



My Demon

REBOUND

POSSESSIVE LOVE

ASHLYNN MILLS

My Demon Rebound

Ashlynn Mills

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Thank you so much to the amazing Kota Quinn for stepping in last minute for some extra reassurance!

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Warning list includes: Bloodplay, horn sex, tail play, blood consumption, some light violence and demons.

Content

Instalust/instalove, fated mates. This is about a demon from hell so please don't expect realism here.

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Prologue

Rorian

It hurts like hell every time I return to the underworld, no pun intended. My bones feel like they're stretching thin, my balance is off, and I'm all twisted on the inside.

As soon as my feet touch the black stone pathway leading to where my father usually is, I stretch out my limbs and shake off the weird sensations running through my body, quickly adjusting to the change in temperature. For humans, the heat is unbearable, and it slowly melts the flesh off their bones. When they say you'll burn in hell, they mean literally.

Good thing I'm not human. Never have been. I'm only in love with one, and plan on marching straight up to my father to tell him I'll be staying with Albert on earth permanently. I'm going to do it. It's been on my mind for weeks, and I'm tired of being away from Albert so much. He's not fond of my trips back home either and is growing tired of hearing my excuses for why I have to leave for such long periods at a

time. I've confessed to being a demon from hell many times and not once has he believed me. Most humans don't.

Walking at a rapid speed around the red curving stone walls, I tense up as I get closer to my dad's lair. He sits up in his chair, leaning forward with his long red fingers spread out over his large red knees. Demons are normally large creatures, so it was a shock to everyone when I grew up to be slim, short, and lacking muscles... well everywhere.

My size isn't the only thing keeping me from fitting in. Ever since I was a child, pretty things have captured my attention, such as silky fabrics, lace, flowers, and jewels. As if that didn't make me stand out enough, unlike my family, my skin is mostly black with random red spots and lines.

Clearing his throat to bring me back to my current reality, my father tilts his head. "Look who has finally decided to greet me with his presence. Did you have a nice trip?"

"I did." I almost didn't come back. His ability to easily find me and drag me back at any time is the only reason I'm here.

"Good," he says pointedly. "Because you won't be going anywhere for a long time. You have responsibilities and are needed here. You were only to go up to earth to find your brother, and that was months ago. What is your reasoning for returning to that treacherous place five more times?"

"I..." I've already fucked up. Pausing and stumbling on words is a sign of weakness. "I want to live there permanently."

His eyes are as big as saucers. “You what?” His loud tone is followed by a screeching sound.

“I’m in love with a human and I want to be with him.”

My father flexes his neck and the veins bulge in his face. “You can’t be. That’s preposterous. Demons don’t belong with humans. Our worlds should never mix that way.”

“I’m old enough to make my own decisions and I was never meant to follow in your footsteps.”

“No. You weren’t. Ever since you were born, all you’ve been is a disappointment. I won’t have you embarrass me more than you already have. You are staying here, training to be a guard, and marrying Dakini.” Guarding the gates of hell is a job they give you when they don’t feel you’re capable of anything else or have no idea where to put you. My brother and I can’t both take my father’s place as Lucifer’s enforcer. I’m always going to be second place in my father’s eyes. The inconvenience. The one who should have never been.

Anger boils inside me, heating the blood in my veins. “No. I won’t be following any of your orders anymore. I’m done living the life you want for me.”

He laughs, the sound eerie and unsettling. “Look at you, so brave and sure of yourself. You forget I’m older, more powerful, and am the one who gave you life. You will do what you’re told or I’ll send you to the pits until I feel it’s time for you to come out.”

“Do what you want. I’ll never marry Dakini or stop trying to reach Albert. You can send me to the pits all you want. I’ll never change my mind.” Me being the nephew of Lucifer, I can’t be kept down there forever, and the pain isn’t as unbearable as it is to humans. Our skin is thick and made to withstand a lot. Not to mention I’m mostly made of fire on the inside.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I didn’t come to ask for your permission or get your approval. I’m here to tell you I’m done living in your shadow and won’t be coming back.”

His smile stretches and he quickly gets to his feet, towering over me, the large black horns on his head twitching. “I didn’t want it to come to this but the only way you’ll ever learn is by suffering the greatest pain of all.”

“Do your best. No matter what you do, I’ll always heal and come back stronger.”

“Not this time, son.”

He snaps his fingers and a new hunger forms inside me. A craving for blood. And not just any kind of blood, but that of humans. No. He can’t. This fucking monster.

“You want your human so badly, you’ll go through great lengths and torture. Let’s see if he’ll go through great lengths for you too.”

“What do you mean? What have you done?”

“Nothing yet. Go to him. Show him your true form. Tell him the only way you’ll survive in the human realm is by drinking his blood. That you can only stay with him as you are and will lose every power I’ve given you, including the ability to change form. You think what you two share is love. I’ll prove otherwise when all he can see you as is a monster. A real living nightmare.”

“You’re insane. I won’t do that,” I spit out.

“It’s the only way I’ll let you walk out of here free to do what you choose.”

“Forever?”

“Yes,” he says through clenched teeth.

“You’ll never bother us?”

He shakes his head, standing taller. “Never.”

“Okay. I’ll do it then. I’ll show him what I am. He’ll accept all of me the way I have him. I know he will.” Albert has only ever seen me in my human form. Showing him what I truly look like has been against the rules. We are only able to go to earth appearing as human; otherwise, I’d have had a better chance at convincing him of what I really am before.

“You’re so sure?” His red lips form into a smirk.

“Yes. More than anything.” Albert said he loved me and that he always will.

“Nothing can ever tear us apart and keep me from wanting you,” he whispered to me as we lay in bed this morning.

“I’ll return you to him exactly as you are, but before I do, know that if he rejects you, you’ll spend your life alone in a dark hole underground until the blood of your fated mate frees you.”

Before I can respond, my view goes from red walls and gold tile floors to a warm living room with a familiar blue couch. I’m back in Albert’s house. Candles are lit and the fireplace is on. I take a deep breath, run a hand down the center of my naked black flesh, and walk toward the sweet humming sound coming from the kitchen. Our love is strong and can overcome anything. My father’s wrong. He doesn’t know Albert like I do.

“Is someone there?” Albert calls out as he places yellow roses into a vase, not bothering to look behind him.

“It’s me.”

“Rorian?” I can hear the smile in his voice, the happy tune making my heart beat faster.

“Yeah. I’ve returned. For good.”

He bounces where he stands, slowly turning around, and his smile quickly fades the moment his eyes land on me. “What... what’s going on? Why do you look like that? Is this some sort of costume?”

“No. This is the real me.” My tail stretches out to rub against his thigh. “Remember when I told you I was a demon from hell and my father was the devil’s brother?”

His eyes bulge and he steps back, hitting the counter. “What happened to you? What— You’re not my Rorian.”

“I am. I promise I am. Listen to my voice. I was here only this morning, telling you how I wanted to show you what it was like to walk on fire someday. And I can now. We can do whatever we want and we’ll always be together.”

His face pales. “You... you were telling the truth. I thought we were playing a game. This whole time you’ve really been... No, demons aren’t real. You can’t be real. Did I hit my head? Am I dreaming?”

“No, baby. This is real. I’m real. I know this will take time to adjust to and all this information is probably coming at you fast but—”

“If I really am awake and you are...” He swallows hard. “Are you... Then you’re a...” He sucks in a breath. “A monster, and monsters only exist in nightmares.”

My heart aches. My father said he’d call me that. It doesn’t matter if others see me as a monster, but hearing the word from Albert hurts. Like sharp daggers to my heart. “No. I’m the same Rorian you fell in love with. You know I’d never hurt you. I normally have to change into human form to be here but this is how I was born, and the only way I could return is if—”

“This is all wrong. You can’t be who you say you are.”

“What?”

“Look at you. You’re not my Rorian. You can’t be. Make yourself human. Show me the you I know.”

I reach for him and he shakes me off, disgust evident in his expression. “I need proof of who you say you are. If you can easily change forms when you normally come to see me, then do it now,” he demands.

“I—” My words catch in my throat as I stare down at my rough textured skin, my long tail wrapping around my trembling body, the tip flaming with fire. It happens when I’m overwhelmed with emotion, whether it be excitement, sadness, or worry. “I can’t. I have to stay this way forever if I want to be here with you. It’s one of my father’s conditions.”

Slowly inching toward me, his bottom lip trembles as he reaches to touch my face. Smiling, I place a hand on his. “It’s me, Alby.”

“Rorian,” he rasps, looping our fingers together as he steps closer.

“Yes,” I say, freezing in place when a strong copper scent hits my nose. Alluring and stirring up a new hunger, blood rises from a small prick on his finger from the thorns on the roses.

My breaths quicken and my mouth waters. No. No. No. This can’t really be happening.

“Albert. I need. I must.” I press my lips together, teeth grinding as I fight back the urge to get a taste of him. It’s too strong. My father needed it to be, didn’t he? If Albert can look past my outer appearance, will the same go for the rest too?

“What is it? You have to go again?”

Shaking my head, I bite the inside of my cheek so hard, a rancid taste fills my mouth. His blood might taste delicious but mine is straight up poison. It has a temporary paralysis effect on any human who drinks it but only tastes like I've eaten something rotten when hitting my own tongue.

“Then what? Is something else wrong?”

“Yes. So much and nothing all at once.”

His eyes widen and he tries to pull away but I grip his hand harder, keeping it on my cheek.

“Rorian... you're scaring me.”

Small horns protrude from my neck and the red cracks in my skin grow deeper, the spaces between glowing like a fire's flame, matching my tail. I've never been in this form here. I don't know what it means—how people will react. No one else can see me. It would cause an uproar and upset a balance. We are to continue existing alongside humans without them noticing and aren't supposed to be up here for long. I've already broken so many rules, and I'm sure my father is hoping my uncle's punishment will be a lot worse than his once he discovers the path I've chosen. It was never my decision to make.

Screaming and struggling in my grasp, Albert's skin turns red and is burning. The smell of his blood is stronger now. So sweet and lovely.

“I'm sorry,” I say. “It's not supposed to be this way. I don't want to hurt you.”

He finally breaks free from me, yanking himself so hard that he crashes to the ground. “But you did and you always will. Won’t you? It’s what you are.”

“No,” I shout, everything around me sounding like static.

“I was right before. You’re a monster. Stay away from me. Go back to where you came from.” He pulls out the cross attached to his necklace from under his shirt.

“No. Please. Not too loud or he’ll hear you. You said nothing would ever break us apart.”

Tears spring in his eyes and he stares toward the ground, scooting farther back. “That was before I knew what you were. I was blindsided. You tricked me. I don’t love you. Who in their right mind ever could?”

My heart cracks in two. My father was right. This hurts more than anything. The pain is spreading through my limbs and it’s almost as if I’m being pulled from every direction. “You don’t mean that.”

“I do.” He finally looks at me again, his eyes red and angry. “You don’t belong here. I don’t want you here.”

The ground starts to shake and I can feel heat rising from it. The floor cracks, and Albert gets to his feet and runs to the living room the moment I start to sink. “Please, Albert. Say you love me still.” It’s my last hope. I have to hear it more for myself than anything else. We both promised each other forever. What we have can’t end here. I’ll have nothing if it does. I gave up so much for us. Can’t he see that?

“I... I’m sorry,” he tells me, his voice cracking. “I’m so sorry. What I thought I felt isn’t enough for me to get past this. Your father was right to keep us apart and to try and stop you from being with me. It’s unnatural.”

Knots twist in my stomach and the fire within me burns brighter as I fall into the widening hole in the ground, my tears burning my eyes. “Maybe what you felt for me wasn’t real but what I feel for you always will be.”

Darkness takes me. Gravel and dirt close in on me when I’m finally all the way in the ground underneath the house. Albert will change his mind and come for me. Or all I can do is hope he will. Feeling heavy and aching, my eyes close and I start to slip into a deep sleep I might never wake up from.

I loved him while awake and above ground, and I’ll love him down here while sleeping too.

One

Everly

“You look beautiful, baby.” Theon’s warm lips press to my neck and his arms wrap around me from behind, our eyes locking in the mirror.

Shaking my head, I shove him away. “You’re not supposed to be in here.”

“Says who?”

“Says everyone. It’s bad luck to see each other before the wedding.”

“You sure that doesn’t only apply to straight couples?” He waggles his brows, reaching for me again.

Slipping out of his grasp, I rush to the other side of the room, shaking my finger at him when he starts chasing me in circles. “You saw me yesterday, you big lug.”

“This is a new day.”

“Yes, and you’ll see me in thirty minutes too,” I say pointedly.

“That’s too long.”

Rolling my eyes, I rush toward the door and open it, nudging my head toward the short hallway. “Go. Now.”

“Or what? You won’t marry me?”

“No. Or I’ll force you to sleep alone on our wedding night,” I deadpan.

“Yeah, you say that now. Just wait until you get cold and the blankets aren’t enough to keep you warm.”

“I’ll use extra blankets.”

“Still won’t be as thick as me.” He winks.

“Oh my God, Theon,” a high-pitched voice comes from nearby. “What are you doing? You trying to end your marriage before it begins? Get out of here and let your husband-to-be finish getting ready,” my maid of honor, Tiffany, yells.

“Yeah, yeah.” He waves his hand in the air. “See you soon,” he says, wearing a giant smile before he turns to leave.

“And you.” Tiffany turns her attention back to me. “Let’s fix that tie and hair of yours.”

Laughing, I follow her back to the mirror and she helps fix the mess I created around my neck before running her gelled fingers through my hair. “There.” She smiles, holding my face between both hands. “All ready to get married.”

“Thanks, Tiff. I’m going to use the little boy’s room and then I’ll meet you out there with everyone else.”

“Okay. Try not to be late to your own wedding.”

I roll my eyes. “Says the woman forcing me to take longer than I’m trying to.”

“Yeah, yeah. The two of you really are a match made in heaven.” She flicks her wrist while exiting the room.

Once I’m done using the restroom, I check my hair and straighten my tie before rushing toward the ceremony room. Music plays and I take a deep breath, about to enter the double doors when a hand grabs my arm, holding me in place. “I wouldn’t walk through there yet if I were you,” my brother, Charlie, whispers in my ear. “At least not until we find your husband-to-be.”

“What do you mean?”

“He isn’t in there yet. I was going to check his dressing room but his cousin Joardie stopped me and said he’ll be there soon. Just had a little too much to drink last night and can’t handle his breakfast this morning.”

“Oh no. But I saw him not long ago and he was fine.” My stomach tightens with worry.

“Yeah, I don’t know. That shit sneaks up on you sometimes.” Charlie shrugs.

“I should go make sure he’s okay.”

“What about your whole bad luck theory?” Charlie tilts his head.

“He already saw me so I’m not sure it matters now. He doesn’t believe in superstitions anyway.”

“Not sure anyone from this generation does, aside from you that is.”

Huffing, I smack my brother in the chest with the back of my hand as I slowly turn around. “Whatever. Tell everyone we’ll be along shortly.”

“Will do.” The doors behind me open and close as I rush toward Theon’s dressing room. I hope he isn’t too sick to his stomach. What if he’s passed out on the bathroom floor? The bad luck has seemed to start already. It hasn’t even been an hour since he’s seen me. Sighing, I slowly twist the knob and the door softly creaks open. My eyes dart toward the open bathroom before falling to the two partly naked bodies rocking together on the red velvet couch. Black jackets hang from their bodies and their white shirts are ruffled, pants rolled down to their ankles. Heavy breathing and loud moans fill the room. Frozen and confused, I can’t stop watching the scene unfold in front of me. Not wanting to believe what my instincts are telling me and what all the clear evidence suggests, I hold onto hope of Theon walking out of the bathroom. *Please come out.*

The two men are so lost in one another. Nothing else exists but them. They are each other’s world. The wild passion and pleasure they share is something to admire. It’s how I want to

look from an outside view when I'm lying naked on the beach with Theon.

"Faster," one says. "I can't be too late." The familiar tone causes my insides to twist. *No*. I look toward the bathroom again and it appears emptier than before, dark shadows looming over it. Fogging my vision, my eyes well with tears. This can't be real.

"They can wait. He can wait."

Anger rises inside me, my blood running hot and cold at the same time. It's not until the man on top turns around and stares at me with wide blue eyes that all the air rushes out of my lungs. Struggling to breathe enough to form words, I step back, pressing a hand to my chest. It hurts so bad. Sharp jabs at my heart make it hard to move and I feel like my shoes have lead in them as I try to leave the room. Scrambling off of his best friend and best man, Theon gets to his feet, tugging up his pants.

"How could you?" I finally manage, my words barely louder than a whisper.

Theon's face hardens. "I'm sorry. I didn't want you to find out this way." His voice is strained. "I care for you, Everly. I really do. It's why I never wanted to hurt you, but I can't help who I love."

"It's..." I swallow down the emotion building in my throat. "It's not me, is it?" I finally finish.

His jaw twitches and he shakes his head. “No. I tried. I have. The truth is my heart was taken long ago but my parents never approved. Unlike you, Harry doesn’t come from money or have a lavish career. He lives on the wrong side of the tracks and will be an embarrassment to my family name.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Are you fucking daft between the ears?” Harry shouts, reminding me of his unwelcoming presence. “He doesn’t love you. He never did. He’s only marrying you because his father wants to merge companies with yours and you are the only one naive enough to ignore what was happening behind your back. So gullible and stupid to believe your fiancé was always too tired to stay over or had to work late. You didn’t even question why the guy you’re dating wanted to save himself for marriage. You made everything so easy.”

“Harry, please.” Theon shoots him a look. “No need to be so cruel. He didn’t ask for this.”

“Sure he did, by being a complete moron and continuing to remain in some fantasy land in his head instead of facing reality like a damn grown-up.”

Harry’s words keep hitting me harder and harder. I didn’t think it was possible to break so much in one day. He doesn’t even give me a few minutes to gather myself together before the next strike.

“I don’t feel sorry for him and you shouldn’t either. Besides, at least he gets to wear your ring on his finger and be invited to family gatherings. All I’ll ever get is hotel rooms and kisses

behind some wall or in a bathroom like some secret side piece. Things could be a lot worse.”

“I... I have to go.” My throat threatens to close up and my muscles are too weak for me to do much to stop it.

“Wait. Please don’t tell anyone. We can still go on as planned. I’ll marry you like you want and we’ll go away on our honeymoon and—”

“You’ll sneak off with him every chance you get.”

“I’m losing in this too, you know,” Theon says, his eyes hooking onto mine.

“You mean by having to spend your life with me? Well, allow me to free you from your burden.”

I rush down the hall and tears spring from my eyes, adding to my heated cheeks. I don’t stop when he calls after me again or when my brother tries to call to me and my cousin chases me in the parking lot. Feeling like my world is crumbling around me, I run faster and only slow down when I feel like I’m far enough away for no one to come looking for me. Walking into the nearest gas station, I wipe my eyes with the back of my hand and head for the bathroom. My phone rings and I wait until I am out of view of others before answering Tiffany’s call.

“Hello?”

“Everly? Sweetie, what’s going on? What happened?”

“I... Theon and Harry.”

“What about them?”

“They were together in the back dressing room,” I breathe out.

A gasp comes from the other end of the phone line. “Oh my God. Those assholes. What the fuck?”

“I can’t marry him. I don’t care what our parents want. I can’t. He gets his dad’s company and to run off with Harry any time he wants, and what do I get? Nothing but fucking scraps. From everyone. Him. My dad. I’m not good enough for anything more than that.” The pain escalates from my heart to my stomach. It’s paralyzing when it reaches every part of me and I almost lose my grip on my phone.

“Then don’t. I’ll tell you what you should do instead. Go on that honeymoon without him. Meet some sexy stranger at a beach party. Have fun and forget all about him. No more wasted tears over some asshole who isn’t worth it.”

That’s easier said than done. Nonetheless, she’s right. Fuck him. He and Harry can have each other. My father can enjoy cleaning up after the mess I left behind. It’s what he gets for only thinking of himself and trying to push his dream on me. “Good thing I have the tickets and he doesn’t. Getting away really is what I need right now, and my family’s isolated beach house in Key West is definitely calling my name.”

“You need me to come with? I’d have to find coverage for my shifts but if you really need me—”

Shaking my head, I clear my throat. “It’s okay. I think I need to be on my own for a bit. Figure out what I want for a change. This will give me time to do that.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Positive. I’ll be fine, I promise.”

“You better send me lots of pics while you’re there.”

“Let’s see if I get reception first.”

She puffs out a breath. “Hopefully long enough to let me know you’re alive.”

“You worry too much. I think there’s a landline in the house, so at least I’ll be able to call.”

“Good. Am I still taking you to the airport in the morning?”

“Yup. So be on time.”

“Already have my alarm set,” she says, her tone lightening a little.

“Oh, and can you maybe pick me up from the green gas station down the street?”

She laughs. “Left without your keys, huh?”

“I asked my brother to get something out of my car and he never gave them back.”

“I’ll grab them and will be there as soon as I can,” she says.

“Thanks, Tiff. For everything.”

“What are maids of honor for? See ya soon, runaway bride.”

“Later.” Chuckling, I end the call and turn on the sink to wash the tears off my face. I look like I’ve been through hell and back—feel like it too. Washing my face only does so much for my outer appearance and not a single damn thing to heal the bleeding wounds surrounding my heart. Maybe flying out alone tomorrow isn’t such a great idea after all but I’d rather not inconvenience Tiffany more than I already have or force her to be stuck in a house alone for one week with a sad, pathetic sap who will no doubt spend half the vacation wallowing in self pity.

“No more wasted tears over some asshole who isn’t worth it,” she said.

How else can I relieve this pressure inside? My heart’s so swollen, I feel like I’ll combust at any minute if I don’t allow the pain to fully pour out. With all the years I’ve spent loving the wrong man, letting what we had go will take more than a few days. I only hope it doesn’t take the lifetime we promised each other.

I pull my engagement ring off my finger and shove it deep in my pocket, having a hard time letting it go on my way out of the bathroom. Why do I have to be so hard to love? First my parents and now Theon. He was my everything and I was his nothing. Lifting my head up, I see a woman and man kissing. The love in their eyes is so evident. There’s no second-guessing it. He looks at her like she hung the moon.

I used to think I could have that too. What are the chances of me finding that on a beach where I’ll mostly be alone?

Looking toward the window, I spot Tiffany's car waiting out front. I drop the ring in my pocket as I'm pulling my hand free and walk out of the store. I have as much of a chance of meeting my soulmate here as I do there, and I don't have a nice ocean view at home. I'll also have to hear from my parents sooner if I stay. Yeah, to the beach it is. Better to be crying alone beside the beautiful ocean with a piña colada in my hand than in the bed where I used to make out with my ex.

Two

Everly

I was excited to have the window seat until the man sitting beside me was too sound asleep to move out of the way to let me pee. Three glasses of wine in first class sounded like a great idea before my bladder was on the verge of bursting.

The moment the aisle clears, I toss my backpack strap over my shoulder, grab my suitcase from the overhead, and haul ass out of the plane. I'm a light packer and plan on spending most of my stay in my pjs and swim trunks, so I didn't need to check any bags. I left all things work related at home, including my laptop, and have no intentions of answering emails on my honeymoon for one.

The only other device I brought with me beside my phone was my Kindle. Reading demon smut in public got awkward when I reached a sex scene and started getting too turned on to sit still in my seat. Definitely a chapter I need to save for when I'm alone in my room and can take care of my raging boner. Who knew the fantasy of a smoldering, sexy demon dragging

me to hell would be such a turn-on? Yeah, I should have chosen another book to open in public. Something more along the lines of *Pride and Prejudice*. Regular happy human couples are the last thing I want to think about right now though.

Dragging my suitcase behind me, I enter the first bathroom I come across and rush into the nearest stall to empty my bladder. My phone vibrates as I'm washing my hands. I ignore it until I'm standing outside waiting for a car to pick me up. A red car pulls in front of me as I'm reading a very long, woe is me message from Theon. Rolling my eyes, I slide my phone in my pocket and toss my belongings in the trunk. A man with dark hair and dark eyes greets me as I slide in the back seat of the vehicle.

He confirms the address he was given and on the long drive, I lean back in my seat, watching the ocean follow me out the window. Bright and sunny, there's barely a cloud in sight.

"Do you want to stop anywhere on your way there? You'll be too far for delivery."

"No. A family member who lives in the area stocked the fridge for me so I should be good for a while." A few cousins lived out here and the oldest, Anita, was far too excited about getting mine and Theon's honeymoon cabin ready. I doubt she's heard the news yet. Harry and my father have been telling people some blatant lies about needing to postpone the wedding due to Theon being too sick to walk down the aisle yesterday. Most people assume Theon is with me now and we

are getting married here, having a private ceremony. I made sure to show up at the airport early so he wouldn't try to stop me at check in. I ignored all his messages of how he wants to make things work and about him being at the airport. It was more for his benefit than mine.

“Okay. If you need to go anywhere, I won't be too far away,” the driver says, adjusting the air conditioner.

“Thanks. I think I'll hang back at the house and relax for a little bit.”

“No sightseeing or going shopping?”

I shake my head, continuing to glance out the window. “No. At least not right away.” Who knows, I might be up for it later. Being around too many people feels like too much right now. Seeing others enjoying themselves with the one they love will cause my already broken pieces to crumble.

“If you get a chance, you definitely should venture away from where you're staying. It's such a beautiful place with so much to see.” He continues looking ahead as he takes a sharp turn onto a long rocky road.

“I'll keep that in mind.” I force a smile in case he can see me in one of the mirrors. It doesn't take but ten minutes to reach the one-story, sky-blue beach house. It's as gorgeous as I remember, with a little more wear on the white trim than before. For the most part it's been kept up with. The front porch is spacious and shaded, holding a large white swinging bench, along with a few other outside furniture. It's a perfect

place to have my coffee in the mornings and sip some wine at night.

“Need help with the bags?” The driver stares at me through the rearview mirror, placing the car in park.

“No, I’ll be okay. Thank you.” Plucking my phone from my pocket, I hit pay and add a tip for how nice and helpful he’s been before swinging the door open. I’m here. Finally. Taking in a deep breath, I inhale the salty scent of the ocean. Sand pools around my feet, pouring into the tops of my flip flops as I grab my bags from the trunk. Heading up the stone pathway, I briefly turn my head to wave off the driver and lug my stuff up the porch steps. A meow comes from behind me as I open the door with the key I pulled from under the tan welcome mat.

Pushing my way inside, I set my stuff in the entryway and look around me. A gray cat jumps out from one of the large plants looping around the bottom of the house.

“Oh, hello. Wasn’t expecting any visitors out here.” Crouching down, I scratch between his ears and he purrs. If Theon were here, he’d tell me not to touch stray animals because of diseases and such. Why did it take until now for me to see how wrong we are for each other? Everything becomes clearer the longer the rose-colored glasses are off.

“You don’t look diseased,” I say to the small furry creature, running my fingers down his back. I wonder if he has an owner. There isn’t another house for miles so I can’t just walk over to my nearest neighbors to ask. I pet him beneath his chin

and he licks my fingers. No collar. The poor thing is skin and bones. He looks hungry.

“Let me see if I can find you a can of tuna or something.” Standing back up, I walk inside and block him with my leg when he tries to follow me. “Sorry, buddy. Not sure others in my family will be too keen on me having random cats inside during my stay.” I do hate leaving him out here all alone.

Rummaging through the cabinets, I find five cans of tuna and snatch one off the shelf. It takes longer than it should for me to find a small bowl. This kitchen is lined with cabinets and open shelves—some teal and some white. The dishes left in clear view appear to be only there for decoration. Something rubs against my leg and I drop a bowl into the sink, the loud clatter causing my new cat friend to run under the powder-blue sectional.

He must have snuck in behind me anyway. Reaching for the bowl, I set it on the counter and search for a can opener in the six different drawers only to discover the electrical one by the fancy espresso machine. People expect me to be familiar with high-quality appliances because my family comes from money, forgetting I’m nothing more than a bank teller working his way through veterinary school.

Unlike my brother, I’m a simple guy who lives in a studio apartment and uses a French press or grabs a cup of Joe on my way to work. I live off take-out meals and frozen dinners, occasionally settling for ramen or mac and cheese on the stove top. I drive a six-year-old Toyota and shop for my clothes

wherever there's a sale. Theon hides behind his family name whereas I try to run from mine.

Meow.

The little intruder is back, circling my feet. After I pop off the tuna can, fill the bowl, and toss the trash in the motion sensor trash can, I set the food on the front porch to lead the cat outside. He sniffs the air and quickly runs up behind me, shoving his little face into the bowl. I laugh, watching him from the doorway. "Good stuff, huh? I'll leave you to your meal and go fix me something with less stench." My nose curls as the scent of fish wafts in the air from him pushing his food around with his nose.

Covering my nose with the inside of my elbow, I close the door and wash my hands in the bathroom sink when the strong fish scent lingers on my fingers from when I touched the top of the can. Seafood of any kind is a no go for me. In a can especially. My stomach shifts at the memory of when Theon last cooked me a fancy shrimp dinner. I shudder. I ate it because he worked so hard and I really liked him.

My heart squeezes in my chest as I dry my hands on the towel with the first letter of my family's last name embroidered at the bottom. If what I thought he felt for me never existed then neither did we. It was all a lie. A role he tricked me into playing to hide his secret affair. Will I ever stop missing him? How can I still want someone who's probably never thought of me once.

My chest caves and I exit the restroom, and explore the house some more.

In my first five hours in paradise, all I manage to accomplish is feeding a cat, tossing my bags in a room that isn't covered in rose petals, scarfing down too many peanut butter sandwiches, and draining a whole bottle of wine in front of the big screen TV in the living room. Leaning on the couch, I get to my feet and sway my way to the kitchen to search for more wine. I stumble a little before reaching the wine rack behind a small bar, tightly gripping the granite top.

Yeah, I can probably do without more wine, but feeling nothing is better than feeling sad and lonely. I'm worried once my buzz disappears, I'll go back to wanting to pour my eyes out under the covers. No thanks. I'll take another bottle of numbing juice please.

Light fades outside the kitchen window and the darkness is almost inviting. The well-lit kitchen suddenly hurts my eyes and my skin craves the warm outside air. Using the bottle opener, I pop the cork from a new bottle, not reading the front. Not bothering with a glass like before, I wrap my fingers around the neck and make my way to the back porch. It's smaller than the front but is more inviting with a cushioned lounge chair and a beautiful beach view. Waves crash and I close my eyes, listening to the relaxing sound of colliding water.

I could stay out here forever. Something jumps into my lap, nudging at my arm. The cat from earlier found me again,

probably trying to convince me to give him more food.

“Tomorrow,” I say, petting him gently. “I don’t trust my can opening skills right now.”

He meows, and I like to pretend he understands. Yeah, I’m so wasted. The numbness spreads from my head to my limbs and I feel lighter than before. Relaxing back in my seat, I glance up at the stars, swallowing another gulp of wine, the bitterness on my tongue no longer fazing me. The strong, dry taste took a little getting used to since I don’t drink often and I’ve never considered myself a wine fan. It’s a family favorite and all I can find in the house.

Hissing, the cat jumps off my lap and stares toward the kitchen. Looking around, I scoot to the edge of my seat. “What is it, buddy?”

A long growl comes from him and he slowly approaches the back door. Getting to my feet takes as long as I expect it will and I use everything around me to keep balanced, confused at what sent the cat into defense mode. He keeps hissing and moves forward before jumping back as if he’s scared to go any closer.

Nothing is there. The kitchen is as empty as it was when I left it. I slide open the door, wondering if I can somehow see better without the glass in the way, and no such luck. Sharp claws dig into my pants when I try to walk inside.

“It’s okay, boy. No one is here but me and you.” My gaze drifts between him and the spot he remains focused on. “See. There’s nothing there,” I say pointedly.

Entering the house, I stumble into the kitchen, grabbing a chair when I'm hit with a dizzy spell. The cat stays outside, his eyes narrowing in on a discolored floorboard. Weird. Inching closer, I walk around it, noticing how it's raised a little, not looking properly put in with the rest.

Did the cat see something I didn't? Is there a small animal living under the wooden flooring? Not sure I want to find out. A weird sensation comes over me when I place my foot over the loose board. Retracting my leg, I try to set the wine bottle on the counter behind me and miss. Clattering hard against the wood, glass shatters everywhere, small flying pieces cutting my leg. Wincing, I try to step over the mess and lose my balance, crashing to the floor. "Fuck," I scream as my knees land on the sharp glass, the blood from my wounds mixing with the wine and seeping into the cracks.

Pressing my hands in front of me, I try to stand and fail miserably, falling into the glass again, cutting myself more than before. I'm going to feel this in the morning. How am I supposed to enjoy a morning swim in the ocean now? Saltwater and fresh cuts do not mix well together. What a damn mess I am. Meowing shifts my focus to the open back door and the cat steps closer, tilting his head in curiosity. He nudges my hip and then my leg.

"I'm okay. Nothing a first aid kit can't handle."

He paws at the loose floorboard, his eyes widening and his body tensing. His tail shoots straight in the air and his ears

flatten. The board shakes beneath and I think I'm imagining it until my furry friend darts out the door.

"Wait," I shout. "Come back." I didn't realize how comforting his company was until it was gone. The whole ground moves this time and my heart speeds up in my chest. What in the world?

The loose board bumps against my leg. It's almost as if something's trying to get out. The hair rises at the back of my neck and I crawl forward, ignoring the pain in my legs. My blood smears across the floor and I move fast when loud banging comes from underneath me.

"Help," a voice says.

Freezing in place, my heart races. Inhaling and exhaling deeply, I crane my neck and slowly exhale as I glance at the small hole in the floor from two boards being popped out of place. I'm losing my mind. No wonder I don't drink often. Not sure I will ever again after this. Virgin cocktails for me from here on.

"Are you still there? I can't get free without you."

I wasn't hearing voices. Whoever is down there is alive and real, but how? "How long have you been down there?"

"I'm not sure. Can you get something to remove more of the wood? I'm pretty squished down here."

"I... I can try." Getting to my feet, I whimper with each step I take, checking every drawer and closet until I find a pry bar.

Unsteady on my feet, I return to the kitchen, my breaths rushing out so fast my throat burns. “Are you still there?”

“Where else would I be?” he deadpans. His voice is light and higher pitched than mine. How is he talking so well after being down there for however long he has? A few days would even be too much without water. With shaking hands, I use all the strength I have to remove more flooring. He stays out of sight until I’m done and waits until I’m no longer in view to crawl out.

Gasping and falling back on my ass, I rub my eyes, not believing what I’m seeing. When I move my hands away, nothing changes. The man standing in front of me has skin as black as tar with red lines in random places on his body. Red horns protrude from his head and a long tail wraps around his ankle, fire spurting off the tip. *No. That can’t be right.*

“What’s happening?” I ask, my voice cracking. “Am I dreaming? Did I bleed out and die?”

He laughs, his lips curving up. His long, thick cock bounces between his legs as he steps closer. He’s naked. I already knew that, didn’t I? I’m not sure what I know anymore. “No, sweetheart. You and I are both very much alive. Can’t you feel it? I can’t be the only one. I knew you’d come for me eventually and awaken me from my repeating nightmare. Only you had the power to bring me back and you did.”

Shaking my head, I scoot back. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve never seen you before in my life. Where did you come from? What are you?”

He sucks in a sharp breath through his perfect white teeth. “Did you already forget? How could that be if you figured out how to bring me back?”

“I... Huh? Bring you back? I still don’t understand.”

He keeps walking closer and I don’t stop dragging myself away.

“Albert. Baby, it’s me. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Then don’t. Wait. Did you call me Albert?” Who the fuck is that?

He tilts his head. Red spikes emerge from his neck. He can’t be real. He’s like something out of a horror film or nightmare but at the same time the most magnificent creature I’ve ever seen. His grayish-blue eyes are pale and his body is slender, curving in all the right places. As terrifying as he is, he’s also breathtaking.

Frowning, he stands still. “I’m afraid I can’t promise that anymore. Not after what happened last time. I can try to be more careful. Lock myself away when the urges become too much.” He licks his black lips. Are they as soft as they look? What the hell? Did I also hit my head when I fell? Why would I want to know that? I don’t. Do I?

“What are you scared you’ll do? What urges? You’re not going to eat me, are you? I can promise you I don’t taste very good. My diet is horrible.”

He sighs, pinching the bridge of his small nose. The perfect shape complements the rest of his face. “Albert, why are you

acting so weird? And why do you look so young and different? Your hair is lighter, and have your eyes always been brown?"

"That's because I'm not Albert. How do you know him anyway? Are you something he accidentally summoned during summer camp?"

His bottom lip trembles. "What do you mean you're not him? You have to be. And we don't always have to be summoned. I've never been."

"Wait. Did I accidentally summon you too?" I wrap my arms around my legs, pressing my knees to my chest. Not an easy thing to do being the size I am.

"Are you not listening? I wasn't summoned. I was awoken from the deep sleep my father forced me into and there's only one way that can happen."

"How?"

"From the blood of my fated mate."

Feeling light-headed, the room spins. "I... think I need to lie down."

"Let me help you. You've hurt yourself enough tonight as it is." He gestures toward my bleeding legs, his brows furrowing.

"No." I lift my hands in the air, struggling to hold myself up. "Don't come any closer."

"Albert, if you truly didn't want me here, I wouldn't be." He looks around. "Everything has changed so much. Have I been

sleeping for years?”

My body grows heavy. “For the last time, I’m not Albert.”

“Who are you then?” His forehead wrinkles.

“I’m not sure anymore.” The room grows smaller and everything flashes until the world completely fades to black.

Three

Rorian

Lying on his back and a little too silent for my liking, Albert's eyes are closed. His rising chest is the only thing bringing me comfort. Frowning, I lean down, running my fingers over his injuries. The blood is still fresh and has me on edge. My stomach rumbles, my hunger not satisfied enough from the little drops I got beneath the floorboard. I need more. Digging my nails into my thighs, I focus on the pain so my thoughts can be somewhere other than on his enticing scent.

He needs to be cleaned up. That's all I'll be doing. If I don't eat a little, I could lose control of my actions, and if he stays this way, he may get an infection. My brother can set shit on fire with his mind and I have the gift of healing through my saliva. I'll be taking care of us both at the same time. What can it hurt?

Leaning closer to his bloody skin, I flick my tongue in and out, lightly licking off the sticky, addicting substance. He stirs a little the more I lap at his leg and I moan in between each

lick, not stopping until there's no more left of him for me to taste on the outside. All this did was make me want more. There has to be another way around it. The blood of an animal could be enough. I can't imagine anything smelling as good as him. I savor what's left on my lips while watching him wiggle in his sleep.

What if he's telling the truth and he really isn't Albert? It's hard to believe his words when him being someone else doesn't make sense. How else was he able to bring me back here? My father's words were very clear. *Only the blood of your fated mate can wake you.* When my eyes opened and a metallic taste hit my tongue, I smiled and my heart was dancing in my chest. The harsh words Albert said before didn't matter to me anymore. He came back for me. Or I thought he did.

Aside from being a little taller than I remember, as well as more muscular with a thicker body frame and different colored eyes, his hair is also light. He's more beautiful than ever and it's hard to not reach out and touch him. Did he not age at all while I slept? Or has he been reincarnated? This has to be my father's doing. Some kind of magic trick.

"I'm not Albert." His words continue to ring in my ears.

If he's not Albert then who the hell is he and why does he smell similar? Dark hair covers half of his face and he's so burly. He's perfect. Soon he'll remember he's mine. Kneeling down, I lift him in my arms and carry him through the strange looking house.

Walls that were once blue are now white and pictures of random people cover the ones in the living room. Albert's bedroom has changed too. It has two twin beds sitting in front of a large window covered in tacky floral curtains. Turning up my nose at the equally hideous rug and vases, I step back into the hallway until I enter a room with bags sitting at the end of a queen-sized bed. This seems more right than the first one.

The decor is more subtle and the room carries the same scent as the man in my arms. I keep looking at him and questioning everything I thought I knew. My heart races in my chest when he buries his face in my neck. He doesn't feel like Albert but it doesn't stop something deep down inside me from claiming him.

Maybe we can make more sense of things when he's awake again. Calm inside, my body temperature remains neutral, the fire within staying beneath my skin and not seeping from the cracks like it sometimes does without notice. For once I feel in control of it. Last time I was here, it owned me and not the other way around.

Walking closer to the bed, I lay him on top of the white comforter. He stirs a little as I start to pull away, and letting him go doesn't feel right. It's like there's a rope in my chest tying itself to him, yanking us back together when I try to leave. Instead of fighting it, I give in and crawl in beside him.

Lying pressed up against him with my arm holding his waist, I kick the bags off the bed and my gaze drifts around the room. More pictures of people. Families, couples, and school

portraits. They are everywhere. What happened to this place and what happened to the man I love? My father had to be responsible for the change in his appearance and his lack of memory of me. Anything is possible with that man. He'll do anything to keep Albert and me apart—to put strain on our relationship.

Nothing is easy with my father. There's hurdle after fucking hurdle. He won't admit it out loud but he wants us to be as miserable as him. My mother was different, and that's why he had her banished into a deeper part of hell where she became unreachable to us. He didn't love her. He doesn't know how to love anyone but himself. I truly believe that now.

He says it's because she went behind his back more than once and couldn't be trusted. She was a fallen angel who left her world for him and he cast her aside so easily. Just like Albert did to me. It doesn't matter where the past led us. We are where we should be now—together again—and all I want is to get back what we had before it was taken away from us. He's the one for me and I'm the one for him. The feeling is stronger than ever—a strong energy zapping between us, causing my heart to smile. “Mine,” my body says. *Always mine.*

When I was younger, my mother took us to a demon of wishes, and while my brother asked for a second power, I wanted something else. I wanted to grow up and find a love worth fighting for. Someone who is made perfect for me. When my eyes first landed on Albert, I thought I finally got what I was promised. I ignored the feeling that something was

off that I sometimes got when we were intimate or spending all day together. Maybe we weren't ready for each other yet.

Albert snuggles into me and everything feels right in the world. A heavy weight in my chest lifts and when his fingers touch my hip, my skin buzzes, sparks flickering between us. The time wasn't right then. That's all. It must be now.

It doesn't matter who he thinks he is or who he thinks I am. Sleep never sounded so good and I haven't felt this at ease in a long time. Closing my eyes, I press my nose into his hair, breathing him in. He's so big compared to me. His warmth pulls me closer and the weight of his hand keeps me grounded when I normally feel like I'm going everywhere at once. Maybe everything changing while I was gone isn't a bad thing after all.



Light from the window forces my eyes apart. I woke up again. It will take a while to get used to this, to not feel like I'll be sleeping forever. I wasn't fully resting underground though. It's why I'm so exhausted now. The recurring nightmares kept my mind awake. Albert was living a life without me. Getting married to a woman and having children. His smiles and sounds of pleasures belonged to someone else. It all seemed so real.

A warm body wiggles against me and I stare down at him, smiling. Only in bed with him scooted down and curled up

does he appear shorter than me. My stomach grumbles and I'm not only craving blood. I had the ability to make myself human before but never actually was one. It was nothing more than a skin change. A costume. Eating, sleeping, and using the restroom were irrelevant to me and things I faked around people. Food was more of a pleasure than a need.

Now with all my powers gone, I look like a demon while needing everything a human does. My bladder suddenly feels full and I quickly get off the bed to run into the bathroom. Standing in front of the toilet, I reach for my cock and point it down toward the center of the bowl. I've seen others do it plenty of times before. It can't be too hard. Relaxing, I spread my legs and take a deep breath. A warm stream releases from me, hitting the toilet. I'm doing it. I'm peeing. Never did I think I'd see the day where I'd be like everyone and yet still different at the same time.

Once I'm done relieving myself, I wash my hands and face. My appearance is the only thing recognizable. Other than that, I don't know who I am anymore. I'd give it all up for him a thousand times over. Even if Albert wouldn't do the same for me.

Walking back into the room, I watch him shift in the bed a few minutes before finding the kitchen. Albert and I have made breakfast together before. He loves to cook, and watching him in his happy place makes me smile.

The fridge is fully stocked when I open it and I grab everything required to make breakfast tacos. I set the eggs,

bacon, cheese, and four potatoes on the counter before grabbing two pans hanging above the stove. I look behind me and when the house is still as quiet as before, I turn on the stove top and wait until the pans are hot enough to start cooking. I want to give him something familiar when he wakes up. If he doesn't remember me then maybe the first meal he ever made me will jog something inside him and he'll look at me the way he did when we first ate together. Just maybe.

Four

Everly

My throbbing head stirs me awake and the sting in my legs keeps me from falling back to sleep. Sunlight from the window behind me fills the room, not doing any favors for my aching eyes. Rubbing my face, I slowly sit up and hang my legs over the bed. Why did I think drinking alone was a good idea again?

Stretching my arms, I slowly stand up, a little wobbly at first. Getting my bearings, I walk to the bathroom, my body screaming. Without looking in the mirror, I approach the sink and wash my face, rinsing out my mouth. The cotton feel is mostly gone. Nothing more water and coffee won't fix. When I finally look up, my swollen eyes and puffy face have me stepping back. Good thing I'm alone because who'd want to wake up to this?

Certainly not my ex fiancé. He was all about perfection. I didn't fit the bill apparently. Harry did. Groaning, I run a hand through my hair, my attempts to look more human not

working. The bizarre dream I had last night resurfaces as I'm entering the room again. No more reading demon porn for me.

Reaching for my bag on the floor, not remembering putting it there, I search for clean clothes to change into. The bag is empty. What's happening? Where are my things? Looking up, I notice the closet partly open and when I look inside, my clothes are hanging up in front of me. When did I unpack?

All I remember is drinking wine and then a sexy demon showing up. That must have been when I passed out. Wait, did I just think of him as sexy? Nothing makes sense. I'm suffering from delusions and can't remember doing shit I obviously did. Is yesterday's drinking also resulting in memory loss?

I tug off my clothes and they drop to the floor, pooling around my feet. Cold air bites at my skin. I'll have to adjust the AC. I get cold easily. Everyone else will be sweating their asses off and I'll be in the corner shivering, wearing a thick ass sweater. Something else my Theon complained about. Here I am in a cabin on a beach where it's hotter than Satan's asshole outside and I still feel like I'm waking up in an igloo.

My skin burns when I tug on a pair of sweats and when I look down at my legs, I choke on air. So the fall was real. A memory flashes in my mind of me landing on glass in the kitchen. Did I faint from the sight of blood? My wounds are clean and bandaged though... weird. It takes me longer than usual to finish dressing, my disorientation and hangover slowing me down.

The sun is brighter in the kitchen. Too much light coming through the window increases my headache. After I eat and hydrate, it's back under the covers for me. I didn't plan on spending my honeymoon sleeping but I also didn't expect to spend it alone either. Yet here I am about to do both. I expect to see a huge mess when I enter the kitchen but instead it's almost as clean as it was when I first arrived. So apparently I accomplish more when I'm drunk and half asleep than I do when I'm sober and fully alert.

No glass on the floor or spilled wine. A rug I don't remember seeing before is in front of the sink. Bending down, I'm about to search for broken floorboards underneath it when approaching footsteps have me retracting my hand.

"Morning," a soft, upbeat voice says from nearby. Freezing in place, I glance from side to side, too stiff to turn around.

"How did you sleep? You're not hurting too bad, are you?"

Slowly straightening out my back, I take a deep breath and spin around. All the blood goes to my head and I pinch myself to check if I'm awake. My skin pressing tightly together says I am. My eyes must be playing tricks on me. No way is the demon from my dream standing in the kitchen in nothing but a floral apron. Holy cannoli—he's only wearing an apron. So much skin and muscles are on display. He's a smaller build than I am but still very defined everywhere, with a cock that would wreck me. Wait... Did I just think that?

He chuckles. "Did you mean to say that out loud? Here I thought you'd be hungry for food before anything else.

Clearly, I was wrong.” His lips form into a sexy grin. “I don’t remember you being so vocal about sex before. I’m all for it though. My baby always gets what he wants, but only after he eats and has some water first.”

His what? Wait, did he just agree to having sex with me without me properly asking? I think I’m going to pass out again. “I... What? No. I don’t want that.” Do I? No. I do not. But what if... No. Just no.

I pinch myself again. *Wake up. Wake up.* Slapping myself doesn’t get rid of him either. If I touch him will he disappear? Isn’t that what happens in dreams? As real as this feels, it’s impossible. Men who look like him only exist in movies and romance books.

My stomach flutters when his grin widens, my heart skipping a beat as he inches closer. What’s happening? Closing and opening my eyes doesn’t stop him from getting closer. He’s not going away no matter what I do. Why is there a sinking sensation in my stomach at the thought of him not being here the next time I close and open my eyes?

“Why do you look so real?”

He chuckles and strokes my cheek, tingles traveling along my skin, his touch placing me under some temporary spell. “Because I am.”

My breaths quicken and I lift my hand to press it to the center of his hard, defined chest. Holy demon he’s like a fucking rock. One I want to rub my face over. No... that’s not right. He’s so warm and my body has a sudden desire to be

pressed to his. The heat radiating off him is as inviting as his toasty marshmallow scent.

Keeping one hand on my face, his other rests over my fingers and his heart beats faster against my palm. “I’m real and so are you. I was worried when I woke up, you’d be gone and I’d be back to swimming in dirt like I was underground. Holding you in my sleep and waking up alone was the greatest torture I’ve ever experienced. Until yesterday, I kept opening my eyes before I could fully have you.”

He’s talking to me as if he knows me and touching me like he’s done it a thousand times. Instead of pushing him away, I lean in closer until our noses touch. He’s still here. Maybe I really am awake. “Who are you?”

“Your mate, Rorian.”

“Rorian,” I repeat, and once I fully grasp what he’s saying, I step away. “My mate?”

“Yes, baby. I’m yours and always will be. Doesn’t matter where or who we are.”

My throat tightens. “As flattered as I am, I think you have the wrong person.”

Sighing softly, he reaches for me again, his fingers tangling with mine. Why do they feel so good? Why is my body responding this way? I want him closer but at the same time I want to run away. Not because he scares me but because I’m scaring myself. This whole situation is bizarre and I feel like I’m trapped inside one of my books or the twilight zone.

“I promise you I don’t. I’d know if I did. You wouldn’t keep gravitating to me if you were.”

“Huh?” I tilt my head, captivated by those mesmerizing eyes.

His face lights up in amusement. “Your hands are on my hips.” He glances between us and I follow his gaze, taken aback. He’s right. There my hands are, clutching him tightly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to... I don’t know what’s happening.” I quickly pull back my hands, placing them in my pockets instead, hoping they stay put. If I was touching his hips without realizing it, who knows what I’ll grab next. “How about you stay there and I stay here for now.”

“If that’s what you want.”

Is it? Yesterday I was on a plane reading about a demon fucking a human into a desk, thinking how lucky he was and wishing it was me being split in two. Now that I have one standing in front of me with eyes darkening with desire, sporting a hard-on under an apron barely covering anything I... Yeah, I still want that.

“It’s what I need. At least until I figure out what the hell is going on.”

“Look, Albert, I know it’s a lot to—”

Holding up my hands, I stand up straighter. “Okay, let’s get one thing straight, I’m not nor have I ever been Albert. Do I look like him or something?”

He shakes his head. “No. That’s the part I don’t understand. Along with a few others. You look different but smell almost the same. Taste similar too.”

I swallow the lump in my throat. “Wait. What do you mean by taste? Did you eat some of me while I was sleeping and I don’t feel it yet? Is that why you have an apron on?” I give myself a once-over and relief settles in when I don’t see any chunks missing.

His eyes crinkle in the corners. “No. I was making you breakfast. Well, us, since I need food too now.”

“Then what did you mean?”

“Your blood. Your wounds needed to be cleaned.”

My breaths stutter. “So you, what, used your tongue instead of alcohol wipes? Doesn’t sound very sanitary if you ask me.”

A laugh bubbles out of him. “It’s not what... My saliva has healing properties. At least it did. I don’t know if that was taken away from me too.”

“Healing properties?” I hold my hand to my forehead, spinning around to lean over the counter. “I think I need to sit down or maybe dunk myself in a tub of ice water.”

“You still think you’re dreaming, don’t you? At least you’re not telling me to leave like before.”

Tugging at my hair, I turn around to face him again. “For the last time, I’m not who you think I am. There was no before. I’ve never seen you until yesterday. Wait. Did you really come out from the floor?”

“Yeah. You woke me.”

Thinking back to yesterday, I recall what he said when I asked what brought him here.

“The blood of the man my heart belongs to.”

My tongue thickens in my mouth. “Are you some kind of vampire or something?”

“No. I’m a demon from hell.”

“A demon from hell who likes blood?”

“I wouldn’t say I like it. More of a requirement than a choice.”

“Are you saying you’re going to need more?” I gawk at him.

“Eventually, but I’m okay for now,” he says all casually.

Like no big deal. *I’ll need to eventually stick a straw through you like a Capri Sun but not until later.* It’s fine. I’m fine. We’re all fucking fine. “Does it have to be from me?”

He nods slowly, struggling to stay where he is.

“And if you don’t get it?”

“I can’t remain on earth.”

“So you’d go back to where you came from then?”

He shuffles in place. “I don’t think I will go anywhere. I’m not fully sure. No way would my father just let me return home without stipulation.”

“This is too much.” I press back into the counter. “There’s a demon in my family’s beach house saying I’m his mate and he

needs to drink my blood to live. What the hell was in that wine I drank last night?"

His forehead wrinkles. "You don't live here anymore?"

If only. "Psh, as if I could afford the property taxes on this place. I live in an apartment in bum fuck Missouri."

"Missouri? Why did you move?"

"I didn't. I've lived there my whole life. Always wanted to leave but never got the chance." Are we actually talking to each other the way two people on a date would?

"How old are you?"

"I thought you knew me?"

He scoffs and I laugh. "Twenty-nine."

"A little younger than last time."

"Look buddy, there is no last time. I hate how I have to keep repeating myself. I'm sure Albert was great and all but I'm not him."

"If you say so." Him crossing his arms causes the apron to bunch in the middle, exposing a little more of him than before.

"I know so. So how much blood are we talking here? Like a pint? A thimble? The amount you'd use as a condiment on your hot dog or sandwich?"

He laughs, shaking his head... in disbelief? Surprise? Perhaps a little of both? "We don't have to discuss that now."

"Did you really come from hell?"

“Yup.” He holds my stare.

“I bet it’s warm there.” I shiver a little, wrapping my arms around myself. “Do all the other demons there look like you too?”

“I’m actually the only one who looks like me. I never really fit in there. I stood out amongst my family and friends. Probably too much.”

“Something tells me you’ll stand out more here.”

“Maybe just a bit.” His lips tilt. “Should we eat now? You still like tacos, right?”

I huff out a breath. “Who doesn’t like tacos?”

Smiling, he leans a little to the left. “There’s always someone.”

“I can promise you it’s not me.”

“Good. What other foods do you like these days? I want to know what to cook for you for lunch and dinner.”

Yup. We’ve officially entered the getting to know you stage, and his nipples poking out a little at the top of the apron have me feeling like he’s already coming upstairs for a nightcap.

“I’m not picky. Hamburgers, pasta, chicken tenders, barbeque. I’ll eat whatever.”

“But what’s your favorite?”

“Hmm.” I scratch my chin. “I guess maybe pozole or enchiladas. Or maybe my mom’s chicken flautas.”

“I don’t know what any of that is but I can figure it out. Do you have a book somewhere?”

“A book? That’s what Pinterest is for.”

“What’s Pinterest?”

I gasp. “When did you say you were on earth last?”

“I didn’t but it was 1995, I think?”

“Yeah, it’s 2024 now and a lot has changed. We’ll have to get you up to date. Right after we figure out why you keep thinking I’m someone I’m not and how there’s fire coming from your tail.”

He cups his hand over the flickering flame, hiding his tail behind his back. “How about you sit down and have breakfast with me. Don’t worry about anything else right now. We can figure it all out as we go.” He walks around me, grabbing a container from the oven. Placing it on the stove, he finds two plates and fills them up with food. Trying to untangle my thoughts, I watch him move around the kitchen, heating up the food and I don’t sit down until he does.

Lowering myself in the chair furthest away from him, I tug my plate closer to me, my stomach grumbling from the delicious aroma lifting off the plate. Breaking the overstretching silence, I ask, “What if I don’t want to be your mate or give you my blood?”

He sets his silverware down. “Then you don’t. I wouldn’t ever make you do what you don’t want to. Now eat your tacos before they get cold.”

“One more question first. Who’s Albert?”

Something shifts in his eyes and his jaw twitches. “A human I fell in love with while on earth. It’s the reason my father trapped me underground. Our two worlds aren’t supposed to mix together.”

“So he’s the reason you were down there?”

He looks down at his plate and then back at me. “Him and Albert.” The sadness and betrayal in his eyes is palpable.

“What—”

“I thought you said only one more question?”

Chewing on my bottom lip, I lift one of the tacos from my plate. Neither of us talk for a long time and I have no idea why I want him to break the silence first. He needs my blood and I feel like I need something from him too but I don’t know what.

How did I go from catching my fiancé cheating to this? Is there a chance I could still wake up? Do I want to?

If this is truly me being awake, then the upside is, I don’t have to spend the next two weeks alone anymore. The downside is, I’ll have to become Sookie from *True Blood* in order to keep the company.

Is that really better than being alone?

Standing up, he collects our plates and his tight ass bounces a little as he walks to the sink.

Eh, people give blood to doctors and blood banks all the time. What's the harm in offering a little to a sexy demon who cooks and washes dishes mostly naked?

Besides, I'm still not a hundred percent convinced this is real.

Five

Rorian

He finishes his food, downs two glasses of water, and says he needs more sleep before returning to his room. He shuts the door behind him and I don't hear a lock turn. Is that an invitation? Does this mean he isn't scared of me anymore? Instead of following him, I clean up the kitchen and then search each room for clothes in my size. Turning my nose up at the cable sweaters and collared shirts I find, I enter another room and rummage through each drawer until I stumble upon a pair of purple yoga pants and a white tank. Not perfect, but it'll do for now.

Once dressed, I walk around the house, looking for anything recognizable. So much has changed in twenty five years. I guess it's to be expected. Aside from a few vases and candle holders, everything from before has been replaced. He said he doesn't live here and never has. It would make sense for my father to have put him as far from me as possible. Either he

found his way back to me or someone else found their way to me instead.

Pictures on an end table in the living room stop me in my tracks. A happy couple posing with a baby are smiling and dressed in Christmas colors. The top of the frame says Feliz Navidad. Grabbing the photo, I caress the glass, circling my fingers over the familiar face while a knot forms in my throat. Albert. The dreams I had were true. He did go on without me, getting married and creating a family.

The hard evidence resting between my fingers sends me stumbling back and my chest caves. He went on living while I slept underground with only my nightmares to keep me company. If this is him in this photo, then who the hell is the man who woke me? Why did his blood work? Why is the pull between us so strong?

Setting the photo down, my hand shakes as my gaze drifts along the other pictures. They are all different people. The stranger who I recently had breakfast with said this was his family's home. They all must share it when wanting to enjoy a beach vacation. What brought him out here alone, and why is he spending his time inside instead of enjoying the beautiful outdoors? I could feel his sadness from across the table as he rolled a picture of him and another guy between his fingers.

Someone hurt him. The heartbreak in his eyes was recognizable. I know that pain too well but forget all about it whenever he's around.

I want to help him too. Maybe I can bring his smile back—real smiles that don't feel forced. We can swim in the ocean, build sand castles, and collect sand dollars while watching the sunset.

My favorite pastime when out here was lying on the sand, holding Albert's hand. Someone else gets to do that now. My heart sinks, but when I look toward the room I slept in last night, it picks itself back up. Weird.

“*Mate,*” something from within screams as my eyes land on a framed image of the man I fell asleep next to last night—the man whose blood I drank and still thirst for.

He was right. He isn't Albert, and a part of me says I don't need him to be, while my heart doesn't know how to fully let him go. We shared too much. Was I mistaken before? Did I fall in love with the wrong person? Was it really wrong if in the end it led me to the right person?

Turning away from the pictures, I stand in front of his bedroom, not sure if I should go in or wait until he comes out. My fingers itch to touch him again and my body aches to be near him. This is my mate. The man I'm fated to be with. Albert was merely a stepping stone, and he is the destination I was supposed to end up at.

If they are related, then why didn't he recognize Albert's name? He kept saying he didn't know Albert but the pictures of them standing beside each other prove otherwise. There were so many. Some of them on a boat or on the beach, others

at family gatherings. They resemble each other a lot while also being so different.

I didn't like spending time away from Albert, but it never ate me up inside the way it is with me standing in a different room from the younger man. We're in the same house but it isn't enough. After spending so many lifetimes without him, I'm not ready to be away from him so soon. How crazy is it to want someone you don't know. The intensity is so great, it consumes me.

Knowing he needs his rest and space, I go to the living room and fall back onto the couch. Everything really has changed. TVs are different. There aren't any VCRs. Where do you play the movies at? Studying the remote on the coffee table, I eye each button carefully and hit the one with the power symbol. Nothing happens. How does it work? The next time I press it, the screen lights up and I lie back on the cushions.

A menu pops up showing weird symbols I don't recognize. Then I see one I do and immediately select it. All the options overwhelm me and I scroll past Albert's favorite movie, almost wanting to select it for old times' sake. No. He's moved on and so should I. He didn't free me, someone else did—the man who didn't exist until it was time for him to.

“What ya watching? *Constantine*? *Legion*? Oh wait, I know, *Insidious*.”

“I have no idea what any of that is,” I state, looking back at him.

Wearing an oversized sweater, he smiles as he enters the living room and collapses beside me on the long sectional. Not too far but not close enough either. “In that case, we should watch all of them. You can tell me which one’s more accurate.” His tone is playful.

“How about you put on what you want to see.” I hand him the remote. “I want to know what you like to watch.”

“It probably won’t be the same as him.”

“Good.” I inch close enough for our legs to rub together.

Staring between us, his Adam’s apple bobs in his throat and he scrolls through a list of movies, not stopping until he lands on *Interview with the Vampire*.

“Really?” I glare in his direction.

“Oh, so you know it?”

“Yes, I do. Saw it in the theater.”

“With Albert?”

“No.” I let out a sigh. “Alone. Every time I came to earth for a job, I stopped at a movie theater before returning home and watched whatever movie was playing next.”

“Why a movie theater?”

Shrugging, I drag a blanket from the back of the couch, spreading it over us. “I don’t know. I like watching movies. It was nice to experience some of the same things that humans did.”

“Did you share a lot of those experiences with Albert?”

“Not as many as I would have liked. He didn’t care to leave the house much and preferred the beach to the city.”

“Where do you like to be the most?” he asks, adjusting the blanket.

Smiling, I rest a hand on his knee. “Right here is good.”

He wiggles underneath me. “Should I start the movie now?”

“Hold on,” I breathe out, wrapping my arm around him to stop him from shivering. Running hot works in my favor and he settles against me. “Cold?”

“Not anymore. You’re like a furnace.”

“So I’ve been told.” I press tighter to him, giving him all the warmth he needs to relax.

“The AC is stuck on 55 and I can’t adjust it. I think it’s broken. Would have been nice to know before staying here. All I was left with was a handful of blankets, and two barely qualify as one.” He pokes his fingers through holes in the knitted blanket.

“They must not have seen it as a big deal because of it being summer. Why are you here anyway? A break from work? Needing time away from your husband?” I gesture to his ring slightly peeking out of the blanket. He hasn’t worn that before. I don’t remember seeing it.

“No. I’m on my honeymoon.”

My stomach twists and my skin feels too tight for me to move. “Don’t honeymoons usually involve two people?”

He lowers his head, his muscles tightening against me. “Yeah, when the wedding actually happens. Ours didn’t. He’s in love with someone else. I wanted to wear the ring for a day to see what it would have been like if things went differently.” Yanking it off his finger, he tosses it on the coffee table. “Some things are better left not knowing.”

Rubbing his shoulder, I do my best to offer him comfort. “I’m sorry. His loss.”

“Yeah. Or mine.”

Gripping his chin, I force his gaze to meet mine. “Definitely not. I promise you, he’s the one missing out. Not the other way around.”

“Then why do I feel like I’m the one who has lost?”

“Trust me. It’s only temporary. You’re still hanging on too tightly. Once you let go, you’ll realize you deserve better. Now hit Play and focus on the movie instead of him.” What I really want to say is to focus on me. Want me. Need me. We can be enough for each other.

Nodding, he starts the movie and sets the remote on the coffee table before positioning his cheek on my shoulder, his hair brushing against my chin. My hand settles on his stomach and I stare ahead at the screen.

“Hey, Rorian.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m really not Albert.”

Smiling into his hair, I snuggle in closer. “I know.”

Six

Everly

Waking up next to a demon definitely will take some getting used to. He doesn't snore and is so serene, his face relaxed without a single muscle strained. His warmth really is hard to pull away from, but I have to get out of this house and do what I said I would—lie on the sand and swim in the ocean while the sun hits my face. Stirring a little when I toss the blanket off me, his arm tightens around me. A sense of security fades away when I finally free myself from his grasp.

After breakfast, I returned to the room to nap but felt like there was a live wire running through me, so I went out to the living room to see if he was still there. Not sure why, but I keep waiting for him to disappear. Having him around has felt like too much of a good thing for it to last.

To my surprise, he was still in the house, fighting with the remote and wearing clothes. Sort of. Dressed like he was ready to go to the gym, he had on tight purple yoga pants, leaving little to the imagination as I got closer.

The thin material clings to his body, highlighting the large bulge in the center. I see he has yet to discover underwear, and I'm not sure I mind so much. Fuck, I'm such a damn pervert. It's been so long since I've gotten laid and right when I thought I finally would after waiting two years, my fiancé gave it to someone else on my wedding day.

What a huge cock block the whole situation has been. Fuck him. Based on what Rorian said to me in the kitchen about his baby getting whatever his baby wants, I'm the only one standing in the way this time. For good reasons. What if him realizing I'm not Albert means his offer is no longer on the table? Though, his eyes and touches last night told me being someone else changes nothing.

It doesn't matter.

I don't want that—can't want it.

He's a stranger for one, not human for another, and I'm not a one and done kind of guy. I can't handle growing too close to someone else so soon, and Rorian comes off as the type of guy you can't walk away from once you get to know him better. My instincts scream at me to keep my distance. I failed last night, and being held by him felt good enough for a repeat. I can't let that happen again. I can't ask him to go either. Asking him to leave doesn't feel right and every time I so much as consider it, I get sick to my stomach, overcome with nausea.

Hating the harsh, awful feeling so much, I won't kick him out but I will put distance between us. Starting now. My heart

is in a fragile state and not strong enough to withstand another crack down the center.

Rorian groans in his sleep and the sound goes straight to my cock. Holy santeria, I can't turn it off. His legs fall apart and the remote lands between them.

I have to admit, it was kind of adorable seeing Rorian struggle to work the TV and him not knowing about Netflix. I was born only a year before he went into a deep sleep, so we don't have all the same experiences with technology. I'm curious how he'll react to my smartphone and finding out no one plays music on a stereo or boombox anymore. Why do I look forward to showing him how the world works now?

Mumbling unintelligible words in his sleep, he turns to his other side, tugging the blanket with him. I'm still in disbelief that he's real and taking naps with me. A real life demon. Out of all the houses to wake up in, he chose this one and me. Not wanting to disturb him, I tiptoe quietly to the back door and carefully open it before slipping outside. The sun is out and a nice ocean breeze sweeps over me as I walk down the back porch, heading for the private beach.

I can tell it's midday by the brightness of the sky and the lack of clouds. Not bothering to go back inside to change into swim trunks, I strip down to my underwear and run toward the water. Closing my eyes, I step forward, getting only my feet wet at first. Waves splash against my ankles as I move forward. The smell of salt, sand, and sea hangs in the air, and being out here is so peaceful. Seagulls are squawking and

waves slap against each other around me. Although it's quiet and relaxing, it's also lonely.

Opening my eyes, I take in the beauty wrapped around me. Clear skies, blue water, swaying palm trees, and *him*. Wait, he's supposed to be sleeping. Rorian waves at me, stepping closer. I invited myself into his quiet moment and now he's pushing himself into mine.

"I wondered where you went," he says, tugging off his tank top. "I'm glad I found you out here. I haven't been swimming in a long time. I bet the water feels amazing."

"Not since 1995, right?" I squint my eyes when looking up to meet his. Only out here does he appear bigger than me, looming over me like a giant as I crouch down in the water.

"Right." His smile is brighter than the sun as he shimmies out of his pants, not at all bothered by being completely naked in front of me. Is this normal for demons? In hell, do they strut around with their dicks swinging everywhere? If so I need to sin more.

Lifting his hand above his eyes, he looks around, taking in the sun and tilting his head back as if enjoying the warmth on his skin before sticking his feet in the water.

"Stop taking your sweet time and get in already. The water feels perfect. A little cold at first but you get used to it." I lift myself a little, flapping my arms.

"It's nice to be out and about but with it still only being us," he says, submerging himself in the water as he approaches me.

“We don’t have a whole lot of options. Can you imagine the attention we’d get if we walked into a restaurant together?” I run a hand through my hair, ringing out some of the water.

“Probably a lot.” He chuckles softly, holding his arms out in front of him. “Everyone would panic and run.”

“People are too quick to react to everything. Not sure how jumping to the extreme solves anything. You should be able to eat out, if you want. Anyone should.”

He quips a brow. “Are you not scared of me at all?”

“Should I be?” Tilting my head, I allow the current to pull me back some. Sure, he’s a little intimidating and different, but nothing about him leaves me feeling unsettled. Only at first did I freak out. A random demon came out from the floorboards, saying my blood brought him here. How else was I supposed to react?

I’ve watched too many horror movies and it never goes well for others in similar situations. Everyone knows when you find some old, leatherbound book buried somewhere to put it the fuck back, but I can’t really do the same with a demon.

If he wanted to hurt me, he would’ve already. Dracula doesn’t ask permission to drink people’s blood. This man has cooked for me, ensured I was drinking enough water, kept me warm as I napped, and treated my wounds. He’s caused me less trouble than most humans and is the last person I should fear. What he looks like on the outside doesn’t change how he is on the inside.

“No,” he finally responds. “And I don’t ever want you to be. I’d prefer you run toward me than from me.”

“Well since I don’t run, I won’t be doing either.” I smirk.

Laughing, he dips his head in the water, staying under only for a few seconds before coming back up for air. Water drips from his black skin, hair, and horns. Without thinking, I reach out and touch the side of his head, rubbing over where his skin meets the dark-colored bone. Rough ridges spiral around his horn and he eyes me curiously as I continue to explore each visible one. *So much for staying away, ya dingdong.* “Do they always protrude out of your neck?” I trace along his pulse point before reaching the hard bony growth.

What are you doing? Take your hand away.

“No, only sometimes. It’s really unpredictable. No one ever touches them, but then again, I haven’t really been this close to anyone in this form.”

“Not him either?” I don’t say Albert’s name because for some reason I don’t want him to. The reason I continue asking questions about him is because I want to know more about Rorian. The good, the bad, and everything in between. Albert was what connected him to earth before and I’m what brought him back. Will I be the one to keep him here too? Wait... I’m not supposed to want that.

He covers my hand with his and I practically melt.

I shouldn’t want that either.

Tangling our fingers together, he kisses the back of my hand.

Or that. Fucking hell—that’s where he’s from and where he’s taking me apparently.

His brows pull tightly together and he shakes his head. “No. The first and only time he saw me this way, he did everything he could not to touch me, but here you are finding ways you can.”

My hand freezes on one of the red cracks of his cheek. “Sorry. My brother told me my curiosity would get me in trouble some day. I can’t help myself sometimes though.”

Fucking try, you danger whore.

“I’ve never seen horns on a person before. Well, not a person but, you know, someone who kind of looks like one... Not that you look human because humans don’t have tails, horns, black and red skin... but you get what I mean.”

“Yeah. I do.” He smiles. “This is the longest I’ve been in my true form on earth. It feels different than when I’m at home.”

“How so?”

“My skin is more sensitive out here, where it can withstand the hottest fires down there. It might be my lack of magic. Without it, I’m not able to fit in with humans and look more like you.”

“Good. Why be ordinary when you can be exactly as you are? Being all the same is boring. A little variety never hurt anyone.”

“You keep surprising me,” he says, running a hand through the back of my hair, his long claws gently scratching my scalp.

Lord almighty.

“In a bad way?” I ask, trying to distract my mind from the euphoric sensations of his fingers. The perfect combination of rough and gentle. He’s like no one I’ve ever met either.

He shakes his head, pressing his nose to mine, and his radiating heat keeps me where I am, making me want to stay here forever. No sweaters, hoodies, or blankets are needed whenever he’s around. “In the best ways. You’re nothing like any other human I’ve ever met. You hum in your sleep, laugh with your eyes closed, don’t ever know where you’re putting your hands until I bring it to your attention.”

The last statement catches me off guard. “Huh?”

Grinning, his gaze falls between us, and my fingers are stroking his nipples. What the hell is wrong with my hands? They have a mind of their own. Maybe I should ask them if they wish to be alone with him because they clearly don’t know how to follow orders.

“I’m sorry.” I swim back, my foot catching on a rock. “Fuck,” I scream, hopping on one foot while I grab at the other.

“What is it, baby? What happened?”

Baby. There’s that name again, and here I am lighting up from the use of endearment like last time. No one has ever called me that before. He says he knows I’m not Albert and yet is still calling me baby.

“Did you hurt yourself? Are you okay? You’re not losing consciousness, are you?”

“What?” Pain stinging my foot brings my attention back to what’s happening.

“You don’t look so good. Let’s get you out of the water.”

Before I can respond, he lifts me in his arms. This guy, who’s a whole foot shorter than me and probably half my weight, is carrying me to the sand with zero issues. I’m enjoying it way too much. I like how his size doesn’t represent his strength and how he looks on the outside is contradictory to how he is on the inside. He takes me by surprise too.

Setting me on the sand, he examines my body carefully, his face tensing when his gaze reaches my foot. Jumping back, fire sprouts from the tip of his tail.

“What is it? Did I cut it that bad?”

“You...” He holds his hand to his nose, his eyes hungry and darkening. “Your foot is bleeding. You hit something.”

“A rock I think.”

“Maybe some broken coral reef. You have cuts all along the bottom. You don’t know how to go long without injuring yourself, do you?”

“Excuse me, no one told you to keep coming to my rescue like Hercules. And this happens more around you.”

“So you’re saying it happens without me too?”

“Yes.” I lift myself up on my elbows before forcing myself into a seated position to check out the damage. “But I usually get a small break before the next occurrence.”

His laughter dies quickly when he lifts my foot again. Pain shoots up my body when he drops it to the ground.

“What the fuck, man. Why did you do that?” Turning away from me in shame, he cowers into himself. Blood soaks the sand and I finally realize what’s wrong. Being near my wound is hard for him.

“I can’t help you, I’m sorry. You smell too good and I’m worried I’ll lose control if I come close again.”

Bending my knees a little, I scoot back in an attempt to help the situation. “Can you really heal my wounds?”

He lifts his face from his hand, his eyes peering between his long, black lashes. “Why don’t you see for yourself.” He gestures toward my bandaged leg.

Taking a deep breath, I rip the first Band-Aid off, wincing at the tug of hairs on my skin. Nothing’s there. Like it never happened. No scratch or scar. Peeling back the other Band-Aid, I check and see the same thing—completely gone. The cuts were there. I felt them and saw them.

My chest heavily rises and falls as my breath quickens. “They’re non-existent. Looks like your father didn’t take away all your magic after all.”

Crawling closer, he looks at my legs. “He only took enough to punish me. To make my life here difficult so I’d want to

come home. I refuse to go back to living someone else's life."

Nodding, I prepare myself for what I'm about to do. If he didn't go too far last time, maybe he won't this time either. This is a win-win for both of us, right? He gets his blood and I can use both feet without screaming every time I walk. Yeah, a win-win.

"Go ahead." My voice wavers. "Help me like you did yesterday."

His eyes round. "I don't think that's a good idea. What if I can't stop this time?"

"You will. You don't ever want to hurt me, remember? You're not a monster, Rory."

Eyes hooded and hands trembling, he closes in on me and gathers blood from my cuts. Parting his lips, he lifts his fingers to his mouth and swipes them clean with his tongue. He repeats the action two more times before lowering his face to the bottom of my foot. Ticklish and warm, his black, long, thick tongue laps at my skin as his mouth adds a little suction, soaking my skin with his saliva.

His eyes watch me the whole time, and I can't tear mine from him as arousal surges through me. As if answering my silent request, he bites at the closing cuts enough for them to bleed again and dives back in for more, shaking my whole world off its axis.

My cock jolts between my thighs and his caressing fingers are like flames licking at my skin. An unexpected moan

escapes my lips and he licks me one more time before pressing a kiss to my already healing wounds. My head is woozy, heart racing so fast it crashes against my chest. What in the netherworld? How much blood did I lose?

Setting my foot down, he wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, the hunger in his eyes mostly dissolved.

No more pain. No more blood. My foot is healed faster than my leg was.

“Better?” he asks, searching for an answer in my eyes before I can give him one.

Nodding slowly, I look down at my foot again, flabbergasted at what my eyes are seeing. To ensure they aren't playing tricks on me, I touch my skin, and it's exactly as it was before I got in the water.

A cool breeze sweeps over me and I shiver, pulling my knees to my chest and wrapping my arms around myself.

“Want to go back in the water?”

Staring down at my feet, I shake my head.

“Let's get you inside and in dry clothes then.” Oh crap, I forgot I was only wearing underwear. Looking up, I notice I'm still more dressed than him. Naked and dripping, he's yanking me into his arms and standing up while holding me. He sure likes carrying me everywhere. Too tired and cold to care, I hook my arms loosely around his neck and rest my head on his shoulder. Closing my eyes, I doze off and quickly wake up

when he sets me on the bathroom floor, my back against the cabinets while my feet come in contact with the cold tile.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart, but I need to get these off,” he says, tugging on my underwear, keeping himself at eye level as if trying to preserve my dignity.

How can someone whose diet consists of blood be so considerate and caring?

Reaching around me, he opens the cabinet and grabs a towel. “Good to see some things have remained in the same place.”

Unfolding the towel, he wraps it around me, only covering the top of me. “Wait here.”

He leaves the bathroom and comes back with a stack of clothes. Maroon sweatpants and a shirt. The guy doesn’t like underwear, does he? His large, thick cock swaying in front of my face reminds me he’s still naked. Not only is he hung like a horse, he’s also ribbed, with a massive curve in the center.

Squeezing my legs together, I grab the clothes from his hand and look everywhere but him. “Thanks,” I say.

“Need help?”

“No. I got it, thanks.”

“Okay, I’ll go fix us some sandwiches while you dress.”

“Are you going to prepare the food while naked?”

He exits the bathroom laughing instead of answering me. After I’m dry and have clothes on, I shiver my way to the

kitchen. Coming to a halt, I place a hand over my face to keep from laughing at his new choice of wardrobe.

“Nice dress,” I say, eyeing the purple ensemble hanging loosely off his shoulders with the back zipper only halfway up. Ruffles hang around his legs and the fabric pulls around his hips. He turns around and the front buttons are undone in the front, causing a major nip slip.

“I think my aunt Sally wore that for my brother’s graduation.”

“You have a brother?”

Is that really all he catches from my statement?

“Yeah. He’s got huge commitment issues and gets bored with every job he has but he’s always been there for me. Do you have any siblings?”

“Yeah.” A breath rushes out of him. “One. The apple of my father’s eye.”

“Ah, one of those. Lucky for me, my parents are disappointed in us both,” I say jokingly but meaning every word I say.

“You’re still shivering,” he says, changing the subject, his eyes roaming my trembling body.

“Yeah. It’s still cold in here.”

“If I had more time, I would’ve made you some soup.” Smiling, he carries two plates of sandwiches to the table.

“You really can’t find anything else to wear?”

He stares down and shrugs. "I was in a hurry and it was the first thing I saw. You didn't want me in the kitchen naked."

"Couldn't find my grandma's apron?"

He sputters a laugh. "No. I misplaced it somewhere."

"Can't be too hard to find. The thing's an eyesore." He was a major improvement to it but I won't admit that out loud.

"It's not too bad. Better than having grease splatter on my dick."

I spit out my food, reaching for one of the cups of water he has set out. "I won't argue with you there. So you can shoot fire from your body but can't touch it?"

"I can, but I'd still rather protect myself, and I don't know what all I can withstand while under the curse."

"Ah. Have you ever walked through flames before?"

"Yes." He takes a bite of his sandwich, humming around it.

"Have you ever set anyone on fire?"

He pauses, lifting his head. "Yes."

"Bad people?"

"If you count my brother then yes. We used to set each other on fire and toss one another into the lava pits all the time as kids."

I laugh. "And here I used to complain about my brother giving me a wet willy."

"A what?"

“You know, when you lick your finger and stick it in someone’s ear.”

Wrinkling his nose, he reaches for his water. “Humans are weird.”

Tossing my head back I erupt into laughter. “That we are. Then again, taking dips in lava and cooking your siblings aren’t exactly what I’d call normal either.”

He snorts, reaching for his sandwich again. “I guess you got a point.”

We finish eating in silence and I clean the table while he washes the dishes. Shoving my hands in my pockets, I try to warm up.

“Here, allow me.” Grabbing my wrists, he tugs me against his body and wraps his arms around me, blowing warm air down my shirt.

Yeah, I can keep my distance starting tomorrow.

Seven

Rorian

Not following him into his room last night was hard. I paced around outside his door for over an hour, hoping he'd open it and tell me he was cold. It never happened. I finally fell asleep for a short while, winning against the urge to break down his door. Now I'm up hours earlier than him, cooking enough food for an army. Not knowing what else to do with my time after getting dressed, I rummaged through the cabinets and took out a box of pancake mix. After setting a huge stack on a plate, I cooked some bacon and scrambled some eggs, then peeled potatoes.

Now, too full to eat anymore, I go to the living room. Instead of bothering with the remote again, I pick up a strange device on the coffee table. I turn it every which way, trying to figure out what it's supposed to be for. There's a title and picture of a half-naked man with horns on the front. The image resembles a book cover—the author's name is at the bottom. Weird. I

push all the buttons on the side until a light comes on and words show up. *Page 239* is written in the bottom corner.

The little I read in front of me has me so curious, I try to figure out how to... I don't know, turn the page? Do books not exist anymore? Is this what they've become—some lit up, complicated, hard square? Resting my thumb on the screen has the words changing to new ones. Ah, so that's how you do it. I read some more and tap the screen every time I reach the bottom.

The big green demon rubs the tip of his bulbous cock over my lips and I moan as the taste of a generous amount of precum lands on my tongue. Tugging at my hair, he forces my eyes to meet his and—

“What are you doing?” The voice from behind me has me dropping the device to the floor.

“I was bored waiting for you, so I came out here to explore a little. Try to figure out all these new gizmos. Maybe surprise you with knowing how to put on a movie.”

“You were reading my Kindle. Wait... Did you read it? Please say you were only looking at it and didn't actually figure out how to turn it on.” He rubs his temples, his face turning a pretty shade of red.

“What's a Kindle? And am I not supposed to know about the kind of books you like?”

“It's something you read on. It says it at the bottom.” Tugging at his hair, he groans. “You... you're... Did you read

it or not?”

Thinking about how the human was slowly taking a demon cock in his mouth on the page I left off on, I grin. “I did. It was lying out and I didn’t realize it was yours. Do you always read about humans sucking big green demon cocks?”

His cheeks turn brighter and he grinds his teeth. “I forgot to put it away and no. Do you usually go through other people’s things?”

Holding my hands up in defense, I stand up. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know what it was and assumed it was something left for a guest’s entertainment, like the TV.”

“Well it’s not.” Shoving me away when I try to touch him, he bends down and picks up the... Kindle. Is that right? “And I’d appreciate it if you didn’t look at my stuff unless I give you permission, which I did not.”

“Okay. I won’t. I really am sorry. I didn’t realize how touchy you’d be about your books but I guess I can understand why. I don’t think others would be as delighted as I was to know that you like demon dick.”

“Rrrr. That’s it,” he bites out. “I’m going out. I think you and I need some space apart.”

Frowning, I look toward the kitchen. “But I made breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry,” he snaps, grabbing a jacket from the closet and slipping on his shoes a little too forcefully.

“I can put it away for you if you’d like and you can warm it up later,” I suggest, following him toward the door.

“You can if you want.”

“I didn’t mean to upset you, sweetheart. Tell me what I can do to stop you from leaving.”

Turning around, he tugs on his bottom lip with his teeth before responding again. “You can’t, and I’m not your sweetheart.”

My heart sinks. Just when I thought we were getting closer, he takes two steps away from me. He opens the door, pausing in front of it and looking at me again. “Look, I know you didn’t mean to do it and I’m not mad at you. I just think being cooped up in this house is getting to me and I need to get out for a bit. Sightsee a little. Do some shopping.”

“I could go with you.”

His bottom lip trembles but there’s also a little light in his eyes. “The company would be nice but you seem to forget how impossible that is.” His shoulders slump and my heart thumps. Does he want me to go? Am I seeing what I want to see? It’s a problem of mine apparently. “I won’t be long, I promise.”

“Okay. I’ll see you when you get back then.”

“Yeah.” He smiles softly before walking out and closing the door behind him.

I fucked up. I should have left the device alone the moment I figured out what it was. I really didn’t know it was his but I also didn’t think it was left by his family either. I only want to know him better. To see more signs of why he was chosen for

me. To separate him from Albert in every way possible. Albert didn't read. He certainly wouldn't have read that. He also didn't blush or smile as prettily as... I need to ask him his name.

Who doesn't know their own mate's name?

Too busy getting wrapped up in his company and shocked by each revelation, I've forgotten everything else. I'm also afraid to have it trapped in my memory forever—another name to cause me pain every time I hear it. My heart says he's mine but it's been wrong before. What if he's another stepping stone like Albert? Maybe being with the one you're destined for isn't supposed to be easy. Sighing, I search for clothes. I settle on a pair of Dockers and a blue collared shirt. Is this what he wants, I wonder? Looking at myself in the mirror, I run a hand through my hair until I'm satisfied with how it sits on my head.

Too bad having a good hair day doesn't help me fit the appearance I need to shop beside the person I want to be with. When he said the company would be nice, his sad, conflicted eyes said he meant it. I'll have to figure out a way to be what he needs. I won't let my father stop me this time. Yeah, maybe he's not the right one either, but what if he is?

Searching through all the closets, I gather together an umbrella, sun hat, sunglasses, a scarf, and a sweater to complement my current professor look. After putting on the hat, sunglasses, and wrapping the scarf around my neck, I leave the house and use the small boat to go to the other side

of the island. It's one straight shot this way and I don't have a car.

As I get closer, I open the umbrella, blocking my face. It's busier than I remember it being. Some of the buildings are new or painted differently. I don't recognize the store sitting in view as I dock the boat.

Out of practice, I nearly stumble back when getting out of the boat. Two women chuckle, walking ahead of me, luckily not noticing the bit of black skin peeking out from my disguise. Not the time for me to go for a swim.

I loop the whole area in an hour, about to give up and go back to the boat when I spot a man sitting at a table outside with a cup of coffee in his hands. He has sunglasses on and is staring at his phone wearing the same red and white striped tank he left in. The sun hits his dark tan skin just right, creating a beautiful glow. He really is breathtaking. His large size always makes everything around him appear smaller, including the chair he's sitting in.

"You aren't planning on spending all day out here like that, are you?" Someone tsks from behind and when I turn around, I lift the umbrella and am met with a pair of familiar dark gray eyes.

It can't be.

"Hey there, baby brother." Cannon smiles, his white teeth blinding and hair staying perfectly still in the sweeping cool breeze.

If he knows I'm here, does that mean my father does too?

“How'd you find me? How'd you know I was awake?”

Glancing around, he grabs my arm and drags me behind a pink brick building. “Father felt you wake up, and I wanted to find you before he did.”

“Why?”

“To give you this.” He removes a silver ring with a red stone in the center from his pocket.

“What is it?”

“It's a glamour ring. It's laced with magic. When you put it on, you appear human. Whatever features your mate looks for in a guy.”

Tilting my head, I set the umbrella down and tug the scarf loose, dropping it on the ground. “Is this a trick?” I ask, hesitantly reaching for the ring.

He laughs. “No. Now is not the time for games. If you're rejected again, the same way as before, you will go underground forever. Father didn't tell you all the stipulations or that he knew Albert wasn't your fated mate.”

“What?”

“He wanted you to learn your lesson the hard way and never wanted to give you the chance to find the right man. He was hoping you'd give up on love and come home. That you'd assume the man you were destined for would never accept you

for who you are. So he let you think you'd already found him."

"Albert was never... But I loved him." A part of me still does. It feels like only the other day we were holding each other in bed.

"Yeah. You fell for him but he never loved you, Rorian. He was married with a kid and another on the way."

My blood goes cold. "What?"

"In fact, his name was never Albert. He's a con artist. Or he was until Dad got a hold of him and came up with this little scheme, offering to make him rich and successful for the rest of his days if he succeeded. I don't think Father counted on you ever waking up."

Taken aback, I hold my hand to my throbbing chest. Flashing in my head are images of Albert begging me to stay on earth with him. To go against my father. To be with him forever. He tricked me.

"It was never real. If he was never who he said he was then I could've never loved him." I fell in love with a lie. What an idiot I was.

Resting a hand on my shoulder, Cannon forces the ring into my palm and closes my fist around it. "If you're here, that only means one thing. You found your fated mate. Father lied about Albert having the power to keep you here and wake you up. He never could. Father wants you to fail again, so don't give him the satisfaction. Being fated isn't always a guarantee.

You have to do the work too. The broken ones aren't always easy. Sweep him off his feet and win over his heart. Get him to choose you back. It's the only way for you to get your powers back and stop Father." He quickly shoves something in my pocket. "You'll need this too. It's a credit card. It'll help you buy anything you need. Including a better wardrobe." He eyes me up and down.

I roll the ring between my fingers. "But what if..." My words catch in my throat when I look up and my brother is gone. Fuck. Replaying everything he said to me in my head, I slide the ring on, pinching my skin a little. I toss the umbrella, scarf, sweater, and hat in the trash, leaving the glasses on.

If only there were demon handbooks on how to woo a human. It was easy with Albert because he would've pretended to want me back no matter what. Nothing I did could've ever been wrong. It can be now, when it's actually real. I can't mess up when it counts the most.

Rounding the building, my stomach knots when I no longer see him. He's gone. Great. A red and white shirt flashes in a store window and my heart shoots up my throat when the man I'm looking for glances my way. He offers me a friendly smile that has my stomach doing a somersault before he turns in the other direction.

Looking both ways, I run across the street and enter the small shop. Shelves of books are in every direction I turn. It's a bookstore. Real books do still exist, and my mate reads those too.

My mate.

It really is him. He's meant to be mine and I'm going to do everything to convince him he is.

Eight

Everly

“What are you reading?” A deep, familiar voice has me looking up from the book in my hands. The man’s bright eyes cause my heart to pound faster. I’ve never seen him before but I feel like we know each other from somewhere. Maybe he was at the cafe earlier or one of the shops I stopped in.

“I...” Tongue-tied, I look at the book and back at him. He’s shorter than me, slender with pale skin and beautiful grayish-blue eyes. Those eyes. Where have I seen them before? His brown hair is slightly parted to the side and he’s dressed like a school teacher, wearing shoes that look like something my grandpa would wear. It doesn’t take away from how striking he is though.

His warm fingers sweep over mine as he closes the book enough to see the front. “Ah. So you like thrillers too. I don’t think I’ve read this one before. Must be new.”

“Yeah,” I finally say. “It came out a few weeks ago I think and thrillers are usually my go-to.” I tuck the book under my

arm and glance around. Where did he come from? Why did he approach me of all people?

“Thrillers are always a good book choice. Romance is too.” He leans in closer, his warm breath trailing over my neck as he reaches for something on the other side of me. “This is a good one too. A classic.”

Staring at the book in his hand, I nod. “Agatha Christie is a great author. I have lots of her stuff on my Kindle.”

His brows pinch together. “Do you own any real books?”

Laughing, I nod. “Some. Not any of hers though.”

He looks between me and the book. “Then today we’ll have to change that. This one will be on me.” He smiles and for a second or two I forget how to breathe.

“You don’t have to do that.”

He waves his hand. “No, but I want to, and everyone should have at least one Agatha Christie book on their shelf.”

“Is this what you do in your free time? Walk into bookshops and buy strangers books they don’t own?”

His lips wrinkle, his blue eyes sparkling. “Nope. This is my first time. I’d also like to buy you a dessert at the bakery across the way if you let me. Then you can tell me what other books you wish you owned.”

“Are you planning to buy them all for me or something?”

He cocks his head. “If that’s what you want.” He’s coming on a little strong but instead of going in the other direction like

I should, I step closer, inhaling his smoky scent that reminds me of the demon waiting for me back at the house. Wait. No. That's impossible. Rory said he was stuck in demon form. Unless... No. This guy looks way too human. The clothes are an odd choice though.

“If you'd like. So what do you say we get out of here and go share a chocolate cake?”

“What makes you assume I like chocolate?”

“Are you saying you don't?” He quirks a brow.

“No, but I do prefer cheesecake if I have to choose.”

“Cheesecake it is then.”

I need to get back to the house. I told Rory I wouldn't take long. If I go sit down at a bakery with the guy standing in front of me, I'll surely lose track of time, but a strong urge inside me is begging me to say yes.

“I guess I can for a little while. I do have somewhere to be though, so I can't stay too long.”

“Do you have to meet your boyfriend somewhere?”

“No. I promised a friend I'd come see them.” Is Rory a friend? The word doesn't feel right when I think it. And I didn't promise to see anyone but more like come back home to him. To my demon. Wait... he's not mine. He is, however, sitting at the house all alone, probably wondering how to work the ice machine on the fridge or struggling to figure out the trash can.

“In that case, I’ll try not to keep you.” We walk to the register and he ends up buying both my books despite me objecting. When he hands me the bag, our gazes meet, and his blue eyes remind me of Rory again. I can’t stop thinking about him being alone.

He doesn’t have anyone else and hasn’t been on earth in a long time. But I left him anyway. I left him. My heart aches from guilt and I hate my next words as we’re about to enter the bakery. “I’m sorry. I can’t, sorry. I just realized the time and I’m already really late. Maybe I’ll see you around again sometime,” I say, clutching my bag tighter.

“But—”

“I really am sorry. Thank you so much for the books and I hope you enjoy your cake.”

Fuck, I’m an asshole. The disappointment and confusion in the stranger’s eyes stays with me all the way back to the house. As I step out of the rental my brother, Charlie had dropped off for me, I notice a familiar cat walking down the porch steps.

“Hey there, stranger. Where have you been all this time?” I reach down to pet him and he meows, rubbing against my leg.

“I see. Only come back when you need something. Just like everyone else.”

Everyone but *him*. Except Rory didn’t come here for me. He came for Albert. With nowhere else to go and looking the way he does, he has no choice but to stay. What if he’s also holding

out hope for Albert to come back? He says he lived here but my family has owned this property ever since the house was first built.

Either way, I have to not forget a very important detail, whether it sometimes feels like the opposite or not—Rory isn't here for me.

The cat follows me into the house and doesn't stop circling my legs until I set down a can of tuna for him. Leaving him to eat, I search each room, not finding Rory in any of them. Did he go outside? He did say he loved the water and to swim—two things Theon was never a fan of. I don't know why he agreed to have our honeymoon out here. He kept asking how secluded it was too and if there were neighbors. I figured it was because he wanted me all to himself but now I'm not so sure since it turns out he never wanted me to begin with.

“Rory,” I call out, not spotting him anywhere. The sun is already fading, leaving red and yellow hues in the sky. Waves crash against the sand and I walk along the water, freezing when I see the boat is in a place it wasn't before. My heart nearly stops. Did he go somewhere? Did someone see him? Why would he leave when he told me it wasn't safe? Was he looking for me?

I'm clearly mistaken. The boat has been here this whole time and my brain is confusing itself.

“Coming out here for a swim?” The deep, soothing voice has my heart skipping.

“I was looking for you,” I say, turning around.

“Well here I am.” He’s standing naked, his black skin and hair wet, leaving droplets on the sand. He smiles and touches my arm when I start shivering, the heat from his body traveling to the center of my chest. Why did I leave again?

Because the way he makes me feel confuses me and I don’t have a logical brain when he’s around. I move without thinking and soon I won’t remember how to go in the right direction.

“Did you enjoy your time out in town?”

“Yeah. Drank a frozen hot chocolate. Met a new friend. Got some new books.”

“Sounds like a good day.” He strokes my arm, every part he touches buzzing and leaving me with a high feeling I’ve only experienced with him. Weird.

“Yeah. It was. I’m sorry I left.”

He lifts his other hand and cups my face, making me feel like I’m everything in the fucking world. *Don’t fall for it. It wasn’t real before and isn’t now.*

“Oh, sweetheart. That’s okay. I’m glad you’re enjoying your vacation. You’re back now. That’s all that matters.”

“Yeah.” My eyes stay on his, getting lost in his gray-blue irises. I’m drowning in them and I’m not ready to come up for air.

“Come swim with me?” His sharp claws scratch against the side of my head and my eyes fight the urge to roll in the back of my head. I’d probably agree to anything right now.

“Okay.”

He takes his warmth with him when he moves closer to the water. Stripping down to my underwear, I get in behind him and we swim until we're both tired and starving.

“Breakfast for dinner?” he asks, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the house.

“Sure.” Freezing and wet everywhere, I tremble. His tail lights up a little, wrapping around me, and I lean closer, too comfortable to be anywhere else.

We both dry off in separate bathrooms and I carry a knitted throw with me to the kitchen, laying it over my lap as he heats the food. We eat and talk about random things, running through every topic our brains think of—our favorite cartoons, books, songs. As the sun fully sets, the house gets colder. I tremble as I eat my second plate of food and am only able to hold the spoon steady when Rory places his hand on mine.

After we clear our plates, he sets everything in the dishwasher and we watch old reruns of random shows from the 90s before both turning in. As I lie in bed, I cover myself in all the blankets I can find in the room, missing how little I need when he's around.

Nine

Rorian

We spent the last three days staying at the house. We made cookies and s'mores, watched new movies, and he also showed me what a Keurig was before making us hot chocolate. Sometimes, we went to the beach, chatting and going for random swims. He doesn't push me away but he never comes close enough either. My craving for blood is getting strong again but I ignore it. Fighting against it is getting hard, but having the urges of a monster doesn't have to make me one.

We are growing closer. He's letting himself go in front of me more and more. Pushing him could lead to us starting over. We don't have time for that. My father will eventually come for me. Or worse, him. I was less powerful before but am useless against Father as I am now. I have a better chance of protecting him with all my powers and strength back.

"What do you think?" His voice pulls me from my reverie.

"Of what?" I smile.

Sighing, he points to the ground. "Of my sand castle."

My gaze falls to the lopsided, squared, awkward shape between us. "It's great. Absolutely amazing."

"You're lying."

"What?"

He tosses sand in my direction. "Let's see if you can do better."

"Oh, I didn't realize this was a day of sand castle wars."

Laughing, he tosses a bucket and shovel at me. "Let's see what you can do, big shot."

"Alright, but you asked for it." Using the bucket and my hands, I make a castle twice the size of his. He watches me the whole time, both intrigued and annoyed. I add the finishing touches of rocks as windows and scoot back, admiring my work. "Not my best but it'll do." Crossing my arms, I grin in his direction.

His mouth gapes open and he kicks more sand at me. "Are you this good at everything?"

"I don't know. What do you want to test out next?"

He scoffs. "You're ridiculous and so is your castle." He shoves at the top, knocking off one of the towers.

"Hey, I worked hard on that," I say playfully.

"Oh yeah?" Kicking his foot forward, he knocks down another tower.

“Oh, you’re going to pay for that one.” I toss sand at him and tickle him on his sides.

“Stop it.” He slaps at me, his eyes lighting up as he laughs, trying to get away.

“Nope. Not until you apologize for ruining my castle.”

“Nope.” His eyes roll back in his head when I reach under his pits.

“This can all stop with one little word.” I straddle his legs, locking them between my thighs, careful not to press my claws hard against his body. It’s not needed. He’s ticklish everywhere. A soft pinch of my fingers has his head falling back and his face scrunching up like he ate something sour.

Laughing and shaking, he shoves me back into my castle, my weight flattening it to the ground. My breath rushes out of me a little too hard when he slams his body against mine, landing on top of me and forcing us chest to chest. We erupt in laughter. I stroke his cheek and we both go quiet, our heavy breaths mingling. His face lowers to mine and the moment our lips brush together, he rolls off me. “I... I’m going to go inside.”

There’s a gnawing at my chest when he walks toward the house, not looking back at me. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” he shouts back. “Going to shower all this sand off before it goes farther into my body than it already has.” He still won’t look at me and trips before reaching the door, the entry table catching his fall.

“I’m fine,” he yells before I can ask.

“You sure? I can have a look?” I get up and quickly move his way.

“Yeah.” Turning his head, those pretty brown eyes of his finally reach mine. If only I can keep them where they are forever. “Only a scratch. I think I’ll let it heal the old-fashioned way.”

Again we were so close and then he pulled away.

He enters the house, hobbling on one leg as he goes to the bathroom. Moments later, a loud crash has me running into his room, toward the bathroom. With my heart going haywire in my chest, I pull back the plastic curtain. His eyes are so big I think they’re going to fall out of his sockets. Suds cover his hair and he uses a small washcloth to block the front of his body. “What are you doing in here?”

“I heard a crash and thought you needed me.”

“Well I don’t,” he mutters underneath his breath. “I’m fully capable of showering myself.” Bending down, he reaches for the bottle and falls forward, catching himself on my body.

Grabbing on to his soaked skin, I pin him in place with my gaze. “You’re still unsteady from your fall and I don’t want you to hurt yourself. What if I wasn’t here? You would have fallen through the curtain. I’m staying with you until you’re done.”

He glowers at me. “What do you mean you’re staying?”

Opening the curtain all the way, I enter behind him and close us both in together. “I mean exactly what I said. Don’t worry, I’ll keep my hands to myself. Until you don’t want me to.”

“What makes you think I never won’t?”

“What makes you think you always will?”

“You’re so sure of yourself.”

“I like to think of it more as hopeful.” I smile. “It’ll all happen how it’s supposed to in time.”

Rolling his eyes, he steps back. “So you assume.”

“So I know.” I grin. “Don’t worry, I’ll be patient.”

“You’ll be waiting a long time.”

The wash rag drops from his hand, landing on his feet, and he stays where he is while my eyes travel up and down his body. He’s perfect. Gah, I can’t wait to touch him. To run my fingers over his hard body and feel him writhe against me, crushing me with his weight while he rides my cock. I can’t help but be jealous of the water’s ability to cover every inch of him all at once.

“Are you going to stand there and stare at me the whole time?”

“It’s the only way I can properly watch you. Are you going to rinse your hair out or leave the shampoo in for the rest of the day?”

“It’s kind of hard to do anything with you in here and the odd clothes you’re wearing are distracting.”

“There isn’t much for me to wear here. I’d disappear in any of your clothes. You’re twice my size.”

“Does that bother you?” His eyes darken and he lathers soap between his hands, washing his body at a leisurely pace. The smug human is taunting me, touching himself in all the places he knows I want to be.

“Not at all.” Oh, I can play his games too. “You’re exactly what I like.”

“Was Albert too?”

I freeze. “Honestly, you’re more my type.” After much consideration, him being my mate makes more sense than Albert did. I always wondered why my supposed perfect match didn’t have the usual body type I was attracted to. Albert was slender and shorter than me. My desire for him was there but not as much as it is for the man in front of me. *My mate.*

“I’m really not him,” he says, running his fingers over his dark, tiny nubs. My mouth salivates. “I never will be.”

“I know.”

“Do you?” His hand slides between his legs. Oh, he’s going to pay for this. Such a sweet tease.

“Yes. I don’t care about who he was. Only who you are. Tell me.”

“I...” He nibbles on his lip. “I can’t. I was glad you hadn’t asked. I don’t think I can handle you saying it. It might make me see everything for what’s it’s not.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like you only see me. Like I’m who you really want.”

“But you are.”

“How, when you came here for someone else?”

I try to reach for him and he steps behind the water, using it as a shield.

“I only thought I came up here for him. I was wrong. You’re the only reason I’m here. You’re all I see. All I’ll ever see.”

He shakes his head. “Don’t say what you think I want to hear. Too many people have done that already.”

“I’m not. I won’t. I’ll only tell you what you deserve to hear and I’ll mean every fucking word. Now tell me your name so it can be the only one I use from here on out. The only one I ever think about.”

“Everly,” he breathes out.

“Everly,” I repeat. “That’s very pretty and different.” I step closer. “Just like you. Do you always use your hand to wash yourself?”

“No. I lost my wash rag so I have no other way.”

“You can use me if you need to.” I lick my lips. “Let me give you a break, lovely.”

“I…” His eyes blink and he hesitates. “I told you I was capable of doing it myself.”

“Doesn’t mean you want to. Look how tired you are. You need someone to take care of you so you can relax better.”

“I’m okay. I’ve never needed someone to help me before,” he rasps, rubbing his fingers over his straining cock. His head is purple and swollen, growing with each tug.

“That’s because no one’s shown you how good it can be. Once I do, I promise you’ll feel differently.”

He shakes his head, moaning as he gropes his balls.

“Does that feel good? Touching yourself?”

“Mhm.” His bottom lip slips between his teeth.

“Yeah? What about now?” I stroke his nipples and he whimpers.

“Oh.” Bucking his hips, he fucks into his hand faster. Tugging and pinching a little at his small nubs, I lick along his neck, my teeth eager to bite down. To rip at his perfect flesh. To leave behind my marks before taking them away so I have a reason to do it again.

My tail hangs out from the top of my shorts and wraps around his waist, the tip sliding between his cheeks to graze his hole. No stress. No fear. No fire. I feel safe with him. Calm and sated. Capable of anything.

“Fuck. Rory.”

“You want me to stop?”

“Yes.” He moans, rolling his hips. “I don’t know.”

“So, no?”

“I... Please.”

“What? What do you want?”

“For you to say my name.”

“Everly,” I whisper, sliding my hand down his body to roll his balls between my fingers. My tail keeps rubbing his tight pucker, and I smile when I see a bottle of lube next to the conditioner. He keeps stroking himself while I lube up my tail. Pressing the tip of my tail to his entrance, I slowly work myself inside, his warm walls squeezing me tight. I won’t hurt him. He’s my mate. The other half of my soul. His body shakes as I push past his tight ring of muscles. He goes rigid when I start fucking in and out of him, his hand on his cock moving lazier than before as he fights to stand up straight.

“Rory,” he says between clenched teeth, his eyes partially shut.

“Everly. My sweet, precious Everly. My sweetheart.” My thrusts are faster and harder, and his warm walls spread around me the more I open him up with my tail, the thicker part hitting his sweet spot on repeat.

Both of his hands grab me and he bends his body a little, shoving his face into my neck as he comes hard. His nails dig into my skin and before I can realize I’m doing the same, he cries out in pain from my claws cutting his hips.

Backing up against the wall, he stares at me in horror, watching as the water turns red around his feet. His hand is covered in blood after he touches the torn flesh. “What did you do?”

“I’m sorry, Everly. It was an accident.” As he’s shoving my tail away, the tip lights up, grazing his finger.

Groaning, he holds his hand to his chest.

“Let me see,” I say, reaching for his arm. He slaps my hand away.

“Get out, please.”

“Everly.”

“You didn’t mean it, I know. It’s my fault for letting it happen. This wasn’t a good idea. We’re too different.”

My chest caves. I wait for the ground to open up and swallow me whole again. It doesn’t. Afraid what he’ll say next might be what sends me back underground forever, I don’t reach out for him again. I promised I’d never hurt him and did anyway.

Sliding back the curtain, I step out of the shower and head to my room. The one that will probably always separate me from him while we sleep. At least until my father gets his way again and I’m no longer here.

“*Monster.*” The word rings loud in my ears.

I am. I am a monster. I can fight it all I want but it’s who I was born to be. It’s what Everly sees me as now.

Unless... he doesn’t have to. Grabbing the ring my brother left me, I slide it on and look in the mirror. A normal man stares back at me. No tail. No claws. Someone I’m willing to be in order to be what he needs. What he really wants.

I didn’t tell him it was me at the bookstore because I was scared he’d never want me to take the ring off. That he’d

prefer me as a human. Him accepting me as I really am felt too good. Coming up here to meet Albert in another skin made me feel like an imposter, only half of myself. I'll be whatever I have to be if it means I get Everly. Even if he falls for me as someone else.

As long as he loves me.

Ten

Everly

My eyes burn and my head hurts this morning. I stayed up all night staring at the wall, wondering what Rorian was doing. Beating himself up some more? Sleeping? Trying to work the TV on his own again?

I ran from the beach because I knew if I kissed him, I wouldn't be able to stop. I'd keep doing it, and based on how good his lips felt against mine, one wouldn't be enough. Everything else about him has already become addicting. His touches. His warmth. His hugs. The fucking way he calls me sweetheart. It's dangerous.

I told him to leave in the shower for a different reason entirely. My guard slipped at how good it sounded when he said my name. He looked at me and saw me. Not Albert or anyone else. Our days together have felt like years and all we had were each other. I lost sight of the bigger picture and gave in to all his advances. He was right about his hands feeling

better than mine. His tail slipped inside me and I was fucking gone, ready to drop to my knees and give everything I am to him.

My side burns as I shift from my back. Glancing down, I touch one of the long, red, angry marks with my finger and wince.

He hurt me. His nails cut into my skin as I came and I only crashed harder, temporarily blacking out from a euphoric rush. Still not the reason I told him to go.

I liked it too much. The combination of pleasure and pain. It wasn't until he said he was sorry that I realized what was happening. I was too busy enjoying the high for my brain to connect the dots. Blood was dripping down my leg and pooling around my feet. My skin is ripped in several places. Long slashes. They weren't very deep but it still looks like I had a run in with Wolverine.

I ran because I liked it and the feeling scared me. I *can't* want that. Who does? Seeing his marks on my body has my heart soaring and arousal swirling inside me. What the hell? This isn't normal. Nothing about him is. But that's what I like. He's a breath of fresh air because being with him is like taking a break from the rest of the world.

Getting out of bed, I walk to the bathroom, checking myself in the mirror and then searching for a first aid kit. The scratches really do look worse than they are. Sucking in a breath, I grit my teeth through the sting of alcohol pads. After

I bandage myself up, I exit the room and see that Rorian's door is open.

Something inside me says to go toward it. To look for him. Ignoring the strong inner feeling, I walk to the kitchen and fix myself a bowl of cereal. Rorian is nowhere in the living room when I make my way to the couch. Turning on the TV, I sit on the recliner and watch a serial killer documentary. As much as I love Corn Flakes, they are in no way as good as Rorian's tacos or pancakes. He really is good at everything. Making me come in at the very top of the list.

"Rorian?" I call out when I hear a door close. Setting down my bowl on the side table, I glance toward the kitchen and no one's there.

Standing up, I put on my shoes and walk out through the back door, searching the beach for the black demon I've grown accustomed to spending my days with. He's nowhere to be found and when I walk towards the water, I don't see him swimming either. Where is he?

"It's the perfect morning for a walk, isn't it?"

Smiling, I turn around so fast I nearly tumble forward. It isn't Rory who catches me like I hope. No. Someone else is standing in front of me, helping me to regain my balance. The man from the bookstore. His gray-blue eyes blink at me.

"You okay? I didn't mean to startle you."

"I'm fine," I assure him, standing up straighter, realizing how similar our height difference is to mine and Rory's. The

small coincidences continue to catch me off guard as he rubs the side of his forehead the same way Rory does when he's scratching an itch underneath his horn. Except this guy doesn't have horns. No tail or claws. He's like me and everyone else I know. Ordinary and predictable in his basic clothing. He won't cut me or heal my wounds.

Even though he should be, he's not what I want. With Rory, there's a guarantee I won't know what happens next. That no day will be the same as the last. With this guy, all I'll experience is a regular walk on the beach.

Wait. Isn't this private property? How did he get here? Did he track me down? I rarely ever see anyone out here.

"You sure?" he asks again, resting a hand on my shoulder, and a warm sensation comes over me. It's a strange case of *déjà vu*, a feeling of me being here with him before. I haven't thought. Have I? I stare into his warm, breathtaking eyes again. Surely lots of people have pale grayish-blue eyes. People... Demons.

"I think so. Just a little caught off guard. Where'd you come from?"

Shoving his hands in his pockets, he looks around. "A car brought me. You left this behind at the bookstore the other day and I wanted to bring it back to you." He hands me my driver's license.

"I... How did that fall out of my pocket? I could have sworn I saw it yesterday before bed."

“Kind of impossible if you left it behind.” He purses his lips, pushing the wallet into my hand.

“Yeah. I guess so. Thank you.” Taking the wallet, I shove it in the side pocket of my basketball shorts. I wasn’t planning on going anywhere today so I dressed for comfort. I planned on staying here with Rory, showing him I wasn’t scared of him. Letting him know I forgive him. He really didn’t mean to hurt me. It was an accident. One I oddly welcomed with a squirting dick.

Wait a minute, how did this guy find where I’m staying? “How’d you know I’d be here?” I blurt out.

“Oh uh, I looked at your license and asked around if they knew of the last name. This house has been around as long as it’s been in your family.”

My shoulders relax. “Oh. Yeah, it’s pretty old.” I shuffle where I stand, feeling bad for accusing the nice man who brought me back my wallet of being a stalker. “Thanks again.”

“No problem. The car won’t be back for me for another hour or so. Would you like to take a walk with me? Can’t let a day like this go to waste. The weather is perfect. Not too hot or warm.”

“I... I don’t know. I’m staying with someone and I should at least let him know I’ll be gone first.”

“I’m sure a short walk won’t be a problem. You can tell him where you went when you get back.”

“I’d hate for him to think the worst. I won’t take long, I promise.”

“Okay. I’ll be here waiting when you get back.”

I run into the house and search every room again for Rory, coming up empty-handed. Where is he? Will we run into him on our walk? Finding a piece of paper and pen, I jot down a quick note about where I’ll be. The bookstore guy is standing right where I left him, looking perfect under the sunlight while running a hand through his hair.

“Ready?”

Glancing back one more time at the house, I nod. “Yeah.” *Where are you, Rory?* Will he be here waiting for me like before? I’m ready to get this walk over with so I can find out. I don’t want to leave but I also don’t want to keep watching the door, waiting for him to walk through it. I say it’s because I’m worried the wrong person will see him or he’ll get lost but my heart says otherwise.

“We’ll go this way today.” He points forward, already walking ahead of me.

Today. He acts like he’ll be back tomorrow too. Trying not to put too much thought into his words, I catch up to him and neither of us speak for a long time. He’s the first to break the silence, bending down to pick up a black seashell. “This one sure does look out of place, surrounded by all the light-colored ones.”

Leaning closer, I stroke the top, smiling down at him. “Yeah. I like when things stand out. Is it okay if I keep this one?”

Smiling wider, he nods. “Of course. It’s all yours.” I feel like he’s offering me the whole world when he slips the shell in my back pocket.

We walk some more, stopping to collect more shells or stick our feet in the water. A lady passes us, walking a small brown dog on a leash, and Rory immediately drops to the ground, petting and exchanging kisses with the dog. Wait... not Rory. Why did I call him that? What’s his name anyway?

My thoughts temporarily slip away when I’m distracted by the goofy, playful man in front of me. Me and the lady laugh as he grabs the dog by her front paws to dance with her. Maybe he surprises me after all. I smile as easily as I do with Rory. I never thought it was possible for my cheeks to ache so much until I met Rory. Now it’s happening again, and I don’t know whether to be relieved it’s with a human or disappointed he’s someone else.

When the dog and lady head for the water, we go toward a vendor selling shell necklaces and bracelets. The stranger, whose name I still don’t know, swipes his card into a card swiper attached to the vendor’s phone before lifting up a leather necklace with a sand dollar in the center. “For you.”

“What?” I shake my head. “No. You’ve already bought me books. You don’t need to buy me a necklace too.”

“Yeah, but I want to. Turn around, sweetheart, so I can put it on you.”

My mouth goes dry. There's another coincidence to add to the list. Spinning around, I step back enough for him to reach my neck. His fingers are warm and soft on my skin as he fastens the leather. "There, let's see how it looks."

I turn around and adjust the sand dollar to the center of my necklace.

"Perfect. Just like you."

"You're as cheesy as someone else I know."

"Am I? And who might that be?" Closing in on me, I can feel his hot breath against my lips.

Soft plastic hits the back of my leg and we both break apart, looking down at the large, colorful beach ball behind me.

Laughing, the stranger picks it up and tosses it toward the waving kids in the water. "Is it time for me to take you back?"

I want it to be but I also don't at the same time. "Yeah. We can start heading back. We have a long walk ahead of us." And I have a demon to find.

Nodding, he leads the way and I follow. We don't talk for a while, walking in silence, taking in all the calm and beauty of the sea. If only I could stay here forever. Come out to the beach any time I wanted, eat at the cute cafes and see... Rory.

We reach the house and I quickly say bye before running inside, ignoring the shouting behind me. All rooms are empty of Rory. My heart feels heavy. So do my feet as I step into the shower to wash the day and sand off me. I dress, check the messages on my phone, and head to the kitchen. Stopping

halfway, I smile at the view in front of me. Rory sings “Tell It To My Heart” while shaking his hips in front of the stove as he flips what looks like grilled cheese sandwiches. He has the floral apron on again, along with a tight pair of black cotton shorts with white stripes on the side. They fit him as perfectly as the white crop top he has on. Yeah, it’s good to be back.

“Smells good,” I say, causing him to jump.

“Oh, Everly. Didn’t see you there. Hungry?”

“Starving.” Rounding the table, I fix two drinks and carry them to the table. He’s swinging his hips around with two plates in his hands as I’m sitting down. Each one has a small bowl of tomato soup and two grilled cheese sandwiches cut in half on them.

“How long have you been here?”

“Not long. I went for a walk.” He sets the plates on the table and takes off his apron. His taut stomach is mostly visible beneath his formfitting shirt. I don’t know why but this outfit feels more like him. So does the bright blue nail polish on his nails. How long was I in the shower for? Who knows. I did sit in there until the water turned cool and it took forever to respond to the messages I actually wanted to write back to. My brother’s, my best friend’s, and my mom’s. I ignore everything from my dad and Theon.

“Me too. I didn’t see you.”

He shrugs, lowering himself in the closest chair to me. “We must have missed each other. I hope you didn’t fall too much

without me.”

Reaching for my plate, I laugh. “I’ll have you know I only almost fell once.”

“Only almost, huh?”

“Yeah.”

We joke and laugh all through dinner. When I walk to the couch, Rory goes to his room. As soon as I’m settled in the center of the large cushions with my Kindle in my lap, he plops down beside me, swinging his arm on the back of the couch. “What are we reading?”

Holding my Kindle to my chest to hide the current page I just opened up to, I clear my throat. “We are reading nothing. I thought you were turning in.”

“I was going to but didn’t want you to get too cold without me. You’ll read better when you’re warm.”

“What will you do then?”

“Watch a movie or show.”

Wanting to feel his warmth again, I reach for the remote and hand it to him. “Okay.”

Smiling, he puts on an episode of *Friends* and I scoot down on the couch, pressing my back to the edge while I lay my legs over his lap.

His eyes widen in surprise and I go back to the page where I left off, humming softly when he strokes my legs. I do like walks on the beach but I like this too. Mostly because it’s with

him. Only Rory can warm me up in seconds and make me feel good when hurting me.



I'm in my bed when I wake up. Rory isn't next to me like I wish he was. Shivering and uncomfortable, I get out of bed and walk next door. His door is cracked open and he's lying under the covers with his eyes closed. His even breaths and relaxed body confirm he's sleeping soundly. Not wanting to wake him up, I turn around to return to my room but stop before I can reach the door. Something flashes on a tall wooden dresser, and I rush over to it, my heart speeding up when I get a better look at it. This looks like the ring the stranger had on.

Lifting it between my fingers, I study it closer, rubbing the red stone in the center. I remember how a similar one flashed under the bright sun every time the stranger scratched his forehead. Other memories from today pile on. How he sounded when he talked, him calling me sweetheart, his unique pale grayish-blue eyes, and how he caught me when I was about to fall. Rory.

Looking toward the bed, I walk closer, holding the ring in my hand. Rory stirs a little, resting his hand on his stomach. Quietly, I slip the ring on one of his fingers and in seconds he's no longer a demon. He's... My hand shakes as I place it over my mouth. He's the guy on the beach. Except he's right

where Rory just was. I slide the ring off and his skin goes back to black. His horns stick out from his head and his tail hangs out of the blanket.

Why did he want me to believe he was someone else? Did he think I'd like him better if he was? Did he think it was the only way I'd want to be near him again?

He's wrong if so. If our moment on the couch wasn't reassuring, maybe he needs me to do more to prove he's good enough as he is. Why keep fighting against what I want when all it's doing is making me more miserable? I'm scared of being hurt again but not as scared as I was when I woke up to him gone this morning.

Placing the ring on the nightstand, I slide down my pajama pants and pull off my shirt. I'm only cold for a brief moment and quickly warm up when I slide under the blanket beside him. He shifts a little as I press myself closer, sliding my hand down the front of his body to grip his cock. Long moans slip from his lips as I stroke him slowly, lowering my body under the covers. He jolts in bed as soon as my lips stretch around his leaking head. Fuck, he's huge. He's so big my jaw cries out in protest as I take more of him into my mouth.

He tosses the blanket back, staring down at me with wild eyes. "Everly? What are you doing?"

"What I should have done yesterday instead of pushing you away."

"Molest me in my sleep?" He grins.

“No.” I laugh, sliding back up his body to straddle his stomach. “Showing you I don’t need you to be anyone but you. Will you let me?”

I cup his cheek and he slips his fingers between mine. “Are you sure this is what you want?”

“You told me you wanted to know me for who I am and not think of me as anyone else. I want to know you for you too.”

“What if I hurt you again?”

“Then I’ll probably enjoy it as much as the first time.”

Eleven

Rorian

Rolling his hips, Everly slides down enough to rub his ass over my cock. Is this really happening? Is he finally giving himself to me? How much is he offering?

Sucking on his lower lip, his lashes flutter as he slides down more, rocking his hard, dripping cock against mine. It's the only place where he's smaller than me and he has to lean forward to line us up better before stroking us together at a slow, antagonizing pace.

As long as he gives me a little more of him every day, I'll be happy.

“You feel so good, baby. I can't wait to see where else you feel good at,” I say in a gravelly voice, grabbing his face to tug it closer to mine. Already burning up and spiraling out of control, I smash my lips to his. Our hot tongues tangle together and he tastes like all my favorite things in one. I can't get

enough of his hungry, warm mouth and he can't get enough of mine either.

Panting and slightly pulling his mouth from mine, he continues grinding us together. Sweet moans slip from his lips when my tail caresses his back, teasing the crease of his ass.

"Please," he begs. I'll never get tired of hearing him this way. Breathless and desperate. He's a dream I don't want to wake up from.

"What is it, sweetheart? What do you want?"

"I think you know," he says, stretching out his back.

"I need you to say the words." My tail moves between us and circles one of his nipples before moving to the other. He shudders, his breaths coming out shallow.

"Your tail. Inside me."

"Wait here for me," I say, kissing his shoulder and gently moving his body off mine. He falls to the side of me, reaching out when I get off the bed.

"Where are you going?" he asks needily. Leaving him is so fucking hard. Five minutes is too long, and I hate how his naked body trembles under the blanket without me beside him.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I'll be back. I need to get something. Keep touching yourself for me while I'm gone."

Licking his lips, he nods, reaching for his beautiful uncut cock. He's everything I could ever want. How did I think I'd found the one already when I wasn't anywhere near this happy

with Albert? Maybe because a part of me believed my father about love. How it's not as good as everyone makes it out to be, and how you'll always feel like something's missing.

He was wrong.

Rushing to Everly's room, I grab the lube from the bathroom. On my way back to him, I imagine how he uses it in the shower and picture his dreamy face when he comes. I can't wait to see it again. Seeing him writhe between the blanket and bed when I enter my room again, I know it won't be long.

The bed dips when I climb onto it and Everly watches me as I scoot closer to him, positioning myself on my side.

“What took you so long?” His words rush out of him.

I laugh. “Someone's impatient tonight. It almost makes me want to draw this out longer.”

I squirt lube onto my fingers and reach for his hole, rubbing over his wrinkled pucker before slipping one digit inside. Breathing harder and shaking, he grabs on to me as I spread him open. I scissor my fingers inside him before fucking in and out, hitting his sweet spot each time. More desperate sounds come from him and I feel like I could erupt from them alone. They are like a melody I want to play on repeat.

“Doing okay, sweetheart?”

“Mhm.”

“You're doing so good for me, Everly. My Everly.” I kiss him tenderly, capturing his moans with my mouth. Sucking on

his tongue, I roll my hips, moving my cock up and down against his.

“Fuck. So close,” he says against my lips, his warm breath mingling with mine. We collide together in more ways than one. Our mouths crash together again and my tail replaces my fingers, thrusting deep inside him until he loses all composure. “Rory.”

“I’m right here, sweetheart. I got you. I always got you.”

Our hips meet again, cocks brushing together and kisses growing more sloppy as we take each other closer to the edge. This is what I’ve waited my whole life for. Having someone reach for me as much as I do them. Holding my mate close as we both fly and touch the sky.

“Go ahead, baby. Let go for me. I want to feel you come apart again.” For me. Only me. No one else will ever touch him again. Not his ex or someone new. No one. He won’t want anyone to. I’ll make sure he doesn’t. I’ll give Everly the world as long as he gives me him.

His cock twitches and his hole constricts around my tail. I rut against him faster, rubbing our leaking tips together, and my tail curls as I massage the place inside him that has him lighting up the way the stars light up a dark sky.

“Hurt me,” he pleads. “Hurt me and kiss the pain away.”

Doing as he asks, I dig my claws into his back, scraping the side of his cock with my other hand. That’s all it takes to have him shooting his cum between us, covering both of our skin.

The combination of tugging around my tail and cock has me losing myself right beside him, ropes of my cum mixing with his. A copper smell hits the air and I can feel myself growing hard again.

“Still okay?” I pull my tail free, gently caressing his hip.

“Better than okay.” He chuckles, sounding out of breath. “I don’t think I’m supposed to want some of the things I want when I’m with you. They don’t feel wrong though. Nothing with you does.”

“That’s because it’s not. There is nothing more right in this world.” Slinking down his body, I lap up the blood on his cock, moaning at the same time he does. He tastes so good. I want him to be the first and last thing on my tongue every day. I want his scent to remain trapped in my nose and the feel of him to remain on my skin, never going too long without touching him.

A few more swipes of my tongue has the short scratch closing up in minutes. The first time it took longer because I wasn’t strong enough. Consuming his blood woke up a little magic inside me and it grows a little more each day we spend together. He lit the spark and only he can set the fire again. Only he can bring me back. I have to bring him back first—to finish merging the pieces the last guy broke. If only he got to me sooner. Then all he’d know was what I gave him—love and trust.

He squirms as I continue licking his body. I swirl my tongue along his hip and back, getting a mixture of old and new blood

on my taste buds. Sparks brush over my insides, waking a part of me up that has remained sleeping until now. I'm finally feeling more demon than human. I didn't eat much before bed and fell asleep hungry. The uncomfortable twisting in my stomach has dissipated. Sated and full, I kiss his healing skin and take him in my arms.

“Can I stay here with you?”

“What do you mean? This is your family's house and we've both been here together this whole time.”

Sliding down in bed, he makes himself appear shorter than me while his large, muscular arm squeezes around my lithe form. “In this room. In this bed. I don't want to go back to mine tonight. It's too cold.”

“You can stay here every night if you want. In fact, I don't think I want you sleeping anywhere I'm not from here on out.”

“You mean until you tire of me.” His warm breath trails over my skin as he yawns.

“That won't ever happen.”

“It has before. It always does.”

“Not this time, sweetheart. I'm not him or anyone else. I'm me and you're you. What we have will never be a reflection of anything else we've experienced in the past. It will be better and no matter what happens, I will never let you go. Not without a fight.”

“You say that now.”

Nuzzling my nose against his head, I press a kiss into his sweaty hair. “And I’ll say it years from now too. I’ll always want you. Only you. Everyone else could disappear and I wouldn’t bat an eye.”

“I want to believe you but I’m also scared to. If I think of your words as a lie, they can’t hurt me.”

The sadness in his cracking voice hurts my heart. Too many people have let him down in the past. He’s lost trust in everyone. Holding me at a distance feels safer for him. It’s the opposite of what I want though. I want to be the place he comes to when the rest of the world has him unsteady on his feet. Someone he can lean on when he loses his grip on the ground.

“The only one who lied was him and he doesn’t matter. He never did. You weren’t the one for him and he wasn’t the one for you either. Set him free from your mind, sweetheart, and let me in.”

“I don’t know how to.”

“You will. You’re already on your way.” Lazily sliding the sides of my claws up and down his back, I kiss him again and he snuggles closer. His snores fill the room seconds later. The comforting noises he makes in his sleep have me drifting off beside him.

Twelve

Everly

Something warm and wet slipping inside my hole has my eyes snapping open. Air pulls from my lungs and I grip the sheets, humping the mattress as pleasure explodes inside me.

Crying out, I bury my face in the mattress, thrashing like a fish out of water at the wonderful sensation on my prostate. Holy guacamole. How did I get on my stomach? I must've turned over in my sleep. Or Rory turned me over. When heat pools in my stomach and his hungry tongue has my toes curling, how I got here is no longer important. Me being able to stay is. His sharp claws dig into the globes of my ass as he darts in and out of me, his tongue thickening the deeper it goes.

No one's made me feel this good before. Rorian keeps finding new ways to keep me under him and to satisfy my needs. Some I didn't know I had until he came into my life. He was unexpected and a blessing in disguise. So much good has

come from a creature I was taught to fear. Growing up Catholic, my parents took me to church every Sunday, where we learned only the bad came from and went to hell. I'm not sure they were right. Not when it comes to him. Where he's from doesn't define him.

I'm startled out of my thoughts when he pulls out to dive back in, his tongue swirling and hardening inside me. Oh fuck. He said most of his magic was taken away but I'm glad some was left behind. Rough ridges rub me on the inside, hitting every nerve ending, and I cry out as his tongue changes between different textures, mimicking every monster sex toy probably in existence. The room spins and my body tenses right before I spill my release over the sheets. He doesn't stop.

I claw at the pillows, twisting my body. I feel as if I have electric wire running through me and he keeps turning up the voltage. He's eating me out like he's trying to reach the bottom and every corner of a yogurt cup. Fuck. Fuck. The intensity is too much and I'm on the verge of tears from the overstimulation.

"Rory." My voice shakes. "It's too much."

"I want you to come for me again." It's almost like he's talking in my head and not out loud. His tongue hasn't stopped moving inside me the whole time. How is this possible? I guess the same way everything else he does is.

"I don't think I can," I think in my head.

"You can and you will," he says back. "Your body responds so well to me. It was made to take everything I plan to give it."

His words don't scare me. They should but they don't. Instead, they excite me and make me impatient for what's to come.

Feeling like I'm everywhere at once, my thighs tremble. I try to crawl away but he yanks me back. Overwhelmed and ripping at the seams, I reach my hand out and turn on my side, trying to grab at the edge of the mattress. Holding me tightly, Rory flips his body and licks at my seam with his head pointing toward the bottom of the bed. The tips of his horns occasionally come in contact with my thighs—the thicker, harder bone a little rough on my skin.

“You taste so good. I could spend all day here, getting lost between your thighs.” His tongue runs along my taint and balls. I can't take it anymore. My cock jolts and I'm lighting up like a fucking firecracker, sparks flickering behind my closed lids, and I come for the second time today.

Sore and achy everywhere, I smile lazily, ready to pass out and sleep for days. If Rory's holding me, I for sure won't have a problem staying in bed. I don't have to wait long for his warmth. Minutes later, he maneuvers behind me to wrap me in his arms.

“I knew you had another one in you. It's been way too long, hasn't it, sweetheart?”

“Yes. Too long.” It has, and my toys don't compare to this. I really have been missing out. On real pleasure. Him.

“We need to get you cleaned up. You're all sticky and sweaty.” He breathes me in and I swear I hear him humming in satisfaction.

“What about you?” I ask, pushing my ass back against his very hard, giant cock. The thing is nearly the size of him. Okay, maybe that’s a bit of an overexaggeration. It’s more comparable to having a third leg. How does one walk so straight with a second monster resting between his legs?

“Don’t worry about me, lovely. We’ll take care of me later. I wanted to focus on you this morning.”

“You sure this was all about me and not about you even a little bit?” I look back at him, my head feeling too heavy for my neck.

Smiling, he brushes his lips over my cheek. “It may have been a little about me too but in a different way. I get pleasure from taking care of you and being the reason you fall apart.”

He peppers kisses along my neck, tracing the curve of my hip with one of his nails. I really do need to clean up. The sheets are sticking to me and I stink. He’s so unaffected by all this, holding me tighter and unable to stop kissing me. I don’t want him to. His warm lips feel so good on my cold skin. It’s like being kissed by the sun.

“And here I thought you were being selfless.”

Chuckling, he nibbles at the skin of my neck, and I wonder what it would be like for him to sink his teeth into me, leaving bite marks all over my chest and the insides of my thighs. Fuck. I don’t have to worry about becoming Sookie. I am Sookie. Maybe a little bit of Bella Swan too.

“Ready for that bath now?”

“Nmg.”

“Nmg? Is that some new language I’m unaware of?” he deadpans.

“You broke my brain. So you’re to blame for my new form of communication.”

He kisses my shoulder and tugs at my nipple. “So yes? We’ll wash up and we can have waffles on the back patio.”

“Nmg,” I say again.

Laughter spills from his lips, tickling the inside of my ear. “I’ll take Nmg as a yes.”

Before I protest, he climbs off the bed and walks around to lift me in his arms. He struggles less this time, making it seem effortless. Confused when he passes the bathroom and carries me into the kitchen, I glance behind us. “You’re aware the bathroom is back that way, right? Or do you typically bathe in the sink?”

Spurting a laugh, he shakes his head and his grayish-blue eyes light up. “I thought we’d take a rinse in the water today.” Balancing me with one hand and both arms, he opens the door and steps outside. The air is cool today and the sky is so blue, it nearly matches the water.

“If you’re expecting me to swim right now, it’s not going to happen. My limbs are not fully working yet.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not ready to let you go yet anyway.” He presses a kiss to my lips, looking at me like I’m the most precious thing in the world. Slowly entering the water, he

treats me as such too, holding on to me the whole time. His grip tightens when he's waist deep in the water and he lowers us enough to where we're both mostly submerged in it.

“Someone already needs a nap and we haven't been awake for very long.”

I don't realize I'm closing my eyes until he says that. “You sure? I feel as if I've been awake for days.”

“It's okay, lovely. Go ahead and close your eyes. I have you. You're safe with me.” His words wrap around me like a blanket of hope. His promises sound so good and believable. So did Theon's though, and look at how that turned out. It's funny, I was prepared to have him on my mind the whole trip and to struggle to find ways to drown out our memories together. I'd also planned to be alone.

Rory changed everything. The only time Theon pops up in my head is when Rory has me wanting to trust again. What I'm feeling for him in such a short amount of time terrifies the fuck out of me. Never mind him being a demon from hell. Of course that would be the number one issue for normal people. I was never good at being one of them before so why start now?

Warming up and splashing into my side, the water feels good against my skin. It feels even more glorious with the sun hitting me just right and Rory stroking my back. I planned on experiencing this all alone. Lying in the sand with no one to talk to. Reading on the couch, snuggled up with a pillow instead of someone else. Swimming and holding myself up in

the water. I'm glad things don't always work out the way they're supposed to.

Burying my face in his neck, I breathe in the combination of salt water, smoky campfire, and me. I can't help but want to always be one of the scents lingering on his skin. He kisses my nose and then lips, swaying us with the water. Not knowing how much time has passed, I open my eyes when the cool air of the house hits my skin. We're back inside. He closes the door shut behind us with his foot and smiles down at me.

“Have a nice nap?”

“How long was I out for?” I look around, horrified by how much water we're dripping all over the floor.

“Don't worry. I'll clean it up while you sleep some more. The sheets in my room too. And I'm not sure. Not too long. Boats were driving out too close to us and I didn't feel like being a new discovery for someone to take back to their lab this morning.”

My chuckles are cut off by my shivers when he sits me on the cold bathroom counter. My body tightens up and I wrap my arms around myself.

“I'm sorry, sweetheart. It's hard for me to think of any surfaces being cold since nothing ever is to me.”

“Nothing ever?” I ask, tilting my head.

“No. As soon as I touch anything, it turns warm beneath my touch.”

“It makes sense why you're the perfect blanket then.”

Smiling, he reaches for two towels under the sink. He wraps one around me and ties the other around his waist. He assists me in drying off and lifts me from the sink. We look so odd in the mirror's reflection. My large body looks like it's crushing him but he takes me to the bed so effortlessly and lays me down, treating me like delicate glass.

“Do I not get any clothes?”

“No. I'm going to keep it like this the rest of the trip.”

“I hope you don't plan on taking me to that bakery then. Don't think I'll meet their dress code.”

“You're not mad I pretended to be someone else?”

Shaking my head, I reach for his face as he sits on the edge of the bed. “No. More like I'm feeling guilty you felt you had to. I'm sorry if I made you feel that way. I told you I wasn't scared of you and treated you like you were dangerous anyway. You're not.”

“I scared you. I wasn't cautious enough and for a moment forgot how different we are.”

“Everything happened how it should. How else was I going to know what I was missing out on?” I run my thumb over his bottom lip.

“And now you'll never have to go without it.” Leaning down, he kisses my lips.

He keeps using those words, always and never. He's promising me too much at once and my heart doesn't know

whether to accept it all or not. I'm returning home in a week and I can't see how continuing after that will be possible. What do I tell my parents? *Meet my older demon boyfriend?* Except I can't call him my boyfriend when neither of us has agreed to that. What we have is better staying here. Why can't I say the words out loud?

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Just spaced out. That nap definitely wasn't long enough."

"Rest then. I'll go make us brunch. You can wake up to eat and we'll nap together after we're done eating."

"Then take a real shower?"

"Yes. Then take a real shower. I'll let you choose what we do the rest of the day."

"Then you should choose what we eat."

His brows bunch together. "I have. Waffles."

Rolling my eyes, I shake my head. "No. Something you want to try. Not my favorites. What's a food you haven't tried and are curious about?"

His face is perplexed as he sits up straight. "Spaghetti and chocolate chip cookies. Oh, and Pop-Tarts."

My heart warms and I smile. He really is adorable sometimes. "Pop-Tarts, huh? Not so sure those qualify as food."

“They are placed with food at the grocery store and that’s good enough for me.”

“I know I told you to choose, but we’re not having Pop-Tarts for brunch. Not sure we have any here anyway. And the cookies can be for later.”

“So spaghetti then?”

I don’t have the heart to tell the guy that no one eats spaghetti for brunch either. I’m worried I’ve already broken his spirit about the Pop-Tarts and chocolate chip cookies. Wanting to keep him smiling exactly as he is, I nod. “Spaghetti then. Need help making it? I’m not the best cook but I can handle the simpler meals.”

“No. I told you I’d handle it so you can rest, and I will.”

“But do you know how?”

“Maybe it’s in the recipe book I found in the kitchen.”

Laughing at how helpless he looks, I sit up and get out of bed.

“What are you doing?”

“Change of plans. We’ll cook together, eat, and then crawl back in bed for a nap.”

“Okay.” He stands up and watches me dress before following me to the kitchen, smiling and humming.

“What song is that?”

“Song?” Confusion spreads across his face.

“The one you’re humming?” I ask, going to the pantry. “Oh, and can you grab the ground beef from the freezer?”

“I’m not sure but I heard it before on the radio when I drove with Albert or went to grocery stores. He used to change the station because he didn’t care for it but it’s kind of something that’s stuck in my head.”

“Hum it for me again?” I gather what we need from the shelves and shut the door, listening to him hum a very familiar song. Setting the box of pasta and can of sauce on the counter, I smile. “‘Everlong’ by the Foo Fighters.” Holding up a finger, I grab my phone from the living room and search for the song on my music app. As soon as I reach it, I turn it up as loud as it’ll go.

Tilting his head, his eyes light up as he looks at my phone, and he touches the screen, smiling the most beautiful smile I’ve ever seen. I’m the reason for it and I can’t wait to be again. And again. And again. I intend to bring as many mesmerizing smiles from him as I can while we’re here. My heart drops when I think about only having one more week left to do it.

“What is that?”

“A phone.”

“That plays music?” His voice shifts to a higher octave and his eyes are so big, he reminds me of a cartoon character.

“Yes. Music, movies, games, and much more.”

“That’s incredible. It can play any song we want it to?”

He's like a kid at Disney World right now. "Yup. Anything you want."

"This song is good for now." He sways his head as he walks to the freezer and then dances with the beat as he makes his way back with the ground beef.

Placing my phone on the counter, I set the song to repeat. "Yeah, it is," I agree. I can't keep my eyes off him the whole time we're cooking dinner. I could get used to this—him cooking beside me in nothing but a floral apron, singing and swaying his hips to "Everlong."

Going back will only be harder the longer I'm around him.

Thirteen

Rorian

Everly and I have gotten into a routine over the last three days. Me waking him up with my tongue or tail, lazy mornings in bed, cooking lunch together, going for quick swims, and dancing in the living room to “Everlong” and other songs he introduces me to.

I can't believe I've gone without this for so long. I've waited many lifetimes to experience all this and I won't let anyone take it from us. Not Everly's awful ex or my father. Or anyone else. I haven't seen my brother since he gave me the ring. Hopefully that means my father has laid off for a bit. He won't forever. There's no telling why he hasn't come up to find me yet or sent one of his minions to handle his dirty work. He has to be up to something. Slowly I'm gaining my powers back. My strength is returning tenfold and it's all because of Everly.

Once he fully opens his heart to me, I'll return home and try to stop my father before he can make his move. Before he can

try and take everything from me again. Except he really will be this time. It was easier for me to believe the lies with Albert smelling so similar to my true mate. His real name wasn't Albert though, and he doesn't deserve to be another thought in my head.

A warm body presses to mine and my brain shifts focus to the man lying beside me on a blanket laid out on the sand. We found a more discreet place to lie by a grouping of large rocks, keeping us out of view of anyone passing by. With no other house for miles, we only have to worry about people on boats and jet skis.

Everly's legs tangle with mine and he lazily trails his fingers along the horns on my neck. "I have to go to the grocery store today."

"I want to come with you."

His eyes soften and he nods. "Okay. I think I prefer not to go alone anyway."

"You don't have to go anywhere alone ever again if you don't want to."

"You can't always be with me." He rolls onto his back, placing his arms behind his head.

"I can try."

Sighing, he looks up at the sky, his eyes squinting from the sun peeking out from behind the clouds.

"Rory. In only six days I'll have to leave and go back to reality."

“And I’ll come with you.” I kiss his shoulder, rubbing my fingers over his hard, chiseled stomach.

Turning my way, his lips shift into a half frown. “I don’t think you should. It’s not a good idea.”

“Why not?”

“Because, Rory, I barely know you and this... you and me...” He pauses, turning away from me again.

“You and me, what? What’s wrong with this?” I gesture between us.

“Nothing,” he breathes out. “It’s too perfect. No one can ever be this happy without there being consequences.”

“I don’t believe that, and I’m sorry no one has shown you any differently. If you let me, I’ll—”

“You’ll what? Be better than they were? Never want anyone else after leaving here and meeting new people? Are you going to wear that ring forever? Keep hiding who you are for me?”

I’m not used to someone caring so much about me staying true to myself. “I’ll never want anyone else. You’re more than enough for me. If I have to wear the ring forever I will. I’ll go wherever or be whoever I need to in order to be with you. Don’t you understand that?”

“No.” Tears hang in his eyes and he sits, rubbing his palms over his sandy legs. “None of this makes sense when it feels like it should. You don’t know me. I don’t know you. Eight

days locked away together isn't enough time for you to guarantee any of this."

"Then I'll tell you again in six more and again in a hundred. Whatever it takes to make sense to you."

Rubbing his eyes, he shakes his head. "Me being here was nothing more than a convenience for you. It was for me too. Both heartbroken, we looked to each other for comfort. A rebound."

Hooking my fingers around his chin, I tug his face toward me to force his eyes to meet mine. "You're wrong. For me you were what I've been looking for all along. Albert never was. He was only in my life to lead me to you. You are not a convenience or a rebound. You're everything. If a hundred people were around us, I'd still choose you. Only you. Always you. You're my fated mate."

His bottom lip trembles and tears stream down his cheeks. "That's not... Fated mates aren't real. Only in books."

"They don't typically happen between humans and demons. You and I were brought together by some strange chance. Maybe to bring peace between both worlds... who knows. But you were made to be mine and I was made to be yours."

"You said Albert was your mate." He pulls away from me and stands up, dusting the sand off his body.

"I was wrong."

"What if you're wrong again?"

“Something was always off between me and Albert. Nothing’s off between you and me. It feels right all the time. You feel right. We don’t have to discuss this now. We can go on as we were and see where things are in six days.”

“Yeah.” He nods. “I think I’ll go to the store alone this time.” He rushes toward the house and I don’t call after him. What else can I say? All I can do is be patient. Waiting is hard but I’ve waited for thousands of years. What’s a few days or months in comparison. I only worry about what can happen to him or me between now and then. I’ll wait but I doubt my father will.

When I enter the house, Everly is exiting his room, twisting his shirt between his fingers. Only he can make a basic T-shirt look so damn good. The tight material pulls against his muscles, highlighting his thick biceps.

“You heading out?”

He doesn’t say anything, his gaze drifting everywhere but me.

“Everly?” I approach him with careful steps, sand falling from my feet. He’s fully dressed and I’m as naked as I was before he left me outside.

He looks to his feet, continuing to play with his shirt with one hand while the other tugs at the drawstring of his red basketball shorts.

When I finally reach him, he doesn’t pull away, and I cup his face with both hands. “What’s wrong, sweetheart?”

He looks at me, his face distraught. “I don’t want to go without you. I was going to walk out the door but couldn’t move my feet. I’m sorry, Rory. I’m just so fucking confused. So much has happened and I don’t know how to handle it all.”

“Oh, baby.” Standing on my tiptoes, I take him in my arms, nudging my nose into his neck. “It’s okay. You don’t have to work it all out now. Don’t worry about anything other than what you want to do today. The rest can wait.” I can wait, I want to say.

“Will you still go with me?”

Tugging down his chin, I kiss his perfect plump lips. “Of course. I’ll go get dressed.”

“Okay, but please don’t wear any of my aunt Sally’s clothes again. They don’t exactly cover everything.”

I throw my head back, laughing. “Lucky for you, I have my own clothes. Did some shopping while you slept in today. Wanted to surprise you.”

“When did you get money?”

“My brother paid me a visit.”

His brows raise. “What? He came here?”

“Not here. Outside the bookstore. He’s how I got the ring.”

“Oh, that’s where it came from. Does he look like you when in human form?”

“About as much as he does in demon form,” I deadpan. “Not at all.”

“Do I see the same human Albert saw when you have the ring on?”

“No. My human form is made specifically for you.”

“Your demon must’ve been too.” He shies away, fingering my tail.

“All of me is,” I say before reaching up to kiss him again. “You get the car ready and I’ll meet you outside.”

Nodding, he heads for the door and I hurry to my room. Going through the closet, I pull out a pair of red shorts from a bag. Pairing it with a black sleeveless 90s band shirt, I tuck the bottom into my shorts and add a black belt through the loops. Glancing in the closet mirror, I run my fingers through my hair, using my claws as a brush while I slip on a pair of black high top Converse, adding two long necklaces last. What am I missing? I stare down at my legs and shoes. Grabbing a magazine from the nightstand, I examine a few humans on the inner pages and a light bulb doesn’t go off until I reach a full-body shot photo. Ah socks.

I’ll add those to the list while we’re out in town. Walking out of the room, my reflection in the mirror of the dresser I pass has me doing a double take. The ring. Turning back around, I grab it from the place I last left it. Slipping it on, I grab the credit card from the inside of one of the drawers. Now I’m ready.

Everly has the car started by the time I walk outside. I slip into the passenger side and a random cat jumps in with me. What the hell?

Spreading my legs, I jump back against the seat.

“There you are, mister. You keep disappearing on me. I’m going to call you Ghost.” Reaching over me, Everly strokes the top of the cat’s head. “Remind me to add cat food to the list.”

“You didn’t tell me you had a cat?”

“I don’t. He showed up out of nowhere when I first got here. You scared him away and I didn’t see him for a couple of days.”

“Ah. He’s what I heard scratching over the floorboards.”

“You heard him before you woke up?”

“Yeah.” Picking the cat up, I place him in my lap and pet him before setting him outside. “Wish we could take you with us, buddy, but I don’t think they allow cats in the grocery store.” Shutting the door before our furry friend can jump again, I turn to Everly. “Unless they changed that too?”

“Nope,” he assures me. “They still have a no pets allowed rule in most stores unless it’s a service animal.”

“Noted. So what’s all on the list?”

“Depends on what we want to eat for the next six days.”

“We can discuss it on the way there.”

“Sounds good.” He gives me a once-over, grinning. “Much better.”

Smiling, I wrap my fingers in his. “Yeah, everything is.”

Pulling out of the carport, he names some of his favorite dishes and I tell him all I want to try as we're driving down the road. There's a lot of traffic today. It's such a small island but seems so big when we're all alone in our little safe haven.

"So has it all been decided then?" he asks, parking the car.

"Yeah. Oh, and Pop-Tarts."

Laughing, he shuts off the engine and shoves open the car door. "Yeah, Pop-Tarts. I haven't forgotten."

"Also chocolate chip cookie dough. Less work and mess that way. I also saw a cool dessert idea used with it in a YouTube video."

"You're suddenly a YouTube video expert, huh?"

"I've had time to be with all the naps you take." I wink and he rolls his eyes, shutting the car door.

I get out and join him at his side. Our arms occasionally touch as we enter the store and walk towards the baskets. He touches me during most of the trip and I'm not sure if he realizes he's doing it. Sometimes he strokes my arm randomly, holds my hand before reaching an aisle, or grabs my hip. I want to reciprocate but worry I'll go too far. Once I touch him, it's hard to stop and I have the need to put my hands everywhere. Not only my hands but my tongue and tail too.

"And here's the Pop-Tart aisle. Add which ones you want into the cart and I'll pick out some cereal."

"Okay." Unable to decide which flavor to try first, I toss a box of each into the cart. He shakes his head and laughs when

he throws in his one box of cereal. “Do you really think you need that many?”

“How else will I know which one I like best? What if I choose the wrong one and am turned off from Pop-Tarts forever?”

“Then your teeth and insides will be grateful.”

“Not being human means not having human problems.” I shrug.

He huffs. “Keep bragging, why don’t ya.”

Grabbing his wrist, I pull him into me and lift myself onto my tiptoes to kiss his chin. Leaning down, his lips press to mine and I’m too lost in human form to notice the lady trying to get by with her cart.

“Sorry.” Everly blushes, hiding his face behind his hand. We can’t stop laughing as we walk to the checkout. We keep distance between us when we walk back to the car and while we load the trunk. It isn’t until we’re back in the car that we’re on each other again. Our tongues are hungry and I slip my hand between his legs, massaging his hard-on.

A honk from nearby has us pulling apart and it’s luckily coming from the road. No one else is in the parking lot but us.

“Let’s go home,” I say in a sultry tone.

Grinning, he immediately starts the car and drives out of the parking lot as fast as he can. Twenty minutes later, we are back at the house and try to hold off on kissing while putting

everything away but there's this sudden need between us that won't lessen until we feed it.

As soon as the last item is in the fridge, we are on each other, mouths crashing and hands slipping under clothing.

"Take the ring off," he says in a hushed tone.

"You don't want to see what it's like to be with me like this?"

"Not when I already know how good it is with you in your natural form."

"You never know. Could be better."

"Nothing can be better than you being you." He tugs at my clothes. "Now, take it off."

He doesn't have to tell me again. I slide off the ring and leave it on the kitchen counter. He strips on his way to the couch, and I follow suit, admiring his gorgeous body—his dark tan skin and ripples of muscles. His cock is hard and dripping between his legs as he lies down on the couch. Spreading his legs, he bends his knees, showing me his gaping hole still worked open from this morning when I fucked him with my tongue and tail.

Fuck. I could watch him forever. Stretching his arms behind him, he rolls his hips needily and his dark pink hole twitches. "What are you waiting for? Get over here and fuck me. I need you, Rory. So fucking bad."

Licking my lips, I move closer and position myself between his thighs. "You're so perfect. You know that? Look how sexy

you are, spreading your legs for me. Such a pretty, hungry hole.”

“Please, Rory. Stop teasing me and give me your cock already. I can’t wait anymore. You’ve kept me waiting for too long.”

“I had to make sure you were open enough for me first, lovely. I want you to enjoy it as much as me.” I tease his pucker with my knuckle and he whimpers.

“I’m ready now.”

“You are.” I push my rolled finger inside with zero effort. “So loose and ready for me.”

Sliding back on the long, eight-piece sectional, I lower my face to his tight, round ass and open my mouth. My tongue snakes out, sliding between his cheeks to lick at his hole, covering him in my thick saliva. Pushing my way inside, I coat his hole too and flick my tongue against his prostate while my tail wraps around his cock. Moaning and pressing his ass closer to my face, he lifts his ass higher and I push his knees closer to his chest. I jerk his cock and eat him out at the same time until he’s whimpering. So close to the edge and ready to come apart at any minute, he grips the couch, shaking his head.

“*What is it, sweetheart,*” I ask, using my mind.

He uses his thoughts to communicate back. “*I don’t want to come this way. I want to come with your cock inside me.*”

I extract my tongue from his ass and crawl up his body, rubbing my throbbing cock between his cheeks. “Is this what you want?”

“Si.” He hasn’t spoken Spanish before. I didn’t realize he did until now.

“Say that again.”

“Yes.”

“No.” My tail squeezes his cock and he gasps. “In Spanish.”

“Si. Cojeme.”

It’s all he has to say for me to line myself up with his hole and drive myself inside him. His thighs quiver and he whines, rolling his hips as I push past his ring of muscles. He’s still so tight and wonderful. His warmth engulfs me the deeper I go. I’ve been waiting a long time for this too. To be connected with him in this way. To claim his body. His walls tug at my cock. The sensation of him fully wrapped around me, his skin stroking me from all angles as I rock in and out of him, is overwhelming.

I’ll never stop coming back for more. Neither of us will go without this ever again. “Your tight hole feels so good, sweetheart. Are you ready to take more of me?”

“I... I don’t know.”

“I think you are.” My precum leaks inside him, helping me slide in easier. I’m only halfway in when I hit his prostate. I go deeper and he thrashes against the couch, tightening his fists.

“Oh. Rory. It’s too much.”

Holding on tighter to his legs, I fuck him faster. In and out on repeat, sinking in a little more each time. “Look how well you stretch around me. Such a slutty little hole.”

Leaning forward, I capture his soft cries with my lips, wiping at his tears with my thumbs. Our bodies glide together in perfect sync, our kisses off kilter, my teeth sinking into his bottom lip. He arches his hips, swallowing more of me, and I’ve never had this much of my cock inside someone before. Tightening my stomach, I hold back from coming too soon, yearning to ride the high a little longer.

“Fuck, you take me so good, sweetheart. Your human hole is so hungry for me. So fucking eager.”

I bite down harder, sucking on his lip as I tear into the soft flesh. He screams and I suck the blood pouring from the deep cut. It heals under my tongue and my body is disappointed when he heals too quickly. Kissing my way down his body, I bite his neck and then his shoulder before sweeping up all the blood in one sweep of my long tongue. His strong copper tastes bursts in my mouth and then I’m coming inside him.

He wraps his fingers around my neck and forces my mouth back on his, spilling his hot, sticky load between us. Moaning and jolting through his orgasm, his nails dig into my neck. I stay where I am for a little while longer, enjoying him being this close with his legs wrapping around me, holding me in place.

Pressing a sweet kiss to his lips, I smile down on him. “How are you, lovely?”

“Mmm.”

“Mmm good?”

“Si.”

“Why don’t you speak Spanish more often?”

“You’re asking me this now when I can barely think straight?”

Chuckling, I pull out of him and scoot back enough to lick him clean. His loud moans fill the room and he tugs on my hair, squirming beneath me. I don’t stop until I’ve eaten out most of my cum. Lifting my face near his half-hard cock, I lap at his head, my tongue following the trail of his cum. He tastes so much better than me. Like heaven.

“Why’s that so hot?” he asks, looking down at me with glazed over eyes.

Slapping his thighs, I kiss his lower stomach and stand up, my legs shaking as I shift my world back on its axis.

“I’ll be back. Don’t go anywhere.”

“I couldn’t if I tried.” He watches me go toward the kitchen with a sleepy smile. I fight the urge to take him again right then and there. Stumbling to the fridge, I grab two water bottles and hold on to the counter, along with everything else I can grab on to as I return to where he is waiting for me on the couch. His skin glistens with sweat and he’s flushed all over.

Reaching for the small throw draped over the couch, he tugs it down on himself. My human is always so cold. Good thing I'm always hot.

On my way to him, I'm hit with a dizzy spell and sway a little. I'm drunk off the high of the best orgasm of my life and barely saw straight when I got off the couch. Not many humans can bring a demon to his knees, and he has done so almost too many times to count. Eventually I'll completely fold, and I don't care if I ever get up again as long as he's always looking down on me.

"Here." I hand him a water bottle.

Taking the bottle, he downs the water in one go and I drink mine at the same speed.

"I hope we didn't forget anything in the car."

"Nothing cold at least," he adds. "We kind of rushed inside when we got here."

"Only a little."

"What are we eating today?" I stroke his inner thigh.

"Pop-Tarts sound pretty good right now."

I jump to my feet. "Pop-Tarts it is."

His laughter follows me to the kitchen. "I hope you're this excited after trying one."

I am. After the first strawberry Pop-Tart, I try a chocolate one and then a cookies and cream. Everly has to finally cut me off once I'm at my tenth.

Sitting in my lap on the front porch swing, he kisses my lips, smiling wide. “You taste like every Pop-Tart flavor in existence.”

Pushing my tongue between his lips, I sweep it over his tongue, kissing him harder before breaking apart. “And you taste like mine.”

Fourteen

Everly

He called me his. Not once but several times. On the porch swing after we ate our weight in Pop-Tarts two days ago, in the water when he fucked me in the shallow end yesterday evening, and this morning in the shower as he teased my hole with the flat surface of his horns, rubbing me there until I dropped to my knees. Never have I wanted something to be so true either. What's wrong with me? I promised to protect myself better this time and I've already failed. Staying away from him grew harder and harder. Once I had all of him, I was too addicted to even entertain the thought.

“I want to ask you something.” He wraps his arms around me from behind as I stare at us in the mirror. How strange we look together. But at the same time also beautiful.

“What is it? Not to get more Pop-Tarts I hope?” He's already moved on to raw cookie dough, so that can't be it. He isn't going to ask to come home with me again, is he? I'm not ready

for him to. I was sure of the answer before and I'm not anymore. I'm being pulled in two different directions, one more enticing than the other but not as logical.

He leans his cheek on my shoulder. "No. Something else." Pausing, he looks around the room. "I want to take you out on a date."

My heart dances in my chest. "A date?" Will I really say no? How is a date crossing the line more than allowing him to fuck me with several parts of his body?

"Yes. A date. Where I take you out somewhere. To have dinner at a restaurant, to see a movie or maybe out dancing. I've heard humans mention something called putt putt before and bowling."

"You throwing a heavy ball sounds dangerous and you swinging a putter too close to me sounds like an accident waiting to happen."

He cracks a smile. "Are you sure you're the one who should be worried? You're the clumsy one, remember?"

I twist my lips. "You do have a point but when I fall I don't cause cracks in the ground." He's getting stronger. Rorian doesn't have to say anything for me to know. When he fell from me tackling him in the living room yesterday after our movie ended, the wood cracked beneath his weight. By looking at him, you'd never guess he'd have the ability to create so much damage. Not based on how small he is. He looks so strong and powerful when he's on top of me though. I love it.

“Also a good point. So no bowling or putt putt then?”

“At least not during busy times when it’s crowded with people, and it most likely will be in the summer.”

“Damn people. Always getting in the way.”

“Yeah, how dare they be everywhere on the planet they came from. I mean the nerve.” I smirk and he laughs, rubbing his horns on the side of my arm. Man, he looks so good behind me. In front of me too. Between my legs and looking at me from above.

Before he can speak again, my phone goes off in the bedroom. Huffing out a breath, I ignore the call.

“You ever going to answer that?”

My phone has been going off for days. I only turned it back on so my brother and best friend don’t freak out, assuming I’m lost at sea. “Nope.” Spinning around, I lean down to kiss him and he meets me halfway. To some, the height difference might be bothersome but not to me. I like being the taller and bigger guy in the relationship while my smaller partner shoves me to my knees to fuck me.

Ringin again, my phone drags me from my thoughts. “I’ve blocked both of them but then they call me from different numbers.”

“Who’s them?”

“Theon and my dad.”

“You want me to answer it?” He cocks his head, moving toward my phone.

I consider the idea and then shove him away. “No. I’ll keep ignoring it. I’ll be home soon anyway and they can bother me in person then.”

“What do they want?”

“Same as usual. To control my fucking life.” I heave out a sigh, turning my phone off before tossing it in the nightstand drawer.

“I’m sorry you’re dealing with that. I did too once. Still kind of am. Except my father is in hell and doesn’t have a phone.” He looks at me wearily and I can tell he wants to say more but doesn’t.

Facing him again, I lean down and stroke his face. “How about we pretend none of them exist and go for a swim. Then later you can take me on a date and I might even invite you inside for a nightcap.”

Smiling, he kisses the corner of my mouth and a loud banging on the door has us jumping apart.

“You expecting company?” he asks, his expression twisted.

“No. Maybe they’re lost?”

“I’ll answer it,” he says, already stomping toward the front of the house. Yanking at his arm, I stop him before he can reach the door. I’m glad I did when I hear my dad’s voice outside the door.

“You know them?”

“Yeah. It’s my dad. Go wait for me by the water and I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

His forehead wrinkles. “You sure? I can stay with you if you need me to.”

“No. I need to talk to him alone. Him seeing you, whether it’s like this or as a human, will only worsen the situation.”

“Okay.” He forces a smile on his face, the worry in his eyes not going away. “I’ll see you outside then.”

“Yeah.” We kiss one more time before he rushes toward the back door in the kitchen. Taking a deep breath, I wait until he’s fully out of the house before opening the door to face my dad.

“What are you doing here?” I grit out.

Standing tall, my dad smiles maliciously, adjusting his bright blue polo. He’s up to something. He wouldn’t have flown all the way out here if he wasn’t.

“Ah, so you are alive. Good to see my son who won’t answer his phone is living, breathing, and well.”

“I’m on vacation. Enjoying my honeymoon.”

“Hard to do alone, isn’t it?” He glances behind me. “Not to worry, your husband-to-be will be here in a couple of days. He got a little caught up with work.”

Anger heats my blood. “What do you mean he’ll be here? Why is he coming? I don’t want him here and I’m supposed to

go back to work in three days.”

“You don’t have to worry about that anymore. You don’t need that job. Once the two of you are married, you’ll come work for me so you’ll be ready to run things next year with your new husband by your side.”

My stomach shifts and I ball my fists at my sides. “I can’t leave my job because you want me to run some bullshit company I want no part of.”

“Good thing you don’t have to. I took care of everything for you.”

“You did what? Who the fuck do you think you are to make decisions like that for me?”

He shoves at my chest, his nostrils flaring. “Who the fuck do you think you are? I raised you, paid for your education, and gave you the life I didn’t have while growing up, and how did you repay me? By being an ungrateful little shit. You will marry Theon and the wedding will happen in three days.”

“And if I don’t?”

“You don’t want to know what will happen if you don’t. I have a letter ready to give to your landlord and your boss if you run away again. If they get it, no one will ever hire you or rent to you again. Don’t make me have to do this.”

“You’re fucking crazy. Why are you doing this to me? I’m your son. Don’t you want me to be happy?”

“Happiness always comes with a price, and there are sacrifices you have to make first in order to get there. To

ensure you have a good life. I've made my own sacrifices, and now you'll do so too. Or else everything I've done for this family was all for nothing."

"What are you talking about? Are you listening to yourself right now? Theon is a liar and cheater. I want nothing to do with him. He wants nothing to do with me either."

"That's not what he told me. He said he misses you and you're the one who left, and the only one here not listening is you."

"He was fucking his best man in the dressing room right before our ceremony." I can feel my skin tightening around my bones.

"You've been lying to get yourself out of things since you were a child. I didn't listen to it then and I won't now. I'll see you in three days. Your mom and brother will be here too, so try to practice your best fake smile."

"Fuck you." All the blood rushes to my head and I'm on the verge of passing out at any moment.

"I'll see you in three days, son. Theon will be here with your tux. If I were you, I'd put it on and make the right choice. If you don't, I'll do it for you. If I have to tie you up and force 'I do' from your mouth, I will. I won't let you sink the company."

My throat clogs with emotion and I want to keep screaming but it'll do no good. All I can do is stand here, unmoving and silent, as my father gets back in his fancy ass car. I won't do

what he asks. He can threaten me all he wants but I don't want to live a life of misery like he did. He sacrifices a lot for all he has and hates who he is. His marriage to my mom is a sham and so are all the smiles he puts on for the world.

I'm not like him. I never will be. I won't marry Theon. Not in three days or ever. I'd rather crawl under the floorboards where Rory came from and fall into a deep sleep for a thousand years.

Rory.

My mind flashes to the beautiful demon waiting for me outside. He gave me a glimpse of how differently my life can go and I want the full view. I want him.

Fifteen

Rorian

Something is wrong. Everly won't say there is but he doesn't have to. He's been quiet and tense ever since his dad left. He sits beside me in the sand, holding my hand tighter than he ever has. Like he's scared if he lets it go, so will I.

“Did you still want me to take you out today?”

He shakes his head, looking at me with sad brown eyes. “No. I want to stay here and be with only you.”

Smiling, I rub my horn against his cheek. “That can be arranged. Want to order in? I still haven't tried that circular food that comes in a box yet.”

He laughs. “You mean pizza?”

I'm happy to have made him smile even if it was only for a little while. “Yeah, that. Pizza. I forget all the different names of food humans eat. It's a lot to remember.” he shakes his head. “Did something happen? Did your dad hurt you?”

“No.” He wraps his arms around his legs, resting his head on his knees. “He’s trying to. I won’t let him. He wants me to marry Theon.”

My blood boils. “Why? After what he did to you?”

“He doesn’t believe me. He always thinks I’m lying. I hate him. I hate all of them.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” I pull him toward me. “They don’t matter. What matters is right here.” I lace my fingers through his.

“Yeah.” He leans his head on mine. “Will you still come with me when I leave?” He grabs my hand tighter.

“You already know the answer to that question.”

“Yes, but I want to hear it out loud. *Dígame.*”

“I’ll go anywhere you go, Everly. You’ll never have to be without me again.”

Lifting his head, he crashes his mouth to mine and we don’t go inside until darkness falls around us. We stay on the sand, kissing and holding each other in front of the waves. Treating each moment like our last. He’s scared. I am too.

Meow.

Something rubs between us when we enter the house. The cat circles Everly’s legs. “There you are, Ghost.”

“Is Ghost coming with us too?”

“Possibly.” He bends down to scratch the cat between the ears. “Only if he jumps in the car when it’s time to leave. We’ll leave the decision to him.”

Meow.

Ghost bites at my leg and I lightly kick him away. “I think someone’s hungry.”

“Oh, I left the food in the car. I’ll get it,” he says, walking toward the front.

“Want me to come with?”

“No. I got this. Order that pizza, will you? You remember how to look up numbers and call people, right?”

“I do. I’ll have it done by the time you come back.”

The cat jumps between him and the door, hissing.

“If you want food, boy, I have to go outside.”

Walking around the feline, he opens the door and Ghost bites at his shoe, like he’s trying to keep him inside. “I got him too used to the tuna and he thinks I’m going the wrong way.”

Relaxing, I laugh half-heartedly. “Don’t worry. I got him.” I pick up the cat and hold the squirming animal until Everly is out the door. Carrying the cat, I grab the phone from the bedroom and finally set him down when he attempts to strike me with his paw.

“Okay, okay. Back on the floor you go, you vicious beast.” His tail sticks straight up, tickling my nose. Smoke and fire.

Quickly standing up, I step back as the cat transforms in front of me into the human I saw the first time I went into town.

My brother.

“Fuck. Why does that always hurt so bad.” He spits. “Damn hairball.”

“Cannon? Were you that cat this whole damn time?”

“Unfortunately. I wish I had chosen a dog instead. They groom themselves a lot less. Do you have any idea how many times I had to lick my own ass?”

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“Father had sent his minions to earth a lot over the last couple of months, so I followed them. It’s how I knew Everly was important. He was after him for a reason. So I came here to see why.”

“That’s why you scratched the floor. You are why Everly fell and cut himself.”

“I had to see if my suspicions were right. If Father caused a plane crash because he wanted to stop your true mate from reaching you. I saw those floorboards move and I knew I was right.”

“So he crashed the wrong plane?”

“Yes. I switched Everly’s name last minute to save his life. I’m only sorry about all those people on the other plane. They didn’t deserve that.” Regardless of what most assume, a lot of us demons don’t want to hurt innocent people if we can help it. Cannon won’t forgive himself for a long time. He did what he felt he had to in order to bring me back by ensuring Everly stayed alive.

My heartbeat quickens. “Everly. He hasn’t come back yet. I have to check on him.”

“You two need to leave. Go somewhere Father can’t track you. You can’t stay here. I think he’s going to try and kill Everly again. Last week, I overheard him ordering his minions to follow Everly’s dad because he didn’t trust the guy.”

“His father was here earlier.”

“Fuck,” Cannon says, and we both hurry to the front of the house, running out the door right behind one another.

“Everly,” I shout. “Sweetheart.” My heart stops when Cannon picks up a bag of cat food from the ground. The trunk is still open and Everly is nowhere near it.

“Everly,” I scream louder.

A harsh shrill sound comes from the backyard. Cannon and I loop around the house, my brother’s powers allowing him to get there quicker. As I turn the corner, I see Cannon on the ground, holding his hand to his chest. He starts to fade, gripping the ground. When a demon is killed on earth, we get sent back home.

“I’m sorry,” Cannon says, sinking beneath the sand, and the ground swallows him up. Screaming comes from behind me and I freeze when my eyes land on a familiar face. One I thought I’d never see again.

Older and with a little gray in his hair, Albert smiles at me maliciously, holding a knife to Everly’s neck. “I didn’t want to

do this. I hoped it wouldn't come to this. Your father did too. You know how hard it is to end your own son's life?"

My throat goes dry when I try to speak, so I try again, swallowing down the thickness seeping into my chest. "Don't. Please. Why are you doing this? He's your son. He loves you."

"He's about to cost me everything. He's the reason I had to give up my first job. I was broke, close to living on the streets with a new wife and baby. Your dad came to me and made me an offer after he saw us together at the coffee shop. You thought I was your mate. How stupid you were." He laughs and it's vile. "I never loved you."

He presses the knife tighter to Everly's neck and he squirms. "I had to do what I needed to save myself and my family. Then you come back and complicate everything again. Getting my son involved. I tried to get him to marry Theon. I told your dad I would handle it another way but Everly is stubborn and now has to pay the price. I can't lose everything I have. I won't. Not due to my son wanting to be with a monster."

"The only monster here is you," someone shouts from behind me. "You do this and I'll do whatever it takes to make sure you pay."

Turning around, I'm met with a sharp gaze of a man who is a similar height to Everly. Same brown eyes and hair. Skin also a dark tan. His brother.

"Don't get involved, son. If you were smart, you'd get back in your car and drive away."

“If you were smart, you’d drop the fucking knife and let him go.”

“I can’t.” Albert’s eyes darken and he slips the knife across Everly’s throat. Blood gushes from the wound and he falls to the ground when Albert lets him go.

“No,” I scream. Everly’s body twitches and I run to him while his brother tackles Albert to the ground, fighting for control of the knife.

Dropping to my knees, I pull Everly into my arms and tears fill his eyes. “Thank you for the best honeymoon I could ever ask for.” He smiles sadly and I hold my hand to his wound. “I love you, Rory.”

My chest squeezes and I lick at his wounds as he loses consciousness. “No,” I cry, lapping at his skin over and over. He doesn’t wake up no matter how many times I try to heal him. The wounds won’t close and the blood won’t stop coming. “No,” I say again, holding him tighter and kissing the side of his head. “I love you too. Please stay with me.” Rocking him in my arms, hot tears pour from my eyes and I feel as if someone is crushing me from the inside.

Shaking and cracking around us, the ground opens up and a force pulls Everly away from me. I try to hold on to him and lose the fight when he’s yanked from my arms and taken underground.

Digging at the sand, I try to go after him but the portal has already closed off.

“You,” I grunt out, turning to Albert, who is lying on the ground with a knife pointing to his neck by his other son. The one who gets to live.

“You did this.” Rubbing my eyes, I get to my feet and shove Charlie away and press my foot into Albert’s neck. “My father promised you everything but I’ll leave you with nothing.” Fire rises from my tail and I shove it down his throat, burning him from the inside. Shaking and making torturous sounds, his eyes widen. When he finally goes still, I remove my tail and stare at his lifeless body. His eyes are bloodshot and empty.

“Is he...”

“Dead. Yes. Your brother was right about happiness coming at a price. Especially when you look for it in all the wrong places like your father did.” Light glows around Albert’s body and it disappears quicker than Everly’s did. Albert belongs in hell. Everly belongs with me.

“Where are you going?” Charlie asks me as I walk toward the water.

“To find your brother.”

Closing my eyes, I think of home and am standing in the center of the pits in a matter of seconds. My bones ache as they snap back into place and the cracks in my skin widen.

“I’ve been waiting for you. So has your mate.”

I turn around. Huh. My uncle is standing behind me.
“Lucifer.”

“That is what some call me. Welcome home, nephew.”

“Where’s my father?”

“Oh, he won’t be a problem for you anymore. He’ll be spending eternity in the pits.”

“What? I don’t understand.”

“He broke the rules. More than once.” Standing tall, he stretches out his slender red neck, rubbing over his black horns. He can look any way he wants but chooses to use the image humans draw of him because he finds it comical. “Octavius has been causing me issues for a long time now and I really had my ass handed to me by the guy upstairs recently. We have a truce, he and I. He doesn’t get in my way and I don’t get in his way. It’s one thing to make a deal with a human, another to kill on earth and force people down here when they don’t belong.”

“You’re talking about the plane crash.”

“And Everly. He killed Albert’s older brother too, originally thinking he was your fated mate. When Albert came around, he knew he wasn’t right away. The man was conniving and willing to easily walk away from you for twenty dollars. No fated mate would ever do that.”

“Where’s Everly? What’s happened to him?”

“He’s fine. He’s with your mother as we speak.”

“My mother?”

“Yes. She is taking over your father’s old job until you and your brother are ready. I want you both to be my new enforcers. Your mother is one of the strongest and most

trustworthy demon I've ever met. I wish I never believed your father when he told me she killed your uncle and other humans who stood in his way over the years. It was him. All of it."

"So Everly's alive?"

"He can't permanently die. He's the fated mate of a demon. A little detail your father clearly missed. You two had too strong of a bond and once he accepted you, your dad's curse went away and he became untouchable."

"He's..."

"Right here." A hand rests on my shoulder and when I turn around big beautiful brown eyes stare back at me. Seeing his smile is everything. He's alive and standing right in front of me, and I'll go out of my mind if I don't touch him soon. My heart is so happy, I can barely breathe. He never fails to take my breath now.

"You're okay."

"I am." He cups my cheeks and I kiss the inside of his palm. "I was waiting for you."

"I came as soon as I could." Time works differently here. Minutes on earth can feel like weeks in hell. Flames rise above us and I kiss his lips. "I'll always go wherever you go, remember?"

Kissing me back, his fingers fall in my hair and I raise myself off the ground to reach him better. I thought I lost him. The pain was worse than the first time. My heart broke when Albert turned his back on me but when Everly died, my whole

soul felt like it was being ripped from my body and I was cracking on the inside.

Pulling back, I kiss his nose. “I bet you didn’t expect to meet my family this way.”

“It’s definitely not an experience I’ll ever forget. They have surprisingly treated me better than my family. Demons are actually very hospitable.” Laughing, he wraps his arms around me and when I glance behind me, my uncle’s gone and in his place is my mom.

“I’ll give you two a minute.” Everly smiles between us. “Then I’ll need to return to earth to make sure my brother is okay.”

“I’m on it,” Cannon shouts from out of nowhere and disappears before we can decide against it.

“Don’t worry.” My mom walks toward us. “Cannon will take care of him. The same way you have your mate.”

Both mine and Everly’s eyes widen. “But only I wished for love that day.”

“Yes, but I wished for it for both my sons. I wanted y’all to be happier than I was with the right person by your side. Whether human or demon.”

“You went back to see the demon of wishes.”

“I did. They also told me those who are meant to find each other again will when the time is right.”

“It’s good to have you back, Mom.”

She pulls me into a hug, pressing a kiss to my cheek. “I wish we had more time together before you left again but you have a mate to take care of and a life to live.”

“You mean... on earth?”

Nodding against me, she whispers in my ear. “It’s where he belongs, and the food is much better up there.”

“I’ll miss you.”

“You’ll come back for visits.” Pulling back, she smiles at me. “Go and be free now.” She glances between me and Everly with beaming eyes before disappearing into the pits.

“I want to ask you something,” Everly says, smugly.

“Yeah?”

“Will you go on a date with me?” He reaches for my hand and I wrap my tail around his waist.

“Depends on what it is,” I respond playfully.

His lips shift from side to side. “I was thinking either bowling or putt putt.”

Grinning while floating slightly off the ground, I tug him close enough for our noses to touch. “Sounds like the perfect day.”

Epilogue

Everly

Three weeks later

“Are you two going to live at the beach house permanently?”
Charlie sits on the sectional, leaning back against the cushions.

“I think so.” Entering the living room, I set down his tea in front of him. “We really like it here and it’s nice being away from the city.”

“I bet.” Reaching for his tea, he dusts off his pants. “This cat is leaving himself all over my clothes. Robbie is super allergic too and can’t come within a foot of me lately without sneezing everywhere.”

“Maybe that’s not a bad thing. Robbie’s a huge douche canoe and I wish you’d dump the guy already. Wait. Do you have a new cat or something?”

“I don’t know. I guess I do now. After I woke up from a really bizarre dream, I went outside for some fresh air and this

stray followed me in. I fed him and allowed him in my bed after he wouldn't stop crying. Haven't been able to get rid of him since." My brother saw me die and my demon boyfriend go down into hell to save me three weeks ago, but he assumed it was all a dream. Cannon did some weird magic on him and he believes everything happened differently than it did. My father didn't die. He skipped town. It wasn't hard to believe since he's been threatening to leave my mom for a while. My family all thinks me calling off the wedding and his business going under led him to a nervous breakdown. People really will believe anything.

"Sounds like you definitely have a cat now. Not sure what happened to ours."

"What do you mean?"

Laughing, I lift my cup to my lips, lowering myself in the green sofa chair. "He wasn't really ours. In fact I don't think he wanted to belong to anyone. When I first came here, there was a cat that kept popping up throughout my trip, never staying long after I fed him."

"Yeah, this one is nothing like that. He follows me everywhere. Almost thought he was going to escape out the window after he saw me get in my car when I was coming to see you."

"Yeah. Sounds like it's time to buy a collar and license with your address on it."

"Who are we buying a license for? I hope we aren't talking about me. I haven't gotten lost that much around here, have

I?” Rory waggles his brows, sitting on the arm of my chair, always needing to be as close to me as possible.

Huffing out a laugh, Charlie sips his drink and rests it on his lap. “No, you goof. My new cat. I still think it’s crazy you two met on what was supposed to be your honeymoon. So crazy how everything works out.”

“It is,” Rory says, smiling. “A case of the right place at the right time.” More like a case of the right human for the right demon.

“Are you ever going to bring him to meet Mom?”

“I don’t know. She keeps trying to convince me to patch things up with Theon. The man is engaged to Harry and she still thinks she can play matchmaker with us together. It’s infuriating. I have no plans of seeing her until she stops trying to interfere with my life.”

“She’s taking it pretty hard with Dad being gone. Take it easy on her, eh?”

“I’m trying but she makes it hard with all the bickering. She’s better off without that controlling asshole around anyway. We all are.”

“Yeah, but he’s still our dad.” If only he remembered how our so-called dad tried to kill me and only failed because I’m immortal.

“So, Charlie. Are you staying for a couple of days?” Coming to my rescue, Rory quickly changes the subject.

“Yeah. My brother said to come spend the weekend at the beach so here I am. I’ll never say no to the beach.”

“Good. We can go out into town to eat and do some shopping then. I think you’ll like it here.”

“I think so too.” He smiles. “It’s beautiful.” A scratching noise comes from the door and when Rory gets up to open it, a familiar gray cat rushes inside.

“Ghost. I didn’t think I’d ever see you again.”

“Me either.” Rory glares at the cat I was sure had moved on.

Calling to him, I expect him to come to me, but then he goes to my brother, piquing my curiosity. I’m guessing Charlie smells like his new cat.

“Hey there, cutie.” Charlie glances down at the gray fur ball rubbing on his legs. “You look a lot like the cat I have at home.”

“I bet he does,” Rory mutters. Am I missing something here? Does he suddenly have some strange beef with the cat?

We chat some more and Ghost situates himself on my brother’s lap, staying there when we watch a movie. He follows him to the kitchen when Rory picks up Chinese takeout and naps by his feet, my brother not at all bothered by being smothered by a random cat. Weird. What does this remind me of? Why do I get the feeling Ghost is more than some strange cat?

“Ready to turn in?” Rory nudges his nose into my cheek, dragging my chair toward his.

“That’s definitely my cue too. You two crazy kids have fun. I’m going to read in bed.” Charlie stands up, laughing. “Are you coming, Ghost?” Ghost meows and runs after my brother. When they are both out of sight, I turn toward Rory, tilting my head.

“Trust me. You don’t want to know.”

“Okay, then I won’t ask. At least not tonight.”

“So off to bed then?”

“Not yet.” I wrap my fingers around his tail as soon as he changes forms. I’ve missed this side of him. The first one I saw and fell for almost immediately. I’m still not sure I believe in fated mates but one thing is for certain, I believe in Rory.

“What do you have in mind instead?”

“Come for a swim with me?”

A smile spreads across his face. “I’d love to.”

We make our way to the water, stripping off our clothes after we’re sure no one’s around and my brother’s blinds are shut all the way. He already knows better. No doubt he saw the lust in Rory’s eyes in the kitchen and heard the back door close.

Rory grabs my hand and leads me into the water. It’s not too cold tonight and Rory’s warmth is never too far out of reach. “Did you have a good day, sweetheart?”

“I did, but I always do with you.”

“That’s because you haven’t seen all my bad habits yet.”

Snickering, I lower myself in the water to match his height.
“Exactly how many do you have?”

He pinches my side and I squeal. “I have them too, so don’t worry. We can compare and contrast later.”

“Really? And to think I assumed you were perfect this whole time.” He smirks against my lips.

“I hate to break it to you but nothing in life is perfect.”

“Right here and now is.”

He’s right. We are two flawed people in a flawed world trapped in a perfect moment.

“Can I ask you something?” he says, breaking the overstretched silence.

“Sure.” I rest my arms on his shoulders, rutting my cock against his.

“Want to take a trip with me?”

“Where?” We both pant as we rock into each other in a steady motion.

“Everywhere. I want to travel the world and bring you with me.”

“Everywhere you go, I’ll go.”

His lips claim mine and my tongue loses itself in his. Brushing its way down my back, his tail lights up under the water. The heated tip slips inside me and I lose control of my body, grabbing on to him to remain upright. His claws rip at my hips as he fucks his cock into mine and his teeth cut my

tongue. Sucking on it, he hums in my mouth, basking in the taste of me. He doesn't need blood to live anymore but takes it anyway. His hunger for it and my desire to give him what he wants never goes away.

Our mouths break apart and we're both breathless. The red cracks in his skin glow under the moonlight and so do his icy eyes. "Turn around for me, baby." His tail pulls out of me and I do what he says, struggling to catch my breath.

After my heart accepted his and I turned immortal, I've become self healing and Rory can hurt me all I want him to.

He kisses his way down my back, snaking his arm around me to stroke my cock while he sinks in the water. All the air rushes out of me and I almost fall forward when he shoves one of his horns inside me, the injury healing before it can be severe. Pain and pleasure twists inside me and I'm slowly losing consciousness the faster he slams inside me. I'm being torn up and healed at the same time and it's wonderful. It's like a thunderbolt is striking inside me and I come so hard, I see stars right before the world starts to fade. Is it sick to want this? Maybe. It doesn't stop me from reveling in the amazing ability to die and live at the same time.

He kisses his way back up my body, holding me tight in his arms as my limbs go limp. "I love you, my sweetheart."

"Yo también te amo," I say as I black out.

Right here and now isn't only perfect, it's everything.

Afterword

Thank you for taking the time to read my book. I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed writing it. I'm always excited to dive into paranormal. Writing demons was a lot fun and so was the horn play! It's not often my characters have tails so I had to take full advantage of the one time it happens. But since Cannon now wants a book, I might get to write it again! Either way, I doubt this will be the last time I write demons.

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