guide him around. He usually didn't do horrible in crowds, his other senses kicked into high gear and helped him avoid running into people, but there would be hundreds there tonight. And Theo was nervous. There would be too many, too close.

So, seeing would be a must if he was on his own tonight. But it wasn't a big deal. The deterioration of his vision in his youth, which was about a hundred or so years ago, meant he had plenty of time to learn how to bring his werewolf eyes out and not accidentally change other things. He could even keep at it for hours now without so much as even a twinge of pain or exhaustion.

However, even being able to do so...he preferred his darkness. It was interesting. He had zero light perception left. He had heard that others dealing with something similar had constant flashes as their mind tried to create something. Or sometimes it was like static...but Theo... Theo saw nothing—no flashes, nothing. He often wondered if it was because he could see if he wanted to. That his mind didn't try to replace the darkness with something else, because there were times when he didn't have to. Either way...he was grateful for it. Because he found the nothingness calming.

He supposed many wouldn't understand why he chose blindness over being able to see. But it was his normal, his safe place...

For Theo, these moments of darkness let him experience so much, yet do it safely. He found vision overstimulating. Theo was like this even before everything that happened. He couldn't remember when sight had become too much, but it had at one point in his life.

And now he was used to being blind, and could get around well on his own. Except when he went alone into an unknown, or drastically changed location with a shit ton of people. Like two houses being overly decorated and altered for an insane Halloween party.

So tonight, sight it was.

Meow.

Theo smiled and looked down. Sprinkle was by his feet pawing at him, staring up with her wide ocean-blue eyes. "What? Do you think I look good?" he asked.

She meowed again with even more enthusiasm.

Theo chuckled. Bending down, he scooped her up. "Come here, my little baby dragon. It's time to put your scales on."

Chapter Nine



It Begins

Turney stood there and couldn't help but be in awe at all the elaborate costumes the people around him were wearing. He would bet that not a single one was off the rack.

Not to mention...there were a lot of people who he was pretty sure were letting their paranormal uniqueness shine through. Well, Turney's costume wasn't exactly off the rack either. On top of his stone-like outfit, his entire body had been painted that same speckled gray color. Even his hair had been thoroughly sprayed to match. He was basically a statue.

The room was decorated in black, orange, and purples, with cobwebs and shining black chandeliers above. There was a wide grand staircase at one end of the room with a deep purple carpet running down it. Fake ghosts flew above them, dancing on the high vaulted ceilings, looking as if they were having their own party up there.

To the left side were tables upon tables of food that looked disgusting, yet smelled amazing. It looked like eyeballs, brains, body parts, worms, bones, and all sorts of other questionable things were on the menu tonight. And unlike most Halloween foods trying to imitate gross things, it didn't look like all of that stuff in the fun, kid sort of way. It all looked super realistic. The drinks table was much the same;

bowls of vomit, blood, and...well, there was also a fun, pretty normal looking, smoking punch bowl. Nearby the tables, was a giant pumpkin shaped candy bowl on a pedestal.

Opposite the grand staircase, on the other side of the room, was a large hill that had grass at the bottom but turned into a good length of sandy beach at the top, which had a shoreline that ended in a pool of water. The pool looked like it had an oddly deep shoreline. The water rippled like there were gentle waves, but was definitely just a small pool of water, even if it was only a little smaller than the 'beach'.

Turney honestly would have liked to walk around and just take everyone and everything in...but he was currently standing at the bottom of the stairs on a stage marking. The exact spot where he'd been instructed to stand.

So, standing there he was...not that he was sure he had the courage to wonder around much. Turney had never been much of a fan of horror or parties, and he knew some of the shit Octavius had planned would probably give his poor heart plenty of stress. There was also the fact that the house was packed. He wasn't sure how many people were there, but well over a hundred, and...he smelled humans.

Turney didn't know where they were, but he knew they were there somewhere. And that there was more than one. Which was a whole other category of concern. He had eaten some brain burgers before this...and he was pretty sure some of the grilled and fried looking brains on the food table were actual brains. Because walking past them had made his mouth water, and had sent a slight hunger throb in his head. So, he supposed if he got too worried, he could rush and eat some more. Still, new zombies and humans didn't mix well.

Turney eyed those directly on either side of him. His coworkers...well, he supposed now they were more than that... Scarlett definitely was more than that. Either way, everyone from the agency was there, just not all right next to him. Currently, the ones near were Scarlett, Min-ji, Theo, and Sprinkle. Sprinkle wasn't a coworker, but she was there.

Cormac and Henry were at the party too, just not next to him—not that Henry was a coworker. Anyway, Cormac’s costume...well, he was a mermaid—tail, wig and all. The wolf was currently sitting on a large ass shell, in what looked like a movable grotto right next to the pool of water. Henry, dressed as a pirate, was by his side.

Having walked past the ‘hill’ as he squeezed through the crowd to get to this spot, he knew that while the incline of the hill was solid, the side of the pool was see-through.

He wasn’t sure how Octavius had gotten Cormac to agree to that outfit, but he feared it had something to do with Henry. And the suspicious grotto on wheels with a push handle had him thinking poor Henry had gotten roped into one of Octavius’ schemes.

Speaking of Octavius, he wasn’t there. Turney wasn’t sure where he was. He was the person everyone at the party was waiting for.

Turney eyed Scarlett. His sire was dressed in a red puffy dress with cream accents that looked like one you’d see in the 1700s. She was currently fanning herself with a red fan, looking grumpy as all fuck. He wasn’t feeling anything from her, so he guessed she was blocking him, but it told him she was just irritated rather than mad. Mad usually meant he’d feel something. Min-ji stood next to her looking amused, dressed in a...he wasn’t sure what to call it, but the jacket was frilly, and she did match with Scarlett.

Theo was a golden dragon with some impressive face and body prosthetics, while Sprinkle was a cute baby dragon that matched him. Sprinkle’s outfit was nowhere as elaborate as Theo’s, but she did have on a hooded onesie-like outfit that mimicked Theo’s costume with scales and horns. She was currently clutched in Theo’s arms, front paws hanging over, looking around with interest.

Turney leaned closer to the other zombie and asked, “Do you know what Octavius is?”

Scarlett snapped her fan shut, expression still sour. “No, I don’t.” Her gaze swept over him. “But I imagine it has

something to do with yours.”

She eyed him a few minutes longer before flipping her fan open and going back to fanning herself.

“There are humans here...I mean, I’m not imagining that, right?”

Her fan paused. “You are most likely smelling some of the hired actors.” Her gaze on him turned speculative. “You feel mostly calm to me. Are you having trouble?”

“No. The pork brain burgers we ate earlier were very filling. And if I get hungry, there is always the food on the tables... No matter how questionable some of it looks. I’m just nervous. There is definitely more than one.”

“They are likely aware of paranormals if they are here,” Min-ji mused. “Though, the paranormals could always be banking on the humans thinking that those fully exposed went all out for their costumes. But I doubt it.”

How were their costumes not already going all out, even before letting their natural bits out and free? Was spending hundreds on a costume considered a normal amount of effort for paranormals? Turney shook his head—rich people...

Scarlett sighed. “They are aware of us. The actor group that Octavius uses employs both humans and paranormals; it’s required that all humans working for the group be in the know.”

“Them knowing doesn’t really...change my situation...” he pointed out.

The female zombie sighed. “Don’t go anywhere without Octavius or someone else by your side, just to be safe. There is an absurd amount of paranormals in this house right now. There should be no issues with protecting a few humans from one baby zombie.”

“Right. Stick with someone. No problem.” Turney eyed her in concern as she went back to fanning herself. “Are you... hot?”

Which was a dumb question to ask another zombie...but she was acting weird, and he wasn't sure what else to ask her.

Her hand paused again, right brow raising. "No, of course not."

"Are you having trouble breathing?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes!" Scarlett snapped.

Min-ji giggled. "I didn't even bind you that tight."

"Uh...don't you not need to breathe?" Theo asked.

The man hadn't said much since finding them in the crowd, and honestly, he looked nervous.

Turney, personally, thought it would be better for him to have sat out tonight and to not push it. Hell, this was a lot for Turney, he couldn't imagine how overwhelming it would be for Theo after everything.

"Just because I don't need to, doesn't mean I don't want to!" she growled. "And this 'thing' is suffocating!"

Turney snickered, but squashed the sound the minute she turned a glare on him.

Scarlett went to say something, but stopped as the lights dimmed and some atmospheric type music started to play. They collectively turned to look to the top of the grand staircase, where Octavius had said he'd be coming from.

Octavius' voice boomed out as he began to tell a story. Turney was pretty sure it was a recording.

"A fair priestess, wanted by a God. Run, she did. Hoping for protection. But what she got instead was betrayal!" His voice cried out the last part as green and purple glitter burst out above in the high vaulted ceilings. Octavius, in bat form, appeared, his body lit up by spotlights.

As he fluttered down towards the platform at the top of the stairs, glitter continued to rain down dramatically around him.

"Chasity taken, she was changed by the very one she believed in. Into a monster!"

He landed then, a giant explosion of glitter hiding his form. As it cleared, Octavius appeared in all his shining glittering glory, chest and feet bare. He was wearing a brown leather layered skirt tinted in gold. The ones one often saw on ancient Roman soldiers. A gold snake belt wrapped around his waist. There were golden snake bracelets crawling around his upper biceps, bangles at his ankles and wrists. Octavius' toned olive muscles were shimmering green with flecks of purple and gold glitter dusted everywhere. The vampire's arms and legs were covered in green and purple tinted snake scales. His eyes were accented with greens, purples, and gold, with scales around his face, much like his arms and legs. There was a golden sparkling headdress on his head that looked to barely be holding back a mass of shimmering but unmoving snakes. He looked really freakin' hot, but oh so glittery.

“How dare she try to refuse a God? A mere mortal? Did she think she was better than a God?”, was what that Goddess of hers thought. So transformed she was. Her hair turned into snakes, and now any man who caught her gaze would fall to stone. Those she loved would be lost to her from a single look.”

A spotlight lit right on Turney when the word 'loved' was spoken. His eyes widened, and he glared at the group around him as the traitors backed away.

He smiled hesitantly and slowly turned around to face the crowd, giving a little wave.

Welp...Turney guessed he had been turned to stone...

Chapter Ten



Exploring The Party

Octavius giggled in delight as his pre-recorded story ended. Pulling his microphone out of one of the secret pockets in his gladiatorial-like skirt, he happily announced, “Welcome all to the best Halloween party of the year!”

His smile brightened as the crowd cheered, the noise almost deafening with the size of the crowd. “This year’s party takes place across two houses, joined together by a haunted forest. Spooks and horrors all around. There are handheld maps to guide you to the different areas of the houses that are open for entertainment. You’ll find the maps on various stands throughout the manors. You are free to wander between, but do note that for the first half of the party, the actors and the festivities will remain here. The map has a detailed list of times for when rooms will have actors in them. As for when we switch to the other house, no worries about being left behind, we will let you all know when it’s time to head to the home of my dear friend, Scarlett. Now go and have some fun, but make sure to be back here in an hour, as once the clock strikes nine, there will be a show you won’t want to miss right in this very room. So don’t be late.” He sent the crowd a wink. “LET THE PARTY BEGIN!”

As he said begin, there was a burst of glitter shimmering down over the crowd, and the live band began to play some

spooky original song created just for his party.

The spotlights on him turned off, and Octavius made his way down the stairs. He forced himself to ignore the large pumpkin candy bowl in the corner of his eye. He'd not be tempted this time!

Octavius smiled brightly when he reached Turney and the rest—the candy bowl safely out of view.

“So? What do you think?!” he asked with excitement.

Turney's eyes swept over him, there was a bit of heat in his gaze. “It's something. I mean, everything looks amazing, and you look...” Turney wrapped an arm around his waist and pulled him closer. “Edible...and very glittery.”

Octavius giggled. “And you look like the perfect statue. I can't wait to chip away at you with my fangs.”

Turney snorted.

His zombie bun really did look like the perfect statue, color and all. The make-up artist did a wonderful job on his hair and make-up.

He spun out of the zombie's hold, and his gaze swept excitedly over his friends. “Ah! You all look amazing!” he gushed, bouncing on his heels. “Scarlett, so beautiful! Min-ji, just dashing! And Theo, our fierce dragon. Oh, look at you, Sprinkle,” he squealed. “My little baby dragon is looking so cute.”

Theo chuckled as Sprinkle meowed. “She seems very pleased with her outfit.”

He gently petted Sprinkle's head, sending her purring.

Octavius turned to the other two, and promptly turned right back around at the sight of the fierce expression on Scarlett's face. Yes, he had a feeling this was how she would react to her costume. But she looked so good!

“Let's go explore, shall we, Turney?”

Scarlett let out a growling sound behind him.

Turney's eyes widened. “Uhh...”

He snagged the male's arm and started dragging him away. "Come, come. Everyone else. Dance, explore, have fun!"

Turney didn't protest as Octavius pulled him through the crowd, and away from the angry female zombie. They eventually made it to the hallway, where people were already milling about. He supposed most hosts would be overwhelmed with guests trying to meet them, but his friends knew better. Octavius would rather run about having fun, over having long drawn-out conversations with people wanting to 'catch up'. Unless Octavius had specifically set up a time to meet with someone during his party beforehand, he did not want to talk. No one interfered with his Halloween fun with useless talking and gossip. That was the quickest way to not get an invite next year.

"Nice of you to use me as a way to escape, Octavius."

Octavius gasped. "Who, me?! Never!" He stared at Turney with wide innocent eyes, knowing full well how fake he just sounded.

Turney snorted. "You aren't believable at all."

"That's not the point. The point is that I got away!" Octavius exclaimed haughtily.

The zombie chuckled. "I have a feeling she is going to pay you back later for making her wear that dress."

"You...may not be wrong. But you also...may not be right."

"Mmhmm," Turney hummed before hesitantly asking, "So, where are we going?"

Octavius smiled. "What an excellent question, my dear petrified lover. There are so many options, hmm."

"That's what I'm afraid of...all the horrible, horrifying options."

He giggled and clung closely to the zombie as he started pulling him down the hallway. "Nonsense. How about we check out a few rooms and then head into the forest. We have time to do that before the show. Not to mention, plenty of time

before we are supposed to meet all my cute, adorable fledglings.”

Turney stopped in his tracks, forcing Octavius to pause. He peered at the male, brow raised.

“All of them?” the zombie asked, sounding slightly concerned.

“All of them!” Octavius giggled. “Come on!” He yanked him forward.



THE LINES WERE SURPRISINGLY short to each room they’d gone in, but Turney supposed there were enough rooms that the crowd could spread out a bit. There being a short line...unfortunately, did not prevent Turney from getting to spend a few minutes hearing the screams of those who had entered before them.

He clung to Octavius’ arm as he pulled them into another room. If he wasn’t mistaken...this was the library. On first entering, it was completely dark. Then balls of light started to float out of the ground the further they walked inside. He jumped as books began to glow and fly off the shelves like they were possessed, or ghosts were moving them. Some flopped open and screams came out. Turney trembled, trying to not run away as they kept going.

Octavius just continued to drag him forward, weaving them around the shelves. Stepping out of a row, Turney’s eyes widened at the sight of three vicious looking dogs with shark-like teeth. Growling, they began to bark, the sound loud and haunting. The creatures themselves glowed an eerie blue color, and were slightly transparent. Holding their leash was an old man. He was in a rage, screaming, words unintelligible. The man’s skin looked as if it was peeling off, like it was made of

paper. His body was bony, his limbs looked like they were seconds away from snapping.

When the four suddenly lunged towards them, Turney let out a scream of terror, his body going into full zombie mode as his fear swamped him. He took off, yanking a manically laughing Octavius through the rest of the library as the four horrifying haunts remained on their heels until they made it out of the room.

As they passed the threshold, the door slamming behind them, he took a gasping breath, sagging against the hallway wall in relief. His heart continued to beat a mile a minute, while his crazy nut of a boyfriend continued to laugh.

“Fuck...how do you enjoy this?!” Turney brushed sweat from his brow. He knew as a zombie he shouldn’t be sweating anymore, but dammit, he still hadn’t quite figured out how to not.

“Aww, come on, it’s fun!” Octavius giggled.

He glared at the vampire. “Fun, my ass. I knew that man was human, but I still freaked out.” Turney sighed.

Octavius rubbed his back. “There, there, my zombie bunny. It’s fine. You are safe.”

The vampire’s words did not hold even a single drop of sincerity. “I don’t believe you.”

The male sighed. “I promise, nothing here will kill you. Oh, by the way, the humans working here do know about us. So, no worries about them finding out, after that change you did in there. I did warn the company that you are new, and that the humans are not to be wandering around alone. You should be safe, no matter where you go. But still, don’t leave my side, okay? Not that I’d leave you alone in here anyway,” Octavius finished with a giggle.

Turney narrowed his eyes at the vampire. “Why does it sound like you not leaving me alone has nothing to do with my safety, and everything to do with your own entertainment?”

Octavius’ eyes widened before he avoided his gaze. “Whatever do you mean, my dear Turney? Obviously, it’s for

safety purposes! How could you accuse me of such a terrible thing?”

“You are a horrible liar.”

Octavius sniffed. “I’m hurt you would think I would lie to you.”

“You are so full of shit.”

Octavius pursed his lips for a moment before an evil grin slipped onto his face. “Well...if that is what you think of me then...I won’t hold back!” The vampire’s grip tightened on his arm.

His eyes widened. “Wait—”

“TO THE NEXT ROOM!” Octavius yelled dramatically.

As he was yanked forward, fear and dread filled Turney. Why did his boyfriend have to be obsessed with Halloween?



CORMAC SMIRKED and eyed the delectable vampire next to him. “So, sail around these parts often, pirate? Need anyone to raise your sails? Mop your deck? Play with your... mast?” He batted his eyelashes at the male, after he glanced down at his crotch suggestively.

This was the first time he’d had fake lashes on, and he had to say, they made him feel pretty powerful.

Henry sighed and slowly looked towards him. “That was bad, even for you, pup.”

“Aww, come on,” Cormac huffed. “It was on theme. Doesn’t that get me a few points?”

The vampire stared him dead in the eye for a few moments before saying, “No.”

He chuckled. “You’re so cute.”

Henry blinked, cheeks flushing slightly. “You are so strange,” the vampire said sharply before crossing his arms and turning away.

Cormac grinned. He wanted to touch Henry’s heated cheeks so badly. They turned red so easily. Though he’d probably end up beaten to death if he tried. Would it be worth it? Maybe...

Either way, he’d get a chance to touch those cheeks soon enough...and other things. Though he’d still have to be good.

Cormac had a feeling Henry was a bit nervous about the performance. He was also pretty sure Octavius had somehow tricked the vampire into agreeing. Cormac wouldn’t take advantage of that, even if he would thoroughly enjoy the results of said trick.



THEO TRIED to use the press of the wall against his back to calm his racing heart, but the wings prevented him from fully connecting. So, it wasn’t working. Even Sprinkle’s constant purring and rubbing herself against his chest wasn’t helping.

He had to get out of here...

No...he was fine. He would be fine. Theo took another deep breath in and out, trying to ignore the overwhelming number of scents around him. He closed his eyes, shutting away all the noise that cluttered his vision.

Chapter Eleven



Through The Haunted Woods

Leaves and sticks crunched under their feet as they walked the path created between Octavius' and Scarlett's mansions. The path was about twelve feet wide, the bare trees on each side filled with lanterns and cobwebs. Some of the shadows being thrown...didn't look natural. The twisting forms looked like claws about to strike out and drag him into the forest.

Turney jumped, barely containing his scream when a ghost-like illusion of a woman in a bloody wedding dress, with glowing red eyes, flew from a nearby tree and dove right through him as she let out a death wail. His heart was seemingly beating at a permanently increased speed at the moment. Octavius snickered beside him.

Why, oh why, did his boyfriend have to be obsessed with Halloween?! Why?!

“You are enjoying this way too much—FUCK!” he said with a sigh that ended in a scream when a human dressed like a murderous clown jumped out of the shadows to the right of them.

Where the fuck had that asshole even hidden?!

Octavius burst into a fit of laughter.

He covered the vampire's mouth with both hands, glaring. "Shut it, you evil bat!"



OCTAVIUS GRINNED behind the zombie's hands. His bunny was so cute, all scared and grumpy. Pulling Turney's hands down, he gave him a peck on the lips. "Shh, it's fine. It's not real. None of it is real. Once you understand that, what's to be scared of?"

The zombie just glared harder. "Knowing it's not real doesn't take away the scare factor."

"Hmm, odd... It does for me."

"Yeah, but you aren't normal."

That he was not. Normal was boring though, so why would he ever want to be normal?

He hummed. "Never claimed to be."

"Though, I suppose I'm not either...because I think I find all this scarier than the times when I was actually in danger. You'd think facing wraths and wendigos would be worse. Apparently, my brain can be more stoic when in real danger, rather than when I know it's fake..."

Octavius' head tilted at that. "Hmm, thinking back...you were afraid, but there always seemed to be more anger than fear to me. But, perhaps your brain knows you don't have time to completely freak out when you are in real danger?"

"Maybe..."

"Something to worry about later, my pretty statue. Come on!" He tugged Turney down the path.

His zombie bun jumped at almost every scare. It was... sooo funny.

As they neared a turn in the path, they entered a brief patch of darkness and fog. Once around the bend, the sky lit up with jack-o-lanterns of all shapes and sizes hanging from the bare tree limbs. Octavius had seen it in daylight, and even then, it had been impressive, but at night, now this was beauty.

“Wow...that’s a lot of pumpkins,” Turney gasped in awe. The zombie’s gaze remained fixed on the trees as they continued to walk.

“I think the total came in close to five hundred.”

The zombie’s head snapped in his direction, eyes wide. “Five hundred?!”

“Well, five hundred here. There are of course more around and throughout the house. It’s a pity that I don’t get trick-or-treaters out here. I’m sure they’d have so much fun walking through the woods to get candy from various costumed actors. Like, they could start at my house and then walk through the woods to get more candy from Scarlett’s...it would be so much fun!”

While the thought of candy was painful...the idea of giving it out to children sounded like a lot of fun—like something he’d enjoy thoroughly.

“I mean, you could always advertise and sell tickets. People would pay for this type of stuff. Though you’d have to remove the spells. They are a bit too realistic to keep up without humans asking questions.”

Eh, Turney had a point. The costumes and real decorations would be fine, but the spells...they would probably get him into trouble with the reapers. Though, depending on the ages of the children, he may need to have multiple days based on age, and switch out actors and costumes. Wouldn’t be good to emotionally scar some children...

But oh, what a great idea—a haunted Halloween candy walk! At least someone would get candy, even if it wasn’t him!

“I don’t need to sell tickets, as I don’t need the money. But maybe I could advertise multiple free haunted Halloween

walks with candy for kids,” Octavius said with a happy hum, before quickly adding, “Not actually on Halloween, though. Cause that’s my party day. But maybe a few days before. Then I could add the spells after the children leave.”

“Maybe... Why are they in the trees?”

Octavius blinked in confusion. “Why are what in the trees?”

“The pumpkins, Octavius?” Turney chuckled. “Why are the pumpkins in the trees?”

“The reason is simple. It’s because they look so cool up there!” He eyed the jack-o-lanterns, just looking at them made him smile.

“Right...how silly of me to not realize. Isn’t that a fire hazard?”

Octavius laughed. “No worries, it’s just some super bright and fancy fake tealights. There are no real candles inside. The flickering fooled you, right?”

“A bit. Good to know that you won’t accidentally be setting the forest on fire.”

Yeah, been there done that. Octavius had learned his lesson. Candles in trees were a no-no. They turned another bend and Scarlett’s home came into sight.

Turney gasped. “When the hell did you have time? This was not decorated when I left like four hours ago.”

Octavius smiled brightly as they approached the house. “I have my ways,” he said with a giggle.

There were jack-o-lanterns lining the path to Scarlett’s front door—up both of her sets of staircases. Webs were placed on top of the pumpkins. Well, spiderwebs were pretty much everywhere now. They spun down from the roof, hanging intricately while also covering the roof itself. Giant black spiders, along with others of various sizes, were placed all around, with lights under the webs to illuminate them. The bushes were also covered in spiderwebs and strings of lights.

On the lower part of the house were silhouettes of a dead forest, with glowing eyes peeking through the branches. In front of the vinyl trees were actual physical fake trees, creating a mini forest to the right and left side of the house. These were also covered in spiderwebs. Of the windows you could see still, those on the upper floor looked as if they had been shattered. And in the center covered balcony there was a mass of spiderwebs, with a spider larger than all the rest hanging partly out of one of the windows. That spider moved, looking as though it was spinning a dead body in its web.

It was truly a feat of hard work...and money. Not too much, but probably a lot by Turney's standards.

Turney lifted a brow at him and asked, "Do those ways involve magic or money?"

Octavius sniffed. "I can't divulge my secrets. Now, let's head back. Can't miss the show. We can check out Scarlett's place later!"

Turney sighed. "Why did we go through all that just to turn around?"

He grinned. "Because it's fun!"

"For who?!"

"Come on!" He tugged the zombie around and giggled as he pulled him back along the path they'd just come down.



MIN-JI TWIRLED Scarlett around to some sort of spooky dance song. She wasn't sure who it was by, but it was the first time she had ever heard it.

When Scarlett flinched again in her arms, Min-ji couldn't help but ask, "Is something wrong?"

The zombie sighed. "Turney..."

Her brow rose at that. “Turney?”

“My poor neophyte is suffering due to what Octavius considers fun. I keep feeling him freaking out.”

Min-ji chuckled. “Considering I’ve seen most of the rooms, I suggest cutting the connection for now. Or you will likely be dealing with that all night.”

She sighed. “I wanted to keep watch due to the humans.”

Min-ji spun the woman, before pulling her tight against her body and placing a kiss on her forehead. “He will be fine. Turney has adjusted quite well to his change. I doubt he would attack anyone.”

“He has adjusted well, and found control that some take months to gain... He has a remarkable ability to adapt to even the most absurd situations.” Scarlett sounded quite proud as she spoke. “That being said...he is not even two months past his change. I’d rather he not be pushed to his limits.”

“Turney will be fine, Scarlett. There is no way Octavius will leave him to wander around alone.”

Scarlett grimaced. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Min-ji scoffed, twirling her once again, but frowned at how pale the zombie was looking. Paler than normal, practically white, which seemed impossible considering her normal complexion. Was she really that uncomfortable in her costume?

Pulling the woman close again, she suggested, “How about we slip out and I switch costumes with you? I may be taller, but it should fit well enough.”

Scarlett’s eyes widened. “Would you really?” Her voice sounded elated at the thought.

Min-ji smiled. “Of course. I want you to have a good time. Even if this is obviously not either of our ideas of fun.”

Scarlett frowned. “Octavius will fuss if we do.”

“Who cares. I want my girlfriend to be comfortable and happy. That matters more to me than Octavius pouting.”

Scarlett's cheeks flushed at the word, but she smiled and hesitantly said, "We can...slip away after the show. Octavius will be distracted then."

Min-ji frowned. "Why not now? I don't think he's in the room at the moment."

She laughed. "But he will be soon enough. He won't miss the show he sneakily plotted away for. And he will no doubt look for me beforehand."

"Fine," Min-ji said with a smile. "After."

Chapter Twelve



A Show And A Kiss

O ctavius smiled brightly as he reached the top of the fake hill, which was really just a water tank with dirt, fake grass, sand, and a wooden structure underneath. His cute little stone statue stood at the bottom waiting for him. On the other side of the hill behind him, hidden from the crowd, there was a set of stairs for actors to come up and appear. Henry and a slew of other actors were waiting there.

It was time for the show to start! Oh, he couldn't wait to see it. With a wave of his hand, he signaled for the music to be cut. As the music eased away, he looked out over the crowd, his smile widening when he spotted Scarlett and Min-ji. He sent them a wink, laughing softly when Scarlett rolled her eyes.

Gaze moving on, he frowned when he caught sight of Theo in the corner with Sprinkle... Was the wolf okay? Maybe he'd send someone to check on him after this. Or he'd do so himself...after...

When spotlights that mimicked the sun lit up the area, he shook the thought away and smiled brightly at the crowd who could now see him clearly. Though with them all being paranormals, it was likely they could see him perfectly clear before—whatever.

He cleared his throat and loudly spoke with the help of his microphone. “Ladies, gentlemen, and everyone in-between, now is the time to find a perfect spot and focus your eyes up here. In just a moment, you’ll get to feast your eyes on a story of seduction and death!”

Saying his bit, he made his way back down the hill, grabbing onto Turney as he reached him, before backing up with the rest of the crowd so they had a better view of the show.



HENRY TOOK a deep breath and walked up the stairs, stopping near the top, remaining just out of sight of the viewers. The only one in view for him was Cormac.

The werewolf was sitting shirtless, his deep brown skin wet with water droplets dripping down. The wolf was very built, he couldn’t help but note. He was, of course, wearing the red mermaid tail, and he had small realistic-looking fake fins attached to his forearms, the same color as his tail. Silver bands were clipped on his thick biceps, and his ears were pointed and decorated with all sorts of earrings, some that dangled. Cormac’s face was decorated with scales, and some very elaborate eye make-up that was a mixture of black, red, and silver. The thick black eyelashes seemed to make his startling amber eyes appear larger than they were. The wig he was wearing...really drove home that this costume was probably never meant for Henry. The wig had medium sized braids that fell to Cormac’s trimmed waist, the strands turning from black to red—an ombre effect.

Henry tensed as music started... It was time.

Cormac began to sing. Well, he was lip-syncing. Though the voice was male and very beautiful, seductive...entrancing

even, it wasn't actually his. Though Henry was pretty impressed by Cormac's ability to fake it.

He stood there waiting until the song reached the mid-way point, and then he went up the last few steps, making his appearance as the pirate seduced by the 'siren'. How... unoriginal.

Henry stepped onto the hill into view, eyes focused on Cormac. Pretending as if he were in a trance, he followed the siren's song to the water's edge. Just as he reached it, more pirates spewed from the other side of the hill. The music took on a dramatic effect as they attacked and tried to capture the siren. Some tried to drag Henry back, attempting to snap him out of the entrancement.

But as he was supposed to, according to Octavius' cheesy script, instead of snapping out of it, he attacked his fellow pirates. Pulling his fake sword free, he fought them all off. 'Fighting' to the bitter end, to protect the creature that had 'entrapped' his mind.

And unlike in real life when a human fights this many opponents—because the script was ridiculous—he, of course, miraculously manages to take them all down—all fifteen of the other men. But not unscathed, *couldn't be too unbelievable*, he thought with an inner eye roll.

Henry let out a fake cry of pain as the blood pack on his side burst open, giving the illusion of his 'injury' as he collapsed to the ground. But he had 'won', and the rest were 'dead'.

On his hands and knees, he crawled 'desperately' towards the water.

Eyes on Cormac, he tried to fake emotions and pain. "Go, go, more will come!" he cried.

The 'siren's' eyes were sad as he swam towards the edge. On reaching it, the siren pulled Henry into his arms, and into the water. He did his best to not react to someone picking him up. It was a bit startling to see he fit so well in the wolf's arms.

He flinched when Cormac cupped his cheek with one of his hands. Meeting the wolf's gaze, Henry's eyes widened at the warmth he saw in Cormac's amber eyes. When the wolf's lips met his, even though he knew it had been coming, he still gasped in shock, face flushing. His heart started to speed up in slight panic as Cormac dragged him under the water, his body heating in places it shouldn't, and hadn't in a very long time.

Perhaps...it wasn't just a kiss?



OCTAVIUS WATCHED, bouncing on his feet as the two performers swam underwater. They dove deeper and deeper, their lips remaining pressed together, hair flowing around them, before suddenly, a large cloud of blood obscured them both. The lights above the hill and pool went out, and everyone clapped as the dance music began again.

Octavius giggled and leaned into Turney. "Well, wasn't that just a wonderful show?!"

Turney snorted. "I'm sure Cormac is very happy. Not exactly a Halloween type show though, was it?"

He smiled and tried to not give away his act of trickery. "Yes, well...not all shows have to be hardcore Halloween, just because it's a Halloween party. Like dressing up and putting on a show is Halloween enough, don't you think? Anyway, come on, my statue! Let's go see them!"

"Lead the way, my snake headed fiend."

They headed up the hill and reached it just as Henry and Cormac resurfaced. Henry pulled himself out of the pool and sat on the edge. His face was flushed, eyes slightly wide.

Cormac did the same, sitting there in his tail. The werewolf was looking very happy.

“Quite a show you two put on,” Turney said with a laugh.

“Hey, I didn’t do anything outside the script. That sword of Henry’s may be fake, but I’m sure he’d find a way to skewer me if I had,” Cormac said cheekily.

Henry cleared his throat, but said nothing in response. Which was odd...

Hehe, had his plan worked?! Did Henry finally realize that maybe he wasn’t as disinterested as he claimed?! Octavius eyed his fledgling, trying to feel out the emotions that were coming through their bond. His head tilted at the confusion he found. Did that mean Henry felt something?

Octavius supposed the confusion made sense, considering Henry’s dating history. Well, as far as he knew, Henry had only been with women...and had shown no interest in men before. Not to mention, Henry had not been with another soul since the death of his wife, all those years ago. Maybe he’d talk to him about it later...if he remembered. Either way, this was progress. Good progress!

“So, what’s it feel like to have a tail, Mr. Mermaid?” Turney asked, a teasing light in his eyes. “Nice wig, by the way.”

“If you recall, in some forms, I do have a tail. And as for the wig...” Cormac flicked part of his wet braids over his shoulder with a hmph. “You are just jealous that I can pull it off. Anyway, we should get dried off and changed.” Cormac eyed Henry. “Wet clothes are not comfortable.”

Henry met the other male’s gaze, cheeks still slightly flushed. The vampire cleared his throat again and pushed up, but instead of fully standing, he moved into a crouch, reaching for Cormac. “Come on, let’s get you on the grotto so we can change. As you said, wet clothes are very uncomfortable.”

He smirked as he watched Henry pick Cormac up and settle him onto the grotto. Octavius let out a grunt of surprise when an elbow hit his gut. He glared at Turney who glared back.

“You are not as sneaky as you think you are,” the zombie said with an exasperated huff.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” he replied with an innocent smile.

Octavius was innocent! Utterly innocent! So, he had plotted a little bit? That didn’t make him guilty of anything! This was for Henry’s own good! Was it so wrong that now that he had found love, he wanted his cute little fledglings to find it too?! Once he had Henry done...well, then he’d start on the other six! They would certainly be happy for his interference!

Oh, what if they gave him some little grand-fledglings?! He’d be a grandsire! New goal—BECOME A GRANDSIRE!

Turney’s brow rose, eyes drifting past him to something behind Octavius. He frowned as a long...familiar scent reached his nose. Roses—beach roses.

Spinning around, he hissed at the sight of the woman standing a few feet away from him and partly up the hill, next to Eshla.

“Catalina...”

Chapter Thirteen



Catalina

Turney's eyes widened at the name. Catalina? The ex-friend, Catalina? That Catalina?

He looked closely at the woman standing next to Eshla with more interest now than when he'd first seen her. Catalina was short, standing only about five foot tall, curvy, with thick waist length curly brown hair that flew free around her gently pointed face. Her skin was naturally tanned, eyes a deep brown color, and her lips were heart shaped. While Eshla looked to be a tightrope walker, the witch was dressed as a circus ring leader.

So, this was...Catalina? She was beautiful.

He glanced at Octavius, and then back to the woman whose eyes were locked on the vampire.

Turney hurriedly stepped up next to the vampire. "Uh, hi!" he said awkwardly. "I'm, uh, Octavius' boyfriend."

Catalina glanced at him, but said nothing. He met Eshla's gaze, and she gestured towards Octavius with her eyes, as if that told him anything.

"So, this is awkward," Turney drawled with a nervous laugh. "You two would probably like to talk, I imagine? Why don't we take this to an empty room, yeah?"

Catalina gave a tense smile. “I would like that very much.”

Octavius remained silent for a few moments before sighing and saying, “Fine.”



OCTAVIUS **CROSSED** his arms and stared at the witch he hadn't seen in many years. He had sadly let Turney drag him into a room he hadn't decorated. So, now he and Catalina stood in a standoff while Turney and Eshla sat on a couch watching them. It was all sorts of awkward. The kind that usually came about with ruined friendships over betrayals. Not that he had experienced many of those... Okay, maybe he had. Was it his fault some of his friends were so dramatic?!

Octavius pursed his lips before stating, “You're back early.”

“The job finished up quicker than expected.” Catalina got this familiar small smile on her face as she said it. It was something that used to make Octavius happy and smile himself, now he just found it irritating due to the memories it brought up.

“I see,” he replied stiffly.

The smile disappeared and she grimaced, staying silent for a moment before her words burst out, “I missed you.”

The words were like a stab to his heart... He bit his bottom lip and hesitated before saying his next words. “Have you? The last time I saw you, you told me that you never wanted to see me again.”

She sighed. “I know what I said, and I regretted it the minute the words were out. I just didn't know how to take them back.”

Octavius snorted. “You set my teddy bear collection on fire the day after you said it.”

Catalina winced. “Okay, maybe I regretted it like a week after. You know how stubborn I am.”

“Understatement.”

She shrugged, that small smile of hers returning. “Yes, well, stubborn or not, I did regret it. It was a stupid fight. And I did something I shouldn’t have. It was really pointless, ending a five-hundred-year friendship over a fish I didn’t even know. And I am sorry...for Bubbles, that is. You had him since he was a baby, and while in paranormal terms that isn’t long...I know you loved him.”

Octavius began to pout as memories of his adorable Bubbles filled his head. How he swam... How he came to the surface to see him... How he gave his hand kisses. “I did love him,” he said with a sniffle.

“I know you did.”

He sighed and reluctantly admitted, “I know you also loved that spotted devil baby fish, even though you barely knew him. So, I am sorry he died too.”

Catalina chuckled. “Still calling him that, are you?”

“Well, he attacked Bubbles, so what else should I call him?” Octavius grumbled.

“Technically, devils aren’t evil,” she pointed out.

He snorted. “They are neutral, but you know damn well they like leaning more towards evil than good.”

“True,” she agreed with a giggle, before letting out a soft sigh and saying, “That being said, I *am* sorry...and if you can find it in yourself to forgive me...could we please start over? Be friends? I miss my friend. I miss you, Octavius.”

Octavius’ eyes teared up, his bottom lip wobbling as finally the memories of the good times, before that fight, came flooding back. Them running around scaring villagers with fake ghosts... Making up monster rumors and spreading them about to see if they’d be believed or not... That time they

slowly drove an asshole human insane by placing sticky spells that randomly whispered nonsense at all hours all around them... They had done so many amazing and fun things together!

“I didn’t just love Bubbles... I loved you, too,” he rasped, before crying and flinging himself at her. “I miss my friend too!”

She hugged back, laughing joyfully. Their hug was slightly awkward due to his headpiece.

As they pulled back, they were both smiling now. But then her smile suddenly brightened.

“Oh, I have a surprise for you!” Catalina said as she pulled her phone from a pocket in her ankle length ringmaster jacket. She tapped away before turning it around to show him a picture.

He stared, eyes slowly widening as he realized what she was showing him. It was a picture of a porcupine pufferfish... except this one was oddly colored. The majority of it was a bright turquoise, with darker blue markings on its head, and golden spots. It was a baby, he could tell...and it had a small smile on its face.

“What...?” he asked, confused...but with a bit of hope.

“This is Bubby, your new baby fae porcupine pufferfish,” Catalina said with a smile, before quickly adding, “If you want him, that is.”

“I WANT HIM!” Octavius screamed, excitement roaring inside him.

“Wait, what?!” Turney cried.

He completely ignored his zombie bunny. Because he had too many questions. Also, he didn’t know what Turney was getting hyped up about. It was Octavius’ fish.

“Wait.” He frowned. “Fae? But they don’t make fae fish!”

“They didn’t. But the Goddess of fae creatures has recently decided to create, and allow the creation of a few specific breeds. I learned of this news through my work with the

reapers. And after putting some feelers out, and cashing in some favors, I managed to secure this little guy, just for you. He should be arriving in the States a month from now, so you can have him shortly after that. I know he can't replace Bubbles, but maybe he can make his own space in your heart?"

"YES, YES!" He threw himself at her again. "Thank you! Thank you!"

Catalina laughed, arms coming around him again. Her smell filled his nose, and he felt like something broken inside him had been fixed. Like he had finally gained back something he had lost.



TURNEY EYED OCTAVIUS as they continued through the halls back to the party. The vampire's gaze was glued to his phone—more specifically a picture of his new fish, Bubby.

"What about Sprinkle? She is a cat, in case you forgot?" he pressed.

It wasn't that he didn't want Octavius to have Bubby, but he could see all the issues it could lead to. Sprinkle was adorable and listened well. But she was also still a cat, not to mention a very smart one. And one they spoiled and didn't often say no to... Turney wasn't sure how she would react to a fish in the house. Though he supposed...Octavius may put Bubby at Scarlett's for now, since that is where they were currently living.

Octavius snapped his phone shut, slipping it into a pocket that was impressively hidden in one of the flaps of his leather skirt. The vampire eyed Turney, expression calculating. "No worries, Sprinkle won't bother another fae pet. If Bubby had been a normal fish...she probably would have tried to eat him.

But since he is not, she won't. It has something to do with the code in their DNA."

"Their DNA?"

"Remember how the shop was?"

"The shop?" He frowned, thinking back.

"It was all open. The predators were not separate from what would be considered their prey. Remember?"

The vampire was right, they hadn't been, had they? Turney found it odd how he hadn't questioned that at the time. Then again, he had been focused on not looking, and then on Sprinkle, because she had been cute. After that there was the whole Octavius signing a contract without looking, on top of the enormous price for one tiny kitten.

"You're right...they weren't. Everything was just sort of cohabitating near each other. Some even in each other's space."

"Yes, well, something in their DNA prevents them from attacking other fae pets. Which is why they can be placed together without worrying about them killing and eating each other. So, Sprinkle won't hurt Bubby, even if he is a fish," Octavius finished explaining with a bright, hopeful smile.

He eyed that smile and thought over all the possible arguments he could make against Octavius getting another pet... Even thinking over the trouble it would make for poor Henry, but in the end, he came to one conclusion... Turney definitely wouldn't win this argument. So, was there any point arguing?

Besides, he had seen the yearning in the vampire's eyes as he had looked at the fish...and it was a fish, so it wasn't like it was going to cause much trouble. Like, all it would be able to do is swim in its tank, right? No big deal. Also...Octavius seemed to really miss Bubbles...

"I'm not going to argue against it," he said with a sigh. "Because I doubt I'd win even if I tried, but can I at least ask...will having Bubby make you happy?"

Octavius beamed at him and began to nod cutely in excitement. “Yes!”

Turney smirked. “Then I guess congrats on the new fish, and the rekindling of an old friendship.”

Octavius giggled and wrapped an arm around his waist, pulling him close. “That’s my wonderful boyfriend.” He patted his cheek.

Turney narrowed his eyes and pushed Octavius back, pinning him to the wall. “Don’t be thinking you’ve got me trained, mister. I’m not protesting, only because I know how sad you were about Bubbles. That’s it. Also, the pufferfish is cute, and mostly hassle free, being a fish and all.”

At least...he thought it was hassle free... Turney had never had a fish before...

Octavius chuckled and gave him a peck on the lips. “No worries. I know perfectly well that at the mere mention of glitter your objection will be loud and fierce.”

Turney snorted. “Brat.” He kissed him back.

Octavius threw his head back on a laugh. “But you love me anyway.”

He sighed. “Yes, yes, I’m in love, and now I’m trapped in your crazy.”

“Crazy is fun, hehe.” The vampire giggled. “Speaking of fun. We have a bit of time before the fledglings converge to the designated meeting place. Why don’t we have a bit of fun ourselves to pass the time?” Octavius wiggled his brow.

Turney grimaced. The idea of meeting all of Octavius’ fledglings at once drew a strange sense of fear inside him. “There’s a designated meeting place?”

“Nothing to worry about!” Octavius chimed.

He let out a yelp as the male grabbed on to him and yanked him towards a door, then into a dark room.

The light flickered on and it appeared to be a normal bedroom. Turney let out a startled laugh when Octavius tossed

him onto the bed.

“Come, my statue! Give me your pole, your rock, your stone rod.”

He burst into laughter. “Octavius, that was all horrible. And...won’t the body paint ruin the covers?”

Not that it had smudged at all throughout the night, even with him sweating and them constantly touching each other. Which was interesting, as Octavius was also painted, even if more of his natural skin tone shined through. Paint aside, it was odd that the glitter currently dusting Octavius’ entire body hadn’t budged.

“Shhh.” The vampire shushed him and crawled onto the bed on top of Turney, hovering above him on his knees. “It’s fine. The paint won’t budge without oil. Also, shhhh, I’m Medusa, and you are my turned to stone lover.”

“So, I should just lay here and relax then?” Turney asked with a brow raised. “Statues don’t move much.”

“Yes, sadly, you looked into my gaze and you were PETRIFIED!” Octavius dramatically gasped the last word out loudly, and in clear horror. “So now I must take my pleasure from your stone cold, yet very hard body.”

“You are so weird.”

“Yes, but I have lube.” Octavius reached into a secret pocket in one of the many leather flaps of his skirt and pulled out a bottle of lube.

“How much do you have hidden in there?”

“It’s a secret.” The vampire sent him a wink. “Now, statue up!” Octavius giggled, smiling bright as he flipped the bottom of Turney’s tunic up. And then his smile turned right into a frown. “How could you wear boxer briefs?! It ruins the costume!”

“I’m not walking around with my cock hanging out.”

Octavius stared down at him, eyes slowly getting wider. Turney got so lost in the ocean blue that he didn’t see the trap.

He flinched in shock when the devious vampire suddenly tore his briefs in two.

“THAT’S BETTER!!!” Octavius sang loudly.

“OCTAVIUS!”

“Hm, though...” The vampire eyed his cock narrowly. His prick, which had been hardening in interest, started to deflate under the look. “...it is the wrong color.”

Turney gasped and shielded his parts with his hands. “You are not painting my crotch.”

Octavius huffed, brushing Turney’s hands aside. “I was just making a comment!”

He glared. “I don’t believe you...”

“If I painted it, then I couldn’t do what I wanted to with it. No worries!” Octavius chimed, as he flipped the lid off the lube and squirted some on Turney’s cock.

“How nice to know—ah!” His words cut off in a moan when the vampire wrapped his hand around his half hard prick and began to jerk him off.

He pumped up into Octavius’ fist.

“No moving, statue!” the vampire said with a whine.

Turney chuckled. “Fine, fine.” He tucked his hands beneath his head and laid there trying not to move...

He frowned at the evil grin that appeared on Octavius’ face, and watched him slide down his body. The vampire took the tip of his cock into his mouth. Turney let out a low groan. The sight of Octavius sucking his cock while sparkling, slightly green, and with a pile of snakes on his head was bizarre, yet...so hot.

The urge to push further into the male’s mouth was so strong he reached up and grabbed hold of the poles on the corner of the bed frame to keep from moving. This was going to be torture... Pleasurable torture, but still torture.

A whimper slipped past his lips, his cock jerking when the vampire dug his tongue into his slit. Octavius seemed content

to tease and suckle him, but not actually take him fully into his mouth.

“Octavius! Please!” he gasped after many minutes had passed.

Octavius let out a muffled giggle, mouth still on him... and ignored his cries—the brat. He closed his eyes, grip tightening on the poles as sweat formed on his brow. The tension inside him was building and easing, over and over again. His cock spilling pre-cum while Octavius continued to torture his tip with his mouth and tongue.

Turney’s eyes snapped open at a familiar sound. Looking down, he licked his lips at the sight of the vampire’s lips wrapped around him while he opened himself up at the same time. That had been the noise he’d heard—fingers plunging into a wet hole. God did he want to see.

“Turn around,” Turney rasped.

Octavius pulled off his cock. “No,” the vampire said with a breathy giggle. Octavius stopped opening himself up and crawled up Turney’s body. The vampire’s hard cock was peeking out of his leather skirt.

Turney tried to remain still as Octavius gripped his prick and pushed up onto his knees overtop of him. He licked his lips, shuddering at the feeling of the male’s wet pucker against his tip.

“Fuck...” He moaned loudly when the vampire pushed down and Turney’s crown breached the male’s hole. His grip on the bed frame tightened.

Octavius let out a groan as he slid all the way down. “Ah, so hard for me, my stone lover.”

“Always,” he grunted.

“Mine!” Octavius gasped, lifting up before he plunged back down. “All mine!” the vampire moaned.

“Fuck, Octavius!” Turney shouted as the male began to ride him.

He rotated his hips, thrusting up the next time Octavius plunged down.

“No moving!” the vampire cried out, his pace not slowing even a bit.

“You are trying to kill me,” Turney moaned.

Octavius threw his head back on a much too evil laugh. “You’ve been turned to stone. You are far past the point where you’d need to worry about death.”

“Right, how silly of me.” Turney rolled his eyes.

Jaw clenched, and his hold on the frame tightening, he laid there and let Octavius take all that he needed.

The vampire looked otherworldly as he rode him, his skin glistening, his muscles looking smooth and perfect as he moved.

“Yes, oh by the Gods,” Octavius moaned, his speed increasing. Bouncing hard on Turney’s cock, he began to jerk off.

The vampire screamed out, body arching on top of him as his cock sprayed a stream of cum over Turney’s chest. Whimpering, Octavius kept going, his hole spasming around Turney’s cock.

“Oh, God, oh, God...” Turney cried out as his orgasm hit. His cock jerked inside Octavius’ ass. His cry of pleasure turned into one of shock as the poles in his hand snapped and the canopy over the bed came falling down.

“Oh, shit!” Octavius barked out in laughter, the vampire slowly coming to rest on his lap. The fabric of the canopy pretty much blocked the male from his view.

“Scarlett’s going to kick us out if we keep breaking things in her house,” Turney rasped.

“Well...” the vampire started slyly. “As you are the one who broke it, and you are her neophyte, it is only right that you tell her.”

“WHAT?!” His screech of outrage caused the vampire to laugh harder. Turney sighed again. “You are such a menace.”

Chapter Fourteen



The Fledglings

Turney reluctantly let Octavius pull him by hand into a brightly lit doorway. He eyed the room...it was something else. Frankly, it looked like a Halloween birthday party. Orange and black streamers hung from the ceiling...along with a shit ton of balloons. On the center wall there was a large bat banner that said ‘welcome home, fledglings’.

Was that a bat piñata hanging near the right wall? The only thing missing was a punch table. There was a set of black sectionals set up underneath the banner...but everyone was standing.

Pulling his gaze away from the decorations, he stared at the group of incredibly beautiful individuals. There were a total of eight people in the room. One was Henry, and another Cormac. Who, apparently, had no choice but to join this escapade due to being stuck on a movable grotto. The werewolf looked entertained, but...something was off about his easy smile.

The rest though, he had never seen them before. There were two women and four men. Out of the four men, two were obviously twins. They both had golden bronze skin, light brown eyes, pointed noses, a slightly dimpled chin, a sharp jawline, and high cheekbones. Their hair was a very dark

brown color, almost black, but one wore it at shoulder length and the other short like Turney's. The twins were dressed as ancient Egyptian pharaohs.

The other two male vampires...were opposites. One was well over six foot tall, maybe six foot seven, while the other was at most five foot five. The tall vampire was thickly muscled, had blond hair that curled slightly and went a few inches past his shoulders, and a thick beard and mustache. Though, from what he could see, he looked to have sharp, strong facial features. The guy was dressed like a Viking...and really did look like one.

The shorter vampire was obviously of Asian descent, and was dressed in what looked to be a traditional Chinese robe. He had lightly tanned skin, long black hair pulled up into a high ponytail with red ribbons. His features were delicate, chin slightly pointed. Turney was going to assume the shorter vampire was Haoran.

The two women were opposites as well. While one had short curly brown hair in a pixie cut and brown eyes, the other had green eyes and long straight blonde hair that went to her waist. The brown-haired woman, who was the taller of the two, had the same olive skin as Octavius, and seemed to be more toned than the other, which was easier to see as she was wearing a tunic very similar to Turney's. The blonde was actually wearing something similar to Scarlett, but probably from an earlier era. She was also very petite with a thin frame. They both were lovely, with the brown-haired woman's facial features being more rounded, while the blonde's were pointed.

The group of them appeared to be jesting and nudging a straight-faced Henry, making jokes about his performance.

When they entered, as a whole, the group turned towards them, and Turney's eyes widened. His hands clenched Octavius' arms the minute they all started to approach at once.

"Woah, my precious family, you are scaring my zombie bun," Octavius laughed, holding out a hand for them to stop.

Turney's face flushed as a few of them awed over the nickname.

“I have to say, sire. That is by far the cutest nickname I’ve ever heard you use for one of your partners,” said the taller, brown-haired woman with olive colored skin.

“Yes, well, my Turney is special,” Octavius gushed, before giving Turney a peck on the cheek. “Now, this is Turney Pimms, my boyfriend. He is adorable, and sweet, and in case you ever need to bribe him, he loves plushies.”

He narrowed his eyes at his lover. “Was the bribery part necessary?”

Henry chuckled. “With this crew...yes.”

He frowned at that, and then thought about it for a moment before he decided that the vampire was probably right. They *were* Octavius’ fledglings. The vampire had definitely taught them everything he shouldn’t have. Even Henry got up to some mayhem, despite how normal he appeared. Though the realization that Henry was not as calm and collected as he first thought had really snuck up on Turney. Those damn pixie sticks...

Octavius hummed, sounding unconcerned, as if he had not even been asked a question. “Yes, well, anyway, introduce yourselves. Oldest to youngest!”

“You hear that, fellow bat pack? He wants us to line up and get organized!” the large blond male said with a booming voice.

Bat pack? There was definitely a story there...

Most of the others shrugged and got into a line, which he was going to assume was in age order. The one he was pretty sure was Haoran let out an exasperated huff, but he did move eventually after a small staring contest with the tall blond.

The first in line was the brown-haired woman. She smiled at him when their gazes met. “I’m the oldest. From Roman times, in fact. Gaia Evander.” She sent him a wink, her smile turning devilish, before speaking while she nodded in Octavius’ direction. “You’ll find a few of us took this crazy old bat’s last name.”

Octavius spluttered. “Old?!”

The others laughed.

“Nice to meet you,” Turney said with a hesitant smile.

“I’m not *that* old,” Octavius grumbled with a clear pout. “Well, I’m old...but I’m not *old*. My heart and mind are fully young!”

The next up were the twins. The one with the shorter hair first. “As I’m sure you noticed, we are twins. Egyptian twins. I’m the oldest though. Heka Evander, here in all my glory.” The vampire spun in place, as if to show himself off fully.

His brother rolled his eyes. “Glory, my ass. He’s older in age, not in mind,” the younger twin said with a sigh. “I’m Seti. It’s nice to meet you, Turney.”

Turney nodded. “Likewise.”

The giant blond-haired man stood slightly straighter then. “Rune Evander. Viking era.”

“You were a Viking?”

It kind of made sense because he looked like one, and probably would even without the costume.

“Mm, a damn good one, until the bloody Franks got the jump on me,” the vampire replied with a vicious smirk.

“If you were good, you’d have lived to a ripe old age,” Haoran drawled sweetly.

Rune growled but didn’t respond.

The blonde-haired woman chuckled. “Ignore them. They are always like this. As I’m sure you can tell by my accent, I’m British. My name is Elizabeth Burroughs. But you may call me Lettie.”

“Nice to meet you, Lettie.”

Haoran cleared his throat. “I’m Liu Haoran. I’m Chinese, born during the Yuan Dynasty.”

“Nice to meet you, Haoran. Scarlett mentioned something about you and fireworks.”

The smaller male let out a loud groan. “Set fire to a house once and they never let you live it down!”

Octavius reached out and patted his arm, clearly sympathetic. “They really don’t let you live anything down. Not a single simple mistake.”

Turney snorted. “Your definition of a simple mistake is nowhere close to anyone else’s.”

Octavius sent a pouty glare his way.

“Moving on from burning down houses, which may I remind you, by the way, was not a one-time occurrence,” Henry drawled with a small smile. “You know who I am, Turney. But my full name is Henry De León. And I was changed at the end of the seventeenth century.”

Haoran looped his arm through Henry’s. “Yes, he’s the baby.”

Henry sighed.

“That he is, and what a show our baby put on!” Heka said with a laugh.

Lettie giggled. “So, now that we’ve introduced ourselves, why don’t you tell us who this fine finned friend of yours is, Henry?”

“Yes, tell us, Henry. Tell us.” Haoran snickered.

The man looked up at the ceiling, there was a clear ‘why me’ expression on his face.

Cormac cleared his throat. “Ah, I’m Cormac. I work at the agency.”

His expression seemed even stiffer than before...

“Ah, the agency. How is that doing, Father?” Gaia asked, brows pulling in interest.

Octavius slid to her side and started to cling onto her arm, the vampire’s eyes wide and shining. “It has been so much fun!” He burst out, as he started going on about their very first case...including his rare BTS photocards.

Turney would have complained yet again about those damn cards, but his mind had been stuck on the word 'Father'.

"Father?" Turney asked hesitantly.

"Ah," she tittered. "Unlike the rest of the fledglings, Octavius raised me. I was quite young when he found me at death's door."

Octavius' expression soured. "Too young."

"Nonsense," she said with a smile, giving him a kiss on his cheek before pulling away.

"So, I've been told you have discovered a new hobby?" Seti drawled, looking concerned.

Octavius blinked, head tilting. "Be more specific."

"I was told something about a room full of glitter," the vampire clarified.

His boyfriend gasped. "Who told you about that?!" He glared at Henry.

Henry held up his hands, as if to ward him off. "I didn't tell him."

"Dammit, it was Scarlett, wasn't it?! You're talking to her behind my back."

Seti sniffed. "It's the only way to know what is truly going on with you, as she doesn't hold back, while you do. Especially when it comes to concerning behavior. Though, this...return of Dayan is more concerning, as is all that has surrounded it. But I will leave that topic to a more suitable time."

Cormac stiffened at the mention of Dayan.

Heka sighed. "Sorry, sire. I can't help you here. After many years of trying, my brother, unfortunately, is still a stick in the mud."

Turney was going to assume Seti was the more serious of the twins. Heka's words set off a small argument between the two that the rest quickly joined in on. Eventually, they came back around to Octavius' glitter room. He slowly stepped back

a little bit at a time as he continued to watch. Turney was beginning to feel a bit overwhelmed and out of place as they teased and joked with each other.

Would this be what one would call a family reunion? He got a sense of warmth watching it all, but also one of disconnection. For Turney had never experienced such a thing. He eyed the group and his gaze caught Cormac's. The wolf stared back, and it was then he realized...that Cormac...was feeling the same way. God, his family situation probably didn't have many reunions either. A look of understanding flashed in the werewolf's eyes, and he gave him a weak smile with a nod.

Turney nodded back awkwardly before he forced himself to look away, not wanting to see so clearly the same emotions he was feeling in another's eyes. He didn't want to see the yearning...

Chapter Fifteen



An Odd Bunch

“I swear it was the loudest thud I’ve ever heard. Followed by intelligible cursing, and what sounded like a flood!” Lettie said with exasperation, though she was smiling brightly.

Octavius burst into a fit of laughter, the others joining in, even if they had heard this tale too many times to count.

“How was I supposed to know the bottom of the tub would be that slippery?” Rune huffed.

“Gee, water on a surface and it being slippery, who would have ever surmised such a thing?” Haoran hissed, arms crossed. “Do you know how hard it was to secure that thing?! Literally, months of bribery, payments, just a whole lot of hassle...and for what?! For you to break it in an instant!”

“I was so mad.” Octavius giggled. “I avoided parts of the world for so long, simply due to the lack of hygiene.” He shuddered. “The smells I smelled... Why we decided to settle down for a bit in the western world I’ll never know. But I was outvoted. And then when I finally had the luxurious tub of my dreams—which, like Haoran said, took months to get—not only did I not get to use it, I didn’t even get a chance to see it in one piece.”

The big Viking gave him a sheepish smile. “Sorry, sire.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard it before.” He laughed. “So, where is everyone staying? And do you all have time to stay longer? I would love to individually catch up with each of you before you leave. I’m curious why none of you chose to stay here. It’s not like I don’t have the room. Though, I am currently staying with Scarlett due to Turney’s change.”

“Can’t say I’m past the bizarreness of Scarlett having a neophyte, but anyway. We all booked at the Bellton Hotel,” Heka mused.

Seti, as he often did, gave his brother a disapproving look. Some things never changed. “I believe we all will be here for at least the next month. Which should give everyone plenty of time to catch up.”

“And as for staying here…” Gaia hesitated for a moment before letting out a laugh and saying, “We knew if we did, we’d only end up staying longer than we intended, as we would fall victim to your pouting.”

Octavius gasped. “Victim?! And what are you accusing me of, missy?”

“Nothing at all.” She grasped onto his arm, still laughing.

He narrowed his eyes at her. “I don’t believe you.” He sniffed. “Anyway! While you are all here, we should go to a club! Dancing!” He pulled free to dance around a bit. “Dance, dance, dance, yes!”

Henry smiled while the rest laughed a bit, nodding in agreement.

They may laugh, but they knew together they would dominate whatever club they ended up at!

He frowned when he realized that Turney was no longer standing by his side. Instead, the male was standing back a little just watching them talk. Octavius smiled at his fledglings as they started to talk again about old times. Instead of joining in, he slowly slipped away to his zombie’s side.

Octavius wrapped an arm around Turney’s waist. “You okay?” he asked.

Turney gave him a hesitant smile, gaze wandering off. “I’m not going to lie...I’m feeling a bit overwhelmed. I’m not used to all this... As you know, I was in foster care a long time before my parents adopted me, but their time in my life was brief. And they didn’t have any other family besides Aunt Trudy. And after they were all gone...” Turney gave a small shrug. “I was alone.”

He smiled softly at him. “You aren’t anymore...you know that, right?”

The zombie gave him a real smile then. It wasn’t the biggest, but it was real. “I know.”

“And it’s not just me, you know? There’s Scarlett. And everyone at the office. I feel we are all closer now after everything, aren’t we?” His gaze flicked to Cormac and grimaced at the uncertain look on the young wolf’s face. “You too, Cormac. You are family now!”

The werewolf’s eyes widened and his face appeared to flush. He slowly reached down and pushed himself and his grotto back behind Octavius’ flock of fledglings. He sniffed—that was fine. Cormac would be captured in the family love eventually. It would take time, but he would fall.

He turned back to Turney, who was eyeing where Cormac had been with a brow raised in concern.

“Anyway, while I’m not sure you want them, my fledglings are your family now too. Even if you don’t, sorry but we’re a package deal.”

Turney faced him, a soft chuckle slipping out. “Stuck with them, am I?”

“Yep, no take backsies,” Octavius said with a giggle, his gaze moving to the men and women who he’d grown to care for, to love, over the many centuries he spent with them. “This wasn’t normal for me either at one point. For almost three centuries, after leaving the reapers, I was very alone. I left my land for a while and went searching... I’m not even sure what I was looking for. But I came back. Of course it was not as it once was, the Romans had taken over, and much had been

destroyed. Either way, I returned. That was when I came across Gaia... When I found her, she was dying...alone. She was eight. I'll admit, changing her was purely selfish on my part. For the questions I asked her were cruel and even manipulative. What else would a dying child say when being asked if they wished to live? Being promised things I'm sure she always wanted. But I didn't want to be alone any longer. I found her when the sting of emptiness was at its peak inside me. It was like the fates had put her before me, just when I needed her. Well, at least that was my mindset at the time."

"Perhaps the action was selfish, but in the end, you did save her, didn't you? And I'm sure you gave her the best life you could."

"It was selfish. I came to terms with that a long time ago. And luckily, she held no grudge, and instead, only showed me love. At the time, when she first came into my life, I found it...startling, suddenly having someone to take care of. Even when I was human, it was not like I had ever cared for a child before. There was a lot of trial and error. But the first time she called me Father, I cried. And eventually, with her by my side, my life settled and I felt peaceful. She stayed for a long while. It was harder for women to go off on their own in the eras past, so it was safer with me anyway. The twins came...and eventually, she met someone, and left my side. You see, she wanted to have a family of her own. Which, at the time, I was definitely not as calm as I am now talking about it."

Turney snorted. "I can't say I'm shocked. She was your little girl. I imagine someone as dramatic as you would not handle it that well at first."

Octavius pouted. "Living with dramatics is the only way to live."

The zombie chuckled. "Of course."

"Anyway! That didn't last and she did eventually return." He thought about his first child's long buried lover, and grinned peacefully as he remembered how fun it had been to crush his world before taking his life.

"What's that smile for? It's...slightly creepy."

“Oh, nothing. As I was saying, along the way, I met more people. Added more to my family. But the thing with family, especially with those that are like your children, they do eventually leave to live their own lives. As it is their right to. And while that did make me lonely at times, they always came back when I needed them the most. Or when I miss them too much. My family is years in the making, and you are now a part of it. Someone who I hope won’t ever leave my side though. As I definitely don’t see you as my child.”

Turney chuckled. “It would be very weird if you did. And...I don’t want to leave your side...even if you are very insane, and like to drive me up the wall.”

Octavius giggled evilly. “Hehe, you loveee me!” he teased.

“Yeah, yeah. I love you, you crazy bat.”

“Love you too, my zombie bun.” He kissed his cheek. “Anyway, as much as I love my family, and hope they feel the same towards me, I know they can’t always be with me like you can. Which is why I’m so happy that you are now part of my family. When the time comes that Henry sets off on his own, I won’t be alone. Don’t get me wrong, I know I’d still have Scarlett by my side...but sometimes, one needs more than friendship. I know some are fine without a lover, but I’m not built that way.”

He blinked when he noticed Henry now looking over at them.

“What?” he asked his youngest fledgling.

Octavius glared at the rest as they started to grin stupidly at him.

Rune’s smile widened, and he stepped up behind Henry, placing his hands on his shoulders. “Sorry, we couldn’t help but overhear. If it makes you feel better, Henry here has no intention of leaving.”

He blew raspberries at them. “Nonsense, don’t speak for your brother. Also, I’ve taught you all better than this. You were supposed to ignore what you heard!”

Haoran snorted. “You taught us all the things not to do, sire. Don’t lie. Why do you think we get into so much trouble in the first place?”

“Slander! Lies!” Octavius cried.

Haoran, the brat, tattling on him in front of Turney! How could he?!

Henry cleared his throat. “I’m afraid Rune is correct. I have no intention of leaving. I’m quite content where I am.”

Octavius’ eyes widened at that. “YOU DO LOVE ME!” He sniffled, eyes tearing up. “Look, Turney, Henry loves me!”

The zombie chuckled.

Henry sighed. “I’m afraid I do.”

He gasped as something occurred to him. “Just wait until I tell Scarlett! She keeps telling me she doesn’t know how you put up with me! That’ll show her!”

Six of his fledglings burst out into a fit of laughter... Henry let out a deep suffering sound. The same one that Scarlett loved to make when around him. Which was an odd reaction, but oh well! This was a win!

“You’re never going to get away now, Henry,” Turney said with a chuckle.

“But he doesn’t want to!” Octavius cried.

Henry’s brow rose. “I believe you have no room to talk, Octavius’ precious zombie bun.”

The rest began to laugh harder, some falling into each other as they did. Turney let out a sigh that sounded exactly the same as Henry’s just had.

Hmm...the people he cared for were an odd bunch...

Chapter Sixteen



Too Much

As he watched the eight bats sing *The Monster Mash* a cappella style, Turney's smile was so wide on his face it hurt. The bats were all different kinds, but he wasn't really sure what type they were, even if they were all adorable. Beside Octavius, there was a large blond bat, a small fuzzballed black bat, a medium sized black bat, a smaller brown one, two mirror dark brown ones, and a small fuzzy white-blond one.

The larger blond bat, that he was pretty sure was the Viking, was horribly off-pitch.

"Stop, stop, STOP!" the small fuzzballed black bat bellowed, causing the song to stutter to a stop. Turney was going to guess this was Haoran. "Just hum along, Rune. You are ruining the song!"

The large blond bat's eyes narrowed and he suddenly screamed, "Never!" Then he started to run away singing *The Monster Mash*.

Octavius giggled evilly as the small black bat squawked in anger. His lover jumped out of line after Rune and began to sing again, this time off-key.

This started a chain reaction. Five of the other bats took off, caroling along, now all singing out of tune as they ran in circles on the small performance platform.

“You’re all insufferable!” the smaller fuzzy black bat cried as he started to run after them, tossing whatever he could get his claws on.

Turney threw his head back and laughed. Every single one of them was a menace. Oh boy...what had he gotten himself into?



THEO BUMPED into multiple people as he fled the room with Sprinkle clutched in his arms. His breathing was out of control, and his heart was racing, but nothing he did seemed to stop things from worsening. His mind was too chaotic. There were too many noises, too many colors...thoughts.

In the hall, Theo ran aimlessly, people a blur as he passed them. He didn’t stop until the crowd thinned out and completely disappeared.

And when he was, at last alone, he picked a room at random. Staggering inside, his hand hit the wall for support. A light flickered on at that moment. Even if darkness was what he needed, it appeared it was not what he’d get.

Gasping, Theo dropped to his knees, releasing Sprinkle. Theo yanked at the collar of his costume. He couldn’t breathe. It was too much. The world around him was overwhelming in its entirety. And even though his blindness would help, he couldn’t find the control to pull back from his wolf to hide it all, so he found himself stuck with the bombardment. His wolf lashing out at the back of his mind, trying to break free. It was a part of him, yet it ran on pure instinct. His panic had thrown it into trying to defend itself from whatever was attacking them. It just didn’t, or couldn’t, understand that the attack was mental.

“Fuck!” he cursed. “Control yourself, Theo!”

The words did nothing. His vision didn't disappear, and the noise, though distant now, still sounded like a cacophony in his ears. Darkness, he needed darkness.

The change pushed towards the surface as his breath increased in speed. His skin tingling and beginning to ripple. His fear and panic heightened as he stared down at Sprinkle. She was meowing and rubbing against him in obvious concern. The kitten was so small... If he lost complete control...

"Go," he begged her, with tears in his eyes.

The light turned off. The room plunged into darkness. He flinched in shock as a hand smoothed over his back. And then strong arms were around him, someone's warm chest against his back.

"Shh, you are safe, Theo," a soft voice told him. The voice...was soothing...and oddly familiar.

Chest heaving, air still sparse, he peered back. His eyes widened as he realized he knew this male. It was...the funny dressed reaper... The one who had been there when he'd been rescued. The one who had stood between him and his father.

His mind tried to churn out a name. The male was Turney's friend, wasn't he? What was his name?

The reaper smiled gently at him. "It's Alexander. Just keep trying to breathe, Theo. You are safe. I won't let anything happen to you."

He frowned, his mind trying to make sense of the words. But the male's eyes were kind... And he was a reaper... Yes... he was...safe... The reaper would stop him from hurting anyone. Theo was safe. He took his first full breath.

"That's it, Theo." He felt Alexander's chest expand and contract against his back, as he heard him draw a deep breath in and out. "Listen to my breathing, and try to match it. It's going to be okay."

Alexander's chest rose and fell against his back again. With the reaper's next breath, he took one in as well. And then

another, and another, until his breathing slowed, and his heart began to calm down.

When, finally, the noises no longer beat at him, his sight no longer taunting, the reaper helped him stand up. His face heated as he peered shyly up into Alexander's eyes.

"Thank you," Theo said, clearing his throat. His cheeks heated further, now slightly embarrassed by the circumstances the very handsome male found him in. "I thought I could handle it...but seeing it all, the noise...everything together became too much. I was fine...and then..." He trailed off.

Alexander grasped his shoulders, the soft smile still in place. "How about you turn those pretty golden eyes off and let me guide you to wherever you want to go? I imagine this place, as it is right now...probably isn't that great to navigate."

He grimaced. "It's not..."

Taking a deep breath, now that he was calm, he easily pulled back. His vision flickered once before complete darkness finally took hold. He sighed in relief as his world fell peacefully into full nothingness again. Feeling Sprinkle still rubbing against his leg, he bent down and picked her back up.

"How do you prefer to be guided?"

"I'm most comfortable with a hand at my back...and if you could warn me whenever there is a terrain change or steps. That would help."

"Do you want to go to your room? I don't know where it is, but I'm sure we can figure it out together."

He frowned, thinking about it for a moment. He really... didn't want to run away...even more so now that he had already freaked out. "I think...I want to try the party again." His hand shook slightly as he ran it through Sprinkle's fur.



ALEXANDER HELD BACK HIS FROWN, even though Theo wouldn't have been able to see it. He found himself, as he always was, stuck behind the mask he showed the world. "Are you sure?"

"I...am," the young werewolf said, almost too hesitantly. "If you don't mind being my guide for the rest of the night... I know it's a lot to ask." Theo gnawed his bottle lip, brow pinching in concern.

Alexander chuckled. "You ask very little, Theo. Never be afraid to ask for help." He laid his hand on the small of Theo's back. "And if you wish to head back to the party, we shall. Though I believe they are heading to the second house now."

"Lead on." The wolf smiled, much calmer now.

Guiding the werewolf out of the room, he led him through the house, following the directions on the posted signs towards the door that would lead them outside.

"We are about to step out of the house. We are about five steps from the door, and there appears to be a single step down."

"Ah, so Octavius used this exit. There...are multiple. I was wondering which one he used. I know how many steps there are at the house, just let me know when we reach them."

"Will do."

Alexander walked with Theo into the woods, flinching as an apparition came screaming out of a nearby tree.

Theo's head cocked after the third or so time it happened. "Is everything okay?"

"Octavius certainly went all out," Alexander drawled. "These spells would have cost a pretty penny."

Theo chuckled, the sound was nice and light. Pleasing to the ears. "I'm afraid he roped Min-ji into doing it all." The werewolf frowned. "Though, I suppose you may not know who that is."

"No worries, I know who you are talking about."

“I have my suspicions that this may be Octavius’ favorite holiday.”

Alexander laughed. “I feel it’s more than suspicion at this point.”

“No doubt,” Theo snickered.

While all the decorations were rather impressive, they held no interest to him. He had no particular interest in any holiday, to be honest.

Alexander guided Theo around a few gawking attendees, and towards the stairs as they reached Scarlett’s home.

“We are a foot from stairs that wind to the left.”

Theo nodded with a smile. Making sure Theo wasn’t impeded by the line of pumpkins going up the steps, they made it inside without issue. The ballroom was only a few hallways away. As they stepped into the room, he took a deep breath, only to let out a startled hiss as an all too familiar smell reached his nose.



THEO BLINKED, frowning at the concerning sound Alexander just made. “What? What’s wrong?”

He knew they must be in the ballroom now, as the sounds of people laughing, screaming, and more were again loud and clear. There were so many smells and sounds, it was hard for him to trust his senses in any situation here.

“I smell...death,” Alexander said stiffly.

“Death?” Theo rasped, brows raising in shock.

Frown deepening, he took a deep breath and tried to sort through what he could smell, and realized he smelled it too. But one wouldn’t unless they were looking for it. He imagined

a reaper's senses perhaps automatically sought out that smell...maybe... At least, Theo thought that was the most logical conclusion for how Alexander smelled it before anyone else.

“Alright, my creatures of the night! Quieten down and listen here!” Octavius’ voice boomed out, the noise of chatter silencing soon after. “It is time for another grand performance. But this one shall be in the air. Prepare to be amazed and frightened by acrobatic feats that have never been seen before! A show that is heart stopping, and possibly a little bloody. Everyone, feast your eyes above!”

There was a swooshing sound followed by a loud crashing thud, along with shattering glass and metal crunching. He had some idea what had just happened due to the screams that followed the noise.

Alexander sighed. “Well, there would be the body...”

“I think...I should change my eyes back.”

“I can guide you to your room, or even to an empty room here. I know I said I’d stay with you, but...”

Theo turned and faced the direction he knew the reaper was standing and smiled. “Duty calls?”

Alexander let out a soft laugh. “Yes.”

He sighed. “Well, I think I would like to stay with you to find out what is going on, at least. I’ll change my eyes when it becomes necessary. Perhaps it will be fine, and I’ll feel more comfortable since the rest of my agency will no doubt be congregating near the body.”

“The rest of your agency?”

Theo nodded. “Yes, I decided to join The Undead Detective Agency.”

He wasn’t sure if joining had been the best decision, but it would certainly be something new and unknown...

Chapter Seventeen



A Halloween Murder Mystery

Turney stood at the back of the stage watching Octavius dramatically announce another grand performance. The ballroom was black with white and gold diamond tiled floors. It was...another room Turney had never seen before, as both Octavius' and Scarlett's homes were ginormous. While the food and drink tables were similar to the other ballroom, along with the orange pumpkin candy bowl, the decorations here were black roses, thorns, spiders, and a shit ton of webs. There was also a bar in this ballroom.

His gaze lifted the moment Octavius instructed them to. In the ceiling, a massive glass and metal chandelier began to lower. Turney frowned when it started to wobble back and forth dangerously, as if it wasn't secure. Something...was on top of it... Was that a hand?

The chandelier suddenly plummeted. The crowd scrambled back out of the way at an impressive speed as the thing landed in a shatter of glass and crunching metal... Not to mention, an odd thump.

Screams wretched up from the crowd. While he could see the top of their heads, the height of the stage wasn't so much that he could see the ground past such a thickly packed crowd.

"What...the hell," he heard Octavius growl. "Please, part!" the vampire yelled out, storming to the edge of the stage.

And the crowd did, instantly, revealing on the ground what looked to be a very dead body...because, of course...why wouldn't there be an actual dead body at Octavius' party? Or was this part of the show?

He couldn't see the face of the person, as long vibrant blue hair obscured their face. He could see that they were male, as the person was wearing skin tight spandex pants that looked like scales in multiple shades of white and blue. His body was fit, thick with muscles...and was covered in scales, or rather, snake skin. The patterned skin was a mixture of white, turquoise, and black, matching the rest of his costume. Turney wasn't sure if they were just wearing really amazing prosthetics...or if the guy was some sort of creature that could grow scales. It looked like real snake skin. Gaze moving away from his body, Turney eyed the blood puddle forming near the male's head.

Octavius hopped off the stage and Turney followed. Reaching the body, Octavius stepped closer, kicking glass out of the way with his bare feet, before crouching down and flipping the wig out of the person's face. Turney's eyes went to the vampire's feet making sure they were unharmed before glancing over to see what was revealed.

Scales came up along the edge of the creature's face before they broke away, giving way to smooth bone white skin. His eyes were closed, lips blue and slightly parted. Turney could see a hint of fangs. He wasn't sure what the performer was, but he knew he wasn't human... At least, he didn't smell human. To Turney, all humans had a certain smell to them, on top of their individual scents. Sadly, to him, that certain smell was also food-like...with their...brains and all.

"Do you know him?" Turney asked.

Scarlett and Min-ji pushed through the crowd then. Curiously, their costumes were swapped. Alexander and... oddly, Theo plus Sprinkle came next. And well... he could hear Cormac, even if he couldn't see him.

"Stupid fucking tail!" The werewolf growled from somewhere in the startlingly quiet crowd.



OCTAVIUS STARED at the dead naga, his mind screaming ‘*who the fuck is this?*’. The audacity of them, dying and interrupting his party! The show had been so cool and spooky, and now no one was going to get to see it!

“I have no clue. He is one of the performers though. I previewed the show, but I wasn’t informed of anyone’s name, or anything like that...” He pursed his lips into a pout. “Henry!” he called out.

His youngest fledgling pushed through the crowd then... followed by Cormac, who was only partly dressed as a siren, his tail now gone. The wolf was walking around in tight purple boxer briefs, looking completely unashamed.

“Where is your tail?” Octavius huffed in added irritation, shaking his head. “Never mind. Henry, could you—” His words cut off in a horror laced gasp as he caught sight of Scarlett and Min-ji. “How could you?!” he cried.

“Umm...Octavius,” Turney chimed in. “Not that costumes aren’t important, but the dead body?” He waved towards the downed paranormal.

Octavius let out a sigh, and then glared at the two women. He’d deal with them later! “Fine! The dead body... As we are a detective agency, it is only right that we solve this mystery. Henry, could you be a dear and fetch the leader of the performers? Well, he’s the owner of the company too... Either way, he should be around here somewhere. Someone in one of the rooms should have a walkie talkie to communicate directly with him. Though, I suppose I could text him...” He shook his head. “No, his phone is likely off. Just go find him.”

Henry nodded and started to push back through the crowd, Cormac following behind him. Though, he supposed the

performers that had been waiting to drop down from their spots in the ceiling had already run off to find the owner of the performance company. He no longer sensed any heartbeats hidden up above, so he was going to assume they had.

As Henry disappeared, Octavius turned and faced the crowd, who were all staring at him. “Ah, my dear friends. As you can see, there has been an unfortunate event on this side of the party. Why don’t you all head back through the woods, and have a little fun over there while we, uh...handle this.”

He smiled at them brightly and encouragingly. Catching the eye of his oldest fledgling, he nodded towards the exit with a stern expression when he saw her and the rest of his crew attempting to approach. She visibly sighed in irritation, but nodded and started guiding the other five out with the rest of the crowd. He did not need them to interfere.

As the crowd started to exit, he scooted over to Min-ji and whispered, “I need you to run outside and put up a barrier to prevent anyone from leaving, humans and paranormals alike.”

“I can just tamper with the one I already set up to prevent unregistered guests from entering, so that no one can come in or out,” she whispered back.

“Good, do that.”

She nodded. Min-ji and Scarlett slipped quickly through the remaining crowd and disappeared.

There was a loud throat clearing.

Octavius turned and narrowed his eyes at the reaper who had made the noise. “Yes?”

“Octavius...be nice,” Turney whispered as he slid up beside him.

“I’m always nice,” he hissed.

The zombie gave him a look at that. It screamed disbelief. How rude!

Sighing, he eyed Alexander. The reaper was dressed appropriately, for once—a jester’s costume was very fitting for his existence.

His brow rose a bit as he noticed that the male had a hand on Theo's back—interesting. Alexander, as he always did, had an annoyingly bright smile on his face. Theo...looked concerningly tired.

The male cleared his throat again. “Perhaps I should take over, considering this is a dead paranormal, and I am a reaper?”

Octavius just barely held back the anger that tried to bubble up at the suggestion. Instead of screaming, he tossed his head back on a dramatic *hmph* and said haughtily, “My house, my case.”

Turney sighed next to him. The zombie sounded exasperated. He wasn't sure why. It was Octavius who should be exasperated! It was his party that had been interrupted! Well, at least everyone would be talking about this one for years. Like, how many Halloween parties could tout having an actual dead body show up? Maybe this was a good thing? Perhaps, this would become the greatest party of all time! One for the record books! Yes, this was a good thing. He could spin this.

“Um...Octavius?” Turney prodded.

He blinked and then eyed the zombie. “What?”

“You zoned out.”

“No...I don't think I did,” he drawled innocently. Even though he so totally had.

His gaze flicked back to the reaper. Alexander's smile got stupidly brighter.

“Octavius,” the reaper started coaxingly. “Surely, I could be of help?”

Octavius pursed his lips and eyed him narrowly. If Alexander wanted to, the reaper could take over and kick them off the investigation. So, an offer to help was, he supposed, better than letting him take over.

Fine, Octavius would compromise. He could do that. Compromising was the easiest and least annoying option.

“I suppose, if you wish to help, you may. But only help. Let’s be clear, this is my investigation.”

The reaper nodded. “Yes, I understand. I’ll only help. You are in charge.”

“Yes, well...” He drew in a deep breath and let it out. Glancing around, he smiled when he found the room was now clear. Clear meant the candy bowl was now completely unobscured. He eyed it. It would be so easy to just walk over and take a piece. Turney would likely try to stop him. But if he flew away... No! He’d be good. He’d stay away from the candy.

“Uh...Octavius?” Turney nudged him.

He blinked... Right, he’d been in the middle of saying something...what had it been? “Oh! Yes.” Octavius cleared his throat and glanced at Alexander. “If you must help, then feel free to examine the body and tell us what you find.” He waved towards the dead body.

Alexander, with a smile still on his face, pulled away from Theo and walked over to crouch down near the body. The naga’s head was cracked open, probably from the fall... The question was, had he been dead before he fell? And if he hadn’t, how had such a fall killed him? It wasn’t as if he was human. His reflexes should have been enough for him to jump free of the falling chandelier. And if he’d been impaired in some way...well, the current crack in his skull wasn’t really enough to kill a creature such as him. Nagas...were a pain in the ass to kill.

Alexander checked each limb, which was pretty easy to do due to the sparse costume. Then again, the performer’s role had been to use his naga abilities to frighten the crowd. It was hard to do that when restricted by a full body costume.

“No defensive wounds, or noticeable injury, besides the head,” Alexander murmured, before lifting up the male’s eyelids. The smile on his face instantly became tense. “The veins in his eyes have turned violet.”

“Murdered then,” Octavius said with a frustrated huff.

Just his luck that some asshole ended up poisoned at his party...like, the nerve!

A thought occurred to him as Alexander moved to check other parts of the dead naga. Pulling out his phone, Octavius flipped it open and tapped on a writing app. He titled a new document *Murder Mystery at the Scarlett Estate*. Quickly, he typed up what had happened, and what Alexander had said about the body.

The reaper opened the paranormal's mouth wider, leaning forward to sniff. "Smells like cardeum."

"That would certainly do it," he drawled with a bored sigh, before adding it to his notes.

Alexander stood up. "No other injuries, besides the one which was caused by the fall. I will say, I smelled death when I first entered the ballroom. So, he was dead before the fall. But he is still warm enough for his blood to run, so he didn't die too long ago."

"So...someone poisoned him, but it took a moment to work?" Turney asked.

Alexander shrugged. "It's a slow acting poison until it actually hits."

"What he means by that is, the man probably felt perfectly fine and normal up until the very moment he died. This particular poison will spread through one's body without notice until it has fully contaminated every organ. And then it will shut your system down. To note, this was probably not a random target. Cardeum is a rare and strange choice poison-wise. It is perfectly harmless to the undead, humans, and a good number of other paranormals. But, for reptilian type creatures, like the victim, it is fatal."

Alexander leaned closer to the chandelier. "It looks like it was tampered with." He pulled at the part that was supposed to keep it attached to the ceiling. "Lines were cut."

"What is he?" Turney asked.

"He's—"

“Kristof!!” a male voice cried out in pure devastation.

Chapter Eighteen



That's Certainly A List

Octavius eyed the phantom who ran in and skidded to a stop before reaching the body. Henry and Cormac followed in more slowly.

Jagger Grandor was what all those romance books would consider to be tall, dark, and handsome. Black hair, fair skin, symmetrical features. He wasn't bad on the eyes, but something about him was irritating. Like, he was just a little *too* perfect.

Octavius' gaze flicked to the male's outfit. It was fitting, gray and ragged—very ghost-like. The phantom didn't have any make-up on, but, then again, he didn't need it. All he would have to do to pull the look together would be to transform into his phantom state.

Alexander started to approach, but Octavius waved him off with his hand. The reaper's brow rose, but he stayed back.

Good! Because this was *his* investigation! Not that Octavius wanted to investigate right now...but how could he let the reaper have this?! The murder happened in his own house! Well...in Scarlett's. But he was living here now, so that made it his too! He couldn't let Alexander take over something that happened in his domain, it would be too... annoying.

“Kristof!” Jagger cried out again. “How could this happen?!” The phantom was literally shaking apart where he stood, staring down in horror for a few moments before he began to sob. It was...an odd reaction for a boss to have towards the death of an employee.

Considering he had some experience in this type of thing, having gotten to experience it only recently, Octavius thought the reaction was more fitting for how one would react to losing a lover. But...if he wasn't mistaken, Jagger was married to a woman...not a man.

Frowning, he scooted over to the sobbing paranormal and awkwardly patted his back. “There, there,” Octavius said.

“Octavius...” Turney whisper yelled.

“What? I'm comforting him.”

“Badly,” his zombie hissed.

He...couldn't deny that. So, he didn't try to and decided to simply ignore the comment. Was it really his fault though? The reaction was weird! “So, Jagger. This is obviously a trying time for you, but can you tell me what your relationship with the deceased was like?”

“He w-was my longtime lover.”

“I see,” Octavius said slowly. “You are married, are you not?”

“Ah, my wife and I are poly. She is fully aware, and part of, all my relationships. Including w-with Kristof.” He let out another sob.

“That would explain things.” It definitely explained his reaction. “Your wife isn't here tonight, is she?”

Jagger sniffled. “No...why do you ask?”

Turney cleared his throat and nudged Octavius out of the way a bit. “Well, I'm sad to say... Perhaps you should sit down for this, uh, Jagger?” he said hesitantly.

Hmm, was this considered tactful? Octavius supposed he had just planned to blurt it out.

Henry, the wonderful fledgling that he was, appeared out of nowhere with a chair and sat it down near Jagger. He beamed at the vampire, who just shook his head before walking over to the bar Cormac was sitting at, and sat down next to him.

Jagger, while still obviously distraught, was looking confused now as he sat down. “What...is it? Was it not an accident? Though...Kristof was a pro. I just can’t believe he would misstep and fall to his death like this. He was so agile, athletic, flexible...smooth...”

Octavius grimaced. That was way more than he wanted to know.

Turney’s mouth twitched as he was obviously trying to control his expression. He succeeded way better than Octavius. Of course, he hadn’t bothered to try...oh well. Maybe next time there was a murder he’d do better. But really, he was in party mode, not work mode. He shouldn’t have to control his face when in party mode... IT WAS AGAINST THE RULES OF PARTYING! His rules, at least.

“So, after examining the body, we unfortunately discovered that Kristof did not die of natural causes,” Turney explained.

Yes, that was very nicely put... Octavius had just been planning to say that someone murdered his ass. Well, not those exact words. Maybe, *‘Oh, Kristof was poisoned to death!’* Something dramatic like that. With some flare, maybe some hand waving.

“W-what do you mean?”

Apparently, being nice was not clear enough.

“He was murdered,” Octavius blurted before the zombie could stop him. Turney sighed.

“MURDERED!?! My Kristof was murdered?! By who?! Why?!”

“That is the question, isn’t it? I’m guessing it wasn’t you. Though, if it was, we will find out eventually. And it’s not your wife as she isn’t here. Unless she snuck in somewhere.”

Jagger's back stiffened. "My wife and I did not murder Kristof."

"Yes, well...do you have any idea who it could be?" he asked.

Turney smiled gently at the phantom. "Was Kristof your only other partner?"

Jagger sighed. "I suppose anyone I'm involved with will be a suspect now. I just can't think of who would hurt him. Everyone knows they each have an equal sized place in my heart." He paused, his bottom lip quivering. "We have always made it clear to everyone that jealousy would not be accepted in our relationships or near it. I..."

Yeah, he was going to guess that plenty were able to hide it then, since they knew of this rule. He never understood people stepping into a relationship they didn't want in the first place. "I'm sorry that we must ask, but we have no choice. Please, tell us who else you and your wife are involved with." He waited, phone in hand, ready to type up a list.

"Well, there is Jessica Bell, Jordan Deti—"

Octavius' right eye began to twitch as Jagger's list went on. How did they have time to sleep? In full bafflement, he typed every name Jagger listed. The phantom's list was so long that it took up multiple pages of his document. Turney made an odd choking noise beside him.

"Wow," he heard Cormac whisper behind them.

"Can you tell us where all these people currently are? At least, the ones that are here. Unless all of them work for your company?"

"I really can't fathom any of them hurting Kristof, let alone killing him. He was well loved by all!"

Oh, he really wanted to ask if that was in a literal sense or figuratively.

"Okay...umm." Turney cleared his throat. His cheeks were slightly red. It was a pretty color. His cute bun bun was blushing. "I know you don't want to consider that one of them

did this, but they are the most likely suspects. So, they are the starting point. We will of course move away from the list you gave us if it's not one of them...but for now, these are our only leads. Unless you know of anyone who hated him and would want to do him harm?"

Jagger sighed and shook his head. "I don't."

"Then you must tell us where they are right now. Here, I made a list of the names, type where they are next to each one," Octavius instructed, handing over his phone.

Phantom's shoulders sagged, but he took it and began to type.

As he was doing that, Octavius leaned into Turney and whispered as softly as he could. "How does he have time to sleep?"

Turney scoffed. "You are a menace."

He gasped. "Rude!"

Silence settled as they all waited for Jagger to finish. It took a good ten minutes before the phantom was finally done.

Jagger sighed. "Here, I'm done. I noted the ones that should not be here as they do not work for the company." The man held out the phone.

Octavius snatched it with a smile. "Good, good. Thank you."

"Would it be okay if I got back to work? I think I would like to get my mind off this right now. Until we know who..." Jagger's voice faltered.

"Do whatever you feel is necessary," Turney replied gently.

Alexander interjected. "To be clear, no one should be leaving the premises right now."

Such an unnecessary add on. No one *could* even leave. Octavius had made sure of that. Why bother mentioning it?

Jagger winced. "Understood." The male stood up and walked off.

Glancing at his phone, Octavius quickly read through the list and began to sort them into five separate ones based on their current locations, including one for the people not there.

As he was finishing up, Scarlett and Min-ji returned. Scarlett eyed Turney weirdly as she came in. He was going to guess she had felt the change in his emotions when Jagger had been giving them the names.

“I fixed the barrier. It now blocks anyone from leaving, whether they be human or paranormal,” Min-ji said as she reached him.

“Perfect!” Octavius exclaimed. “And perfect timing! I can explain the list I’m about to send you.”

“List?” Scarlett asked.

He quickly sent the lists and his notes on the case so far to Scarlett, Cormac, and Alexander. His smile grew as three phones dinged a second later.

Octavius nodded. “Yes, our list of suspects... The list of Jagger’s lovers. And I’m going to assume they are also his wife’s. I broke it down into four separate lists based on location.”

“Lovers? There were enough for multiple lists?” Min-ji asked, brow raised.

Enough for multiple lists and then some, he thought. “Everyone, come here!” he announced loudly.

They all quickly congregated in a circle. Well, Turney just stayed near his side...and Min-ji and Scarlett didn’t move much. But Cormac and Henry moved...ish... They were all there, it was fine. It was circle-ish.

“So, it is your job to question these people, find out what they know, and how they feel about Kristof. You know...he never gave us a last name. No matter, I’m assuming there is only one. At least there was only one on his list of lovers. Anyway, you have a list of names and locations and notes on the murder. Oh, yeah, it was definitely a murder. Here are the groups. Myself and Turney are, of course, together. And then Min-ji and Scarlett, Cormac and Henry, and lastly Alexander

and Theo. But only if Theo feels up to it,” Octavius finished with a bright smile.

Theo frowned, hesitating a moment before he answered. “I think I would like to lie down for a bit.”

“Of course, you are free to do so. Thank you for coming as far as you have for today.”

“I will escort Theo to his room, before working on my list,” Alexander stated.

Octavius’ brow rose at that but he shrugged and said, “Okay.”

“Can’t we just get the performers to come here?” Turney asked.

“No!” Octavius cried. “How could we? They are entertaining guests!”

His zombie bun let out a deep sigh.

Chapter Nineteen



Narrowing Things Down

“I still don’t see why we can’t just call the people we need to us? Wouldn’t that be so much easier than us running around trying to find them?” Turney grumbled, flinching as the same fucking fake ghost got him for the fourth time in the woods.

Mind you, he thought all the pumpkins and the other relatively harmless decorations were cool. Really, he did! Just why did Octavius have to lean so heavily into the scary part of Halloween? He supposed the vampire would focus on the candy aspect if he could.

“You just don’t like being scared,” Octavius said with a giggle.

“Who does like being scared?!” he huffed.

“Plenty of people. Why do you think so many choose to go to haunted houses and things like that?”

“Because they are weird.”

Octavius tsked. “Just because you don’t like being scared doesn’t make them weird because they do.”

He hmphed. “I really feel that it does make them weird.”

“Now who is the one being a brat? Not I!” Octavius said with a laugh.

Turney sighed as they finally made it back through the woods and entered the house. Though, really, he shouldn't be happy about making it back. The rooms they'd be going into were no doubt much worse than the forest ever could be.

"Why are the performers still on this side anyway? Shouldn't they have switched when we did?"

"Because guests still have until midnight to explore this side of the party. At midnight the performers will take a short break before switching to whatever new role they will take on for the other half of the party."

Turney frowned. "Wait, how long is this party?" he asked.

"While it has a starting time, there is no set ending... But it will no doubt go on until early in the morning. So don't expect to get much sleep tonight."

He eyed the vampire as they walked into the house. "So, you are still planning to carry on, even though we now have a dead body."

Octavius huffed. "You don't expect me to cancel over something as simple as a murder, do you?!"

"Gee, how silly of me to think murder would be enough to staunch your Halloween obsession."

"Silly indeed," Octavius said, sounding completely serious.

And he probably was. His boyfriend was such a nut...

"Okay, our first two are in the meat room!" Octavius announced, way too happily.

"The meat room?" he asked with trepidation.

"You'll see!" he chimed. "Let's go!"

Octavius boldly marched forward down the halls. The most Turney could do was trudge behind the vampire.

"The meat room!" the male announced as they reached a door with plastic wrapped around it.

“After you.” Turney waved him forward. As no way in hell would he go in first.

Octavius shrugged, pulling the door open, he walked inside. Turney followed, as what else could he do?

The room...he wasn't sure how big it was, but there were a lot of weird plastic door flaps they had to go through. The smell was...off. He wasn't sure how to describe it. It was blood-like, but yet, not... Nothing was bad, yet...

They pushed into a dark section. A bare bulb up above was the only source of light in the area.

Someone was in there... He heard their heartbeat. Turney frowned and peered around but...saw nothing. He couldn't even make out the walls around him. So much for enhanced sight. Probably a spell or something.

He jumped and stilled at the sound of metal slamming against metal. Turney grabbed onto the vampire's arm when he started to move on without him. Octavius chuckled, but waited. When nothing else happened, together with the vampire, he inched forward.

Hearing a scraping noise, Turney froze again, forcing Octavius to a stop too with how hard he was clutching the vampire.

“Shouldn't we just call out their names?” Turney whispered. His heart started to race as the single bulb of light began to flicker.

And then suddenly there were flickering lights all around him, and the wall showed clearly for the first time, flashing horrors of mutilated bodies, blood and organs pinned everywhere. When a mechanical roar wrenched the silence in two, Turney spun around, coming face to face with a large deformed maniac wielding a chainsaw. Turney screamed, seconds from attacking, but right as he was about to strike out, Octavius swung him away from the performer.

“STOP!” the vampire yelled out.

The performer hesitated.

Turney remained facing away, trembling.

“Hello there,” Octavius chimed, sounding way too cheerful. “So, there has been an incident. Are you James or Ethan? I know both of you are in here. We need to talk to you both.”

Turney, still shaking, slowly turned back around to face the creature. He cleared his throat, and it came out pretty high pitched. “Um, the talk may be a bit upsetting.”

The performer’s hand with the weapon dropped down by his side, a frown forming on the guy’s obviously heavily make-uped and prosthetic covered face. “I’m James, Mr. Evander.”

“Oh, no, please call me Octavius.”

The guy cleared his throat. “Give me a moment and I’ll radio Ethan.”

James pressed something in his ear and spoke. “Ethan. Meet me in the chainsaw section. Put a sign on the door saying closed due to technical issues.”

He heard who he was going to assume was Ethan say, “Roger!”

Moments later, another scary ass looking guy appeared. He was even taller than James, and his face looked to have been shredded by claws. The cuts were deep and bloody looking.

“What is this about?” Ethan asked as he made it to them. He did a slight bow towards Octavius. “Mr. Evander. What can I, or we, do for you?”

Turney saw that Octavius was about to, yet again, blurt out everything. “It’s a sensitive matter,” he quickly said.

Octavius sighed next to him, but waved him on with his hand.

“We found... Kristof, one of the performers, dead.”

Well, technically he had been dead when he had fallen in front of everyone, but whatever.

“What?!” they both cried out at the same time.

“You can’t be serious,” James hissed. “Is this a joke?”

Turney winced. “I’m afraid not.”

Octavius dramatically added, “He was murdered!”

“Murdered?!” Ethan rasped, while James remained silent, looking completely shocked.

He eyed the vampire. Octavius glanced at him quickly with fake innocence. Why was he even trying for tact at this point? Usually, Octavius was better than this. Sure, he was impatient and loved to blurt things out, but he was never this bad...

Turney sighed. He supposed it had been blatantly obvious back in the ballroom that the vampire was not in any way interested in dealing with this right now. He was going to assume Octavius’ lack of interest meant blunt was what he was defaulting to. Turney bet the little menace was forcing himself to investigate because he was too stubborn to just let Alexander handle the whole thing.

“Unfortunately,” Turney said gently before explaining what had happened and why they were there. “We understand that you two are Jagger’s lovers?”

Ethan nodded. “I can see why you would suspect those involved with him. But while James and I have slept with Jagger and his wife, Lorraine, we have also been with Kristof. However...our main partners are each other.” The male grasped James’ hand. “We would never hurt Kristof. We didn’t love him, not as Jagger or some of the others did, but we are not in love with anyone other than each other.”

James smiled at Ethan and leaned closer to the other man. Ethan wrapped his arm around the other male. Which was super creepy due to the costumes... There had to be some fucked up porno somewhere that mimicked this.

James cleared his throat. “To add on, neither of us worked closely with Kristof on his performances. Us going near his equipment, or any of his things, let alone the chandelier, would draw questions. Most of our interactions with him were

outside of the work environment. You can ask anyone. We haven't even stepped foot in the room you found him in."

"Then who does have access?" Octavius asked.

If they could narrow down the list, they could finish up with this case faster.

"Jace, Vance, Kyle, Tina, Gordy, Bates, Brim, Bronx, Cindy, Jessica, Darien—" Ethan continued to list off names, and while he did go on for a while...the new list was at least half the size of the one they currently had. So, that was something.

James explained, "All of them would know what Kristof's role in the performance was, and would not be questioned if they were near his equipment. Some are there to specifically prep things for him for his shows."

"Hmm, that does narrow it down a bit, considering how lengthy our list was," Octavius said with a feigned smile. "Do you know of anyone who perhaps did not like Kristof? Jagger claims to have a policy on jealousy in his relationships, but we all know something like that can be hidden."

Ethan sighed. "Jagger is still quite young. He is very optimistic, and is blind to a lot of things. And, in this case, he's very blind to the jealousy of others. I will say, most of us do get along. But then again, a lot of those that are with Jagger, have a stable partner themselves. While I can't state with absolute certainty that those that are part of a permanent couple didn't have something against Kristof, I'd say to focus on those who aren't in an outside relationship." The male quickly rattled off an even smaller list of names. "Kristof, while he did sleep with many of us, he had something special going on with Jagger and Lorraine. That no doubt pissed some people off."

"Makes sense. But...in what way was his relationship different with Jagger and his wife compared to others?" Turney asked.

James snorted. "Jagger may love spouting nonsense about everyone being in his heart equally, but it's very obvious that

certain people were held higher. Kristof being one of those people.”

“I’m not sure if there’s anything more we can tell you... Is there anything else you need? Or can we get back to work?” Ethan asked.

Octavius frowned, obviously thinking about the question. Turney did have something else to ask though.

“Do you know Kristof’s last name?”

Ethan blinked. “Uh, yes. It’s Berg.”

“Thank you,” Turney said.

“Is that all?” the male asked again.

“Yes,” Octavius hummed. “I believe that is all. We will leave you to your work. If we think of anything else, we will be back.”

The two nodded as Octavius and Turney headed back the way they came and into the hallway.

“Well, at least our list is smaller now?” Turney said with a sigh.

“Maybe. They are both older paranormals. Near my age, if I were to guess. So, they could have lied.”

Turney’s eyes widened at that. “I’m curious why they are working here then.”

Octavius smiled. “No doubt they do it because they enjoy it. They have lived long enough that I doubt it’s related to money. When one gets to a certain age, all we can do is try to keep ourselves entertained.”

Turney chuckled. “That explains a lot.”

Octavius narrowed his eyes at him. “Why does it feel like you just insulted me?”

He smirked and tried to mimic the vampire’s innocent wide-eyed look. “Whatever do you mean?”

“You did insult me, didn’t you?!”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

The vampire hmphed and crossed his arms with a pout.

Turney chuckled. “Anyway, should we use the narrowed down list for now?”

Octavius let out a heavy sigh. “I suppose. It’ll save time. And if what they told us turns out to be lies...well, then they probably did it. So, either way, we will have solved the case!”

“Good enough logic for me.” He paused before asking, “What species was Kristof? You never told me.”

“He was a naga. And let me tell you now, nagas are not a species one wants to mess with. They are also very hard to kill unless you...you know, are sneaky and use poison like our killer did. If I were to describe them, I’d say they are like how the hydra is described. Except just the instant regeneration part, and not so much the lose one head and gain two thing.”

Joy—giant snake creatures were real... “Sounds... horrifying.”

Octavius chuckled. “Indeed.” The vampire pulled out his phone and flipped it open. “Let me just update the list and send it to the others, then we will head off to find the next two!”

Chapter Twenty



Decisions Were Made

Scarlett tried to keep the blush off her cheeks when she slipped her arm through Min-ji's and clung to her. She didn't think she succeeded, but oh well. Scarlett glanced at the decorations in the trees as they walked past. Octavius really had gone all out this year. She had a feeling that next year would be worse.

"So, who are we looking for?" Min-ji asked, smiling down at her...which caused the blush she'd been attempting to fight off to spring forward. Damn pale skin...

She cleared her throat and tried to appear unaffected. "A man named Fedric Noric. He's out here in the woods somewhere."

"I see."

"There is someone hidden up ahead. Perhaps, it is him?"

Min-ji hummed in response.

Right as they neared, the person appeared out of nowhere, a flash of fire shooting out above them as the man dressed as a witch let out an eerie laugh. Scarlett instinctively bent her head down a bit, but otherwise didn't react. Fire and zombies did not mix.

"Are you Fedric?" Min-ji asked.

The witch—as he was a witch in species not just costume—stood there for a minute, looking shocked that neither of them had reacted.

Scarlett sighed. “Yes or no?”

His eyes narrowed on her. “I am? And you are?”

“Owner of the estate that way.” Scarlett pointed to the right, feeling slightly bored by this conversation already.

“There’s been a murder. One of the other performers, Kristof,” Min-ji drawled.

Fedric gasped, eyes widening in shock. “Kristof is dead?” He then frowned and shrugged. “Well, it makes sense, I suppose. His perfectionist qualities were annoying at times. Always so full of himself. Thought himself better than others.”

Apparently, that shock...had not been out of sadness.

“I take it that you two did not get along?” Min-ji mused, sounding just as bored as Scarlett felt.

It was odd, yet pleasing, how similar they were. Not that she didn’t like the differences of those around her. Octavius wasn’t a thing like her, but she loved him.

“Oh, that’s why you are here. You think *I* did it? No. I rarely interacted with the naga. He didn’t like me much. But I fear that’s just his bad taste,” Fedric said haughtily.

Scarlett smirked. “And why didn’t he like you? Difference of opinion or your attitude?”

“What are you implying?” the male witch asked with a sniff.

“It’s a simple question. Just answer it.”

Fedric scoffed. “Zombies sure aren’t as well trained as they used to be.”

Scarlett’s eyes widened. “Excuse me?”

He ignored her, his gaze flicking to Min-ji. “You should really tighten the reins on your familiar. Her species needs

special care and discipline, or they will constantly embarrass you in public.”

Scarlett’s arm slipped free of Min-ji’s. And when her hands started to shake, she balled them into fists to stop it. To stop all of it...her anger...the memories...

‘Special care’, he said... What he really meant was abuse, manipulation...humiliation. Just them doing whatever they can to break her kind down into silent, unquestioning slaves.

This witch was like all those monsters she had met before.

But...Min-ji wasn’t... She looked at the female witch and found her looking back, eyes filled with anger and worry. Yes...Min-ji was different.

“Oh, are you two not bonded?” Fedric laughed. “My bad. In that case, are you looking for a master, zombie? I bet I can get you bent into working order.”

Scarlett growled, letting the shift come as she faced the male.

He didn’t seem worried. He just continued to stand there with an arrogant smirk on his face. “Fierce, I like it. It’ll make it a lot more fun for me when I break you down.”

Scarlett stepped forward, not sure what she was about to do, but Min-ji grabbed her shoulder. It was so hard to ignore Fedric’s burst of laughter when her anger was already boiling to the surface. But she did, and at the same time, she forced herself to face the woman again.

Min-ji smiled at her and leaned down to place a kiss on her forehead. “Allow me,” she whispered, right before turning back to the asshole and slamming her fist into his chest.

Scarlett’s eyes widened as Fedric went flying, his scream cutting off when he hit a tree.

“I’ll just be a second.” Min-ji gave her another kiss on her forehead and then walked off while cracking her knuckles.

A slow smile formed on Scarlett’s face. And when Min-ji began to kick the shit out of Fedric, her heart skipped a beat as her stomach began to fill with butterflies.

Yes...Min-ji was a different kind of witch—her witch.



“AND...TEXT SENT!” Octavius stated with a giggle. He was about to put his phone away when it dinged. Frowning, he checked the new message. His eyes widened as he read.

SCARLETT

Min-ji may have beat up a performer and stuffed him in a random barrel she found lying around.

“What? What’s wrong?” Turney asked.

“Just a little...incident. Nothing to worry about,” he lied with a wide smile.

OCTAVIUS

What did he do?

SCARLETT

Insulted my species.

OCTAVIUS

Deserved. No matter, just put the barrel in a locked room somewhere and I’ll deal with it later. Have Min-ji lock-lock it. If you know what I mean.

SCARLETT

Understood.

OCTAVIUS

Love you, bestie! <3 :D ;3

SCARLETT

Love you, too.

Octavius hummed and dropped his phone back into one of his flap pockets. A problem to take care of later. He blinked when he found Turney still staring at him.

“What?”

“You got this look on your face when you were typing...”

“A look? Whatever do you mean?” he asked innocently.

“It was angry, and then it turned slightly evil.”

“Nonsense. You are seeing things. Come, let’s be off!” He looped his arm through Turney’s and tugged him along.

He was initially headed towards the next person on their now updated list...but he suddenly got a better idea. Octavius pulled Turney into one of the atmospheric rooms he’d created. No actors, just them. He sealed them inside, locking the door as Turney was looking around. He had created a fake graveyard; there were tombstones, grass, fog, moonlight, and even a breeze! All fake. Though, pretty impressive, if you asked him.

“Who are we looking for now?” Turney eyed the room grimacing, but he still let Octavius guide him to the center of the room near a nice, flat patch of grass.

Octavius ignored the zombie’s question, and instead, loudly announced, “This is the perfect place!”

Turney raised a brow at him. “The perfect place for what?”

He began to giggle maniacally, making eyes at his zombie bun.

“Octavius...there’s been a literal murder!”

Octavius pouted. “Well, it’s not like the victim is going anywhere. And the perpetrator is trapped!”

“Trapped on a large ass property with many places to hide,” Turney pointed out. “And what if they aren’t trapped?”

He waved his concern away with his hand. “Not my problem. I’ll just blame the reaper. Now then...” Grinning widely, he grabbed hold of Turney and tossed him down onto the fake grass.

“Octavius!”

“Be a statue and stiffen up, won’t you?” Octavius said with a laugh as he dropped down and began to grope his zombie.

“Octavius!” Turney gasped.

He giggled evilly as he flipped the male’s garment up, exposing his half hard cock. The perfect outfit, in his opinion. He’d chosen so well.

Octavius let out a surprised yelp as he found himself flipped onto his back, Turney on top of him.

“Two can play this game! I’m not the only one prancing around practically naked.”

Octavius laughed. “Play away, my zombie.”

Turney grinned, slipping down his body. Flipping the flaps of his pteruges up and out of the way, along with the linen garment underneath, the zombie freed his hard cock.

Octavius gasped as Turney wrapped his hand around his cock and gave it a few pumps. His balls pulled as he watched the zombie’s lips part and draw closer. He let out a low moan when they closed around his uncut tip, the male’s tongue probing his foreskin and teasing his slit.

He wound his hands into Turney’s hair, moaning loudly when the male sank down, taking his length down his throat. Turney took him so well despite his size.

Knowing the zombie loved when he did it, Octavius began to thrust upward into Turney’s mouth. The zombie let out a choking noise, which he found slightly entertaining, considering Turney didn’t need to breathe anymore. His zombie glanced up, heated gaze meeting Octavius’ as the male bobbed up and down on his prick. Hissing, he increased the speed of his thrusts.

“Fuck, you are good at that, my love.”

Turney hummed, sending a tingle through Octavius' spine, as his throat and mouth vibrated around his throbbing cock.

"Too good," he growled. Octavius pushed Turney back and off his cock, drawing a complaint from the zombie that ended in a cry of shock as he lunged at him with a giggle. They grappled.

"What are you doing, you crazy bat?" Turney laughed breathlessly, right as he managed to get the zombie flipped around and then positioned on his knees, ass facing Octavius.

Licking his lips, he flipped the fabric up and ran his hands over Turney's smooth rounded ass. Hmm, yes, this outfit was a masterpiece.



"FUCK!" Turney moaned loudly, clinging onto the fake gravestone that he was bent over. Octavius was pumping into his hole, the sounds of their bodies colliding together echoed in the room. With each thrust, Turney's cock bobbed and bumped against the surface of the stone, adding a hint of pain with the pleasure.

Speaking of the gravestone... It felt freakishly real and solid under his hands. He wouldn't put it past Octavius to buy actual gravestones for his fake graveyard. Honestly, it sort of felt like he was having sex outside under the moonlight, with everything looking pretty realistic... The fog, the moon...and he swore he felt a slight breeze. His life was so weird.

On a particularly hard thrust, Octavius changed his angle, bumping right against his prostate, pulling a scream from his lips. The dumb gravestone and weird room just fled his mind as his body trembled and pleasure flooded him.

"Octavius!" he whimpered, clawing at the stone. The vampire's pace remained rough, each plunge hitting just the

right spot inside him.

Octavius chuckled. “Yes, Turney? Need something?”

“More!” he cried.

The vampire ran one of his hands up Turney’s back, tracing the claw mark there with the tips of his fingers. At the same time, his pace slowed until he was fucking into Turney with smooth, even thrusts. “More? More what, my dear zombie bun?”

Turney whined in frustration, pushing back into the thrusts, trying to get the vampire to speed up again. “Octavius, please!”

“Ah-ah-ahhh, please, what? If you won’t tell me, how am I supposed to know what you want? Hmm?” Octavius’ hand glided from his back to the front, wrapping around Turney’s dripping cock. As he began to jerk Turney off in time with his slow measured thrusts, what little brain cells he had left just went poof.

He let out a pathetic whimper, his brain struggling to form the words Octavius wanted him to say.

Octavius burst into laughter. “Oh, my poor zombie, what happened to your ability to speak? Only one hole is filled, as far as I can see.”

“Mercy,” he whimpered pathetically, clutching hard to the gravestone. He felt so close to release, he was trembling. He just needed one more push.

“All right, all right,” Octavius purred. Turney cried out, nails gouging into the stone as the vampire picked up his pace, his cock slamming into him again and again. The hand around his cock matching in speed. The band of pleasure that had been tightening inside him snapped, and a scream wrenched from his lips as his orgasm hit.

His balls clenched tight, and his cock spasmed in Octavius’ hand, spraying cum all over the gravestone.

Turney’s body fell into oversensitivity, Octavius continuing to thrust inside him again and again.

Moments later, the vampire's arms wrapped around his waist, and he was pulled back against his chest. Turney found himself crying out once more when Octavius' fangs sank into his neck, causing another orgasm to tear through him.

"Octavius!" Turney whined, his body turning into a trembling mess as Octavius continued to take from his vein while his cock released inside him.

A few seconds later, Octavius slipped out of him, his fangs pulling free. The vampire placed a gentle kiss on his neck.

Turney sagged in the vampire's arms. "Damn..."

"Indeed." Octavius chuckled and kissed his neck once again.

Chapter Twenty-One



Watch Out

Theo sighed in relief when they finally reached his room. He sent an apologetic smile in Alexander's direction. "Sorry that took so long."

He could pretty much tell where someone was standing based on what he heard and smelled. He did it so easily that humans often forgot he was blind until they...did something stupid. Like try to show him something on their phones. It only became an issue when there was a large crowd, as the smells and sounds could overwhelm his senses.

The reaper chuckled. "It's fine. I imagine all the decorations have made the layout confusing."

He frowned. "I'm not sure why that door was locked. It's usually not. I use it to cut through all the time."

"Perhaps Octavius has set something up inside."

He would have thought so as well, yet...it hadn't been locked when he'd used it earlier. Not to mention, Octavius had mostly avoided overly decorating rooms and paths that he used.

"Maybe..."

"No matter, we made it eventually. If you are good here, I need to head off." The reaper's warm hand dropped away from

his back.

“Ah, of course. Thank you, Alexander.”

“You’re welcome, Theo.”

He heard the reaper turn to leave, and he found himself blurting out, “Wait!”

The footsteps paused. “Yes?”

“Can...can I have your number?” he asked hesitantly, his face heating. “I’m not hitting on you!” He gasped. “I just...”

There was silence after his nonsense words, and Theo was just glad he couldn’t see Alexander’s expression. He wasn’t even sure what he was saying or doing. Theo wasn’t interested in anything...he just wanted... He couldn’t even find the words to explain what he wanted.

“You just...need a friend? Or perhaps, just something outside this place, and those associated with it?”

“Yes!”

That’s what he wanted...a connection that was just *his*. Though, he supposed, the reaper was also friends with Turney, and he was pretty sure he had some sort of history with Octavius. Okay, so maybe it wasn’t just an outside connection he wanted... But he could use a friend right now.

His old ones...Goddess knew he needed to reach out...he just hadn’t gathered up the nerve to do it yet. He wasn’t ready. As cruel as it was to them, he wasn’t ready to face them alone, as they had all known both him and Cynthia. Their lives had been so intertwined, their friends the same...

“Hand me your phone.”

Theo beamed up at him as he hurriedly pulled his phone out from a hidden pocket in one of his scales and held it out. “Thank you.”



HENRY TRIED to not glare at the woman they were talking to. He found his eyes narrowing as her hand went to Cormac's shoulder. But he grinned brightly when the wolf moved out of her hold almost immediately afterward—the smile on the werewolf's face was tense.

“I see. So you worked closely with Kristof, especially on his costumes, but didn't get near his props.”

Cindy's red lips pursed into a pout when Cormac moved away, but did respond. “While I worked on Kristof's costumes, I never touched any of his equipment. Kristof was very particular about who touched his things. He was someone who had to have everything in order. And in his mind, since I wasn't someone who maintained or repaired things, I had no reason to go near them. But, enough about that,” she purred. “What are you doing after this? Want to come back to my place?” Her gaze flicked to Henry and she sent him a wink. “You're invited too, handsome.”

Cormac made a choking noise.

What in the hell was wrong with these people?! Every single person they had come across had flirted with either him, Cormac, or both. Was the gravity of someone they knew dying not enough to curb their libidos?!



TURNEY SNUGGLED CLOSE TO OCTAVIUS.

“Admit it, you chose this outfit for me for easy access.”

Octavius chuckled. "I don't have a single clue as to why you would think that."

"Mmhmm, sure you don't," he snorted. "What is my life? Fucking in a fake graveyard, and coming over fake gravestones."

He peered up at the vampire's face. Octavius was smirking and looking smug as he stared at the ceiling. But then the male's eyes suddenly widened. Turney yelped in surprise as a split second later they were rolling across the fake grass.

There was a loud crash, with the sound of glass shattering and scattering nearby. He winced as something sharp sliced across his arm, the one part of him not covered by Octavius' body.

"What the fuck?" Turney rasped, eyes wide. "What happened?"

Pulling from Octavius' hold, he sat up, staring at the spot where they had just been lying. A destroyed chandelier now littered the ground.

Octavius sat up with a grimace.

"Are you okay?" Turney asked.

"I'll heal... What about you?" The vampire lightly grasped his arm with a frown.

"I'm fine. You definitely took most of the hit." There was blood, but he bet if he wiped it away, the skin would be healed. He eyed the red droplet...it was a lot paler than it used to be. "Second chandelier to fall...can't be a coincidence, can it?"

Octavius shook his head. "Unlikely."

"I guess we should take a closer look."

They pushed up, Octavius wincing as he did. He winced himself as he got a look at the vampire's back. Dozens of little cuts. Shards of all different sizes were embedded into Octavius' back, blood dripping down in streaks. "Octavius..."

“My body will push the foreign materials out on its own. Don’t worry.”

Moving closer, they kicked glass, crystals, and diamonds out of the way as they did. Turney crouched down and eyed the lines that were supposed to keep the chandelier secured to the ceiling. It was...cut and damaged, the same way that the other chandelier had been. But why?

His head tilted as a smell that seemed misplaced caught his attention. “Do you smell...human? Not like in the room, but near the chandelier?”

“I do. A citrusy smell mixed with ozone. And you are correct, the smell is from someone human. Possibly someone who likes to use way too much cologne or perfume.”

Turney straightened and backed up away from the mess, looking around the room. Octavius remained hunched over by the chandelier. “The thing was obviously sabotaged the same way as the other one, but why? Why sabotage something in a room few will even go in?”

Octavius straightened from his hunch and came to stand near him. “Because, originally, this was where the second half of the party was set to take place, and thus, the performance. We had already started to set up when Scarlett offered her home. After the switch I, on a whim, decided to make it a graveyard.”

Turney eyed the room. It was certainly big enough to hold the crowd. “So, the person sabotaged this to fall, but when the performance was moved, they didn’t bother to fix it? But the other broke when it started to lower, so why did this one fall on its own?”

“If I were to guess, the weight is probably a contributing factor.”

“Wouldn’t they have taken weight into consideration when they sabotaged it?”

“We never did a full weight analysis and safety check on this one. It didn’t get to that point in the preparation. It’s possible the person wasn’t informed about the location change

right away. So when they were given the specifics of the other chandelier, they assumed it was for this one. While nearly the same size, this chandelier is significantly heavier than Scarlett's. So, if they cut based on those calculations, it's not surprising it ended up falling on its own."

Turney frowned. "Why bother with the chandelier at all? It seems so pointless, since we know he was poisoned."

"Maybe they hoped we wouldn't look into it further, and would just assume he fell to his death."

"How come we didn't smell anything on the other chandelier?"

"It was cleaned before the performance."

"Well, fuck. Then why didn't anyone notice it was cut? Surely, it wasn't just one person working on it. Unless it was and then we can just say ah-ha, we got you."

"It wasn't just one...but the part of Scarlett's chandelier that was sabotaged is normally hidden under a base. The workers wouldn't have seen it. I'm guessing the mechanism the cord went through as the chandelier lowered finished the job of severing the line."

Turney frowned, trying to picture someone cleaning such a thing. "Did they clean it in the air?"

"They did."

"Why?!"

"Efficiency!" he cried, waving his arms grandly. Glass shards fell to the floor as he did. "Oh, good. They came out."



OCTAVIUS SMIRKED at the baffled look on Turney's face. The drop of blood on Turney's arm caught his eyes, and

without hesitation, he lifted the male's arm up and licked at the blood. "Mmm, my nummy zombie bun's blood."

Turney snorted. "More like body paint and sweat."

Octavius blew a raspberry at him.

The zombie rolled his eyes. Pulling his arm free, Turney wiped his spit away. "Anyway, you should probably text the rest about this new information."

"Right, work calls again. How stupid." Octavius sighed. "This was supposed to be my party. A night of only fun! Not work."

"You find work fun."

"Yes, but Halloween fun is different from work fun. And work fun is not as fun as Halloween fun."

"This 'fun' you are talking about wouldn't have anything to do with scaring me, would it?" Turney asked, voice flat.

Octavius' eyes widened at being caught. He quickly tried to appear unassuming. "No, of course not."

"You are such a bad liar. Go, text." The zombie waved him on with his hands on a sigh. "The faster we solve this, the faster you can get back to your party."

"Right!" Octavius hummed, brow pinching in thought as he reached into the flap pocket his phone was in and pulled it out. Flipping it open, he created a group chat, adding Cormac, Henry, Scarlett, Min-ji, and Alexander, before sending the text.

OCTAVIUS

Figure out which on your list are human, and look for someone with a strong citrusy scent mixed with ozone. But, ask questions as normal. Don't give away anything.

CORMAC

Roger!

SCARLETT

Understood.

ALEXANDER

Is there a reason for this?

Octavius glared at the reaper's message. Why was the male always such a busy body? Was it so hard to just *not*?

OCTAVIUS

Found something. Will explain later. :X

Chapter Twenty-Two



Found You

Min-ji faked a smile and continued to ask pointless questions to the human in front of her. “So, you got along with Kristof?”

None of this mattered as this woman didn’t smell like either of the things Octavius had texted them about. Really, she was trying to speed through, so they could extract themselves from the conversation.

Jessica nodded, tears in her eyes. “Yes. I-I can’t believe he’s gone!” she cried.

Min-ji just barely hid her amusement as Scarlett awkwardly reached out and patted the woman’s shoulder. “There, there.”

She had to cover up a laugh with a cough when the human suddenly threw herself at Scarlett and began to sob on her shoulder.

The zombie stared wide eyed at Min-ji, looking so uncomfortable. She mouthed, ‘What do I do?’ before robotically patting the woman’s back.

Min-ji shrugged, lips quivering as she tried to hold back her laughter. She didn’t think Scarlett would appreciate it. Her girlfriend gave her a pointed look, telling her that she hadn’t done a good job at hiding her humor.



CORMAC HAD ALMOST SIGHED in relief at the two humans not flirting with him. He had never been hit on so much in one single night. At least, not outside a club.

He could normally ignore them doing it to him. But these people wanted a two for one deal. Apparently, in their minds, both him and Henry were on the menu.

Based on the initial list they had gotten, and the fact that he knew there had been at least three other lists... not to mention the overwhelming sexual details that some of them had freely spewed out, not a single one of these people needed more partners in bed. Cormac had some friends who were in a polyamorous relationship, but...nothing like this.

This was something else... an orgy. Yep, that described this. And as much as an orgy sounded fun...he'd rather just be with one person. Just one specific person as of late.

He eyed Henry. Goddess, did he look hot in his pirate outfit... His lips had been firm yet soft. And in his arms, the vampire had practically melted. Yep, he knew what he was going to be dreaming about tonight.

He zoned out a bit as he let himself get lost in a fantasy. It's not like he was needed here. Henry could handle it. These two humans were not the one they were looking for anyway. The smell wasn't right, so who cared if he was paying attention or not?

And really, how could Cormac remain focused when the fantasy could so easily be conjured up? Him a mermaid, Henry a pirate. Of course, he'd never let the vampire fight alone. Fin or not, he'd jump out of the ocean and do something. Though, mermaids could transform their lower halves into legs, so...

Yeah, Henry would definitely not die, and that kiss would have not ended in a depressing cloud of bloody water...

“Cormac!” Henry snapped.

He blinked, and then peered at the vampire in question. “Yes?”

“We are done here. If you are finished zoning out, let’s go.”

Cormac blinked again. Looking around, he realized the humans were gone. Oh, that was bad...Octavius bad. He shook his head. “Right! Where to?”

“To the next two, they are only a few rooms over.”

“Okay! Let’s go.” He waved him on, as he still didn’t know his way around this giant ass house.

Henry shook his head on a sigh and started forward.

Ohh, he’d get to watch the vampire’s ass this way! It was a win!



ALEXANDER’S MASK WAS CRACKING, he felt it chip more and more with each new encounter. What was with these people and not respecting personal boundaries? Frayed smile still in place, he pushed the human’s hand off his chest.

“Please, keep your hands to yourself. This is an official investigation. Though, I’m not sure why I should have to remind you when I’m in the middle of asking you about a murder victim.”

The man’s lips pursed into a pout. “I was just trying to lighten the mood!”

He flashed his teeth. “Stop trying,” he said without hesitation and remorse.

This was such a waste of time. This man did not even smell citrusy, let alone like ozone. Why was Octavius trying to keep what he knew secret? Why bother to hide information? It would have been faster if they had just asked one of the performers which one of them had such a scent. What was that vampire planning?



OCTAVIUS WAS USING ALL the willpower he possessed to prevent himself from bouncing in place as Turney asked the culprit a question. They had found him! One, Darien Flake, human, and their murderer! The man was probably nearing fifty, and while his body was in shape, his face was deeply lined, his hair fully gray.

“So, you aren’t sure who would want to hurt Kristof?” Turney asked.

“No! He was well liked,” Darien claimed. By the Gods were his lies obvious.

“I agree, he was well liked by all. Well...mostly. There are a few he doesn’t get along with, but not to the point of them wanting him dead,” the other human, named Kate, stated.

“Well, I think that is all we need from you two!” Octavius announced, cutting Turney off as he went to ask another question. Because, like, what would be the point?

His zombie just shook his head in clear exasperation while the two humans eyed him in confusion. Okay, maybe he could have let Turney go on a little longer...they’d only asked about three...two and a half questions. But he was impatient. And he had things to plan!

“Ah, we will contact you if we have any more questions, thank you!” he said with a fake smile as he dragged Turney away.

In the hall, his zombie remained quiet until they got further from the room. “Why didn’t we out him? Or restrain him? Or something along those lines?”

Octavius sniffed. “The reason is simple, my dear Turney. This is a party. A Halloween party. Therefore, things must be done grandly.”

“What?!” Turney barked.

“Speaking of, I need to set things in motion. Shh, let me focus!” Octavius pulled out his phone.

“Focus on what?!”

He shushed him with a finger and aimed a pout the zombie’s way. “I need to send some texts! You can’t expect me to hold a conversation and text at the same time. It can’t be done.”

Turney snorted. “You mean, you can’t do it.”

“No one can!” he exclaimed loudly. Glaring, he hmphed and flipped his phone open as Turney rolled his eyes at him.

Pulling up his texts, he selected the group chat labeled *The Bat Pack*.

OCTAVIUS

My babies! It is time to gather and carry out my will!

HEKA

Sounds devious. I’m in!

SETI

I don’t know what it is, but I’m protesting. As I’m sure it is likely to cause a spectacle.

HEKA

Let’s ignore Seti, like we always do!

HAORAN

I'm always up for a little mischief. What are we doing?

GAIA

As long as it has nothing to do with fire, I'm in... Please choose now to remember that last village we accidentally burned down in England during the Middle Ages. Let's not repeat that.

RUNE

To be fair, no one died and we did rebuild it even better.

LETTIE

Oh, to have not been born yet. I feel I missed so much fun.

SETI

Burning down a village is not fun!

RUNE

Right, you came only a few years after that, Lettie. It was pretty entertaining. Reminded me of the good old times.

HAORAN

I have to agree, fire is pretty entertaining.

SETI

Don't ignore me!

HENRY

Am I included in this call to action, Master Octavius?

HAORAN

LOL! Can't believe you still call him master.

GAIA

It seems to be a habit he refuses to break.

HEKA

He is as stubborn as Seti when it comes to certain things.

SETI

I am not stubborn!

RUNE

Even you don't believe that...

OCTAVIUS

XD You all are so cute. And no, Henry, I'll give you separate instructions. Everyone else, I need your help in moving the party back to Scarlett's. To the ballroom with the body! In say...about an hour? Let them know there will be a grand reveal. A mystery will be solved in front of their very eyes!

He smiled and switched to the Murderer Search Party chat, while his phone buzzed like crazy as his fledglings responded. Octavius blinked, realizing he never added Turney to the chat. But then again, did it matter? The zombie *was* standing right next to him. He got live updates as to what was going on, so there was no reason for text updates.

OCTAVIUS

Henry, set up a rope around the downed chandelier and body. Everyone else...can just gather in the room.

ALEXANDER

For?

Octavius huffed. Why did the reaper have to be so infuriating?! Always so many questions!

OCTAVIUS

For us to reveal the murderer, of course!

He closed his phone with a huff. “Stupid reaper.”

“And I thought you two were getting along better,” Turney said with a sigh.

“Oh, no worries. We are getting along fine,” he lied. “But hold your thoughts. I have one last person to text.”

Turney rolled his eyes and waved him on.

Octavius pulled up Jagger’s number and quickly sent off a text.

OCTAVIUS

Jagger, I have solved the case. Bring all your people, with some chairs, and be seated in an orderly fashion on the stage and wait for us.

JAGGER

I will gather them.

“Okay, done!” Octavius said with a happy sigh.

“Right... So, now what? What is this grand reveal you have decided on?”

He grinned widely, staring at Turney with interest. “You’ll see. But first, it’s time for a costume change!” he yelled out, posing dramatically with his arms stretched out, doing jazz hands.

Turney stood there for a moment, face blank, not reacting in the least. It was sort of disappointing.

“You can’t be serious,” the zombie said calmly.

Octavius frowned. “I am very serious. Costumes are serious business!”

“There’s been a murder. Why would a costume change even factor in?!” Turney snapped.

“It’s important for the grand reveal!” he cried defensively.

“Important for who?!”

He narrowed his eyes at the zombie and then slowly smiled, stepping closer. His smile was bright and friendly as he snatched the chiton from Turney’s body.

“OCTAVIUS!” Turney shouted, cheeks reddening as his hands came down to cover his cock and balls.

“You can change, or you can walk around like this. I don’t mind. I like to show off what’s mine.”

“This is blackmail.”

“I call it bargaining.”

“You are such a menace.”

“Yes, but I’m your menace.” Octavius grinned and looped his arm through his. “Come on!” Turney tried to awkwardly keep covering his crotch as Octavius dragged the zombie towards their old bedroom.

Chapter Twenty-Three



A Dramatic Conclusion

Back in Scarlett's ballroom, the murder victim still lay where he had fallen earlier. But now, there was a red rope connected by metal polls blocking off the deceased and the downed chandelier. It also looked like the floor had been swept a bit, the destruction completely contained within the ropes.

The rest of the guests from the party were there waiting patiently for the spectacle to start. Octavius' fledglings, Alexander, and the rest of the agency members, minus Theo, were in front of the crowd, right by the edge of the stage.

Turney very much wished he was part of the audience, instead of the show. But he had no such luck. And instead, he stood there at the center of the stage in a Watson costume, beside Octavius, who was in his Sherlock Holmes one, just trying to cover up his bafflement at what had gone down. The vampire had really stolen his...tunic thingy, and made him scrub down and change. How did he even have the costumes ready?! Did the crazy bat just have random costumes lying around?

He eyed the glitter cork board on a stand nearby. There wasn't much on the side currently showing, besides a shit ton of red glitter and a large picture of the body...but he had a feeling there would be plenty of things to see once the board

was flipped. Turney knew he shouldn't be shocked that Octavius would take the time to glitter when they had a literal murderer walking around on the property, but he was.

To the right and left of the board, sitting in folding chairs, were all the performers. There were sixty of them, three rows of ten on each side. No matter if they were paranormal or human, they all looked a variation of upset and nervous. Though, one man looked particularly so, when compared to the rest—as he should.

The only other person *standing* on stage was the owner of the performance company, Jagger. The male looked...tired. Then again, how could one not be when one was with so many people. Not to judge, but how did someone keep up with that many relationships? It wasn't even that Jagger was poly. As like, whatever worked. Whatever made people happy, as long as everyone went in knowing what they were getting into. It was just the sheer number of people that was boggling Turney's mind. Like, Jagger had listed at least fifty names when they'd asked.

Turney couldn't imagine sleeping with more than Octavius. He was pretty sure it would fall off if he tried. Not only because of overuse, but more likely because Octavius would cut it off if he dared. Not that he was interested in anyone else. His earlier attempts at trying to get over his feelings for Octavius had proven that.

Glancing out into the crowd, he sent a weak smile Scarlett's way as she caught his gaze with hers.



OCTAVIUS SMILED out at the crowd. “My wonderful guests!” He spoke loudly, drawing their attention, their focus, their adoring eyes... “As you saw before, there was a death. You witnessed the fall, but not the truth. For the truth was that

it was not an accident...it was a murder!” As he said *murder*, the lights flickered on cue, paired with the rumble of thunder. He would have added glitter, but unfortunately, there hadn’t been enough time to set it up... Much to his sadness.

The crowd gasped. His smile widened at their reaction, instantly feeling quite pleased with himself.

“This story begins as most murders do...with a relationship. Many, many, many...” Octavius cleared his throat, “Many relationships. The individual who died, Kristof Berg, like many of his other coworkers, was in a relationship with the boss and owner of the Beyond Reality Performance and Acting company, Jagger Grandor. As we were investigating, we found some pettiness, some interesting... behaviors, and some downright nasty opinions. But none of those led to this murder. What led here was instead the reality that no matter what rules are in place, or the understandings that are spoken, there is one thing that is hard to control in a relationship, and yet sometimes is easy to hide...” He paused for dramatic effect...and then waited even longer.

He heard Turney sigh behind him. “And what might that something be, Octavius?” Turney asked, voice bright and very fake. But he still fell for the bait, so whatever. Who cared if the excitement was real or not.

“Thank you for asking, my precious zombie.” He sent Turney a winning smile before facing the crowd and strutting dramatically towards the edge of the stage. “That something, everyone, happens to be...jealousy!”

There were ‘ohhs’ and ‘awws’ this time.

“Because, unlike the others, Kristof’s involvement with Jagger instilled jealousy in the heart of one of his other lovers. And that lover happens to be—” He spun, storming forward. When he was feet away, he swung his arm out and pointed his finger right in front of Darien Flake’s face. “—you!”

“ME?!” Darien cried, eyes widening as he leaned back away from Octavius. “T-that’s not true! I didn’t murder anyone!”

The crowd gasped. It was so easy to hear his lies. At least, it was to Octavius. It was probably easy for most of the paranormals in the room to pick up on too. Which is probably why the crowd gasped.

Many of Darien's fellow coworkers scooted their chairs back away, some of their expressions turning fearful, others angry.

“How could you?!” Jagger roared.

Octavius spun and faced the male who was storming forward, and cried out, “Wait! Before he no doubt confesses and rants about why, let me reveal how we discovered his crimes.”

The wind seemed to seep out of Jagger's sails at that, and he nodded as he backed up, expression grim.

Smiling, he walked over and spun the board. Revealing a lot of glitter, extra pictures of the body, pictures of the two chandeliers, up close pictures of the broken lines, and more. The largest picture was of the second chandelier that had fallen.

“Turney and I had taken a breather, to explore our more carnal side.” Octavius giggled. “We fucked like bunnies.”

Turney gasped in horror. “THEY DON'T NEED TO KNOW THAT!”

The crowd laughed—even Jagger was smirking.

“Anyway, in the afterglow, as we were lying—”

“AGAIN! Too much unnecessary information!” Turney snapped.

He tossed a glare over his shoulder in Turney's direction. “Would you stop interrupting! I'm trying to reveal what happened!”

Turney rolled his eyes and waved him on. Gosh, his boyfriend could be so dramatic sometimes!

“As I was saying, before I was RUDELY interrupted. We were lying there in the afterglow, when suddenly, the

chandelier from above began to descend! Thanks to my quick thinking, I rolled us out of the way, right before the chandelier crashed down in the very spot where we had just been!” He raised his voice for effect, lights flickering again as another round of thunder went off.

The group gasped, as they should. Ahh—his friends and family were so cooperative!

Slowly strutting forward, he came to stand by Turney, wrapping his arms around his waist. The zombie eyed him looking unimpressed. Some people were so hard to please—no matter. He’d please Turney to his heart’s content later. Enough to prevent walking for a little while.

“As we brushed off the glass and glanced over our minor injuries, we took a closer look at what had become of my one of a kind custom chandelier. The lines, like the first chandelier, had been cut. We were confused, of course. Why would someone sabotage a chandelier in a room most would not go in? Just one of the many questions we asked ourselves, right, Turney?”

“Yes...” Turney deadpanned.

“That was when I remembered... What did I brilliantly remember, Turney?” Octavius asked with an evil smirk.

Turney glared at him, before rolling his eyes again and grumbling, “You remembered that the room was where the second half of the party was originally going to take place.”

“Yes! I did, didn’t I?” He giggled. “It was at that moment we discovered something. A smell. Citrus and ozone, mixed with the scent of a human. Your scent Darien.” This time, as he turned to accuse, he brought Turney with him.

Darien sat there, gripping the edge of his seat. It only took about a minute of staring for the man to blurt out, “YES! I did it! I killed him! So, what?! He deserved it! He was an arrogant bastard, manipulating Jagger’s time! It wasn’t fair!”

“I don’t get you,” Turney said. “Jagger is sleeping with so many others. Why single out Kristof? Why not anyone else?”

“Because!” Darien spat, standing from his seat, his hands balled at his side. “Jagger... Jagger actually loved him! He didn’t just have a piece of Jagger’s heart. He had his own section, just like Jagger’s wife does. I saw it! He was different from the others! The twit was perfect, beautiful and never aging. So, of course, Jagger went and gave him more love than he deserved! But it was my love. The love should have been mine! I was here first! I’ve been here ten years longer than he has! The largest section should have been mine. It should have been mine!” the human raged. “It wasn’t right! So, I fixed the problem, as I should! As it was my right to do. And I’m not sorry. Kristof deserved what happened to him. For taking too much.”

Octavius stared at him grimly. “How foolish of you to enter into a relationship you had no interest in respecting the dynamics of.”

“What?!” Darien screeched. “I did! It was him who didn’t respect it! He was the one who took too much! IT WAS ALL HIS FAULT!”

He ignored the dumbass’ outrage and glanced back at the sound of someone hopping onto the stage. Octavius eyed Alexander as he approached.

The reaper had a dumb smile on his face like always. “What?”

“Are you done?”

Octavius pouted. The reaper loved trying to mess up his fun. He eyed the human who was just standing there glaring at him, before looking back at the reaper. “I suppose...”

Alexander’s smile brightened. “Then I’ll take over from here.”

He waved him on.

The reaper moved closer to the human. “You’ll be coming with me, human.”

Darien turned his glare Alexander’s way. “For what? You have no rights over me. I’m human. At most you can wipe my

memories. And so what if you do? I'm better off without them!"

Octavius snorted. Boy was this human not only arrogant, he was also very, very wrong.

Alexander let out a dark chuckle. "I'm afraid you are mistaken. If you were a human who had attacked out of fear upon discovering the existence of paranormals, then of course your mind would have been wiped. But that is not the case here. This wasn't done out of fear or self-defense. You, fully knowing all about us, plotted and planned a murder. You murdered Kristof because of your own greed, jealousy, and insecurities. Your humanity will not protect you from the consequences. You will be judged just as any paranormal would be under the same circumstances."

"What?!" the human cried out, his eyes wide. He stood there like a deer in headlights, and then he took off. Alexander, of course, caught him easily.

With a struggling, cursing human in hand, the reaper faced them. "Thank you for the invite, Octavius, Turney, but I believe it is time for me to go." With that, he disappeared into a burst of darkness.

Turney let out a yelp, jerking back. "What the fuck?!"

Oh, right, Turney had never seen the shadow thing. They had never really gotten around to talking about how reapers could disappear into shadows. It wasn't like he could go long distances instantly, but reapers could travel quickly that way, jumping from one shadow to the next. They didn't even have to see the shadow to move through it either, it was more they just needed to be close enough to feel its existence. Looking at Turney's shocked expression, Octavius whispered, "I'll explain later," before turning to face the crowd with a smile on his face.

He went to speak, but right at that moment, Alexander reappeared beside the body, grabbed it, and then once again vanished.

“Well then!” Octavius said with a laugh. “I expected to give you all another show tonight, and I guess I didn’t fail at that. It just wasn’t the show I intended. Now...let’s get this party back up and running! Musicians, play!”

He beamed out at the crowd as they cheered, while the music began to fill the air. For a brief moment, the pumpkin shaped candy was revealed to his eyes...

Maybe one piece wouldn’t hurt? Octavius had been so good, all night long. He’d even solved a murder! Surely he deserved one piece?!

Chapter Twenty-Four



Party Till You Drop!

Turney stared at the spot Alexander had disappeared from, just amazed by all that he still didn't know. Shaking his head, he moved closer to Octavius, and started paying more attention to the conversation he was having with Jagger.

Octavius reached out and gripped Jagger's shoulder. "I know this has been very emotional and upsetting to you all. What you do next is your choice. Your team is free to join the party, continue working, or leave. What they do is up to them, and won't affect payment."

Jagger was frowning, he looked lost and in pain... Perhaps, Darian was right about how Jagger had felt about Kristof.

The guy took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and loudly announced, "The show must go on!"

His people stood from their seats and cried out in agreement, and then all were off, some taking the stairs off the stage while others just jumped down. Jagger gave them both a sad smile before laying his hand on Octavius'. "Thank you for your understanding, and for solving Kristof's murder, Mr. Evander. I apologize for this whole mess."

Octavius slowly pulled his hand free, the smile on his face seeming to be genuine, and finally, full of empathy. "No

worries, Jagger. I'm sorry for your loss."

Jagger cleared his throat, bowed slightly to them, and then walked off.

"So, we really are just going to keep partying like nothing happened?" Turney asked.

Octavius looked at him with confusion. "Of course! Why wouldn't we?"

He snorted. "Right, sorry. How wrong of me to assume the mood could ever be dampened by a murder."

"As long as you know you are wrong," Octavius hummed.

Turney stared at the vampire and tried to decide if he had just completely missed the sarcasm in his tone...or if he had decided to ignore it. The problem...was that he knew that when it came to Octavius, one could never be sure.

"Henry!" Octavius called out as he skipped to the edge of the stage. Turney shook his head and followed.

Henry pulled himself up onto the stage. "You called, Master Octavius?"

"Yes, hehe." Octavius giggled. "Would you call the cleaning team and have them wash away the blood, then sweep and remove the broken chandelier?"

"It'll be done, sire."

"Thank you!"

"Come, Turney! Let's party!"

"Can't I just browse the food table and watch?"

Octavius pouted at him. "No!"

Turney sighed as he found himself pulled off the stage and into the dancing crowd, hoping he was not about to end up in some scary ass room that the nut had created in Scarlett's house.



OCTAVIUS' gaze slipped to Turney, who was currently sipping from a glass, while in deep conversation with Rune. A slow smile formed on his face—this was...the perfect time. The perfect time to get his just rewards!

He slowly backed up. Making sure the zombie was still distracted, he shrank down into his Peter's Dwarf epauletted fruit bat form, and took off through the crowd. Running between their feet, his smile widened with excitement as he caught sight of the orange pumpkin candy bowl.

Quickly looking to make sure no one had noticed him, he approached his prize. Octavius would get his candy. He'd just have a piece! Tonight, he would not be denied! He just had to remember to go slow...let it melt. It would work! It would! As long as he was patient, all that he wanted would be his.

Climbing the thick gothic stand, he propelled himself upward, jumping into the bowl. Candy... Sweet, sweet candy. He picked some up and tossed it in the air with a giggle. Oh, if only it was big enough to swim in... Next year he'd fill a tub full!

Eyes shining, he stared at the glorious bars, the wrapped lollies, all of the delicious jewels just waiting to be eaten. What to choose?! He eyed the orange chocolate lollipop shaped like a pumpkin, with a black bow tied around it to hold the clear wrapping on. It was so cute... It was perfect!

Licking his lips, he reached towards it.

“Octavius!” Turney's voice had him flinching.

He glanced behind him and saw the zombie storming towards him, face grim.

“Just a piece!” Octavius cried!

“No!”

“But, it’s mine!” he screamed as he grabbed the lollipop. Leaping out of the bowl, he ran for his life.

“Octavius!”



TURNEY TRIED to not choke on whatever Rune was pouring down his throat. All he knew was that it was fruity, and it kind of burned.

Octavius was in bat form, bouncing up and down on the bar, giggling as he chanted, “Drink, drink, drink.” And he wasn’t the only one, they had amassed a crowd with their antics. Including all of Octavius’ fledging—Seti...being the loudest. It was the ones who appeared straightlaced that snuck up on you. Though, Henry seemed to be content to just watch as he drank from a bottle himself.

His eyes widened as Heka appeared with a bottle of something, pushing Rune out of the way, right as Turney finished whatever he’d been drinking. He didn’t have much time to think as the bottle’s rim was pressed to his lips and tipped.

Turney had a feeling he was about to find out if he could still get drunk. Well, he supposed getting drunk was better than having to chase Octavius around the party, trying to get candy out of his claws.



MIN-JI DID her best to help Scarlett push through the crowd around the bar.

“Octavius! You and your crazy ass children better stop that right now!” Scarlett snapped.

They all turned to look at her, wide eyed... Well, Turney’s gaze was looking a little hazy and out of it.

Octavius, in his bat form, glanced at his fledglings, before looking back at Scarlett and yelling, “RUN! THE FUN POLICE IS HERE TO SHUT US DOWN!”

Min-ji tried to control her laughter as the crew started to scatter. Octavius followed behind a big blond vampire, who had picked Turney up and ran off with him.

Scarlett stared in shock for a moment, before grinding out, “When I get my hands on them...”

Min-ji’s eyes at this point were tearing up in her efforts not to laugh. Laughing was dangerous... Smiling was dangerous. Scarlett was protective of her neophyte, increasingly so as the days went by and their bond strengthened.

“Help me track them down.”

Min-ji cleared her throat. “Which one?”

Her tone must have sounded off, as Scarlett turned to her, eyes narrowed.



“CORMAC, GET OFF THE TABLE,” Henry said sternly at the werewolf, who was dancing along with the music, hands thrown up in the air, head back, and eyes closed. The small table he was dancing on happened to be an antique. He wasn’t sure how much longer it was going to hold up under the wolf’s weight.

Cormac slowly opened his shockingly bright amber eyes, and glanced down at him with a dazed smile on his face.

Henry tried to stop himself from blushing and staring too long. The male was...a sight to see at the moment. Smooth brown skin, muscular chest, thick arms on full display in only a pair of tiny purple boxer briefs, along with all his mermaid accessories. Today he wasn't wearing his glasses. Henry briefly had the thought of lecturing the young wolf about wearing contacts in water. At least...as far as he knew, it had been fresh water without any chemicals, like chlorine.

“Get down,” he repeated.

Cormac's smile widened. “Why don't you come up here?” His words slurred a bit.

Henry narrowed his eyes at the wolf. “Have my crazy family been feeding you booze as well, pup?”

The werewolf burst into a fit of giggles, which must have been the influence of the alcohol, as he had never heard the sound come from him before. “No, I did that myself. All on my ownnnn!”

Henry sighed. “You have two minutes to get down, before I make you.”

“Ohhhhhhhh, I'm in troubleee!”

He closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath in and out, before opening them again. Calm, he'd remain calm. “Just get down.”

“NO! This is my spot, I found it. Get your own.”

Shaking his head, Henry stared for one second longer, before he yanked the werewolf off the table and tossed him over his shoulder like a sack.

Cormac let out a startled laugh. “Are you taking me hostage, Henry?! What a great party!”

Henry rolled his eyes and began to push through the crowd with the wolf.

Chapter Twenty-Five



The Morning After

Turney let out a groan of pain, his head throbbing to the beat of his heart. Cracking his eyes open, he winced as the light seemed to pierce his brain. He stretched. Straight away his body protested, joints popping. The surface beneath him was hard and uncomfortable.

Blinking, Turney's eyes widened as he recognized the ballroom ceiling. How the hell did he end up sleeping on the floor? There was a soft snuffle. He glanced down and almost laughed at the sight of Octavius. The vampire was cuddled up against his chest, snoring and looking an absolute mess. His detective monocle was on his forehead, his vest unbuttoned, hat gone, and his sandy blond curls were sticking up everywhere. The rest of him was not much better. He was missing a shoe, and not only was a button missing on his pants, but it looked like his left pants leg had been torn off at the knee.

Octavius definitely looked exactly how Turney felt.

Sitting up, his head spun as the horrible throbbing worsened... Confirmed—zombies were not only able to get drunk, but they also could get hangovers. Who would have thought?

Grimacing, he peered around, eyes widening slightly at the number of passed out people snoring loudly around him. They

had literally partied until they dropped. The floor was packed with people, but a few were passed out on the food tables—with some partly hanging off. At least it didn't appear any of the food had been pushed out of the way, onto the floor, to make room. The candy bowl had been knocked over though.

His eyes widened as something on the ceiling caught his eye. There was a guy dressed as a giant ass spider, sleeping in the corner of the ceiling. The longer Turney stared, the more he really didn't want to know. Though, based on the bottle the guy was hugging to himself, he probably wouldn't know how he got there even if Turney had asked.

To be honest, Turney wasn't sure how he had ended up where he currently was either, so he didn't really have any right to judge at the moment. He couldn't remember much past a certain point. Or really, past the fourth...or was it the fifth, bottle of whatever those crazy ass bats had dumped down his throat.

Where were the others? He could tell Scarlett was in the house, but she was not in this room. Then again, he couldn't imagine her and Min-ji passing out and sleeping on the floor with so many other people. Looking around, he almost laughed as he spotted Cormac and Henry, but his head was throbbing too much to do that.

Turney was not surprised to find Cormac passed out on a couch with his head back. What was surprising to see was Henry stretched out on the rest of the sofa, with his head in Cormac's lap, wearing the man's mermaid wig. That vampire better hope he woke up before Octavius did, because he'd bet his boyfriend would start plotting again if he saw them together.

The doorbell chimed loudly. Turney moaned as the sounds seemed to vibrate inside his skull. Truth be told, the chime could have been soft... His head hurt too much to tell.

Grunting, he pulled away from a frowning Octavius and stood up. Something felt wrong... He glanced down at his body. "Where the fuck did my pants go?"

Still swaying a bit, Turney stumbled forward. Pants or no pants, everything was covered—yay for boxers. Turney navigated through the maze of people laying on the floor, as some of them began to stir while the doorbell continued to chime.

Making his way out of the room, he quickly headed to the front door.

When he pulled one of the doors open, he just barely stopped himself from flinching away from the bright sunlight. Eyes squinting, he stared at the uniformed man who was standing there holding a tablet, a small package, and a letter.

The man smiled at him. The smile turned humor-filled as the guy's gaze did a sweep of Turney's body.

He was about to smile back but it froze, no doubt awkwardly, as his addled brain realized that the person was human, and he was now alone with him.

The guy frowned in response.

Forcing a less awkward smile onto his face, Turney quickly asked, "Can I help you?"

"There is a letter and a package for the associates at The Undead Detective Agency. I need a signature from either a Mr. Evander, a Ms. Beaufort, a Mr. Pimms, a Ms. Kim, or a Mr. Laurent."

"I'm Pimms." He held out his hand for the tablet.

The carrier handed it over, Turney signed and then exchanged it for the package and letter. That done, he nodded goodbye and quickly closed the door with a relieved sigh.

Oh, that could have been bad. Though...his head and stomach were rolling too much for him to be hungry. The thought of food actually made him feel a bit queasy.

Turning around, Turney walked through the house and back toward the ballroom, but ran into Octavius before reaching it. He found the vampire standing there looking sleepy, and not at all put together. His other shoe was now missing.

Turney smiled. “We got mail,” he said as he handed over the letter, keeping hold of the package. As Turney figured, why not? Surely the letter was meant to be opened first?

Octavius’ head cocked. With a frown, the vampire broke the seal on the letter and pulled out a folded piece of paper. Turney watched curiously as Octavius’ eyes slowly widened, and he began to vibrate where he stood.

“EMERGENCY MEETING!” Octavius suddenly cried out.

Turney flinched, his head protesting loudly at the noise. “Now?” he asked.

“Of course!”

“With all the people still passed out in the ballroom?”

Octavius blinked. “Oh, right... EMERGENCY MEETING IN ONE HOUR!”

He groaned as the crazy bat once again yelled loudly. “Can you please be softer?”

“Oh, is my poor zombie bun dealing with a hangover?” the male asked with wide innocent eyes, as if he hadn’t been the one to egg on his fledglings and contribute to it.

“Yes...” he said slowly.

“No worries,” Octavius whispered. “I’ll be softer. Now, let’s get Henry up so he can get all these people the hell out of my house.”

“It’s Scarlett’s house.”

The vampire began to pout. “Yes, but I am living here right now, so that makes it my house too.”

Turney snorted and then groaned, as the sound caused everything to hurt. “Oh, my head.”

“Oh, my poor zombie... Come here.” Octavius opened his arms, but there was an odd look in his eyes.

He squinted at him. “No...”

The vampire repeated, “Come here.”

Nope, he wasn't trusting this.

"No."

"Come here and let me love you!" Octavius huffed.

"No!" Turney hissed and ran.

The vampire squawked in outrage. "GET BACK HERE AND LET ME LOVE YOU!"



OCTAVIUS SMILED, humming happily as he settled in his seat at the head of Scarlett's dining room table. Sitting in front of him was his laptop and the small box the courier had brought. The letter he kept in hand. Octavius eyed the decorations, so pleased with how they turned out. It currently looked like the perfect table for a group of cannibals.

"When the hell did you decorate this room?" Scarlett asked, eyes narrowed.

Octavius met her gaze with an innocent smile. "When you weren't looking."

She sighed. His friend looked tired. As did everyone else. Scarlett, Min-ji, and Theo, who was with Sprinkle, sat to Octavius' left. While Turney, Cormac, and Henry were to his right. Henry had decided to join in on the fun. Hmm, perhaps he was getting bored staying at home so much? Well, getting out and about would do Henry good.

Octavius eyed Turney, the zombie was squinting... He didn't understand why his bunny was being so stubborn! Octavius was sure his plan would work! Vampire saliva did healing things. Surely, him licking Turney's forehead would help!

His gaze flicked to the other, obviously hungover, member of their team. Cormac sat there next to Turney looking like he

was about to slump over. The wolf was even swaying a bit. Henry seemed slightly concerned for him. Well, concerned as in watching Cormac with a brow raised but no other expression. Octavius considered such a look from Henry to be him showing concern.

Humming, he shook his head and cleared his throat loudly, drawing everyone's eyes to him.

"We have a new case, and boy is it going to be fun!" Octavius slammed the letter he had in his hand on the table.

Turney and Cormac flinched, but he ignored them. Served Turney right! The zombie should have let him lick him!

"Makes sense why the letter was addressed to the whole agency," Turney mumbled softly. "But aren't we on vacation?"

"Well, it's November now, so technically, our vacation has ended! Anyway, we received an invitation to come explore, and to help rid a hotel of some problems it's facing. But not just any hotel...the Soarta Mare Hotel!" he boomed dramatically as he waved his hands.

Instead of reacting with excitement as they should, everyone just stared blankly... Well, Cormac and Turney were staring with narrowed eyes, but otherwise blank expressions—okay, they may have been pained expressions...

"Are we...supposed to know what that means?" Min-ji slowly asked.

Scarlett sighed deeply. "He thinks we should, but we don't. So, my guess is, he is about to pout because we didn't respond."

Octavius gasped. "I was not!" He totally had been about to, but now he wouldn't because he refused to be predictable! "Hmph! Well, since you don't know, I'll explain. The Soarta Mare is a hotel built by the infamous Romanian mass murderer Alexandru Dobrin. It is believed to have been completed by the late 1860s, and is located on the edge of the Hoia Forest in Romania. In one record it states that Alexandru built the monstrous estate without help. But honestly, most historians just assume he killed off the construction crew. The

hotel itself is one of hidden rooms, torture chambers, cages, and more!”

“That sounds like...not my idea of fun,” Theo said hesitantly.

Turney snorted. “You’ll find Octavius’ idea of fun can be rather twisted.”

“I feel like you are all bullying me right now.” Octavius sniffled, lips pressing into a pout.

Was it so wrong to be excited about mayhem?! And like, going to a cool, spooky hotel right after Halloween... What’s not fun about that?!

Cormac chuckled before wincing and grabbing his head with a groan.

Turney leaned over and kissed Octavius on the cheek. “We’re sorry, Octavius. Please, tell us all about the hotel and this new case.”

He sniffed. “So, as I was saying, it’s a hotel of murder! Before his execution in 1885, it was believed that Alexandru had successfully lured hundreds to their deaths there. They uncovered many bodies, but at one point, Alexandru started burning the remains, so the total count is unknown. I suppose burning was easier than having to dig so much. Anyway, the sordid history of the property doesn’t stop there, as for many decades after, people would continue to disappear, or be found dead in the hotel or on its grounds. These odd occurrences continued well into the late 1960s. But in 1967, the deaths and the disappearances suddenly stopped. They stopped on the very day the hotel was abandoned. And that brings us to now. There is a new owner, and well, what does one do with a hotel with such a tainted history, one may ask? They turn it into a haunted spooky year-round attraction, of course! Which is what the current owner wants to do. But he has a problem. Ghosts!” He yelled out the last part. “Hundreds of very angry, unpleasant ghosts!” Octavius pulled the brochure out of the box and spread it open on the table. “Look! Look at the pictures. The map, the old décor, the secret chambers, just look at it all!”

Chapter Twenty-Six



Turney watched as Octavius slowly ramped himself up again, excitement shining in his eyes as he went over all the details in the attraction brochure he'd slapped on the table. He eyed the hotel in the pictures. The structure looked looming in the black and white photos. The architecture was gothic, making it look like a giant cathedral with its pointed arches, flying buttresses, and perched gargoyles. There looked to be many, many floors, and a section of the building extended well up past the rest of the arches.

“Cool...ghosts,” Cormac said with a yawn, looking bored.

There was a soft chuckle from Henry at that.

Octavius looked to be moments away from pouting again at how unenthusiastic they all were about the hotel. “Octavius, I feel I should mention, the last time we went into a place with what we thought were ghosts. I almost ended up dead, and there was a crazy witch who sacrificed some humans... Remember that? So, not that I want to rain on your happiness, but how real is this person inviting us, and can they be trusted?”

Octavius grimaced. “Yeah, that was an unfortunate incident, wasn't it? But it's different this time because I know them, as do Scarlett and Henry.”

Turney blinked. “You know them?”

Henry cleared his throat. “Correct me if I’m wrong, Master Octavius. Would it happen to be Godric? It sounds like one of his ventures.”

“You are correct! It is my dear friend, Godric Dae! I’m so happy you’ll get a chance to meet him, Turney.” The vampire beamed. “You see, he has a thing for buying old creepy properties with horrible histories and setting them up as year-round or seasonal horror house getaways. Which is fun, right?!”

Turney grunted. “Yeah...fun. If he is a friend, why wasn’t he at the party?”

“He had work, or something,” Octavius said with a sigh. “Stupid, I know... Who would work during Halloween?!”

The way Octavius said the last part sounded like he thought doing such a thing was blasphemy. “Octavius...all the workers here were working during Halloween...”

“Yes, but they were doing fun Halloween stuff! I just know Godric was probably doing something stupid like paperwork!”

Turney stared, but Octavius stared back, eyes wide and waiting for some sort of a response. He cleared his throat. “Ah, yes. How awful...”

“Right!” the vampire huffed.

“I had forgotten Godric had started to do that,” Scarlett drawled. “Then again, I have no interest in such things, so after a while, he stopped telling me about each new purchase. Any time I speak to him, we tend to talk about the dozen or so other things he is currently obsessing about.”

“This man is a friend of yours, Scarlett?” Min-ji asked as she eyed the other woman.

“More than just a friend,” Octavius said with a laugh. “He is the zombie who helped train her.”

Scarlett nodded. “He did. For all intents and purposes, he is my sire, in all but blood. As eccentric as he is, I will always be grateful for him taking on a role he didn’t have to.” She

smiled at Turney. “With everything going on, I have yet to tell him about you, Turney. He will be excited to find that I have finally become a sire myself. He has no children and no other neophytes, so prepare to be no doubt stared at with too much interest.”

“He’s...an Octavius type person, isn’t he?” Turney asked with a laugh.

Scarlett chuckled. “Yes.”

“‘Me’ type? In what way?” Octavius asked with a frown.

“I’m glad you had someone like that by your side after everything,” Min-ji said with a bright smile, ignoring Octavius.

Turney frowned. After everything? What was that supposed to mean?

Scarlett reached out and took one of Min-ji’s hands with a smile.

“Hey, I asked a question. In what way is Godric like me?! I’m one of a kind, I’ll have you know!”

“Yes, yes, you are your own unique style of crazy,” Scarlett deadpanned, robotically patting the vampire on the shoulder.

Octavius narrowed his eyes at her, but Turney could easily spot when the vampire decided to just accept it as a compliment. Hard to miss his frown turning into a beaming childlike smile.

“ANYWAY, back to the case! But I won’t keep going on. Why bother when there is a video!” Octavius opened his laptop, the screen lighting up instantly. Turney’s brow rose when the vampire started scooting his chair towards him, eyes beaming cutely. Chuckling softly, Turney moved over as far as he could without ramming into Cormac. Now sitting beside him, Octavius pressed the spacebar, starting the video.



OCTAVIUS SMILED as Godric appeared on the screen. The male was sitting in a chair, and he looked to be in some sort of hotel room. The zombie looked about the same as the last time he saw him. Long platinum blond hair that reached past his shoulders, pale angular features, sharp jaw and nose, and plush lips. His eyes were a startlingly light blue color.

“Hello, my old friends. As the letter said, I recently purchased the Dobrin estate. The purchase included the Soarta Mare Hotel and surrounding land. I’m not going to lie, it was quite a deal. But as most too good to be true deals go, there was a catch. I got the hotel and land for a steal...along with hundreds of murderous ghosts. You would think, how could that many be trapped in one place? Well, the truth was, the human who was blamed for the murders, the one who was hanged for them, he was a scapegoat.”

Octavius gasped. “Alexandru Dobrin wasn’t the murderer?”

Godric chuckled. “I’m sure you just gasped, Octavius, and possibly asked a question.”

Turney snickered. “He knows you well.”

How did Godric know that?! Was he predictable?! No... no! He couldn’t be!

“To answer your question. No, Alexandru Dobrin wasn’t a serial killer. Now, I will say, the human wasn’t innocent. He knew what was going on, helped fund it, and even covered it up. But, the real killer was a zombie by the name of Radu Bucur. He got away with it for almost a hundred years before being discovered by the reapers.”

“Godric always was one to over explain with many pointless details,” Scarlett said with a bored sigh. Min-ji

chuckled.

“Now, I’m sure Scarlett is wondering, or complaining about me saying so much. But if you’d give me just a moment, I can explain why I am telling you all this.”

Octavius burst into a fit of giggles. “It seems I am not the only one who is predictable.”

Scarlett rolled her eyes and crossed her arms with a huff.

“Bucur is quite dead now. Taken out by reapers in 1967. But I don’t think they bothered to explore the hotel at the time. Or if they did, they weren’t thorough. Not that reapers generally take care of ghosts. Usually, they are seen as an acceptable paranormal occurrence in front of humans, due to the fact that it’s rare for a ghost to reach wraith level. This hotel, having sat empty for a few decades, rumors of course spread. Mentions of screams and other such sounds spread. Spread, no doubt, by the teenagers who had, over the years, stupidly tried to break in. Well, I quickly discovered, on entering the hotel, that not only were there ghosts, but that every single one of them were wraiths.” The zombie held up his hand. “Before any of you start asking questions, yes, I am sure. The house is full of powerful and very homicidal wraiths. While one or two harmless ghosts for a horror attraction is fine, this is at a dangerous level. I wouldn’t invite a paranormal, let alone a human, to stay for a night of fun here. On top of that...I am still uncovering hidden spaces. Some of the things, the remains, I have found...” Godric grimaced. “As I’m sure you all know, it is illegal for zombies to change anything other than humans. But, I believe, Bucur was experimenting before his death. Nothing has been found still moving, but I’m worried I may find something eventually. So, I am asking for your help, my friends. Come help me clear out these angry ghosts, and make sure nothing dangerous is hiding in these walls. My private jet is available for your use. And I have already set up transportation services for you. I hope to see you all soon. Goodbye, my friends.”

The video ended there. Octavius frowned at the implications of Godric’s words. It was forbidden to infect

animals with the zombie virus... The consequences could be horrifying and dangerous.

“Okay...wait,” Turney said with a frown. “Wraiths...are different than wraths, right?”

“Yes, while the names are similar, they are very different. Wraiths is just a fancy name for very angry ghosts. It doesn't matter if it's the remains of a human or paranormal. Though, most don't refer to ghosts as wraiths unless they are powerful, even though it is a generic term. While wraths are the captured souls of phantoms that have been corrupted and twisted by the magic user who murder them,” Scarlett explained.

“The experimenting shit sounds sketchy,” Cormac said with a yawn.

“It's concerning, I'll give you that,” Octavius mused. “But given the time that has passed since the original homicidal owner died, I doubt anything we find will still be together. Animals infected with the zombie virus, really anything infected with it, without maintenance and brains, will eventually fall apart. Once they become a ghoul, the decaying process speeds up as the virus, from what I understand, attacks the body, looking for the nutrients it needs to survive. As fierce as ghouls are, that strength doesn't last forever. It's been over fifty years since Bucur's death. Anything he created by now must be in pieces, or just dried out and mummified.”

Turney grimaced. “When you say that...will these be moving pieces or...?”

Min-ji chuckled. “While moving zombie pieces would have certainly been a possibility perhaps thirty or forty years ago, too much time has passed. The virus wouldn't be able to survive for that long without food. And once the virus dies, so does the creature it was animating. The virus is what keeps you and Scarlett undead. If it dies, so do you, or in this case, the experiments.”

His zombie bun sighed. “Less than ecstatic to know that I could move my pieces even when separated, but it's good to know we aren't going to find writhing, moving body parts...”

As I really don't need to add that to my list of recurring nightmares.”

Cormac snorted, drawing a glare from Turney. The werewolf just smirked. The two were looking more awake and less like death. Good to know their hangovers were wearing off.

“Master Octavius, when are we set to leave?” Henry inquired.

Cormac's gaze snapped to Henry. “You're going?”

“I intended to.”

“Tomorrow,” Octavius said with excitement. “Everything is set up for us to leave tomorrow!”

“Um...not to be a downer or anything,” Theo broke in. “But how much is the agency being paid for this?”

Octavius blinked, eyeing Theo. “Well...it would be considered us helping a friend. I will, of course, pay you all for your time.”

That had the older werewolf frowning, shoulders stiffening. “So, he is not intending to pay for our services?”

He frowned. “Well...no?”

Theo's frown deepened. “In my professional opinion, friends should know better than to expect so many hours of free labor from their friends. This will, at the very least, be a week to two weeks worth of work.”

A bright smile appeared on Turney's face as the rest chuckled. Octavius glared at them before crying out, “But he's my friend! And it's a haunted hotel! Godric no doubt invited me because he knew I would enjoy myself.”

The werewolf sighed and rubbed at his forehead. “Him knowing you enjoy doing something, has nothing to do with him not paying for it. Just because you enjoy your work does not mean you should do it for free.”

“What...but... Well, what do you want me to do about it now?!” Octavius huffed, baffled at this logic. What was so

wrong with helping a friend out?!

His eyes widened when Theo rolled his eyes at him. “Fine, but this is the last time. As your company financial advisor and accountant, I refuse to allow you to ever again accept a job without the company being properly compensated for it. We will be having a long discussion about proper compensation, finances, and company spending when we come back.”

Octavius squirmed in his seat as Theo stared at him. Well, faced in his direction. He knew Theo couldn’t see him at the moment, but dammit, the wolf’s senses were good enough that the aim of his serious glare was accurate.

Wait...he was the boss. He could just fire Theo and then no more rules! Dammit, no...he couldn’t fire Theo, he just hired him. And he knew the wolf needed this change right now.

Oh, by the Gods...he had been TRAPPED! HE’D BEEN TRAPPED! He glared at Turney and then at Scarlett. These two had lured him into a trap that he couldn’t get out of.

Turney attempted to look innocent while Scarlett smirked smugly at him.

Sighing, he finally said, “Fine...we will discuss all of that when we get back.”

Discuss, as in, Octavius would do whatever he could to get out of actually talking about it.

Theo smiled what Octavius thought was an evil smile, and replied, “That we will.”

“Do we all have to go?” Cormac asked slowly.

“Yes!” Octavius snapped, glaring at the wolf. “You better be ready to go with everyone else tomorrow, as I have no qualms about throwing you on a plane with nothing in hand. Anyway, everyone, go pack! Do you think Lilah will take Sprinkle?” He didn’t give Scarlett time to answer. “I’m sure she will! Prepare thyselfes, we leave tomorrow at 9am!” He waved them on dramatically with his hands.

“Nine?” Cormac cried with a groan.

Chapter Twenty-Seven



Off On An Adventure

Octavius ran up the steps and into the private jet, leaving the others to follow behind. “OHHH!” he gasped.

Everything looked so shiny and new! Could have used a bit of color, as it was all different shades of beige. The jet was like a plane inside, if a plane had been mixed with a lounge. There were four bucket seats per shiny wooden table on the left side of the jet, and the right was just multiple rows of three bucket seats. At the very back, there was a door marked *restroom*.

Usually, Octavius found such things as jets distasteful, with the whole pollution thing and all. Still he couldn’t help but enjoy looking at shiny new things. He was a hypocrite—so what?! It wasn’t like everyone else wasn’t one too.

“Ohh, it’s so big and nice! Look! Look! Turney, the seats turn into beds!” he yelled, as he plopped down into a seat in the last row on the right side, and started to recline all the way back.

“I guess that will be useful on a long flight like this one,” Turney said. The zombie walked to the row Octavius was in and stored his luggage in a bin above, before scooting past Octavius to take the seat next to him.

He pressed the opposite button and stared cutely at Turney as his seat straightened up again. “I wonder how long it will take for us to set off?”

“As it’s just us, I imagine it won’t take too long,” Min-ji stated as she boarded, the rest of their crew coming in behind her. “Having used a private jet before, at the expense of the reapers, I found flights generally take off pretty close to time.”

Scarlett and Min-ji settled on the left side, at a table facing away from Octavius, near the front of the jet.

The two brothers ended up settling down in a row in the middle of the aircraft, with Henry taking the seat on the inside. It was curious that the vampire had decided to sit with the werewolves. Hmm—curious enough to investigate...

A flight attendant came out from the front of the jet, a bright smile on his face. “Welcome aboard, dear friends of Mr. Dae. I’m Tim and I’ll be your flight attendant today. Please go ahead and store your larger carry-on luggage in the bins up above.” He waved towards the upper compartments. “While your smaller items can be stored in the small bins in front of your seats. Once you are set, please buckle up so we can set off. I’m happy to announce that there is no risk of exposure as this flight is manned entirely by paranormals. So, feel free to get as comfortable as you can.”

Octavius’ mind drifted off as the male went through all the safety protocols. He really didn’t need another demonstration on how to use a seat belt, amongst other things.

Turney nudged him.

He glanced over. “Yes?”

“You didn’t hear a single word he said, did you?” the zombie accused.

“Well...I’ve heard it before.”

“That is not the point.”

Octavius blinked, head tilting in confusion. “Then what is the point? It has been the same speech for years.”

“You...” Turney shook his head and sighed. “Never mind, carry on.”

Okay...then.

The PA system beeped and a woman’s voice came over the line. “This is your captain speaking. Skies are looking clear and we are headed for a nice, smooth flight. Please make sure that your seatbelts are on as we will be lifting off momentarily. We’ll let you know when it’s safe for you to get up and move around. Until then, please stay seated with your seatbelt fastened.”

It wasn’t long after the notice that the jet began to move, and minutes later, they were in the sky. Octavius sat there trying not to get antsy as he waited for them to tell him he was free to move. Unfortunately, it was a good while until they announced that the seatbelts could be unfastened.

He practically threw the seatbelt off when they finally freed him.

“Freedom!” Octavius cried. Jumping up, he shifted into his bat form and ran past a few rows into Cormac, Theo, and Henry’s.

“Octavius!” Turney yelled.

He gasped in horror to find Henry asleep with a mask over his eyes. “How are you asleep so fast?!”

Henry didn’t move an inch at the words, his breathing remaining even. Damn fledgling... Henry had gotten so used to Octavius waking him up at crazy times that he’d slowly become harder and harder to wake up.

Theo blinked, his face twisting in confusion. He could only guess the wolf was trying to sense out the situation. “He has transformed into something...right?”

“Yep,” Cormac said, sounding unimpressed. “A bat, to be specific.”

He heard stomps coming his way. Oh, his zombie was coming! He had to make a break for it. Octavius ran between

the bins and crawled under the seats, continuing to crawl until he made it to Min-ji and Scarlett.

Min-ji eyed him with a brow raised. Scarlett looked uninterested.

“Octavius, get back here and sit down!” Turney snapped as he reached their row.

“NEVER!” he cried, dodging the zombie’s grasping hands. Octavius evaded capture again and again. It helped that he was small enough to squeeze through things, and that Turney was not.

Octavius giggled as he continued to run back and forth down the length of the aircraft, his zombie bun doing his best to try and catch him.

“Octavius, just change back. This isn’t safe,” Turney huffed.

“It’s fineee!” He laughed evilly.

“Is this...normal?” he heard Theo ask hesitantly.

Cormac snorted. “This is beyond normal. It’s pretty much an average day.”



TURNEY HUFFED as he plopped back in his seat next to Octavius, who he’d just **FINALLY** gotten to change back and sit down. “You are a menace, you know that, right?”

“I like to think of it as spunky.”

“Chaos creator.”

Octavius pouted. “But I’m adorable!”

“Yes, you are an adorable, chaotic menace.”

The vampire crossed his arms. “Well, someone has to be! It might as well be me.”

Turney closed his eyes and took a deep breath in and out. Octavius grabbed his thigh. He opened his eyes and frowned at the look being aimed his way.

The vampire smirked, fluttering his lashes.

“What...?”

Octavius fluttered his lashes again, eyes going wider.

“No.”

More fluttering.

“The answer is no, Octavius.”

The vampire’s bottom lip popped out into the biggest pout ever.

Turney shook his head. “We are literally on a plane surrounded by our coworkers, our friends... The answer is no.”

Those ocean blue eyes got bigger, the pout setting in deeper.

“Fuck...”

Octavius slowly grinned, the smile of a full-blown menace who knew he had won.



TURNEY’S MUFFLED moans were driving Octavius crazy. Pulling his fingers out of the zombie’s lubed hole, he turned the male around and lifted him up into his arms. Turney gasped at the sudden change in position, clinging on to him. Grinning at his flushed cheeks, he shifted his hold so he could line up the tip of his cock and plunge inside.

Turney let out a clipped cry, covering his mouth with both hands as his legs wrapped around Octavius' waist. He barely held back his groan as the zombie's tightness closed around his throbbing cock.

"They can still hear us, you know," he said with a breathy laugh. "Possibly not Min-ji...but everyone else..." His hands moved to grip the zombie's ass as he slowly pulled out and pushed back in.

Turney gasped, eyes rolling back before he managed to glare at him. The zombie slapped at his chest, and snapped, "Just hurry up or I'm hopping off and taking this ass back to its seat!"

"Yes, my zombie bun. Your wish is my command. Or rather, your command is my command," Octavius snickered.

"Octavius!" Turney huffed.

"Yes, yes." On the next thrust in, he didn't hold back, causing Turney to cover his mouth again as another scream was forced past his lips.

With each thrust, Turney covered up the most delicious moans. Such a pity he couldn't hear them. Turney's hard cock bobbed between them, dripping now. His muffled whimpers were sending tingles through Octavius' body.

There was just something so exhilarating about being tens of thousands of feet in the air as he fucked into his zombie. Sure, Turney and he had been on planes together before. Unfortunately, they had all been normal commercial flights... where the bathrooms were not conducive to love making. In fact, most were not even large enough to fit the single person meant to be in there.

"It's odd hearing you so quiet as I pump into you," he said with a smirk, right before he slammed hard inside the zombie.

Turney cried out, his hole spasming around Octavius' cock, causing his balls to clench tight. The zombie glared over his hands.

"Oops, one slipped out." Octavius chuckled. "Hmm, but I'm afraid I rather like your screams, and can't stand to not

hear them.” He grinned, showing his fangs fully lengthen.

Turney’s eyes widened. “Don’t you dare.”

He let out a maniacal laugh before pressing Turney’s back flush against the wall and his chest. As he pressed forward and buried his face into the zombie’s neck, Octavius’ body shuddered in satisfaction at the scream of pleasure that Turney let out the minute he sank his fangs into his vein.

Octavius let his head float, the pleasure of taking blood overwhelming him. Just as Turney shouted out his release, spraying cum between them, Octavius’ body spasmed as his own orgasm hit him. Gasping, he pulled his fangs free on a low moan while his balls clenched and his cock jerked, filling Turney’s insides.

“Fuck,” Turney moaned.

“Fuck indeed,” Octavius said with an evil laugh.

Turney leaned his head back against the wall, glancing down at him. “You suck, you know that.”

He burst into laughter. “Indeed, I did suck.”

Turney groaned.



TURNEY TRIED to keep the blush off his face as he exited the bathroom with Octavius, but he knew he’d failed. In fact, the heat increased when he caught sight of the others’ faces. Scarlett looked like she was disappointed, Min-ji seemed amused, Cormac was way too entertained, and poor Theo looked slightly shocked. Henry was still sleeping...

He tried to ignore them as he did the walk of shame with Octavius back to their seats.

“Is...” Theo cleared his throat. “Is *that* normal too?”

Cormac released a loud, booming laugh. “Yep, normal too. Welcome to my crazy everyday life.”

“Oh, my...”

Octavius sniffed. “You’re just jealous you aren’t getting any, wolf.”

“Octavius...” Turney groaned.

Chapter Twenty-Eight



Entering The Grounds

Turney had to say, the person driving them to the hotel was not as pleasant as the people who had flown them into the country.

He eyed the human driver from his seat in the back. The man was dressed in a black dress shirt and slacks—a simple enough outfit. His hair was so shaggy that you could barely see his eyes under his bangs. But what you could see...well, there was something off in his stare. Something that set Turney on edge. But no one seemed to notice anything was off with him except him, so he kept trying to ignore it.

It had been a good twenty minutes since they had set off, and there hadn't been anything except the small dirt road and trees for at least ten of the twenty. How far away was this place?

He couldn't say it felt normal to enter a country by a private landing strip in the middle of the night. It felt like he'd just been smuggled in. Here's hoping they didn't get arrested somehow.

The van had been waiting there for them when they arrived. And it didn't appear that the driver knew they were anything but human, so they'd had some pretty stunted conversations since then. At least the vehicle had been big enough to fit them all. Though some of the luggage ended up

having to be strapped to the roof. Cormac, Theo, and Henry were in the far back, with Scarlett and Min-ji in bucket seats in the middle, followed by him and Octavius.

“Why didn’t we just rent a car?” Turney asked.

Octavius looked at him. “Why? Did you want to drive?”

“I... Why are you assuming that?”

“Well, I did hire you to be my driver at first. And considering your previous interests, I’d assumed you would want to drive.”

Did he want to drive? At the moment, not really. The road was foggy, and honestly, kind of creepy...yet... “I do kind of miss driving.”

The vampire’s lips pursed. “You haven’t gotten a chance to drive much lately, have you?”

“Not really...”

“I’m sorry, Turney.” Octavius grasped Turney’s left hand and kissed the top of it. “How about after this case is over, we can see if there are any cool cases dealing with race tracks, or something like that?! Oh! Oh, or maybe we will get lucky and end up in a car chase!”

Turney chuckled. “Sounds like a plan.”

“You know, Turney...you are just as weird as he is,” Cormac said with a snort. “No wonder you two are dating.”

“What?!” Turney gasped and peered into the back at Cormac.

The younger wolf smirked. “Like, Octavius’ weirdness is right out there for all to see. But you seem normal most of the time. You hide it so well.”

“There is nothing wrong with being weird!” Octavius said with an indignant sniff.

“Cormac, you shouldn’t speak about your boss that way... especially not to his face,” Theo said with a huff. “Where did your manners go?”

Scarlett and Min-ji were grinning widely at the exchange. And Henry sat there looking like he was fighting a smile.

Octavius hmphed. “Moving on. It wouldn’t have been wise for us to drive here on our own. According to rumors, the roads to the property are hard to navigate, with pointless streets branching off to nowhere. Some even go all the way to the edge of cliffs, while most just make no sense at all.”

“GPS is a thing, you know,” Cormac pointed out with a laugh.

“I haven’t had any signal for about ten minutes now,” Min-ji said with a sigh. “Though...some map systems do work without signal, I suppose...”

You’d think at this point the driver would speak up and add a comment about the bad signal in the area...but he remained creepily silent. Which is how the guy had been the whole time.

Turney cleared his throat. “Uh, sir? Is the signal known to be bad in this area?”

He waited and...he didn’t even get a single glance in the rearview mirror. No response whatsoever.

Octavius frowned. “Perhaps...he doesn’t speak English?” The vampire cleared his throat. “Scuzati? Este zona aceasta pentru semnale dificile?”

Now, Turney didn’t speak Romanian, but he was going to assume Octavius had just repeated what he’d said. Yet...the guy still didn’t react, not even a glance.

“Well, that’s rude!” Octavius huffed, as he started to glare at the back of the driver’s seat.

Turney had to agree...it was a bit rude. The guy seemed intent on ignoring them. The driver hadn’t even gotten out when he arrived to pick them up. He had just opened the doors and silently sat there, never glancing over or back.

“I...wonder if he has hearing issues. Has he even acknowledged us at all?” Theo asked softly.

“Not even a glance,” Cormac said with a yawn.

Theo's lips pursed. "Perhaps he just dislikes people?"

"Valid," Scarlett mused.

Turney snorted. "Anyway, how far away is this place?"



"HOPEFULLY, NOT TOO MUCH FURTHER," Octavius said with a smile, ignoring the strange and very rude driver.

Truth was, Octavius wasn't sure how long the drive would be. He hadn't asked, or really, he hadn't gotten the chance to ask. Godric's phone kept going to voicemail. He supposed he could have checked a map or two and planned ahead.

Honestly, he was surprised that Turney wasn't already grumbling about that. But it appeared the zombie hadn't realized they had jumped in without planning much. Then again, maybe he assumed they'd plan once they got here and met Godric.

Planning aside, they had gathered up everything they thought they may need to get rid of the ghosts, and any possible ghoulish zombie creatures they may find. Not to mention, he was pretty sure, judging by the size of the supply backpack Min-ji had brought with her, that the witch had prepared for every possible danger they could run into.

"You don't know, do you?" Turney asked, eyeing him.

He met the zombie's gaze with large innocent eyes. "Not exactly—" he started to say, but was cut off as the van took a sharp turn and then screeched to an abrupt stop in front of a large creepy iron gate. "Oh, look, we are here." His brow rose as the doors around them opened and the spooky gate swung inward without a single creak. "And apparently, we are walking now... Godric did warn in his letter that the roads on the property were in need of repair."

“Why does it feel like I’m in a horror movie?” Turney groaned. The zombie was eyeing the gate with trepidation.

“It’ll be fine! I imagine Godric is keeping it as creepy as can be because he plans to make the path part of the attraction. You know, a fun haunted walk through the woods and all!”

Cormac snorted. “I have to agree with Turney on this one... This seems suspicious.”

“You just want to go home and get out of working!” Octavius snapped.

“Have you spoken to Godric at all?” Scarlett asked.

Octavius frowned. “No. His phone keeps going to voicemail. But it’s common for him to get lost in his interests and miss calls. Not to mention, he does tend to lose his phone a lot. But it also could have been the time I called, or the lack of signal out here.”

Everyone flinched at the sound of a honk, their gazes going to the driver. The man was finally looking at them, and boy, what a look. Octavius glared back. He would not be rushed.

“I’m guessing that’s our cue to get out,” Henry said, speaking for the first time since getting in the van.

“Seems so,” Turney said slowly.

They jumped out, some working to get their things off the roof while others headed to the trunk. Octavius scurried back, making sure to get to the trunk first. He snatched up his suitcase and leather backpack, and hurried around to the other side of the van out of everyone’s view.

Glancing around, making sure no one was looking, he unzipped his backpack and pulled out the small packet of golden glitter he had brought with him. Tearing it open, he dumped it into his left trouser pocket with a giggle. He’d thought of a perfect way to surprise Godric last night. The trick he had planned...he just knew it would send the older zombie into a laughing fit.

“What are you doing?” Turney asked from directly behind him.

He jumped at the words suddenly being whispered into his ear. Spinning, he hid the empty packet behind his back and stared wide-eyed at Turney. “Nothing?”

The van started to move, doing a sharp U-turn before it sped off and disappeared back the way they came.

“Well, I guess everyone has everything!” Octavius said. “Let’s get going. I think it’s a long walk.”

Turney stared at him with a face full of suspicion, but eventually he sighed and turned toward the open gate. The minute his back was turned, he shoved the empty bag back in his backpack and zipped it up.

Scarlett walked past, dragging her suitcase along, eyeing him with amusement, but said nothing.

Gathered together, they walked through the open gate. They had only gotten a little bit down the road when they heard the gate slam shut.

“That’s comforting.” Turney slipped his arm into Octavius’.

Octavius laughed nervously. “I’m guessing Godric has already started working on the outside. Perhaps there are no ghosts to deal with out here?”

He said that, but at the same time...something felt off here. The forest felt odd. But yet not...ghostly odd...

Octavius glanced at Scarlett as they continued to walk forward. She was frowning, her gaze kept flicking to the forest around them. The area was dense with trees and plant life, which impeded visibility. But worse was the fog that seemed to have thickened when they arrived. Turney’s grip on his arm tightened the further they walked. Everyone was slowly growing more tense, their faces grim.

“Do you...hear anything?” Theo asked.

Octavius halted at the question, causing everyone else to stop. “There’s...nothing.”

Which wasn't right. It was a sizable forest, yet...

"No birds, no animals...nothing," Henry slowly said. "Something is wrong here..."

"Does anyone feel like we are being watched?" Turney asked, voice wavering.

"I..." Octavius trailed off at the sound of a twig snapping...followed by another.

They all slowly turned towards the direction of the noise. At first, there was the sound of more twigs breaking, but then a strange creaking noise began. Or was it more of a popping noise? He couldn't quite describe it, yet he knew he had heard it before. But he just had a feeling it was wrong that he heard it here.

His eyes widened when out of the dense woods and fog a zombie shambled out. No...not a zombie...a ghoul!



TURNEY STARED, jaw slack, when what could only be described as a zombie stumbled out of the brush. But it wasn't a zombie like he was a zombie, it was like the zombies he had seen in movies. The creature had once been a man, that much was clear. His clothes were torn. The exposed areas showed peeling and cracking skin, as well as rotting flesh. In some places, bone was even visible. The creature's left arm was limp at its side, as if it was about to fall off, and one of its eyes was hanging out of its socket. Could this be...a ghoul?

Oddly, when it had first appeared, he had felt a flash of fear come from Scarlett. Which logically, he knew that meant he should be afraid. Yet, the zombie, or ghoul, looked so broken down, like it would fall apart at any moment, that he was finding it hard to feel scared of it. Actually, Turney didn't

really feel anything as he looked at it. Which could have meant he was just in shock. A real possibility.

No one moved as it stumbled closer. Turney couldn't help but wince at the sound of its joints scraping together. It was mere feet away, seemingly about to collapse when it let out a loud screeching noise and attacked.

Moving faster than he'd thought it should be able to in its condition, the ghoul was on him in an instant. Turney screamed as he went down. At the last minute, he managed to grip its wrists, preventing its boney clawed hands from reaching him. The thing's skin felt leathery in his grip, as if it could easily peel off.

His hold didn't stop it from trying to bite him. The ghoul's teeth chomped at air, a strange gurgling moaning noise coming from its mouth. The scent of rotting meat invaded his nose. He was shocked he hadn't smelled it sooner. It felt like he was holding back an unbearable weight, his arms shaking as he stared into soulless eyes.

That weight was soon lifted off him, Octavius sending the zombie flying back. The creature hit the ground hard, rolling, but was up in seconds, as if nothing had happened. Scarlett didn't give it time to attack, as she plowed forward, fully transformed. Her skin was pale and cracking, her veins now bulging, lips and clawed fingertips now a white-blue color. Yet the ghoul who appeared to have been barely able to move before fended her off easily.

Octavius pulled him to his feet. The vampire's eyes were filled with worry. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'm..." He cleared his throat. "Fine."

Octavius' eyes seemed to scan him over for a moment before nodding. The vampire tossed his backpack to the ground before jumping into the fight.

Turney stood there stunned as he watched them battle. He flinched, eyes widening when Octavius was sent flying. The vampire landed much more gracefully than the ghoul, managing to push up with his hand as he hit the ground and

flipped back to his feet. Blood ran down his cheek as he sped back towards the creature. Beside Turney, Min-ji began to chant something.

The ghoul kept fighting, seeming unfazed, even after losing limb after limb. He went to join in with the fight, but was grabbed by Henry.

“It’s best to not. Ghouls are not things one so young should mess with,” the vampire said firmly. “It’s best if all of us stay back, that includes you two brothers.”

He heard the wolves grumbling, but Turney’s gaze remained fixed on the fight...or rather it was more of a slaughter now. The vampire and zombie were tearing the ghoul to pieces. The fight ended just as quickly as it began. And even though the ghoul had been torn apart, the pieces still moved, desperately trying to get to them.

Min-ji suddenly stopped her chant and walked boldly towards the writhing body parts before she threw what looked like black dust over them. The pieces ignited then, and seemed to burn to ash in an instant.

Turney eyed the three as they walked back. Besides some small scratches here and there, Scarlett and Octavius looked... relatively okay, not limping or anything. Their faces were grim though.

“Why was it so strong? It felt like I was trying to lift a car or something.” Turney grimaced.

“I mean, you can technically lift cars now...easily,” Cormac said.

“You know what I meant!” he snapped.

Octavius took a deep breath. “Ghouls are animated by the very virus that keeps you alive. It has your strengths, but no thoughts besides to feed. No pain, no understanding of injury, no sense of self-preservation. They will fight to feed until incapacitated. And even then, they will continue to try until the virus dies inside them.”

“Based on its decomposition, that creature was made from a corpse way past its first year of death.” Scarlett sighed. She

went to say more but stopped at the sound of twigs breaking again.

Except this time, it was not one, but hundreds.

“Theo, transform your eyes right now!” Cormac growled.

“Run!” Scarlett screamed, moments before what could only be described as a horde of ghouls came bursting from the forest around them.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



Run

Octavius pulled Turney along, praying none of his friends fell behind. His hold on Turney's hand was iron clasped. He refused to risk them being separated. Behind them was a screeching, groaning, scrambling horde of ghouls. One false step was all it would take for them to be overwhelmed. Their luggage, besides what was on their person, had been long left behind.

"I don't understand," Octavius cried out. "Godric would never do something like this! He's never turned anyone!"

"I can't think this was him," Scarlett gasped. His gaze flicked back, eyes widening in horror when Min-ji's steps began to falter. Scarlett noticed his gaze and was there suddenly sweeping the witch up. The woman yelped but didn't complain, even as she was thrown over Scarlett's shoulder. The bookbag made it too awkward to carry her any other way at the moment.

Octavius felt bad. He should have thought of her sooner. A witch's speed and stamina were no match for theirs. She could boost it temporarily but, in the end, she'd never be able to keep up.

"What if it wasn't him?!" Cormac yelled out.

“We’ve been drawn into a trap, haven’t we?!” Turney cried.

Octavius didn’t want to think it was, but what else could it be?

“Godric would never betray us like this. He would never betray Scarlett like this,” he said firmly, even as he couldn’t help but think that perhaps he had...

They remained quiet for a moment, just running as hard as they could as the words were left between them. The thunder of feet was a constant reminder of the danger they were in. He knew he sounded like he was being stubborn or naïve, but he knew Godric. The man would never put him, and certainly not Scarlett, in harm’s way. He saw Scarlett as family...

“What if he didn’t have a choice?” Min-ji voiced what he was sure they all were thinking.

“Dayan,” Octavius said softly.

“There is no one else it could be,” Scarlett said firmly. “And, while I’d hate to think Godric would do any of this, the fact is, he does have a weakness.”

“His sister’s line,” he gasped.

Godric may not have any children, or any self-created neophytes, but...he had watched over his sister’s descendants since his change. The line was not as far spread as one would think after two millennia of watching. Plagues and wars having taken many... There were only eight still living.

“If Dayan had gotten hold of any of them...” Scarlett hesitated to finish that thought.

Octavius grimaced, it didn’t need to be said. They were all he had left of his sister. Godric would die for them...and he probably had...

Cormac growled. “This is a bit of fucking overkill, don’t you think? I thought Dayan wanted Octavius alive?”

“Maybe he assumes we will survive this?” Theo said stiffly. The wolf’s eyes were a bright solid golden color.

“Maybe he is hoping some of us don’t?” Henry suggested.

“FENCE, FENCE!” Cormac suddenly started screaming.

Octavius’ gaze snapped forward, his eyes widening as he spotted the large, at least twelve-foot-tall, fence up ahead surrounding the looming façade of the hotel. The windows of the hotel were all lit up. “Prepare to jump!”

“Jump?!” Turney screeched. “That?! How?!”

“You are no longer human, Turney! JUST JUMP OR BE EATEN!” Cormac cried.

“HE IS NOT GOING BE EATEN!” Octavius hissed.

Cormac threw his head back and let out a slightly hysterical laugh. “He will if he doesn’t jump! Oh fuck, what is my life?! Why did I take this job? Why didn’t I run away?! Stupid past Cormac! Stupid, stupid, stupid!”

“You slept through most of our past cases, what are you even complaining about?!” Turney growled.

“WE ARE BEING CHASED BY A HORDE OF HUNGRY ZOMBIES! WHAT’S NOT TO COMPLAIN ABOUT?!”

“QUIET!” Scarlett bellowed. “Get ready to jump, you idiots!”

“Jump!” Octavius screamed when they were about ten feet from the fence. He jumped and made it over, but was tugged back by Turney who seemed to have hesitated and just barely missed making it over the top.

Octavius held on tight. They dangled over the fence. Turney was on one side and him on the other, linked by their hands. The horde plowed into the fence then. It groaned in protest.

Turney screamed, kicking his feet out as ghouls tried to drag him down. They tore at his clothes, snapping the backpack off his back in their efforts to pull him down. Octavius felt a rush of panic as he felt himself starting to be dragged upward. Gritting his teeth, he grabbed onto Turney’s

hand with both of his and yanked as hard as he could, tugging the zombie up and over the fence.

He winced as he landed hard on his back, his grunt matching Turney's when the zombie landed on top of him.

Octavius took a deep breath, just lying there for a moment. Turney's head lifted up, meeting his gaze. There was fear in his eyes. He cupped the zombie's face. "It's okay, we made it."

Turney kissed him on the lips, his bun was trembling. "I don't think we are safe."

He wished he could wave those worries away...but he couldn't. The groaning of metal was only getting louder. "We aren't..." He licked his lips and kissed him back, trying to find calm in his taste before he pulled away.

Turney pushed up and off of him, and Octavius forced himself to get up.

He eyed the others. The wolves were panting lightly, Theo a bit harder than Cormac. Scarlett looked grim but unfazed by the run. Min-ji was sweating, no doubt from exerting herself as she had tried to keep up at first.

"I'm sorry, Min-ji. We should have never let you attempt to keep up. I wasn't thinking," he apologized.

She gave him a weak smile. "There wasn't really time to think."

The fence groaned again and began to bow inward under the weight of the ghouls.

"That won't hold for long," Henry stated grimly.

Octavius glanced at the fence, his gaze then wandering to the hotel, before back to his people. What was the right choice? Did they even have a choice at this point?

"There's no choice, Octavius. We have to go inside," Scarlett said gently. "I'm sure this is what Dayan intended."

"So, we just have to keep walking deeper into his trap," Turney sighed. "I have to say, I preferred being chased by fake zombies over real ones."

Octavius let out a soft laugh. “Yeah, I would much rather be on a fun zombie run than here.”

It was odd thinking about how just days before he and Turney had run hand and hand away from a horde of fake zombies while laughing, and now they were literally facing a real horde of zombies who were trying to eat them.

“What are you two even talking about?” Cormac said, sounding exasperated.

“If this is Dayan, then the only answer is to go inside,” Theo growled. “He must be stopped.”

Cormac leaned against his brother. “It’s not like there’s anything else we can do.”

“Let’s end this bastard,” Turney said with a weak smile.

There was a loud screech as the fence started to give way.

“RUN!” Octavius cried.

They sprinted up the drive. Octavius made it to the door first, he yanked it open and then held it. And he would keep holding until all his people had run in. Scarlett with Min-ji in her arms was the last to run past him. Octavius made it inside when the horde was only steps away from him, slamming the door shut just in time.

The minute it closed, his whole body shuddered as he felt a ward stronger than any he’d ever felt before snap into place.

“Shit!” Min-ji gasped, her eyes widening. “That’s...not good.”

Chapter Thirty



Into The Trap

“**W**hat was that?” Turney asked. Once the door had closed, he had felt something run through him. Like a buzzing across his skin. He was pretty sure it was a ward, but it had felt more bone shaking than the ones Min-ji had cast around them before.

“A ward,” Min-ji said grimly. “A powerful one. One that will not be easy to break.”

“You can’t break it?” Octavius asked.

“I didn’t say I couldn’t, just that it’s not going to be easy.” The witch sighed. “It’s an extremely complex spell. It will take hours for me to break it down.”

“Considering the path outside is at this very moment blocked by a horde of ghouls that we have no hope of fighting off...perhaps we should worry about the ward later? Such as, on our way out?” Henry suggested.

“Yeah, it’s not like we’d go out there at the moment, even if there wasn’t a ward in the way,” Cormac said with a huff. “Though, without the ward, the ghouls would be probably minutes from breaking the door down, so...we are pretty fucked.”

He tried not to agree with Cormac, but...in terms of the ghoule situation...they were as strong as him, yet had no fear.

The reality was, there was no way they could fight off that many at once. So, even if they defeated Dayan...it would be difficult to escape the hotel after.

Turney pulled out his phone, grimacing at the zero bars. No signal, no nothing.

“Still...no signal,” Turney told them.

“It’s possible that Dayan’s doing that too,” Cormac said.

Octavius frowned. “There is a way to block signal now?”

Turney eyed him. “There are these things called cell phone jammers... I’m surprised you haven’t seen them in those spy and detective movies you love to watch while I sleep.”

The vampire often woke up in the middle of the night to sneak off and watch movies while Turney was sleeping. Most of the time Octavius would sneak back into bed before he woke up, but there had been a few times he caught the tail end of the movies with him. And each time they had been movies about a spy or detective, or something along those lines. It did make him wonder if vampires possibly didn’t need as much sleep as zombies. Probably was just Octavius...he seemed to be wide awake at random ass times.

Octavius shrugged. “You know I tend to watch the classics.”

“Makes sense,” Cormac snorted. “Jammers have only been around since the late 90s. If he’s watching old movies, they wouldn’t have them.”

“How does Dayan even know about jammers?” Turney asked with a frown.

Octavius’ head tilted. “I suppose he could have learned about them since being freed.”

“Doubtful,” Min-ji drawled. “I suppose it’s not a well-known fact, but Knights are able to learn about new world changes, even if they aren’t there to witness them. It’s a mechanism to help them easily adapt, or in this case, help them not be left clueless after being locked away for years.”

“They what?!” Turney snapped.

“That’s so...cheatsy; how is that even fair?” Octavius hissed with irritation.

Turney couldn’t help but agree. It’s seemed like such bullshit that the bastard was locked up for years, and they don’t even get to benefit from it!

“We are getting off topic,” Scarlett drawled. “Jammers, world knowledge or whatever aside, this is Dayan we are facing. He’s blocked us in here for a reason, and I would bet that the ward was not a last-minute thought.”

Octavius sighed. “You are right. It’s unlikely that the purpose of the ward is only to keep us in and the horde out. Dayan planned this. There has to be some other reason. He knows we aren’t going to sit here and break the ward. We break it, the horde comes in. The problem is, why does he want us stuck in here with a barrier in place that would take time to break? If he had only wanted to get us in here and to keep the ghouls out, he could have used a much simpler spell.”

“I don’t know much about this Knight, but it wouldn’t have been easy to capture a witch capable of such a spell. So, I’d have to agree, it’s not just a random decision,” Min-ji stated. “Do any of you sense anything else in this building? I know it’s huge, but anything at all?”

Turney left the job of listening to the others. They’d be able to isolate the sounds better than him anyway.

Octavius’ eyes turned red as the two wolves closed theirs. Scarlett and Henry appeared to be just letting the others listen. Then again, he supposed Octavius was older than Henry, and had his ‘super vamp’ mode. Were werewolf senses better than a zombie’s? Something to ask later...if there was a later.

“Nothing,” Octavius said with a sigh.

“Yep, not a thing,” Cormac agreed.

“It’s as quiet as that forest was at one point,” Theo said.

“I was afraid of that,” Min-ji groaned. “There are probably things hiding, other than just the Knight. I’m guessing more spells.”

“Did you feel any spells when we were outside?” Turney asked.

The witch shook her head. “Not all spells have a notable presence. And spells meant to conceal things are understandably lacking one. To be honest, there would be no point in using a spell to conceal something if the presence of the spell itself notifies those passing that something had been concealed.”

That made sense. Well, this all sounded great, really fucking great! They’d been plotted against, there were probably traps and other things all around them, and they were basically stuck between a horde of ghouls and an insane homicidal maniac, and who knows what else.

“What do we do now then?” he groaned.

Theo walked past them, moving closer to the front desk of the hotel. Turney eyed the wolf.

“We look for Dayan,” the older wolf said firmly, before turning to face them with a determined expression.

Turney tried to muster up the same determination. He tried to believe that things would work out. No, he had to believe they would. They had to survive. There was no other option. Turney couldn’t believe they’d go through so much, only for it to all end here. Surely fate had other plans for them? What would the point be if it all ended now?



OCTAVIUS EYED THEO... The wolf was obviously determined to make Dayan pay. As much as he wanted Dayan dead, and had been preparing to take the Knight down, Octavius was worried.

In fact, he was afraid. Trapped in this house were the people he cared deeply for. They were not just coworkers, they

were all his friends, and in Turney's case, the love of his unlife. And really, they all were more than just friends...they were family. He had claimed them. They were his to protect, to care for. There was no doubt in his mind that Dayan had already succeeded in taking someone from him. And now he was at risk of losing so much more.

Octavius wrapped his arms around his waist trying to keep his emotions—his sadness and anger—in check. Godric was likely gone. Dayan had most likely forced his hand. There was no way he'd allow this many ghouls to be created if he was of sound mind. The zombie had either been turned into a ghoul himself...or was dead.

Octavius wasn't afraid of Dayan, or even the possibility of his own death. But he was terrified of what the Knight had planned for those he loved. Why couldn't Dayan have just come after him?! Why did he have to involve so many people Octavius cared about?! The bastard was infuriating.

Familiar arms wrapped around him, pulling him back against a firm chest. "It's going to be okay, Octavius," Turney whispered. "We'll get through this, just like we have everything else."

"You don't know that," he said grimly.

"Hey, none of that," Turney shushed him. "Let's be positive. We will get through this. Dayan will pay for everything he's done. It's fate. I just know it. We have gotten through so much already. There's no way it will end here."

Turning around in his arms, he peered into Turney's eyes. There was fear there, yet...also hope. Octavius straightened his back and took a deep breath. "You are right. We will get through this!" He forced the doubts and the fear away, and smiled. "Let's find that bastard." He pecked Turney on the lips.

The zombie chuckled and gave him a kiss back. "Mm, let's find him and end his shit, once and for all."

Cormac made a loud gagging noise. "I swear you two would make out in a field of dead bodies. Like, is no situation

off limits to your lovey dovey nonsense?!”

“Hey!” Octavius cried. “I bribed you with Henry’s number so you’d stop that.”

Henry gasped. “Master Octavius!”

Cormac chuckled. “I got it like days later from the vampire himself! Bribe me better!”

Octavius narrowed his eyes at the wolf, ignoring the glare he felt coming from Henry.

“Is...this normal too?” Theo hesitantly asked.

“Yes!” everyone said at once.

The older wolf sighed.

“If you two are done,” Scarlett drawled. “Let’s start searching. It’s a hotel...there are a hell of a lot of rooms to check. Dayan is no doubt cloaking.”

Octavius nodded. “Let’s go. Everyone stay close and be careful. The fact remains that this hotel is still what I said it was. A place of many traps and hidden rooms. I suggest we take one floor at a time. According to the building’s layout in the brochure, there are seven main floors, along with an eighth floor that consists of just a single wedding suite. But on top of those there are hidden chambers, and even pits beneath the hotel. However, I’m not sure how to reach any of that. I doubt Dayan is waiting somewhere in a hidden room if he wants me to find him. Though he could be...”

“Right.” Turney frowned. “I guess we look around each floor and then head up?”

“It’s as good a plan as any...” Scarlett shrugged. “What is on this floor?”

Octavius looked around, thinking it over. The area they were currently in was all faded carpet, peeling wallpaper, and a lot of exposed wooden beams. The ceiling was vaulted. There were plush worn-down, dusty chairs and sofas spaced around the room, along with coffee tables, for guests checking in to sit. Centered between two staircases that led up to the next floor was a large wooden desk. Behind it was a wall of

keys. Further up there looked to have been a spot for a sign, the wood had been left discolored by whatever had hung there before. Then off to either side of the room were hallways leading to other parts of the floor.

“There is the check-in desk, but otherwise, some lounge areas, a few banquet halls, and the kitchen,” Octavius said. “To note...there is an elevator, but I would recommend avoiding it at all costs, as it has the ability to be turned into an oven at any moment.”

Cormac grunted, “Yeah...being cooked alive is for sure not on my list of things to do.”

Turney sighed. “It’s not on anyone’s list, I imagine. What do we have left of our things that could be useful?”

“I still have all my supplies,” Min-ji stated.

“Those who still have bags, bring them along if they have something useful in them, toss them away if they don’t,” Scarlett instructed before saying, “They will only be a burden otherwise. Min-ji, get out what you think will be easy for you to grab and use in an immediate fight, and then give me your bag to carry. You don’t need it weighing you down as you fight.”

Min-ji nodded and shrugged the thing off. It landed with a heavy thud. How had she run with that thing on? As Min-ji started to dig into her bag, the wolves and Henry tossed their backpacks aside. A few minutes later, Min-ji had a smaller sling-type bag strapped to her front— there were many zippers and pockets.

“I’m ready,” she announced.

Scarlett picked up the backpack the witch had discarded and slipped it on. “Let’s be off then.”

“I suppose we just pick a direction?” Henry mused.

Octavius nodded. “Pretty much.”

Taking the lead, he walked forward, doing his best to hold back his worries. Min-ji, Scarlett, and Turney followed directly behind him, with Henry, Cormac, and Theo behind

them. They took the hallway to the right. There was a banquet hall this way, but it should eventually bring them back around. At least, it would if he was remembering the map right. He'd have checked it, but the map had been in his leather backpack, which was lost back in the forest.



MIN-JI FELT unsettled by the current situation. She didn't like so much unknown. They were trapped. Throughout the hotel, there were obviously dangers waiting for them that they couldn't hear or pin down. An insane Knight was somewhere, plotting and wanting them all dead—except Octavius. It was pretty infuriating how little could be done at the moment about any of it.

Eyeing the hall they were walking into, it was surprising how well maintained the place was, despite the age. The carpet wasn't faded or dirty...it looked...

She frowned. No...surprising wasn't the word. It was unreal how maintained it was. The décor looked original, yet the longer she stared, the more she was sure it was not. Something was off... Which described the whole situation since arriving here.

Bells of warnings started to ring loudly in her head, moments before the rune on her left wrist began to heat and buzz. "Watch out!" she cried upon realizing the location of the danger.

Without thought, she shoved Octavius as hard as she could. At the same time, she activated a rune on her upper right arm that sent out a blast of strong wind. The wind propelled Octavius forward, further than her physical strength could ever send him.

The vampire flew through the open doorway they'd been heading towards, right as spikes shot up from the floor, piercing through what must have been new carpet, and into the ceiling.



OCTAVIUS SQUEALED in shock as he was shoved, and then swept up in a strong wind that sent him careening forward, through the open doorway. He landed face first with a groan. Shaking his head, he jumped up from the floor.

“Octavius, are you okay?!” Turney shouted, voice shaky.

He spun around, eyes widening at the thick spikes slowly lowering back into the floor behind him. “Yes—” he started to say, but then screamed, “No!” when a metal wall slammed down in front of him, blocking him off from the others. “No! NO!” He started slamming his fists against it.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

“TURNEY! SCARLETT!!” He pounded more.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

“Henry! Min-ji!” he rasped as his hits became weaker, tears beginning to form in his eye.

Bang. Bang. Bang.

“Cormac...Theo.” He sobbed, hands stilling as he braced himself on the door, before slowly sliding to the floor. His hands brushed over smooth unblemished metal... There wasn't even a single dent from his actions.

Chapter Thirty-One



Separated

“Octavius!” Turney screamed, his heart dropping as the metal wall slammed down between them. All he could do was watch it happen, helpless to do anything about it.

“Fuck!” He grabbed at the edges of the spikes. They were slowly lowering back into the floor, but still remained in the way. “Will the trap work a second time?” Turney asked, heart racing as he heard Octavius panicking and calling out for him. Turney released the spikes and spun around. “Will it?!”

Min-ji grimaced, eyes shining with regret. “It shouldn’t reset.” She cleared her throat. “I’m sorry, Turney. I should...I should have pulled him back instead. I didn’t think... I just knew I had to get him out of the way. The warnings I get are not always clear. But usually, they guide me towards the best action.”

Turney took a deep breath. “Don’t apologize... He would have died if you hadn’t done anything.”

Scarlett sighed. “He would have survived...but he would have been in very bad shape.”

“Why would Dayan set such a trap?” Theo asked, sounding confused. “Doesn’t he want Octavius to confront him?”

Turney didn't have the answers to those questions. He didn't think any of them did, but he somehow felt, deep in his soul, that everything was still going according to that bastard's plan.

Cormac gripped his shoulder and gave him a hesitant smile. "He'll be okay, Turney. The vampire's crazy... No Knight is going to take him down."

Henry nodded. "Master is stronger than he looks and acts. I have seen him fight many times. He will be fine."

Turney wanted to believe their words. Part of him did, as he just couldn't handle the thought that Dayan could possibly win. But...this...all of this was what Dayan wanted. Octavius, alone...

He spun back around, just catching the tail end of the spikes disappearing back into the floor. Without hesitation, he ran to the now blocked opening and pounded his fists against the barrier as hard as he could, but it didn't budge, not even a dent. "Octavius! Octavius!" The others followed but they remained silent.

"Turney!" Octavius cried, his voice sounding distant. Turney could tell the vampire was crying.

"We're fine, Octavius! We'll be fine! Calm down. It's okay, right?! This changes nothing! We are all going to be fine!"

"Will it?" He barely heard the words through the metal.

"It will! I told you the fates are definitely on our side!" Turney took a calming breath, holding back the tears trying to break free. "We are going to survive! Now, tell me you can defeat him! This had to be his plan. He wants to face you alone... So, can you do it?! Can you take him down?!"

There was silence for a few moments, driving his stress and fear sky high, before finally the vampire answered, "I can do it! He was locked away for over two millennia... Even if he saw how the world changed, it's not as if he could keep training. And, I am not the same as when he first found me. I am no longer a mere fledgling."

“Then do it! Don’t think about what is going on with us. We will be fine. Your job is to protect yourself, worry about yourself, and kill the bastard. We will find you, okay?!” There was silence again. Then he heard it—a sob. “Octavius, don’t cry! It’ll be fine, I promise! I know I broke my promise to you once, but I’m not going to do it again! Never again!”

“I love you!” Octavius cried. “All of you... Please, don’t die.”

“Aww, he said he loved me!” Cormac said sarcastically before gagging loudly.

He heard Octavius sigh on the other side. The others laughed, except Theo, who shoved his brother, giving him a disapproving look. Cormac shrugged.

“Octavius,” Scarlett yelled out. “Kill the fucker. Stay safe... I love you, my friend.” As she said the words, her face turned several interesting shades of red.

“Octavius,” Henry started. “You have been there for me in times of great sadness. I wish I could be by your side for this fight to come, but it seems it was not meant to be. Please, be careful. I am nowhere near ready to let you go.”

There was a soft watery chuckle. “Now is the time you choose to drop the title?”

Henry just smiled in response.

Turney licked his lips, a nervous energy settling inside him as he realized they’d truly be parting after this. “Octavius. I love you more than life itself. You are the reason I still live! Changing would have been meaningless if you weren’t here. So, you better come back to me!”

“I’ll...” Octavius sobbed. “I’ll come back! I will!”

“You’d better! We’ll see you soon, I promise!”

He didn’t get a response...and he no longer heard Octavius close to the door. Feeling shaky, he turned away. “Now what?” He met Scarlett’s gaze. She moved to him. His eyes widened as she pulled him into a tight hug.

“It’s okay. He’ll be fine,” she said, kissing him on the forehead before pulling away, her cheeks bright red again. “All we can do now is try to find a way to Octavius.”

“What if we find Dayan first?” Theo asked.

The female zombie shook her head. “We won’t. He wants to meet Octavius. I’m sure Dayan knows Octavius will be coming for him. And it’s exactly what he wants. The fight would mean something to him. Us finding him first would ruin everything. In the end, the only one he wants is Octavius.”

“Then why the fuck did he invite all of us?” Cormac growled.

Henry frowned before speaking, “Master Octavius has not necessarily told me everything he knows about this Knight. But, from what I do know, he is rather arrogant. My guess is it is likely Dayan believes he will win.”

The younger wolf huffed. “That still doesn’t tell me why we are all here.”

The vampire’s brow rose. “Does it not?”

“No?!” Cormac cried.

“It...does though,” Turney said softly. “Dayan thinks Octavius is his... He no doubt killed me to try to punish Octavius for daring to love someone else. For daring to give me something that Dayan wanted. Him believing he will win...well, what better way to keep control of Octavius, to break his will, than to sever whatever ties he has to others. Because Dayan doesn’t just want Octavius, he wants all of him. He doesn’t want to share. He probably wants Octavius to have nothing left to go back to. I imagine he’d go after Octavius’ other fledglings after this too.”

Cormac and Theo both let out a growl.

“You are likely correct,” Scarlett said with a sigh.

Min-ji wrapped an arm around Scarlett’s shoulders. “If all you say is true, then it’s possible everything has gone according to his plan so far. I’m not sure how much Cléas told him about us. But if he knew about my runes, and is old

enough to understand how they work...even this separation may have gone just as he planned.”

“So, Father is still screwing us from beyond the grave,” Theo growled bitterly. “How like him.”

Cormac hugged his brother, face grim. “It seems a bit too convenient that he was able to set up a trap that separated us from Octavius so quickly.”

Turney frowned. “You’re right... I doubt this was just luck on his part.”

Cormac closed his eyes, head cocking for a moment. “There are cameras in this room... I can hear them.”

Did cameras make a sound?

“So, he is likely watching us,” Henry sighed. “It puts us at a disadvantage, but there’s nothing we can do about it. And destroying all the cameras would take too long.”

Turney looked at everyone, thinking over where to go from here. He paused and listened. Turney didn’t really hear the cameras, but he did hear a lot of clocks ticking, and the heartbeats of his companions. Outside the room, he couldn’t hear much. It was as if most of the sounds of the building had been muted, yet he heard a single heartbeat. A slow heartbeat going up.

“Octavius is going up the stairs, so I guess we should head back and up? On the map...I think it showed the main stairway was around the corner, to the right of where Octavius should leave the room he was in. This trap was likely on both sides, so that no matter what hallway we took, we’d be separated, forcing Octavius to take the stairs. Unless... Octavius is suddenly led to somewhere underground... I’m guessing he will continue upward.”



SCARLETT FROWNED. Turney wasn't wrong, Octavius was heading up, unless it was another creature they were hearing—doubtful though. She was pretty sure that Dayan was hiding whatever else was here.

But there were so many variables. Was there a trap waiting to separate them on every floor? Because Dayan had no way of knowing how they were going to search. They were being watched. However, did the traps have automatic triggers, or did someone have to set something in motion? Would it be worth it to track down the cameras around them and take them out? Henry was no doubt correct on that—there were too many, and it would just slow them down.

She sighed. “It’s as good a plan as any. There are likely more traps. I don’t hear any heartbeats besides our own. I’d have to guess that is Dayan’s doing, as surely there are more creatures here than just us. Not that ghouls are likely to have heartbeats, but they do make quite a bit of noise. Either way, everyone needs to be prepared for anything.”

The others nodded. And they headed back the way they came.

When their group reached the lobby, they headed up the stairs to the right of the check-in desk, but ended up turning back when they came across another wall. Taking the left stairway up, they found the way open.

The stairway brought them out onto the left side of the second floor, into a large open space lounge area. The furniture and décor was much more broken down and obviously aged compared to the hallway that had the spike trap. The carpet under their feet was coated in a thick layer of dust, making them leave a trail where they walked. Oddly, halfway in the carpet gave way to tiles.

There was a door on each wall of the large room. Scarlett stared for a moment. She hadn’t gotten a good look at the map, but she was going to assume the one on the far wall would take them out into a hallway that should lead to the stairs.

“I guess we head for the stairway? Maybe we can meet up with Octavius there?” Turney suggested.

“It’s probably blocked,” Theo sighed.

“Probably...” Min-ji said, before adding, “But we may as well look.”

The younger zombie nodded. “From what I recall, there are another set of steps on each floor. But I can’t remember where they are all located. I do know the only stairway that connects every floor is the one Octavius is currently using. But...what if...both ways up are blocked?” Turney asked, voice tinged with worry.

“We’ll break through the damn floor if we have to,” Scarlett said with a smile as she patted his shoulder, trying to help him stay calm. With each passing moment, Turney seemed to be drawing closer to freaking out. He was trying though, she knew he was. But it wasn’t good to place new zombies into such stressful situations.

Turney returned her smile with one of his own, even though it was strained. “Let’s go then, I guess.”

Their group weaved through the chairs, heading to the door on the other side of the room.

“You know...there were supposed to be ghosts, or rather wraiths, right? A shit ton of them. Why...” Cormac’s words trailed off at the sounds of something inhuman.

They all stopped and slowly turned towards where the noise had come from. The door on the right wall bulged outwards twice before it flew off its hinges, and three horribly mangled ghouls burst in.

Three soulless pairs of eyes rolled around, barely contained in their sockets. Those dead gazes locked onto her and the others. They remained frozen for a moment, just staring. Shrieks shattered the silence as the three creatures charged at them.

She witnessed Cormac falling under one, right before another collided into her. Growling, she grappled with the being, falling to the floor. Scarlett slashed and clawed at the

thing, before she finally managed to get her hands around its neck. With all her strength, she dug her nails in. Ignoring it clawing at her sides, she yanked its head clean off. Even so, the body still attacked.

Hissing, she flipped them over. Scarlett ripped the thing's hands out of her flesh. Ignoring the pain, she set to the task of tearing the ghoul to pieces. When there were only harmless pieces of flesh left, she stumbled to her feet. Eyeing the fights going on around her, she quickly assessed who needed assistance, and then jumped in to help Turney fight off the ghoul on him.

Theo had transformed into his second werewolf stage—now a large bipedal beast. He had a body clamped in his jaws and was viciously shaking it. Cormac was fully in his wolf form, attacking the smaller pieces that were still trying to harm them. Henry and Min-ji were working together to take down two new ghouls that had burst through the previously closed door to the left.

“Fuck... How many ghouls did that asshole create?” Turney rasped, just as they finished rendering another ghoul into a writhing mass of flesh.

“I’m going to assume it’s a lot more than we have already seen,” Scarlett said with a sigh. “Are you...” Her voice trailed off at the sound of a strange clicking noise from above.

Looking up, Scarlett’s eyes widened on seeing part of the ceiling hanging down, like the panels of a trap door. She could barely make out the edge of something protruding out as years of dust floated down.

Working on instinct, she shoved Turney with all her might, propelling him back and out of the way, right before a large dome slammed down over her and the rest of their group.

Turney hit the wall with a groan of pain, a cloud of dust bursting up into the air as he hit. Groaning still, his eyes opened and met hers. There was confusion there at first, and then fear. Fear she felt in her very soul through their bond as Turney realized what was happening.

“Scarlett!” Turney cried out.

The floor under her feet began to tremble, followed by a loud groaning noise, before they and the whole dome started to lower.

Turney stumbled forward, before stabilizing himself and running toward her. “Scarlett!” he cried, as he slammed his fist into the side of the dome, again and again. She wasn’t sure what it was made out of, or what spell was over it, but it remained solid and uncracked.

Scarlett forced herself to remain calm as her neophyte’s growing panic filled her too. “Go, Turney! Find Octavius!”

“Scarlett! Scarlett!” The desperation in Turney’s wails caused something inside her to ache in pain.

“GO! Don’t worry about us, we’ll be fine!”

Chapter Thirty-Two



Octavius took a deep breath. He peered back at the metal wall one last time, before straightening his shoulders and marching forward. The room he was in looked to be an old fashion nightclub from the 50s. Dusty tables and chairs all around. A grand piano was on the stage against one wall.

He eyed the place... It was much more run down than the hallway he'd just been in.

Swiftly walking through to an opening on the far side, his eyebrow rose at the sight of dead roses along a path right outside the door. He peeked into the hallway and found one side blocked with a metal wall, much like the one that had blocked him from the others.

Interestingly enough, the rose path appeared to go up to the wall, even as it led off in the other direction. It probably meant that there had been a spike trap on both sides, so no matter what path they took on the first floor, he would have ended up here.

“Both a path and a sick, twisted taunt,” Octavius said to himself with a sigh.

Dayan was likely watching him... In ‘super vamp’ mode, he could hear the high pitch buzz of the cameras pretty clearly. At least, he heard them now. Before, he hadn’t... Too many

fucking spells everywhere. Still, how had Dayan known they'd search the first floor first? Then again, it was the most logical course of action. Octavius made a mental note to try to avoid going with the most logical course of action the next time he was being led into a trap by a homicidal maniac.

Stepping out into the hallway, he followed the dead roses to the right, and all the way to a stairway where the roses continued upward. The blackened petals led him all the way up to the seventh floor, through a door to a secondary set of stairs. At that point the stairway turned into a spiral.

"That bastard," he cursed. The Knight was waiting in the wedding suite at the very top of the building, wasn't he? With a hiss, he started up the spiral stairway. There was a door at the top as well, and pushing it open, he found himself in an odd doorless curved hallway surrounded by the scent of licorice and pine.

As Dayan's smell invaded his senses, his anger welled up. The Knight had wronged him too many times to count. How dare he do this to him?! How dare he try to touch those who Octavius loved?!

Fueled by his rage, he found himself storming forward, stomping over the blackened petals as he went. Around the corner, he found a single door. On it, in fancy metal letters, read *Only True Lovers May Enter*. He hissed and lashed out at the words with his claws, the metal lettering flying off onto the carpet.

Taking a deep breath, Octavius grabbed the brass handle and pulled the door open, walking inside. He almost gagged at the cheesy sight of dead roses in the form of hearts, and words like *love* and *mine*. Just nasty nonsense coming from the very one who had caused him so much trauma.

The petals he had followed there continued on inside, trailing all the way to a large four poster wooden bed that was against the wall, where they formed a heart on the dusty old covers. Besides the bed, there was no other furniture in the room. Though he could see spots on the carpet where other things must have been, their shadows had been formed in dust.

Octavius glared at the Knight who stood before him, smiling and leaning against the bed. Dressed in a simple black dress shirt, slacks, and shoes, Dayan looked as he always had; bronze skin, sharp hawk-like features, piercing dark brown eyes. Though his curly black hair was cut shorter now.

The Knight chuckled as he met his gaze. “Ah, Octavius, you are finally here.”

“Yes, finally, I can wipe your disgusting existence from this earth.”

Dayan hummed. “Maybe, maybe... But doubtful. How long has it been? How long have I been waiting, I wonder? By God, look at you. As beautiful as the day I spotted you. Not a thing has changed.” He held his arms open. “Come here.”

Octavius snorted and crossed his arms, just glaring harder. “Immortality will do that to you. Or have you forgotten that you forcefully changed me into a vampire?”

Dayan tsked, his arms falling back to his sides. “I have not. You were always so bitter about that, weren’t you? But if you had just listened, just paid attention to who you should have, this wouldn’t have happened. None of it, really. You blamed so much on me, but the one really at fault is yourself, Octavius.”

He rolled his eyes, face twisting in disgust. “Did you practice that nonsensical speech? Or are you so used to spewing manipulative garbage that it just comes out without effort or thought?”

“Insolent as always, I see,” Dayan hissed. “No worries, I’ll fix that once and for all this time. You know...it’s the one thing I despised about you. Your drive to defy me.”

Octavius threw his head back and laughed. “Most would defy their kidnappers and torturers. Or didn’t you get that memo?”

“Enough!” the bastard snapped, prowling forward. “It is time you finally realized we were meant to be together!”

Octavius moved himself away but into the room, making sure to keep his distance from the Knight. Their steps mimicked each other now. Dayan going forward, as he moved

back. Octavius' heartbeat sped up as he prepared for an attack at any time.

“Meant to be together...where? In torture? In pain? Where exactly are we meant to be, Dayan? As it is for certain that we were never meant to be in anything close to love!”

As Dayan continued to move, Octavius found himself back near the bed when the Knight finally stopped trying to approach. His hand wrapped around the closest column of the bed.

“But that is EXACTLY what we are to each other! Lovers! Soulmates! From the beginning, I knew the moment I saw you that it was destined to be. You were the one who foolishly tried to go against fate! If you had just listened, you'd be a Knight with me, instead of a vampire!”

He snorted. “Yeah, no. I think I prefer being undead over being part of a group of homicidal bigots, thank you.”

Dayan growled. “You're so stubborn. But you know the truth. You know we were meant to be. That us coming together was meant to happen! You were my true purpose. I thought when I joined the Knights all those years ago, I had found my calling. That it had been God speaking to me, telling me to avenge man, to protect man, from all the monstrosities that hid among us. But as the years passed by, things changed. So much changed around me. That purpose from God became unclear and unsatisfying. I began to wonder what my true purpose was again, and thoughts of trying to leave that life grew. When I was in utter despair, that's when it happened. God showed me that I was wrong. I was not meant to be a drone that forever chased creatures, I was meant to thrive! Before my very eyes, he delivered my reward for years and years of seeking retribution against those he deemed unworthy. That reward was you! How surprised I was that you refused to see reality!”

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” Octavius roared. “Reward?! I am no one's reward! I am an individual, with emotions and rights to my own bodily freedoms! You want to know what really happened, Dayan?! It wasn't God rewarding you! You

didn't do anything worthy of anything. You decided to hate all those that were different. You joined a group of psychopaths, got bored, and then saw a pretty face and decided your new purpose was to serve your own demented selfish needs. You stalked, kidnapped, murdered, and raped me! You don't get to blame me for your actions! You don't get to claim that I was the difficult one. You are my fucking rapist. My personal nightmare for fucking centuries. I despise you with every fiber of my being, and I will, with that same being, make sure you don't leave this place alive!" Hissing loudly, he snapped the wooden column of the bed in half, and attacked.

Dayan met his attack, grunting in pain as he blocked the piece of wood with his arm. "You've always had such a temper... In the future, I'll train that out of you!" the Knight growled.

Octavius jumped back in time to avoid being stabbed by the knife the bastard had materialized. "The only thing in your future is death!"

Chapter Thirty-Three



The Path To Octavius

Turney pounded on the glass separating him and the others. Not even his full strength put a single crack into the surface. He fell to his knees, the dome continuing to lower. All he could do was scream Scarlett's name as she stared up at him grimly.

His breathing moved from fast to erratic. His anger and fear surging, Turney felt his control over his own mind beginning to collapse. Thoughts of giving in began to swirl in his mind. How easy it would be to give in to the anger. It would be so easy to just let go, to let his zombie side—that was already so close to the surface—take over.

“Scarlett!” Turney cried out one last time as a panel in the floor slid into place, blocking her from his view, and leaving him completely alone.

He clawed at the floor, trying to pry the tiles up. His nails left gouges behind, but made no progress beyond that.

Hands shaking, Turney fell back on his ass, clapping at his head as the chaos grew inside. The control he had begun to slip away further, sweat forming on his brow as his body stiffened—muscles jerking and bones popping. For a moment his vision swayed to darkness, his thoughts blanking.

“No...NO!” he screamed. He shoved back against the unwilling change, and pulled away from the welcoming hands of nothingness. He couldn’t do this now. He couldn’t! He didn’t have time! Gasping, Turney jerked away from the edge, choking his anger and emotions down. His body loosening up again as he gained back some of his control.

Body trembling, he wiped the sweat from his brow, while his pulse continued to speed along. Scarlett and the others would be okay. They were strong...they would be fine. Even as Turney tried to convince himself, his mind went back to their conversation about Dayan. That he wanted to leave Octavius with nothing...

“No!” he cried out again, as panic started to force him to change once more. Shaking, he took a deep breath, and then another... He kept breathing, trying to banish all thoughts from his head until his mind was finally calm.

Feeling more centered, he closed his eyes and listened. At first, he heard a rather large number of clocks ticking away... then he heard it—a sluggish heartbeat.

Octavius’ heart was all the way up above, and another one was there with him—Dayan. Listening further, he found five heartbeats below him. Everyone was fine... They were all fine.

“Octavius... I have to find Octavius. The others...will be fine,” he told himself, trying with everything in him to believe the words he’d said. Slowly, Turney pushed up from the ground. On shaky legs, he headed towards the door on the other side.

Carefully, he opened the door and peeked out. At the sight of a metal wall to the right, he cursed. “Well, that answers that question.”

Turney stood there for a second, thinking over his options. Dayan likely blocked all paths to the main stairway. The stairs Octavius had used were likely the only set you could take, not only to each floor, but all the way to the top too. The rest only connected to a maximum of two of the floors. It meant each

time he reached the next story, he'd have to find the stairs for the level above.

He frowned, there would likely be traps...but that wouldn't stop him, so he supposed it didn't matter.

Turney opened his senses, hoping to give himself a warning of any danger. Listening intently, he entered the hallway.

CLICK!

He jumped forward without hesitation at the sound. "Fuck!" Turney hiss at the burst of pain as something slammed into his right leg as he fell. He glared down at the spear sticking out of his right calf, and the multiple that were now imbedded in the stretch of wall behind him. Of course, if he had jumped a few inches further, it would have missed him completely. He rolled his eyes.

Taking a deep breath, he clenched his teeth and reached down. Grabbing onto one end of the spear, he snapped it off. With a quick jerk, he tugged the spear out. Hissing at the pain, he stood and limped quickly down the hallway, doing his best to ignore the throb in his leg. The pain definitely wasn't as bad as it would be if he were human, but it was still there.

He didn't end up finding any more traps, and reached the other set of stairs quickly. Hearing nothing out of sorts, Turney slowly made his way up.

The stairs, like the ones they had taken up to this floor, were wide and carpeted. There was no doorway. At the top of the stairs, he could see clearly down the hallway until it veered off to the right.

He didn't hear anything at first, but the minute Turney stepped foot onto the third floor, it was like someone had unpaused a movie. Sound returned, as if in the middle of a scene, his ears catching the tail end of a deep guttural growl.

His heart raced at the sound, a shiver running down his spine. Oh, he was having major flashbacks to that fucking disappearing house from hell. The sound continued, only growing louder as whatever it was obviously approached.

Mere seconds later, a creature bounded slowly into sight at the other end of the hall.

Its body was that of multiple different breeds of dogs. Different color fur and all, stitched together, yet their flesh was obviously rotting and cracking in the same way the ghouls outside had been. But the creature's face was unnatural—more so than even a jumbled mess of stitched together dogs. As it was in no way close to a dog's face. In fact, it was almost horrifyingly human, but even then, it was distorted. Eyes different, nose missing pieces, and the skin over all appeared to be molded on like someone had melted flesh down and stretched it over the thing's skull.

Turney was going to guess that he may have found one of Bucur's experiments...and it was definitely still kicking.

The mutated mouth of the thing opened, revealing jagged, uneven teeth. It let out a garbled bark right before it leaped forward, bounding down the hall towards him.

“Ah, shit...” Turney cursed.



THE LAST OF the ghouls dispatched, all they could do was wait as the dome they were trapped in continued to lower. Scarlett figured they must be underground. They had watched the first floor pass by, and they were in complete darkness now. Not that most of them even needed light to see. Though, both the brothers were back in human form, Theo did still have his eyes transformed.

“This is so fucked up,” Cormac said with a groan.

Henry sighed. “The situation is not good, there is no denying that.”

Theo cursed. “The bastard is so close, and none of us can even do anything about it!”

Scarlett ignored them and blankly watched the stone walls around them slide by. She tried not to think about what she had just done—sending Turney out there alone. Scarlett balled her hands into fists.

What other choice had there been?! He'd been the closest one to her. Scarlett had really done it without much thought. But someone needed to be free to find Octavius. If they had all been trapped...

At least this way, the vampire would know what was going on, right? Unless...Turney didn't make it to him...

Scarlett glanced up at Min-ji, when the woman closed her hand over one of her clenched fists. The witch pulled her into a tight but brief hug. "It'll be okay. They will both be okay."

As she was released, Scarlett couldn't help but ask, "Will they? Octavius...is one thing. He is older. But..." She took a deep breath. "Turney is young. He is still learning. I felt his panic as we left him. He almost changed...twice."

"But yet, he didn't. It shows how strong his willpower is, that he was able to hold it back despite how young he is. Turney is strong. We've all been preparing for this, haven't we?"

"Not long. And what if it isn't enough?" Scarlett asked stiffly.

Her gaze flicked to Cormac when the wolf approached. He cleared his throat awkwardly. "It'll...be fine. I'm sure of it. Turney, I feel, is too lucky to die now."

"How has he been lucky?!" Scarlett snapped. "He almost died once, got randomly injured on other cases, and then he did die."

Min-ji's soft hand cupped her cheek, turning Scarlett's face in her direction. "And yet, he came back. And he is in even better shape than he was during the battle with all those Knights. He will get through this."

Scarlett stared into Min-ji's kind, caring eyes, and just wished she could convince herself with those words. But she

could not... It wasn't who she was. "I...I was never much of an optimist..."

Min-ji leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "Then I shall be that optimistic voice in your head for now."

She snorted.

"I think the dome has stopped descending with us," Henry announced. The vampire was staring down at the floor.

Scarlett glanced down and found that there was an open gap now between the floor and the dome. That gap continued to grow as the seconds went by, until a flash of light came to pierce the darkness around them.

"I believe we are about to reach our destination," Scarlett sighed.

It was slow going, but about ten minutes later, they found themselves in some sort of basement with stone walls and many metal doors all around them. The room was square and probably about twenty feet by twenty feet. Not a large room, but not small either.

As the others walked around and examined the doors, she remained there watching.



CORMAC STOOD there eyeing the metal door, trying not to panic. Shit was going down—or was about to. Turney was cut off from them, Octavius was doing who knows what, and a crazy Knight was somewhere fucking them over.

"There are no handles to open any of these," Theo said.

He eyed the door again, grimacing at the line of bolts where a handle would normally be.

Min-ji hummed. “My guess is that they aren’t meant to be opened from this side.”

Henry sighed. “I have a feeling that we will soon know what they are meant for.”

“Why would you say that?!” Cormac cried, spinning around. “Don’t jinx us! I don’t want to know!”

“Is there still no signal?” Theo asked with a huff.

Cormac reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. There was a nice fat X in the top corner of his screen. “Nope, nothing.”

The others nodded, confirming it was the same with theirs.

“There has to be something blocking it. If I could just access whatever it is, I could probably fix it. Or break it.” Though in a hotel this big, there was probably more than one jammer. Then again, it was possible that there wasn’t a jammer at all, and that the signal here was just nonexistent.

“Speaking of breaking,” Theo began. “There are some cameras on the walls that we should probably get rid of.”

Cormac’s gaze flicked up to where his brother was pointing. He quickly spotted a camera in each of the highest corners of the room.

“Henry, could you be a dear and crush them for us?” Scarlett asked. “I doubt it will stop whatever may come out of those doors, but it can only benefit us if we aren’t being watched.”

Cormac honestly didn’t think it was necessary. He could tell Octavius was above, and he wasn’t alone. Based on the vampire’s heart patterns and movement...he was fighting whoever he was with. If Dayan had been watching, he wasn’t anymore.

Henry nodded, and in an instant, he shifted into a pretty large black bat.

“You are much bigger than Octavius,” Cormac mused.

Henry shrugged. “Octavius prefers changing into very small creatures. I do not.”

Flying up, the vampire quickly dispatched the cameras and was soon landing on the ground and shifting back.

A shiver ran down his spine at the sound of an odd release of air behind him. He slowly turned around, the others doing so as well. His eyes widened at the open metal door. There was nothing to see in the darkness inside. Just blank stone walls and a turn at the end of a short hallway. Nothing to see or hear.

It went from nothing to way too much very quickly. The sounds of bones grinding, the putrid smell of rotting flesh—ghouls...

“Fuck,” Cormac groaned.

Chapter Thirty-Four



Fight For Your Life

Turney screamed out as one of the creatures tore at his leg, while he tried to prevent another from ripping out his throat. Hands on the thing's face, he gripped onto the monstrosity's jaw, and with all his might, he pulled. He heard joints crack and snap as he tore the thing's jaw clean off, blood coating his hands. At the same time, he swung his leg against the wall, again and again, doing his best to ignore the sickening squishing sounds he heard as he crushed it. Soon the experimental dog thing from hell was nothing but a writhing heap of limbs, still moving but no longer threatening.

Rolling with the one still on top of him, Turney sprung up, throwing the thing to the ground. He started stomping on it with his good-ish leg, as both were bleeding now. The ghoul kept trying to fight him off, even though it had no way to bite any longer. One last stomp and the creature was also a mess of wiggling, squirming, bleeding, rotting limbs. Turney gritted his teeth, barely stopping himself from gagging at the mess and putrid smell that was everywhere, all over him.

"I am going to need...the hottest shower of my life after this," he said with a pain filled groan. He eyed the partially intact face of one of the dog creatures. "But...can't say I'm not happy you freaks weren't just dogs."

Turney wasn't sure he'd have been able to so easily hit back if they had been regular animals...even if they were ghouls.

Limping even more now, he started down the hallway towards the next stairway.



THEO USED his rage to slice through the ghouls that were on him. Everyone was pretty pinned down by multiple creatures. As easy as the limbs came off, it did nothing to discourage the pathetic creatures from attacking. Worse...he was becoming more aware of how far behind his strength was from where it used to be. This was only his fourth ghoul and he was already getting tired...

He cut the one in front of him in half, even as the thing's claws sliced across his side. Theo stiffened at the sound of another door opening up right behind him. He had stupidly managed to get himself backed up near it.

Spinning, his eyes widened as he found himself face to chest with a ghoul that towered over him even in his half wolf form. Its hand shot out, grabbing onto his shoulders and lifting him up. He howled as the thing began to squeeze, pushing inward, as if trying to crush him like a can. Theo tried to break its hold, kicking out, but with his arms pinned down, he was unable to reach the ghoul with his claws. Feeling like his bones were being crushed, he shifted back to his human form, hoping to slip from his grasp—it didn't work.

"Theo!" he heard Cormac cry out behind him. In a blur, Cormac slammed into the ghoul with a growl, pushing them both out of the doorway. The ghoul remained standing but its face contorted in confusion. Even more so as Cormac sliced off the creature's hands at the wrist. Theo tumbled to the ground with a grunt, while Cormac continued to attack.

Shaking his head, he tore the severed limbs off him, as they had maintained their grip on his arms, even after being cut off. He jumped up, ready to help his brother, but smiled at finding out that Cormac had already finished off the creature.

“Thank—” Theo started to say, before screaming, “WATCH OUT!” He had caught a flash of movement behind Cormac, who was now standing in front of the open doorway.

Cormac spun around, and Theo screamed out as a small hand burst through his brother’s body and out of his back. “CORMAC!”

He jumped forward to pull his brother back, away from whatever was attacking him. Cormac sagged in his arms, letting out a groan of pain. His eyes widened as he finally saw what had done the damage...a child. A child ghoul. Barely four feet tall, the ghoul was half skeleton and half rotting flesh. Only one eyeball stared back at him.

It let out a gurgling sound, looking to be about to attack. Theo started to push his brother behind him, but Henry appeared with a loud hiss and began to shred through the thing.

Theo wasted no time watching, and instead dragged Cormac back to a corner, so there were no doors at their back, even if they were still all around them. He laid his brother down, staring at the bleeding hole in his abdomen. He could see a flash of intestines, but he smelled nothing that would suggest they’d been punctured. Though the smell of the rotting flesh all around him could be covering it up. Hands hovering, he hesitated as he tried to calm his mind enough to figure out what to do.

He pressed firmly on the wound.

Cormac cried out, and then let out a wet cough that sprayed blood onto Theo. “Sorry... Fuck, that hurts.”

“It’s...going to be fine,” Theo said, not sure what else to say. Because he wasn’t sure that it was. But how could he tell his brother that? He was older... He was supposed to protect Cormac.

He met Cormac's gaze, noting the touch of fear there. "You...you don't have to lie to me..."

"Shut up! You will be fine."

Theo flinched when something small smacked into his side. He looked down, eyes widening at the sight of bandages and gauze.

"Get him wrapped up!" Min-ji yelled as she slammed her hand against the chest of a ghoul, sending it bursting into a bubbling pool of melted flesh.

"Henry, look after them," Scarlett cried.

Theo's shoulders sagged in relief when the vampire appeared at his side, standing there to guard them.

"Thank you..." he rasped, before snatching up the gauze. He did his best to pack the wound on both sides, to staunch the bleeding before wrapping it.

His heart dropped when Cormac's eyes closed and his body went slack. "Cormac..." he whispered, tears filling his eyes. His heart started to race, hands shaking as he brushed his fingers over his brother's face. He looked so young...he was young. He couldn't...he couldn't lose him too. Not him, not his brother. He just couldn't. "Cormac... Cormac!"

"His heart is strong and his breathing even. Just hold him close and keep him safe, Theo," Henry said firmly.

Theo blinked, glancing up at Henry. "He..."

"He will be fine, Theo! That is not a death wound for your kind. He can easily survive it. Just protect him!" Henry hissed before jumping into the fight again.

Taking a shuddered breath, he forcefully shoved down his panic. Pulling his brother into his arms, he sat with his back against the corner, watching the battle continue, preparing to jump in the minute they were in danger.



MIN-JI SLAMMED her hand on the chest of the ghoul in front of her, wincing as the rune on her palm once again activated, causing the ghoul to rot from the inside out. Which was a lot less rotting than normal, considering most of these things were missing a lot of flesh.

Her hands felt as if they were on fire at this point. Each time she activated the rune, it burned just a little more than the time before. But holding back was not an option. Sure, she had other attack runes that she could use. But this was the fastest way she could take them down. The safest way she could take them down...

If they weren't careful, they all could end up dead. Maybe not Scarlett or Henry—it would take a lot to kill them. But the truth was, werewolves, while their strength was up there with zombies and vampires, they were nowhere near as indestructible. And as a witch...her spells and runes were her strength, but physically she was basically human. Not to mention, the energy she used to fuel her spells would only last so long.

Min-ji took a moment to catch her breath on noticing the doors had shut again and the ghouls, at least for now, were gone.

“This is not good,” Scarlett said as she stepped beside her. But the zombie was facing away, her eyes fixed on the brothers.

She turned to face them. Henry was leaning down checking the bandages on Cormac. Theo looked shaky. “It’s not... I tried going through the doors. There is a ward set up stopping anyone from entering. I don’t think even the ghouls can go back the way they came once they cross the barrier.

And it's like the one set up around the house. It would take hours of concentration to break."

The zombie sighed. "Concentration that's impossible when under attack, I'm guessing."

"You are correct."

Scarlett grimaced. "Cormac is out for the count, and I'm not sure how much longer Theo can keep fighting..."

"Not much longer, but he'll probably keep trying." Min-ji sighed. "This battle is too soon after what he has been through."

Min-ji had already seen signs of Theo faltering...and if Cormac hadn't interfered, he would have probably died.

"It is... We can't let any ghouls reach them."

"Agreed. I need to get into my backpack." Without hesitation, Scarlett turned her back to her. Min-ji unzipped one of the smaller pockets on the side of her bag, and pulled out the strongest preset barriers she made before coming here, tossing it at the trio in the corner. Theo and Henry glance back at her, at the feeling of it snapping around them.

"For added protection," she said. "Everyone on this team can enter and leave it, but nothing else can get in... That being said, the ward will not hold up against a horde of ghouls...so it is very important that we try to take down as many as we can."

Henry straightened up and walked forward, stepping out of the ward. "Understood."

Min-ji flinched at the sound of multiple doors slamming open.

"Be careful, everyone!" Scarlett yelled, before charging towards the newest invasion.

Chapter Thirty-Five



A Long Awaited Battle

Sparks flew as Octavius' claws connected with the sword that Dayan had popped into existence. Dealing with a Knight who was old enough to materialize bladed weapons out of nothing was such a fucking pain in the ass.

Hissing, he pushed hard, causing the Knight to stumble back a few feet and into the wall. Something shot out of Dayan's hand, coming right towards him. His body reacted instantly, snagging the object mid-air.

The Knight whistled. "Impressive. You've improved so much, my love."

Octavius scoffed, his gaze flicking quickly down and then back, not wanting to risk taking his eyes off Dayan for too long. "Unlike someone, I wasn't locked in a cell somewhere for over two millennia. It would be questionable if my skills were lacking. Thanks for the knife." He waved it at the male with a twisted smirk.

"Always happy to give." Dayan ran his hand along the broadside of his sword. "Anything, you know that."

"Then be happy and bleed for me!" Octavius growled, lunging forward. Dayan once again met his attack.

They fought, crushing petals beneath their feet as they went. The rose path and disgusting messages that had been

created in the room were now long destroyed. Sadly, despite all the time Dayan had been locked up, it didn't appear he had lost any of his skills. Then again, Octavius wasn't sure how old the Knight was, or how powerful he'd been at the time he was locked away. He never cared to know. And all those years ago, he had never faced him at full strength. Then again, why would he have? Octavius had been a new vampire with no hope of being a match for Dayan at the time.

It seemed they were equally matched now. Octavius feared it would take a mistake on someone's part for this to end.

"I can bleed for you, but not in the way you want me to. But shouldn't couples compromise?" Dayan said with a chuckle, as his sword snapped in half and he just barely jumped out of the way of Octavius' claws.

He didn't bother responding. Charging forward, he pretended to be about to rake his claws down the male's body, a new sword already appearing in Dayan's hand to block him, when at the last minute, he pulled back and brought the knife in his left hand forward, stabbing Dayan in the side.

The Knight's shout of pain was comforting.

"We aren't a couple, and I don't compromise with monsters," Octavius ground out, twisting the knife.

Dayan gasped, meeting his gaze with a glare. "Then perhaps...you need to be taught a lesson about how to give and take."

Octavius released his hold on the knife, jumping back at the sense of danger, but it was too late. His steps faltered a bit when something slammed into his side. Hissing, he reached down and yanked the knife out of his side, glaring at the man who was now a distance away from him.



HENRY GRASPED AT HIS CHEST, hissing at the pain. He stumbled back a little as the last of the current wave of ghouls fell.

His gaze flicked around, taking stock of his crew. Cormac...was down. He was a werewolf, so the wound wouldn't kill him, for now, but he would be no help in the fight. Theo was trying, but Henry feared they'd soon have two majorly injured werewolves on their hands.

He eyed Min-ji and Scarlett. The witch was tiring, signs of strain were showing on her face. Sadly, all it would take was one misstep and Min-ji would fall. Scarlett was coated in gore, and she was injured—as in bleeding—but was in the best shape out of all of them. Zombies were not easy to take down. It would take a lot to stop her from getting back up. Henry knew he could go on for a while still...yet...the odds were not in their favor...

Had his final end come? He gasped as a vision of his wife and children appeared before his eyes.

“Sofia... Diego... Rosemary...” Henry reached out for them. They stood there looking just as they had so many years ago. Sofia's smile was beaming, blonde hair fanning around her shoulders, as she held their son. Diego looked so small. He'd always been small. Only five years old and such a sickly child. His heart ached for all he had suffered. He'd prayed each day back then...prayed that Diego would survive to adulthood. By their side stood Rosemary, looking like a mini version of her mother.

Henry took a step forward, towards them, his heart racing. It had been so long...too long. He frowned, stopping a foot away from the woman, the family he yearned for and loved with all his heart. And his heart wanted to believe, but his mind refused. Sofia and his children were dead, burned to nothing. They couldn't be here in any capacity.

Heart feeling as if it was shattering once again, he let out a frustrated growl and lashed out violently, slashing through the vision. And just like that, it was gone. In its place, a horrifying creature that screeched loudly as he sliced into it. It was eight

feet tall, its limbs long and gangly. It was pure darkness, its skin gray and leathery looking. The thing's hands were tipped with ten-inch claws, while its mouth was gaping wide, filled with rows of sharp teeth. Where the eyes should have been, there were bleeding holes. Henry wasn't sure what it was, but he knew it was responsible for what he'd just seen.

He attacked without pause, fueled by anger and rage that this thing dared to take on Sofia's appearance. His children's... When it finally fell dead, Henry let out a gasp, chest heaving as he struggled to pull back from the anger it had ignited.

That when he heard...sobbing. Spinning, his eyes widened at the sight of Theo approaching another of the very same creatures. Tears were running down his face, and he was mere inches from it, the thing's clawed hands reaching out ready to strike. Scarlett and Min-ji were fighting their own, and were not likely to reach him in time.

"Theo!" Henry shouted, jumping forward. He wrapped his arms around the werewolf's waist and dragged him back.

"NO! Cynthia! Cynthia!" Theo thrashed around, trying to break free.

"Enough, Theo! She is not here! Cynthia is dead! Return to your senses!"

Henry cursed as the creature started towards them. Theo continued to struggle with all his might. Right as he feared he was about to be in deep shit, Min-ji appeared and slammed the palm of her hand into the monstrosity. The thing let out a high-pitched scream before literally bursting apart in a nasty spray of flesh and guts.

"Ugh..." Henry flinched as some smacked into his face. At the creature's death, Theo went slack.

Min-ji took a staggering step forward, before her knees seemed to give out.



“MIN-JI!” Scarlett cried, rushing to the woman’s side. “Are you alright?”

The witch didn’t answer at first, her breathing becoming heavy. “I’m...fine...I just used up a lot of my magic.” Scarlett gently helped Min-ji stand. “I just need a moment.”

“Maybe you should go behind the ward for now?”

“I...” Min-ji trailed off at the sound of a door opening.

“Fuck!” Scarlett cursed. She pushed the woman behind her and spun to face the new opponent. She was about to attack when she found herself stumbling to a stop as her mind registered the face of the ghoul in front of her.

The ghoul’s long platinum blond hair was filthy, blood in the strands, the pale angular face gaunt...the skin on its face was cracked heavily. Their light blue eyes were empty... There wasn’t too much decay, but the amount of wounds, the cuts, the tears...the gouges...it told her that he had suffered.

“Godric...” She gnawed on her bottom lip as anger flared to life inside her. Dayan, that bastard! Scarlett had feared him truly gone... But she should have known the Knight would have no reason to get rid of Godric completely. Why bother when he could be used to fight? “Godric...don’t worry, we’ll bring you back. You will return. I’ll make sure of it.”

As much as it hurt something inside her, she attacked the zombie who had at one point been as much of a savior to her as Octavius was.

She tried to dismember him quickly. Henry joined her, no longer dealing with Theo.

“I just need one part intact, Henry,” she told the vampire as she sliced off Godric’s head.

“You wish to try to bring him back?” Henry asked, though it came across more as a statement.

“It couldn’t have been too long...there is still a chance.” And yet, there was an equal chance that it would not work. All that was happening here took time... If Dayan had been working on this since the caves... it could have been weeks since Godric had fallen.

And bringing someone back from ghoulish state all depended on timing, and dumb luck. The fact was, it would be even more of a stretch since he’d have to fully regenerate from a limb, after already becoming a ghoul. Even so...she had to try.

Once Godric was in enough pieces, they began to destroy them as much as possible. Except for one—a hand.

Scarlett picked up Godric’s still moving right hand. It attempted to attack her, even as impossible as it was. Holding onto the limb tightly, she turned to Min-ji. The witch looked exhausted, but was no longer out of breath. “I hate to ask...but can you please burn the other pieces and create a seal for the hand, to prevent it from healing for now?”

Once the other parts were destroyed completely...full body regeneration could happen in a matter of hours. They couldn’t risk that. They had no brains to give Godric to help return his consciousness. And letting him regenerate without them ready...could ruin any chance he had of coming back.

Min-ji smiled. “No worries. I can do it.”

“Thank you...”



TURNEY SCREAMED as the creature’s serrated teeth sank into his shoulder. All his tugging and yanking did nothing to get the thing off of him. Even tearing at its oddly shaped

body, his nails sinking into its torso and coming away with chunks of flesh, hadn't worked.

He bellowed when it clamped its jaw down hard. Gritting his teeth, Turney grabbed onto the back of the thing's head and just squeezed. Ignoring the feeling of his hands puncturing through the skull, blood dripping down, he pierced its brain. With that, the creature went slack.

Turney sighed in relief and shoved the dead thing off of him. He shook the gunk off his hand, grimacing. Turney laid there on the ground for a brief moment, before forcing himself to move.

He wasn't sure what the fuck he just killed...but he hoped he didn't find another one. He eyed it as he limped past it. It was like a cross between a squid and a person. The head was bulbous and the body was humanoid, but...jiggly and slightly translucent—he shuddered.

Turney had passed all sorts of floors, and had been injured a little more each time... He was also leaving a bloody trail behind him. At least, if the others escaped from wherever they had been taken, they'd be able to find him.

Turney turned the corner and paused, shocked to find the way to the other side unblocked... Had he reached the top floor? He listened. As always, he could hear clocks everywhere, and the seven other heartbeats. Five were below, which told him it was the others...but two were close—right above him. Octavius was near...

He quickly limped forward and found an entrance to a stairway. Oddly enough, when he entered, he found another door to a second set of stairs. The stairs leading down looked normal enough, but the ones past the second doorway were spiraled. There was a black rose petal path leading both down and up. Turney kicked the petals.

Dayan really was a... "Fucker..." he growled.

Shaking his head, Turney ascended the weird ass steps, bleeding the whole way.

Chapter Thirty-Six



Finally Over?

Octavius fell back, hissing at the wound that opened up on his chest. He rolled just in time to avoid being stabbed again by Dayan. Octavius sprung up, ignoring the pain in his left leg, and put some distance between him and the Knight.

Yeah, he was bleeding from multiple places at the moment.

At least Octavius wasn't alone. He eyed Dayan. He'd given as good as he got. For each wound Dayan had given him, he'd given one back. They were pretty equally injured, limping, and in pain.

"You won't win this, Octavius. Why try so hard?" the Knight asked, head tilting as he stared.

Octavius rolled his eyes. "Why do you ask such stupid questions? You literally captured my people, and have me locked up in this place, surrounded by who knows how many ghouls. You have no doubt already killed my friend. You want my lover, my friends, my family dead. Why the hell would I sit back and just accept that? Are you really that deluded?"

Dayan scoffed. "Not deluded. I have simply accepted that you belong to me. You'll see that once you do, things will be so much easier for you."

Ugh—if he hadn't already had reason to hate this man, the way Dayan thought would be enough to push him over the edge. The asshole was fucking insane and infuriating. “Just shut up and die already!” He sprinted forward once again, engaging with him in battle.

They clashed blades and claws once or twice, before Dayan pulled another sword out of his ass and started to wildly swing both at him. Octavius retreated back, the Knight following him.

He cried out as he tripped over something and tumbled to the floor. Dayan was on him in seconds, plunging his swords deep into both of his shoulders, pinning him to the floor. On the ground, he realized it had been the piece of wood he had broken off from the bed that he'd tripped over.

As the Knight got on top of him, pinning him further, he gripped Octavius near his elbows and forced his knees between Octavius' legs.

Dayan grinned smugly down at him. “See, this is where you were always meant to be—beneath me.”

Octavius' eyes widened when the Knight's face started to descend. He barely held back the flashbacks of the past. Mind scrambling, Octavius struggled. Even though his reach and movement were limited, he felt around for anything he could grab hold of. His hand froze for a second, when he brushed against his right trouser pocket. Slipping his hand inside, he grabbed a handful of the contents.

Right as Dayan was about to put his filthy lips on his, he headbutted him.

Dayan cried out in pain, jerking back. Putting his full strength behind the action, Octavius ripped his right arm free from the Knight's hold. As the blade sliced further up his shoulder, he tossed what he had in his hand into Dayan's face.

The Knight bellowed, clawing at his eyes in vain as the finely ground golden glitter coated them. Dayan continued to scream in pain as he stumbled back. Octavius reached up to

his shoulders and yanked both swords out, one after the other, with a grunt.

Without hesitation, he attacked, thrusting his clawed hand into Dayan's chest.

Blood spurted from the Knight's mouth, his glitter coated eyes popping open in shock.

"This is for Turney, for Cynthia...for Godric. For all the people you have hurt before and after me! I wish I could make you suffer, as death is too kind, but as it is the only revenge I'll be given, I'll take it," he growled. "Now, die like you should have all those years ago!" Octavius ripped his hand free, widening the wound as he did.

Dayan slumped to the ground with a graceless thud, coughing up more blood. His reddening eyes staring up at him. The Knight stared for a moment longer before throwing his head back and letting out a wet laugh.

Octavius frowned.

The laugh stopped as abruptly as it began and the Knight tried to speak, but the sound of the door opened had him pausing.

Octavius spun ready to fight, and then gasped in relief at the sight of Turney. "Turney!" Octavius cried, tears forming in his eyes.

"Octavius!" Turney rasped, eyes glistening as well.

They ran—well, limped—towards each other. His poor Turney was coated in blood and gore, and didn't look to be in any better shape than he was.

As soon as the zombie was close enough, Octavius pulled him into his arms, their lips pressing together. Breaking the kiss, he continued to hold him close, just listening to the beat of his heart. When he'd taken off after Dayan...he'd avoided seeking out everyone's heartbeat...fearing he wouldn't find them all there.

"I was so worried," Turney gasped.

"Never leave my sight again," Octavius said with a snuffle.

The zombie chuckled. “I feel that is an impossible request.”

Not impossible but improbable, he supposed. “The others?”

“Safe, as far as I know... I was separated from them soon after we left you. But I can hear them all.”

“As long as they are safe...we will find them and get them out,” Octavius said with a sigh of relief. He slipped out of ‘super vamp’ mode. His head was throbbing. Not as bad as it would have been if he hadn’t been training the last few weeks, but still not good.

“It doesn’t matter!” Dayan bellowed, and began to laugh again.

They turned towards him.

“Would you just die already?!” Octavius snapped in irritation.

Turney pulled him closer and started to growl, looking like he was about to shift.

“Don’t worry about him.” Octavius patted him on his uninjured shoulder. “He is done for.”

“Yes, I am. But I still won! I STILL WON!” the Knight cried out joyfully, before pulling something small out of his pocket. Flipping a small clear lid off whatever it was, he revealed a red button.

Octavius eyed the thing looking confused. “What...?”

“Shit!” Turney pulled away, starting towards the Knight.

But it was too late as Dayan had already clicked it. A booming voice rang out as the Knight began to laugh maniacally. The voice was Dayan’s. “It is my end, Octavius. You may think you have won, but you haven’t. You never could. You were never destined to win! This may be my death, but I will not be alone. As even in death, we will be together! In one minute, the house and everyone inside it will be destroyed!”

Octavius' eyes widened in horror, meeting Turney's worried gaze as the Knight continued to laugh. His gaze snapping back when the laugh turned into a cough and then silence. There Dayan lay...finally dead. But it was too late...

Why...why did it have to end this way? It wasn't how it was supposed to be. They were supposed to get out of here...

"Fifty seconds remaining." Dayan's voice, even in death, was mocking.

Chapter Thirty-Seven



It Was Never A Choice

“Fifty seconds remaining.”

Turney flinched as Dayan’s voice boomed out again. He grabbed Octavius’ hand. The vampire’s gaze pulled away from Dayan’s corpse to look at him. His ocean blue eyes were full of sadness. “The ward...” Turney said softly.

Octavius shook his head. “There’s no way to break it in time. Even if Min-ji was free to do it...”

“I heard...so many ticking noises on the way here. I kept checking to make sure everyone was still okay. I took the sound as clocks...” He winced, and he tried to remember how many he had heard. “There has to be one in practically every room.”

The vampire’s shoulders dropped. “There would be no way for us to disable them in time. It’s possible that some are just clocks too...” Octavius placed his other hand on top of his. “I’m so sorry, Turney. This was not how it should have been.” The vampire winced and shifted on his feet.

“Let’s sit?” Turney suggested with a sad smile. “It hurts me to stand too.”

With a few painful winces and grunts, they managed to sit down. Backs against a broken looking bed, Turney leaned into Octavius. The vampire wrapped his arms around him. In his

lover's arms, he couldn't help but think of fate. Apparently, instead of being so focused on thinking what could be fate, he ignored the realities of it. The fact was, fate could be cruel. He should have known better, considering he had experienced fate's cruelties again and again.

"We thought we had centuries, but there's always the afterlife, right?" Turney said with a smile, peering up into Octavius' eyes.

"Forty seconds."

The vampire sniffled. "Ah, that's one way to look at it. No doubt you are right, the afterlife will certainly be ours to have." Octavius kissed him on the forehead.

Turney's gaze drifted to the dead Knight. He frowned. "Octavius...is that...glitter?"

The vampire let out a pained laugh. "My plan to surprise Godric ended up being just what I needed to turn the tables on Dayan... We were sadly evenly matched."

A chuckle slipped free, despite the dire situation. "You are by far the most ridiculous, yet also the most amazing man I have ever met. I'm sorry I didn't let you buy all the glitter you wanted." He pulled Octavius closer.

"Thirty seconds."

Octavius laughed. "It's pretty useful in a fight."

"Apparently... Well, this is a shitty way to end things. But...ward or no ward, we wouldn't have been able to leave anyway. Not without the others," Turney said with a soft sigh. "We could never leave them behind. Not while we know they are alive. And I can hear them, even now. Their heartbeats... though some are weaker than others."

The laugh Octavius let out this time was half a sob. "Our strong crew survived... I knew they would. I wish..." The vampire swallowed hard, tears spilling over. "If I had only vetted the letter more...the case. I jumped in without planning...I..."

"Twenty seconds."

Turney cupped Octavius' face, and stared into his water-stained ocean blue eyes. "Shh, none of that." He kissed away each tear. "This is not your fault. You hear me. None of this is your fault. You trusted the words of a friend. You had no reason to think anything was wrong."

The fact that none of the people who knew Godric noticed anything off in the video, made Turney think that perhaps the case had been real at one point, but Dayan had gotten here first.

Octavius' bottom lip trembled but he nodded, even as his tears continued to fall. "I want you to know that I was...happy. You made me so happy, Turney. Each day, I woke up happy to be undead. Happy that there would be a tomorrow. For the first time, in waking up as a vampire, I was happy that I was able to live as long as I had, because it meant I got to meet you. So..." Octavius' voice broke. "So, while we...may not have forever, what we had meant the world to me. You were worth waiting thousands of years for."

Turney smiled, even as his heart was shattering to pieces. "Not going to lie, it's been a crazy ride. But dammit, it was worth it, Octavius. It was worth living for. Worth coming back for. Even if it was short."

"I love you, with all my heart. In this life, and in the next."

"I love you too, in this life and in every one after."

"Turney!" Octavius sobbed, clinging hard to him.

He held him tight, his eyes closing.

"Ten."



"NINE."

Min-ji stared at her coworkers and her lover, her mind going completely blank. Henry sat in the corner holding onto an injured Theo and Cormac. Theo was still awake but drained. Scarlett was slashing at one of the metal doors in vain. She left claw marks behind... but also blood. Not that it mattered.

The doors wouldn't open once closed. They were bespelled in some way. And even if they managed to break one of the doors down, the ward beyond them would be in the way. There was no time to break through.

“Eight.”

She shook her head. No...this...there had to be something she could do. She grasped the sides of her head, hands digging into her hair. *Think*, she desperately screamed inside. *THINK!*

“Seven.”

But...she was tapped out...nothing left. Min-ji wasn't even sure how she was still standing. However, it couldn't end like this! It couldn't! This wasn't how it was meant to be.

“Six.”

She let out a barely audible laugh as the solution came to her, hands falling to her side.

“Five.”

Min-ji eyed Scarlett, the woman had begun to scream in anger as she continued to slice into the door. Staring at her slim back, the decision forming in her head was almost too easy. Oh, how she wished she had gotten more time... All the years wasted. If only she had met Scarlett sooner. But if this was how it ended...then it was worth it.

“Four.”

She let out a watery laugh. “Scarlett...I love you.”



EYES WIDENING, Scarlett spun at the softly spoken words. “What...?”

“Three.”

As Min-ji met her gaze, she could clearly see the emotions the woman had just proclaimed to her. Scarlett stepped towards her, gasping as a ward suddenly came up between them. She could get no closer.

“Min-ji...”

“Two.”

Min-ji’s eyes never left hers, as the woman raised her hand up and began to chant. A bright red glowing light appeared at the center of her stomach.

The chant became an echo in her ears, right as the light became blinding.

“One.”

Chapter Thirty-Eight



Octavius slammed his eyes shut, holding tightly onto Turney as the countdown hit one. He gasped, eyes shooting open as, right at that moment, something odd surrounded him. He eyed the strange red barrier around him and Turney. His gaze only widened as the bombs went off.

Outside of the barrier, the floorboards, furniture, and ceiling were torn to shreds. What was surely a deafening sound of destruction was muted. The flames spread almost silently as they ruined all in their path. Turney was looking around much the same way, his heart racing.

It went on and on...but just when he thought it would go on forever, it stopped. And the red bubble that had formed around them popped. Most of the hotel...was gone, as was a good part of the forest. Whatever ghouls had been around the outside had been blown away. The explosion had taken out the ward with it. Burning rubble replaced what had been there before.

“We’re...alive,” Octavius said in awe.

Turney let out a soft laugh. “We survived!” Together they slowly stood up. The remaining section of floor beneath them was precarious at best. It felt very unstable under his feet.

“I...I don’t—”

Turney suddenly cried out, grasping at his heart before breaking into full body wracking sobs. “Something’s wrong. Something—something! Scarlett!”

Octavius’ eyes widened at the words, fear filling him. He listened and counted the heartbeats, eyes tearing up at what he found. “One...one of the heartbeats is missing...” Turney let out another heart wrenching sob, and began to fall to his knees. Octavius scooped him up. “Let’s...go find them.”

The minute he took a single step towards the edge of the platform, it began to tip. “Oh, shit!” he yelped.

Leaping off as the floor collapsed, he jumped towards a part of the hotel a few floors down that was oddly still intact. It was small and barely any more stable than the platform they’d just jumped from, but it was better than nothing.

On landing, Octavius paused at the sound that reached his ears... It was one that he hoped to never hear again. Scarlett’s anguish-filled screams.

Seeing no option but to jump from here to the ground floor, Octavius took a calming breath, trying to ignore Turney and his friend’s despair, and jumped.

He landed, foot slipping on some of the rubble that remained of the hotel. Luckily, he managed to catch himself and regain his balance. Just in time too, as he’d been seconds from falling into a burning pile of trash.

Turney grew more agitated, losing himself to the emotions being fed through his bond.

With his zombie still in his arms, he followed Scarlett’s pain-filled cries to a giant hole in the ground, near the middle of all the destruction. Without hesitation, he leaped down.

When he reached the bottom, he almost fell to his knees at what he saw. “Scarlett...”

Scarlett sat there on top of Min-ji, her hands pressing, again and again... She was obviously trying to restart the witch’s heart.

“Scarlett,” Turney cried out. The zombie struggled out of his hold, but Octavius caught him around the waist and held him back.

He had realized it was probably her who had saved them. And Octavius now knew the cost. Min-ji, out of magic, used the one source of power she had left...her life. Holding on tight to his sobbing lover, tears ran down his face as he watched his best friend fall apart.



SCARLETT SCREAMED in anger and pain. It wasn't working... Nothing was working. She pounded on Min-ji's chest. "Wake up!" she screamed. She held her nose and blew into her mouth a few times. "Wake up! You don't get to say that and then do this to me! Do you hear me, witch?! You get up, this instance! Wake up! Min-ji, get up, you stupid bitch! How dare you?!"

She tried and tried... Why...why did it have to be like this?! It wasn't right. Her hands stilled and she grasped at her heart. It hurt...it hurt.

"You didn't...you didn't let me say it back..." She sobbed as she tried again to restart Min-ji's heart. "You have to wake up and let me say it back! It's not right! It's not..."

"Scarlett..." She heard Octavius call out to her, but she couldn't pull herself away...couldn't acknowledge him at all. She felt Turney's emotions mirror hers, but couldn't even find the will to cut the connection.



OCTAVIUS LET his tears fall freely...unsure of what he should do. He couldn't find it in himself to stop her.

He flinched when Scarlett suddenly sat up. Back bone-straight, she began to silently sit there staring down at Min-ji as tears ran down her face.

His eyes widened in shock as the zombie did something he would never in a million years think she'd do. She sliced into the palm of her right hand and into Min-ji's left, joining them together. The words she spoke next were old and laced with power. It was not the words he expected to hear... The words were so old, even Octavius did not know exactly what language it was, or even what they meant...only what they would lead to.

His heart clenched in pain when the words cut off and nothing happened.

“Work!” Scarlett screamed. “WORK!”

Scarlett and Min-ji's body both jerked. Min-ji's eyes snapped open, lighting up like flashlights, a mirror of Scarlett's own eyes.

Min-ji took a gasping breath as the lights dimmed and the women's eyes returned to normal.

Scarlett shuddered, body swaying. There were tears still running down her face. “I'm...so mad at you right now,” she weakly rasped, before collapsing forward on top of Min-ji.

Min-ji's arm, shaking though it was, came up to wrap around Scarlett, her eyes closing, but alive.

“Scarlett! Scarlett!” Turney screamed, his struggles to pull from Octavius' hold intensifying. He tightened his arms around him.

“It’s okay, Turney. She’s fine. She is just tired. She probably just shut down the connection. The sudden loss of such strong emotions is confusing, I know. But it’s fine. I promise, love. She...she made herself Min-ji’s familiar... It was the only way to bring her back. Let her hide from you for now.” He whispered the last part.

Octavius...didn’t know exactly what was going through Scarlett’s head at the moment, but he imagined it was not anything she wanted to share.

Turney struggled for a few moments more, before sagging in his arms. “Are...are you sure?”

“Listen, my precious bun. You can hear her heart beating. Not that it needs to beat. She is a zombie like you are. It would take a lot to kill her.”

Turney was silent for a moment. “I can hear it.”

Octavius smiled and kissed his neck. “Yes, you can...”

“Master Octavius...”

He glanced at Henry, smile still in place. “Thank you for keeping yourself and everyone else safe.”

Henry smiled back, looking exhausted. “As always, captain.” Octavius chuckled at the phrase the man had used constantly back in their pirate days. “I believe the ghouls outside were wiped out in the explosion. They would be invading by now if they hadn’t been, as the ward is gone.”

“You are right. We were up above when it happened. They are all gone...”

“Is...” Theo started, and then cleared his throat. “Is he dead?”

“Yes, Theo. Dayan is dead.”

Theo sagged. “Thank you.”

Tired, yet feeling unbelievably relieved, he looked around at his team—at his friends and family. He couldn’t help but feel overwhelmingly happy. Dayan was finally dead, and they

had all survived. How could he not be happy about that? Smile brightening, loudly he said, “Let’s go home.”

“How?” Turney asked. “Ugh, we are going to have to walk to the nearest town, aren’t we?”

Octavius chuckled. “I’m not actually sure.”

“We have signal again,” Henry announced, his phone in hand.

“Oh, thank fuck.” Turney sagged further in Octavius’ arms. He slowly lowered the zombie so he could sit, plopping down right next to the male.

“I suppose I should call that blasted fashion criminal and get him to help us out... The reapers will have to clean up this mess anyway. Get rid of whatever remains there are. And who knows if any humans saw the explosion.” Octavius reached into his pocket and pulled out his cellphone.

“Think he’ll do that poofing transportation thingy to us?” Turney asked.

Octavius chuckled, and then winced as it irritated some of his wounds. “That ‘poofing transportation thingy’ is really just them moving through visible shadows. And no, he won’t. Reapers are limited to shadows within a certain distance from them, and they can’t do it between continents. I’m afraid, if he wants to come here, he will have to hop on a plane. But no worries, I’m sure there are closer reapers than him.”

Octavius was shocked that his screen was still intact when he opened his phone—lucky. Just as he went to search for Alexander’s number...a wayward thought sprung to the front of his mind. He gasped, blurting out in horror, “There’s a guy in a barrel locked in one of the rooms of my house!”

“There’s a WHAT?!” Turney barked out.

“I forgot, okay!” Octavius whined defensively.

And he really had. He’d intended to do something about the witch when he’d woken up after the party...but then the invite came...and well, he forgot!

“FORGOT WHAT?!”

“It’s only been like two...three days! I’m sure he’s fine!”

Scarlett burst into a fit giggles, Min-ji soon after.

“Why are you laughing?!” Turney cried out. “How is this funny?! Octavius, who did you kidnap?!”

There was a deep groan. “Why are you guys so loud?!” Cormac growled out. “Can’t a guy die in peace?!”

“You aren’t dying, you brat,” Theo said with a chuckle as Henry also started laughing.

It was all so infectious that he began to giggle as well. Eventually, even Turney was laughing, even if he did still look worried and confused.

Their group sat and laid there injured and bleeding, probably even with a few broken bones, but all laughing. They had survived. This humor, this joy, even if odd and misplaced, was well deserved in Octavius’ book.

Chapter Thirty-Nine



It had taken two days, but they were finally home. Octavius smiled as Turney snuggled into his chest. He ran his hand through the zombie's hair. After two long and tiring days...they were home...but were mostly just existing and recovering still.

“Octavius?”

“Mm?” He looked down at his zombie.

“I love you.”

Octavius beamed. Bending forward, he kissed him on the lips. “And I love you.”

“Do...do you think Scarlett...everyone...is going to be okay?”

He frowned. “Scarlett will need some time to adjust. Both her and Min-ji will need time. There are some things that have happened in Scarlett's past, things I can't tell you about without her permission, that will make this very stressful for her. The best thing you can do is just be there. Try to support her decision. It was not an easy one for her to make.”

“She's...kept the connection closed ever since it happened,” Turney said, his eyes sad. “It feels...wrong to me.”

I feel like I'm adrift, if that makes sense. I just wish I could help."

Octavius winced. He felt slightly stuck. Scarlett had a right to her privacy, and her creating a bond with Min-ji was not a small thing, after the forced bond she had lived with for all those years. Worse still, the bond she had created was not a normal familiar bond.

She had connected their very souls, their lives. It had been the only way Min-ji would have survived. The witch had given her life, sacrificed her very soul to save them all, and so Scarlett had sliced hers in half, winding them forever together to bring Min-ji back. It was not a bond one could break. To even attempt to break it would end in both of their deaths.

Yet, he understood where Turney was at. He was still a new zombie, and being cut off from his sire for days would feel discombobulating. And if Scarlett wanted to maintain their bond and let it continue to grow, she would have to reconnect it soon. The bond was far too new for her to cut it off for so long. Though, no doubt she was experiencing the loss as well, as the sire and neophyte bond went both ways.

"Give her a few more days, okay, Turney? She has a lot to think through. A lot of feelings to get under control. She'll connect again, she just needs a little more time."

He would talk to her about it if it went on for too much longer...

"I'll do my best to support her."

Octavius smiled and leaned down to press a kiss on the top of his head, before resting back on the pillow. "That's all you can do."

Turney sighed. "You know...we should really keep this almost dying thing to a minimum, don't you think? Multiple times in a year is a bit much."

Octavius chuckled. "Is it?"

"Mm...maybe once every five to ten years. Or should we make that twenty to thirty...considering how long I'll be living now? Either way, there were at least three times this year

where I almost died...two if you subtract the time I actually died. Should I also count the time those wendigos wanted to eat me?"

As much as all those actual instances of danger had caused him pain and worry, he still found himself bursting into a fit of giggles. "I don't think you can count that, just because they wanted to eat you. Especially since one promised they wouldn't. I will say, you may want to make it once every hundred years, if we are going to consider your life span."

"Noted." Turney sighed. "Octavius?"

"Yes?"

"Did you...mean it?"

Octavius blinked, looking back down. "Did I mean what?"

Turney's eyes were glassy as they met his. "What you said...back in the hotel, did you mean it?"

He cupped Turney's face, caressing his cheek. "I meant it. Every word. You were worth waiting for. I would have happily suffered many more years of pain, for a single second longer with you."

Turney turned and kissed his palm. "I meant it too. You were worth coming back for. Meeting and loving you was worth dying for. Worth becoming a zombie for."

Octavius blinked rapidly as tears formed in his eyes. He laughed. "Ah, we shouldn't be crying now, not after we all survived."

Turney chuckled, and reached up to wipe his tears away.

"So..." He grinned evilly. "Did you mean what you said about letting me buy all the glitter I want?"

"Octavius!" Turney barked out in laughter.

He squealed when the zombie began to tickle him. Octavius wiggled, giggling like crazy as he tried to escape Turney's hands. "I surrender!"

Still laughing, but no longer tickling, Turney flipped them, pulling him on top. "You are a menace, you know that?"

Octavius grinned. “You wouldn’t have me any other way.”

“Mmm, I suppose I wouldn’t.” Turney wrapped his arms around his neck, hands gliding through his hair as the zombie pulled Octavius down into a kiss.

Octavius kissed him back, and was about to deepen the kiss when a thought popped into his head. “Oh, my Gods! I forgot to free the witch locked away in a barrel again!”

“Octavius!” Turney cried. “It’s been days!”

“We just got back! I didn’t forget on purpose!”

“Oh, my God... I suddenly have a headache.”

“I really didn’t mean to!” Octavius whined.

Turney groaned. “My head...”

“But I didn’t!!”

Epilogue



The Undead Detective Agency Is On The Case

Turney sat back in his desk chair and eyed the door in the middle of the wall opposite of him. It had...been two weeks since they'd returned. Since they'd been rescued—well, brought home—by the reapers, after giving their statements...

On returning, Octavius had 'taken care of' the witch he had imprisoned in his home during Halloween. Well...he had after he remembered him again...

The vampire refused to tell him why, or what he did to the male, but Turney figured it was better he didn't know. Then if Alexander ever asked him, he could honestly tell him, he knew nothing.

Everyone was, of course, healed in just a matter of days. Theo seemed calmer than before, though he was still going through a lot. Cormac seemed very into training nowadays. Probably hating that he was the first one to be taken down, and that he had missed most of what happened after. Scarlett and Min-ji...from what he understood, were adjusting.

Scarlett had reconnected their bond...and they'd had a long talk. She explained some things from her past, things that he wished he'd known sooner. Turney understood why she hadn't told him. They hadn't really been close until recently, so there hadn't really been a reason for her to tell him. It did

make him wonder if those things had something to do with the witch being locked up in a barrel.

Scarlett had, for some reason, felt the need to apologize for the stress she had caused him in the hotel. He'd brushed it off, of course. And told her that there had been nothing to apologize for. Turney knew he wouldn't have been in any better state than Scarlett, if it had been Octavius that had died. Either way, everyone was...getting by.

The fledglings had descended on them a day after they returned, apparently that was as long as Henry could hold them back for. Turney had come to the conclusion that it was for the best that Octavius did not get together with all of them very often. He honestly feared that the destruction would be too great if they all lived in the same place. Based on the stories he heard...there had been a lot of wreckage left behind in the past.

Other than the random guests dropping by, they were currently preparing everything they'd need to attempt to bring Godric back. Turney was glad he was there to hold Octavius as he cried in relief upon finding out that Godric hadn't been destroyed. It was still up in the air on whether it would work or not...but the chance itself was enough to have hope, right?

Though, from what he understood, it would still be another month before they tried to revive him. It apparently took a lot of brains to bring a zombie back from the ghoul state, on top of having to gather all the organs a regenerated zombie would need.

Today marked their return to the office. And what they found when they'd returned...was a wider office, with a new door leading to a private office for Theo on the right wall. Along with a small cut out space to the right of it that made room for another desk and chair for Henry. Because, apparently, Henry was now joining the agency, so he could, in his words, 'make sure his sire didn't end up dead'. Man... money got shit built really fast.

Turney eyed the door some more, watching Octavius through the frosted glass window as he walked back and forth

inside. The vampire was ranting about something. That shadow came towards the door, and Octavius was soon shoving it open and storming out.

“Tell him that I need all these things for the office!” Octavius stomped over to Turney, slamming a piece of paper on his desk.

“And you can get them, but not with company money. They will not be listed under business expenses,” Theo said loudly, sitting there at his desk, looking unimpressed by Octavius’ show of protest.

Octavius spun back around and dramatically cried, “BUT THEY’RE NECESSARY ITEMS THAT THE OFFICE NEEDS!”

“No,” Theo said firmly.

Turney picked up the list and started to read, eyes widening at the nonsense. “How is a fancy inside duck pond necessary for a detective’s office, Octavius?”

The vampire spun around again, eyes wide as if he hadn’t expected Turney to read the list. “Well, you see. I figured we needed an emotional support duck. After everything we’ve been through, don’t we deserve a little support?! Also, Bubby is coming in two weeks! What if he gets lonely and needs a friend?!”

Turney shook his head. “How is having an office duck going to stop a fish, that will be living at the house, from getting lonely?”

Octavius gasped. “Well, obviously, the duck will come home too. He can’t just stay here by himself!”

“No duck,” Turney said firmly.

“But, why?!” the vampire cried.

He sighed. “You don’t need a duck.”

Scarlett let out a snort. “That explains why you went to Turney’s desk and not mine.”

“Did he think I wouldn’t read it?”

“I think he thought you’d cave while looking at his big blue eyes,” Min-ji chuckled.

Turney glared at the vampire, whose expression went sheepish at the witch’s words. Yep...that was exactly what the menace had thought. “I am not a pushover, Octavius.”

“Of course you’re not, my zombie bun. I would never think that!” Octavius whined.

“Support animal or not, the answer is still no,” Theo said bluntly, as he folded his hands on his desk.

Octavius spun around again on an exaggerated gasp. “HEARTLESS!”

Cormac burst into laughter.

“And why, pray tell, are you laughing, dear brother?” Theo asked, his smile turning slightly evil.

The young wolf’s laughter cut off when he glanced back at his brother and saw his expression. “I...”

Theo leaned back in his chair with a hum. “Octavius, I looked through your financials for the agency, and I have to say, you are paying Cormac way too much to do nothing. So, either he does more, or he gets a pay cut.”

“WHAT?!” Cormac cried out.

Turney snickered as Octavius burst into laughter. Cormac and Theo started to bicker, right when the phone began to ring. Octavius, of course, also then started back on his quest for his list.

Turney eyed Scarlett, who sighed and reached for the red phone on her desk.

“You’ve reached The Undead Detective Agency, this is Scarlett speaking, how may I help you?” Scarlett asked with her professional fake salesman voice. She frowned, glaring at the three who had started yelling. “One moment, please.” She covered the receiver and then bellowed, “QUIET, YOU IDIOTS!”

Octavius, Cormac, and Theo went silent instantly, and Scarlett went back to the call.

Turney shook his head with a soft chuckle as Octavius skulked over and hopped up to sit on the edge of his desk. There was a clear pout on his face.

The vampire sat there pouting for a few moments, and then...Cormac stuck out his tongue. Which of course set Octavius off. Turney sighed as the two started a silent and very immature war with each other.

His gaze drifted past the silently bickering paranormals, to Henry in his small alcove. He frowned to find the vampire on his phone. Henry glanced up, the smile on his face...made him instantly concerned. Turney gasped in horror when the vampire held up his phone to show the screen, showing off a website about keeping ducks as pets.

He mouthed 'no', but Henry's grin widened.

"No duck," he whispered fiercely.

Looking put out, Henry sighed and slowly placed his phone upside down on his desk. Oh, the unsuspecting menaces were the worst!

There was a loud click as Scarlett hung up the phone. "We have a new case. You and Turney need to go to Café Barron on First Street and meet our new client, John Bordu. The man plans to hand over all the documents to you there."

Octavius jumped to his feet, beaming happily, as if he hadn't just been arguing like crazy. "Wonderful! Did you hear that, Turney?! A new case!"

Turney couldn't help but smile as the vampire went from pouty to excited in a blink of the eye. Just normal everyday behavior for Octavius. His smile widened when the vampire began to bounce on his feet.

God...did he love him. His gaze swept around the room at Octavius, Cormac, Theo, Henry, Scarlett, and Min-ji. So much had changed.

It felt like it had been a lifetime ago since he first set eyes on Octavius' crazy black flyer. He wasn't even human anymore. Dying, and then becoming a zombie, hadn't exactly been fun...yet so much more had been gained than lost.

Because before he had nothing...no family. Sure, he had a few friends, but...not close. In truth, Turney had been alone, just like he'd been for most of his life. As much as he tried to say—and believe—that he'd been okay with that...he hadn't. Turney had just been living day to day, trying to not think too hard. But in truth...he had been so lonely. His eyes welled up at the thought.

Now, not even half a year after he first walked into the office, he had...a family. A real family. A crazy family, but a family nonetheless. Turney was no longer alone. And it was all one crazy vampire's doing—Octavius.

“Octavius, I love you.”

Octavius giggled. “Love you too, my precious zombie bun! Now come! Let's be off! WE HAVE A CASE TO SOLVE!” He bounced more, his laughter growing louder.

Chuckling, Turney stood and followed the crazy vampire out the door. Octavius started talking a mile a minute with excitement, going over all the possibilities of what they were about to face. He wasn't sure what the next case would bring, but Turney had a feeling that the craziness of this new life of his was just beginning.

The End!



Author Note

So, everyone, this is the last book in The Undead Detective Agency. And it is also my first completed series. I experienced a lot of emotions as I wrote these four books. Not all were happy, but I'm satisfied with how everything ended up. Writing these books, these characters, has given me an unbelievable amount of joy. And I'd hate to let them go... So, I'm not going to.

This may be the last book in The Undead Detective Agency, but it is not the last story for these characters! Their stories will continue in a spin off series called The Undead Detective Files, and in one called Agency Side Quests.

The Undead Detective Files will follow Octavius and Turney, and the rest of the crew, as theirs and everyone else's journey continues. There will be new cases, and new paranormals. Not to mention, we'll get to see how relationships develop after what happened in this last book. *cough Scarlett/Min-ji.*

Agency Side Quests is where the focus will come off our crazy main couple and will switch to some of the side characters. As don't they deserve their happily ever afters too? *coughs Cormac/Henry.*

Anyway, thank you for coming on this journey with me. Thank you for loving this series as much as I have. Stick

around for all that is to come!



About Shelby Rhodes

Shelby Rhodes is a lover and writer of MM Paranormal Romance novels, but any genre is up for grabs. She loves building worlds and creating new realities. In her books you can expect to find a mix of humor and fluff with a dash of blood and violence. And while dramatic and comedic monologues may be her favorite things, that doesn't mean she won't try to rip your heart out.



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