



# REAPER

## *Unhinged*

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
**DEBBIE CASSIDY**

# REAPER UNHINGED

DEADSIDE REAPERS BOOK 6



DEBBIE CASSIDY

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)  
[Chapter 2](#)  
[Chapter 3](#)  
[Chapter 4](#)  
[Chapter 5](#)  
[Chapter 6](#)  
[Chapter 7](#)  
[Chapter 8](#)  
[Chapter 9](#)  
[Chapter 10](#)  
[Chapter 11](#)  
[Chapter 12](#)  
[Chapter 13](#)  
[Chapter 14](#)  
[Chapter 15](#)  
[Chapter 16](#)  
[Chapter 17](#)  
[Chapter 18](#)  
[Chapter 19](#)  
[Chapter 20](#)  
[Chapter 21](#)  
[Chapter 22](#)  
[Chapter 23](#)  
[Chapter 24](#)  
[Chapter 25](#)  
[Chapter 26](#)  
[Chapter 27](#)  
[Chapter 28](#)  
[Chapter 29](#)  
[Chapter 30](#)  
[Chapter 31](#)  
[Chapter 32](#)  
[Chapter 33](#)  
[Chapter 34](#)  
[Chapter 35](#)  
[Chapter 36](#)  
[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Other books by Debbie Cassidy](#)

[About the Author](#)

[\*OceanofPDF.com\*](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Copyright © 2020, Debbie Cassidy  
All Rights Reserved

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

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, duplicated, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior written consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Cover by Sanja Gombar

 Created with Vellum

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER ONE

---

The kitchen island in the pack house was the only lit part of the ground floor in the hours before dawn. Sleep had been elusive of late, but I wasn't alone in my predawn vigil and that was a great comfort.

"Are you sure about this?" Cora asked for the umpteenth time. "I can go back to the Underealm and check if Mal's back. You have no idea what you'll be walking into."

Purgatory. That's what I'd be walking into. Malachi's territory. His domain. He knew the place inside out. I'd hoped he'd be able to come with me. Help me find the Edge, where the cores of the purest souls were held prisoner, but he wasn't at the Keep.

He and Azazel were scouring the Underealm, looking for Lilith.

I stared into my empty coffee mug. "We can't wait any longer. I can't expect Mal to drop the search for Lilith to come and help us."

Grayson topped up my mug and then took the seat beside me, but even his reassuring heat couldn't chase away the chill that seemed to cling to my veins ever since the Dread attack on Deadside and the Dominion angel's, Cassius', revelations.

I'd been stupid to send Cora to fetch Mal from the Underealm. Mal and Azazel needed to focus on finding Lilith. If they failed, Mammon would take over the Underealm, and if that happened, saving the Beyond would mean nothing, because there was no doubt in my mind that Mammon's greed would bring him into the earthly realm sooner rather than later. The demon wanted power. He wanted everything, and the Underealm wouldn't be enough for him. However, if I didn't find a way to save the Beyond,

there would be nothing for him to come for. Earth, along with every living creature on it, would cease to exist.

We needed to handle Purgatory and finding a new power source for the Beyond without Mal or Azazel.

“Seraphina won’t be alone,” Uri said to Cora. “I’ll keep her safe.”

“Have you been to Purgatory before?” Grayson asked him.

“No, but celestials cannot be corrupted by malignant spirits.”

I gave him a skeptical look. “Really? Then why is the Eye still active? Why haven’t the celestials done away with the malignant spirits that live there?”

He pressed his lips together. “It isn’t the malignant that we shy away from, it’s the rift you call the Eye. The forces within are unlike anything we’ve ever experienced. The celestials who ventured forth never returned, and so we steer clear. However, Purgatory was created by the Beyond. You will be safe with me.”

I believed in him. “I trust you.”

He’d gone to great lengths to protect me. Allowing himself to be tortured, having his wings ripped from his body rather than give his celestial captors my name. I trusted him with my life.

I owed him my life.

He had a little color back in his cheeks now, and the wounds on his back had healed, all except the spots where his wings had been. Those wounds were deeper than the rest. They’d take more time. Petra had applied bandages to prevent infection even though I wasn’t sure celestials could get infections. I was still getting used to his slightly longer hair and the five o’clock shadow he was sporting. It made him look dangerous; that, coupled with the clothes Grayson had loaned him, made him look like part of my pack.

I blinked to dispel the possessive thought. I was grateful, that was all. He’d brought us the truth. And I cared about him as a friend. Hell, the last couple of days I’d been afraid the Beyond would cut him off from the celestial power like they’d done the Dread, but they hadn’t. I guess now that our worlds were on the verge of going to shit, they didn’t see the point in locking him out. The cat was out of the bag, so to speak. We knew the truth about the Beyond, how they were using souls to power their realm and how the earthly realm was connected to their world. If the Beyond fell, then so would earth.



“Why hasn’t Cassius gotten back to us yet?” Cora asked Uriel.

The celestial shrugged. “I have no idea. He’s an upper-level celestial. We run in different circles, literally. He’d have to get a meeting with the Righteous and petition for the information. I’m sure he’s doing his best.”

But it had been seventy-two hours since we’d last spoken to him. He needed to speed shit up. If what he said was true, if we only had a handful of weeks left before the power supply to the Beyond ran out, then we couldn’t afford any delays.

The distant beat of wings drew my attention to the front doors. The world outside was gray, signaling the arrival of dawn and the return of Keon. The last couple of days he’d gone flying alone just before the sun rose. He was agitated and restless.

Here wasn’t the place he needed or wanted to be, yet he stayed to keep me safe, because if I died then Lilith would suffer.

Eve’s curse kept him here, and it was killing him not to be out there searching for his queen.

He strode in, his dark blue hair windswept and tousled, falling over his bare shoulders and pectorals. He wore a pair of black joggers loaned to him by Grayson and his feet were bare. He looked wild, feral, and dangerous.

“Another pre-dawn meeting?” He said it with derisive agitation.

“No more meetings.” I stood and pushed back my chair. “I’m done waiting. And when I get back, if we haven’t heard from Cassius, then I’m going to go find him myself.”

Keon’s jaw ticked. Yeah, he wasn’t happy about not being able to come to Purgatory with me. But only a full-blooded celestial or the wielder of a scythe could come and go from Purgatory. He might be Lilith’s son, but he was still very much a daemon.

Keon fixed his yellow cat eyes on Uri. “You will keep her alive.”

It wasn’t a question.

Uriel’s expression was sincere. “Of course.”

Keon locked gazes with him for a long beat, but whatever he saw in Uriel’s eyes must have been enough to satisfy him because his shoulders relaxed a fraction.

There was only one more thing I needed to find out. “Um...does anyone know where the entrance to Purgatory is?”



LUCKILY FOR ME, Uri knew where to take us. His wings were gone, but he could still do his nifty teleport thing, and it brought us to a side street a few meters away from the entrance to an underground train station in East Necro.

It was a small station I'd never stopped at before.

"Purgatory is in there?" It was super early, but people were already up and about, ready to start the daily grind. In an hour this place would be crawling. "You can't be serious."

His expression was deathly serious, though. "We need to take a train three platforms along. The entrance to Purgatory is there." He shrugged. Admittedly there was no train station here a century ago, just thick forestland and tales of monsters to keep humans at bay. Now, with the advance of technology, we've had to adapt. "The scythes open the way for a Dominus, and a celestial can also open the door. Humans are safe. Trust me."

"I trust you, Uri. Let's do this."

We headed across the street and down the steps into the underground. It smelled musky and kinda gross, but I was damned if I breathed through my mouth and tasted the air.

Yuck.

It was strange to think that Mal came this way on a regular basis. That he came down here and rode the train. The world rumbled with the sound of said train. There was no one manning the ticket barriers, and they lay open, letting in anyone who dared venture forth. The booth where a human would have sat selling tickets was closed, glass cracked, and sprayed red and blue with graffiti.

A white sheet of paper was pasted to the wall by the booth. The words *Blood Drive* were written in bold red ink.

Yeah, this was one of the off-the-grid stations. The place people would get off if they wanted to avoid paying for a trip, so I was surprised to see so many suits. Uri and I stuck out like a sore thumb in our casual gear. Dean had loaned the celestial a leather jacket with a fur collar. It looked good on him.

He led the way, and I followed him past the pointless barrier and left into a tiled tunnel decorated with old posters sitting behind glass. Several *Blood Drive* posters were pasted to the glass, obscuring the original advertisements.

A woman sat on the ground clutching a baby to her chest, her dark eyes pits of sorrow in her face. I could see the tile through her barely corporeal form.

A ghost.

She held out her ghost baby like an offering.

I faltered. “Uri...”

His jaw tightened. “They slip through the cracks sometimes,” he said. “The ones who die alone. The ones without someone to care. Not every soul finds its way to a Soul Savers, and not every soul is picked up by a reaper.”

“Well this one will be.” My hand tingled as my scythe signaled its appearance.

Uri gently gripped my elbow. “You can’t. Not now. Not until we’ve finished in Purgatory.”

Shit. Of course. If I took her now, she’d be ejected into the ether with the other souls I intended to save and... An awful thought occurred to me. How could I have missed it. “Uri, what happens to all the souls now? Cassius said they used the voralexes to siphon the souls from our scythes and convert them into energy, but did they also need the voralexes to recycle them?”

He looked momentarily stunned. “I don’t know.” He frowned. “If the Beyond was still recycling souls then it means that the natural reproduction of souls isn’t enough to maintain a human population.”

And with the voralexes gone, humanity would eventually die out anyway. Fuck. “I’ll need to speak to Cassius about this. We need a solution and fast. A power source for the Beyond won’t be enough.”

“Please.....” The ghost’s lament, finally verbalized, reached my ears. “Peace...”

“I’ll be back for you and your baby. I promise.”

She slumped back against the tile as if spent, and her dark gaze glazed over.

We passed several more spirits trapped here in the underground. Not the usual alert ghosts—the ones who’d been given purpose by Soul Savers. Not the registered ones, but the ones that had slipped through the cracks. You could tell the difference by the despair in their eyes, by the slow, sluggish way they moved. They were remnants. They were lost. We stood on the platform with a few other people waiting for the train.

“Why hasn’t Mal done something about them? Surely, he would have seen them.”

“Mal carries the malignant. If he’d reaped these souls, they would have been torn to shreds by the horrors he carries.”

“No. I don’t buy it. He could have picked them up after a drop-off.”

Uri sighed. “I don’t know, Fee.”

I couldn’t believe my Mal would be so callous. I’d need to speak to Dayna about this. I’d need to speak to Mal’s team.

The train whooshed through the tunnel and came to a shuddering stop in front of us. The doors opened slowly, as if fighting some inner battle, and we slipped on board.

The last time I’d been on a train it had been with Conah. It seemed like a lifetime ago. Uriel didn’t bother taking a seat; he remained close to the doors and grabbed hold of a rail.

“We won’t be on for long,” he explained.

I joined him as the door closed. “When was the last time you were here?”

“A few years ago,” he said. “I was in the neighborhood and Mal convinced me it would be fun.”

“And was it?”

He snorted and raised a brow.

“Yeah, he hates it.”

“I know that now,” Uri said.

Mal and his twisted sense of humor. God, I missed him.

“It will be okay,” Uri said. “We will figure this out.”

“We need to. We don’t have a choice.”

The train came to a halt and people brushed past us. The doors closed and we were off again.

“Next stop,” Uri said.

The train wobbled slightly from side to side and I planted my feet wider to keep my balance, gripping the pole, my hand beneath Uri’s.

He smelled of Grayson’s body wash and nostalgia washed over me. What if we failed? What if everything we knew came to an end? No, I couldn’t think like that. I needed to stay positive. We all did.

The train came to a halt and the doors slid open.

“You ready?” Uri asked. “We’re here.”

There was nothing but a derelict-looking platform beyond the doors. “Here?”

He held out his hand and I took it, wincing as a small electric shock passed between us.

Together we stepped through the doors. The gray platform melted away, and crimson heat took its place. We landed on black, rocky terrain. The air stung my lungs and bit at my eyes.

Purgatory.

Uriel coughed. “It takes a minute to adjust to the atmosphere if your body isn’t accustomed to it.”

I blinked back tears. Yeah, he had that right. It felt like my lungs were being roasted. Gah, like I was a forty-cigarettes-a-day kinda gal.

But increment by increment the burn subsided, and I could see clearly again.

The vista was distant crimson and obsidian mountains and a landscape of twisted, black tree trunks with spindly branches reaching for a swirling, fiery sky. This was what I’d pictured when people had talked about hell.

Mal came here all the time.

This was his place.

God, I felt sorry for him.

A wail drifted on the hot breeze. “What was that?”

Uriel squeezed my hand, and I realized he had never let go. “Let’s not wait to find out.”

He tugged me across the rocky ground.

“I thought malignant couldn’t hurt you?”

“I never said they couldn’t hurt us. I said I couldn’t be corrupted and taken over, my body used to do ill, and while you wield the scythe, neither can you. Malachi is a regular, he reeks of this place and so they let him pass unharmed, but you and I, we’re fresh meat to be played with. They will prod and probe and take a bite if given half the chance, and we can’t even distract them with a gift of fresh malignant souls to play with.”

Shit. We picked up the pace. “It would help if we knew where the Edge was.”

“We’ll find it. Just keep your eyes open and reach out with your senses.”

The wails were growing louder, eerier, closer. Crap.

We jogged into the twisted tree grove where the air was even thicker, moving like molasses in and out of my lungs. God I was going to be sick.

“No stopping.” Uriel pulled me along, scanning the terrain for any sign of this magical place called the Edge—this prison for the remnants of the purest souls.

I caught a shimmer at the corner of my eye, but when I turned my head it was gone. “This way!” I tugged Uriel in the direction where the shimmer had been. A flicker to the left.

“Over here.” Uriel had us alter trajectory.

The wails were almost on us and then the fiery sky went black.

What the hell. I looked up. But it wasn’t the sky that was black, but a mammoth shadow.

“Uri, what the hell?”

“Malignant. Run!”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER TWO

---

The ground seemed to swallow the pounding of our boots as we ran. The only sound was the wail of the malignant. Louder. Closer.

Where was the Edge?

Darkness descended on us, tearing at us. My scythe flared to life. I swung it in an arc, forcing the malignant back with the celestial light.

The malignant separated into singular entities, crimson laced with obsidian, barely holding a humanoid form as they circled us.

*You can't keep us all at bay.*

The voice was a scratch at the back of my mind. It surrounded us, coming from all around us. They moved closer, tightening the perimeter.

"Like hell I can't." I swung again to ward them off, earning a screech for my efforts.

*Our place, our rules.*

Uriel's hands lit up with silver light and then two silver swords shot out from them. He twisted his wrists so the blades cut through the air menacingly. "Leave now or I will hurt you."

*Our hunger is stronger. We are legion.*

Legion, my ass. They couldn't possess us. We could fight them off.

*We wish to see, to feel. We wish to taste.*

An idea formed in my head. "Do you want to go back into the fucking scythe?" I held up my glowing blade. "Because I will happily vacuum you all up."

Please don't test me. If I did that then I wouldn't be able to free the pure souls. I'd be saddled with these fuckers.

*You cannot hold us. You are not him. You are not one with our world.*

Dammit. Malachi would have come in useful right now. I swung my scythe again as they moved in.

I caught movement beyond the horde, a shimmer in the air. “Three o’clock.”

“I see it,” Uri said. “You need to go. I’ve got this.”

“Like hell am I leaving you.”

“It’s been a long time since I had a proper battle.” I could hear the smile in his voice, and when I glanced his way, I caught the grin on his face. Anticipation of bloodshed. Anticipation of battle. “I could do with a little exercise. I’ll be fine. Go before the doorway closes.”

He was a celestial. He was a warrior. If he said he could handle it, then I trusted him. The shimmer was shrinking, ready to move, and if it vanished, we might not find it again.

It was now or never.

“Go!” Uriel ordered.

He rushed forward, swords blazing as he cleared a path for me through the malignant. The spirits screamed in anger and rage, but parted to avoid the sting of celestial light, and then I was through.

“Run!” Uriel bellowed.

I sprinted toward the shimmer, focusing solely on it, afraid that it would melt away at any moment. The spot was a disc in the air, three feet off the ground, and it was shrinking.

Shit.

Uriel’s exultant whoop rose up behind me. Damn, he was having fun. Who knew the celestial had a wicked streak.

The disc was less than a meter away now. Time to jump.

The malignant’s pained screams followed me into the Edge.



I LANDED on cream tiles in a corridor lined with white doors. The corridor tunneled into the distance until it was nothing but a dot. The doors were unmarked and all looked the same.

This was the Edge?

What was behind the doors?



I took a step and a beam of light shot down out of the ceiling, blocking my way. "Identification required."

The voice was grating and mechanical, as if it hadn't been used in a long while.

Um...shit. "Dominus Reaper Seraphina Dawn."

"I'm sorry. You do not have access to the archives. Press the blue button to leave."

The wall beside me pulsed, and then a blue button appeared. It flickered, going translucent and then solidifying again.

"Goodbye." The beam of light vanished but the button remained.

I took a step forward and once again the beam of light shot down to cut me off.

"Identification required."

Think, Fee. Think. The Righteous had created this place, so maybe they'd have access. Cassius was one of them, so...

"Identification required," the voice said again.

"Cassius, Dominion, Righteous, Upper circle."

There was silence.

Shit, maybe I should have put on a male voice?

"Access granted. Welcome to the archive, the home of the remnants who gave their light to save us all."

The beam of light pulsed.

Was it going to scan me? Shit, if it scanned me it would know I wasn't Cassius.

But instead of rushing toward me the beam shot away, down the corridor. The doors blazed in its wake and gold plaques appeared on each of them. The plaques had writing etched into them. Names and dates.

The ones at this end were from a century ago. This must be when the Beyond first started to use the purest souls for boosts. It looked like this system had been in place way before the humans started seeing ghosts and learned about the reapers. But it also told me that the Beyond had managed without burning pure souls for a long time, which meant that regular human souls were getting less effective as batteries.

I scanned the doors as I walked down the corridor. Yep, they were arranged in date order. Each room contained a core. The Beyond had created this place. A resting place for the pure souls they'd burned through.

But how the hell was I going to harvest them all? Busting through each door was going to take forever.

There had to be a quicker way. “Um, hello?”

Nothing.

“Keeper? Guardian?”

Nothing.

Shit...what was the system called? Wait, it had called this place an archive. “Librarian?”

“How may I assist Cassius?”

“I need to find a specific...remnant.”

“Name of remnant.”

“Lara Dawn.”

The doors whizzed past in a blur, forcing my stomach back into my spine. I was gonna be sick.

We came to a halt and my eyes wobbled in their sockets. I squeezed them shut and exhaled to ground myself.

“Will that be all?” the librarian asked.

“One moment.” I opened my eyes to find Aunt Lara’s door to my right.

She was here. Behind that door. A remnant, whatever that meant.

“Will that be all?” the librarian repeated.

“No. Can I...Can I see her?”

“A remnant can be seen and heard but cannot see or hear you.”

I needed to know. I needed to see. I pushed open the door and stepped inside.

The room was a dark abyss of emptiness; the only light came from an orb floating in the center of the room. Thick silence pressed against my ears, and then whispers filled my head.

A voice I recognized.

*Where is it? What is it? Can I go now? Will I be okay? Where am I? Where is this? What was I doing? There was something...something...A soft sob. I can't remember. What was it? Why? Why?*

Aunt Lara’s voice filled my head, the whispers growing louder until they were all I could hear. Her confusion and despair pierced me. Cassius had said the cores were safe, that they felt no pain, but he was wrong. This was emotional torment. Eternal confusion and loss.

No. This had to end.

*Please show me...show me...where...something...someone...*

This was the last part of her. The final essence of the only mother I'd known. She deserved peace. My chest ached with love for her. I'm sorry, Aunt Lara. I'll make it stop.

My scythe appeared, glowing bright in the darkness. The orb pulsed.

*What? Where?*

I held the blade toward the orb. "It's time to be free, Aunt Lara."

The orb rushed toward me and then it was absorbed by my blade. I had her. I had my Aunt Lara, and now I needed the rest of these poor remnants.

I stepped back into the corridor. "Librarian, how do I free all the remnants?"

Silence greeted me. Crap, I needed the right words. HmMMM.  
"Librarian. I wish to extract all remnants."

"Do you wish to initiate extraction protocol?"

Bingo. "Yes."

"Bio verification required."

Oh, fuck.

The beam appeared and rushed toward me. There was no time to run before it was over me. The light pulsed, and I squeezed my eyes closed, knowing exactly what was about to happen.

The light went red.

"Access denied. Intruder detected. Ejection protocol initiated."

Oh, shit.

The light went blue. The same color as the exit button. No.

I burst out from beneath the beam and broke into a sprint down the corridor.

"Extermination protocol activated."

Wait, what? Fuck, I should have allowed it to eject me.

The air fizzed and a red beam shot out of the ceiling ahead, cutting me off. I skidded to a halt and looked over my shoulder to find the blue beam almost upon me.

Fee sandwich alert.

I shoved through the nearest door to get out of the corridor, and it was only when I was swallowed by darkness that it hit me...

This door was black.



THERE WAS A VOICE. There were words. There was something... someone, a voice in my head, and then I was lying on red earth with a hot breeze kissing my nape. I was no longer in the Edge.

What the hell? How'd I get out?

Something was wrong—a scratching at the back of my mind.

I shook my head to clear it, and my heart sank. There was no way to extract the remnants. Not for me. Fucking Cassius. He had to have known. I pulled myself up and dusted off my clothes.

The Dominion had some explaining to do. Fuck. I needed to find Uriel and get the hell out of here.

“Back already?”

Uriel?

I turned to find the celestial standing several meters behind me with his head bowed, arms loose at his sides. He wasn't alone. Several malignant stood at his back, their crimson and obsidian bodies heaving as if from exertion, or maybe excitement. I wasn't too sure.

My scalp pricked in warning. “Uriel?” I took a tentative step toward him. “Are you okay?”

His shoulders heaved, and then a dry rasping sound filled the air. It took a moment to recognize the sound as laughter.

His laughter.

My stomach cramped in warning. Thighs bunching, ready to fight or flee. “Uriel, look at me.”

He raised his head slowly and locked crimson eyes with mine. “Uriel isn't here right now.”

Oh, boy.

## CHAPTER THREE

---

Uri was no longer Uri. He was possessed, but how? Malignant couldn't possess a pure celestial, which meant...

"He stays with us," the thing inside Uri said. "He stays with us, and you leave."

What? Why would they let me go without a fight? The penny dropped. Uriel must have struck a bargain with them.

Had he agreed not to fight the possession in exchange for them sparing me?

"Yeah, not happening. I go, he goes."

Uriel's body shuddered, and then the crimson retreated. "Go, Fee." It was his voice. "I can't hold them much longer." He bit out the words with effort, and then his head fell forward again, and his shoulders heaved as if his body was inflating, being filled with another presence. The malevolent presence.

"No free pass for you, little reaper." He raised his head, and the thing inside him locked gazes with me, sending a chill shooting up my spine. "No leaving without pain."

I flicked my wrist, and my scythe materialized. "Pain. Yes. For you."

"Hurt me, and you hurt him."

Fuck.

I needed to think fast because the thing wearing Uri was advancing. I had to get it out of him...Oh crap. Yes. There was only one way to do that, but first, I needed to send Aunt Lara into the ether. If only I knew how.

Shit, too late.

Uri rushed me, and I evaded, jumping out of the way and spinning to kick him in the back. He went sprawling across the ground but was up in seconds and gunning for me. No weapons. I couldn't risk hurting him.

Yet.

“Uri, fight it.”

He lunged, and I punched him in the face.

The malignant may have control of Uriel, but he hadn't absorbed any of Uri's fighting skills. He was clumsy with his blows, so even if there was power behind them, I was able to avoid being hit. The malignant circled us, not attacking by some unspoken command, allowing their leader to take pop after failed pop at me.

“Uri, I know you're in there. You can take this guy.”

The malignant feinted left, so I went right, but he changed trajectory at the last minute, and before I could dodge, he had his hand around my throat. Uriel's hand.

My scythe flared to life, recognizing the threat, the fact that this thing meant to kill me. But my friend was inside there, and I needed him to fight back. To hear me.

I willed the scythe away, eyes bugging as the malignant increased the pressure on my throat. I grabbed his thumb, prising it off my skin, and twisted.

He released me with a bellow. I kicked him in the chest, hard enough to knock him on his back, but he was up too quickly for me to take advantage. His eyes flashed crimson, and then two malignant surged toward him. They grabbed hold of his shoulders, clinging to him, and his frame expanded, muscles bulging obscenely.

Oh, shit. I backed up. How the fuck were they doing that? The thing in front of me still had Uri's face, but the body was something out of a nightmare. He grinned widely, and then he charged at me. The split second my body was frozen to the spot cost me my lead because he was faster now, and when his arm slammed into my face, the world shattered in an explosion of stars. Hands on my shoulders squeezing me, crushing me. Fuck, fight. I kicked out, making contact with his torso hard enough to loosen his grip a fraction, but a fraction was all I needed to twist free. I hit the ground in a crouch and rolled to avoid a fist slam. He was like the fucking Hulk, smash, wallop, and I needed to bring him down. I needed to channel every ounce of power and strength inside me to do it.

He was at my back as I ran. The ground thundered and the world shook as I opened myself to my Loup and reaper power, allowing it to flood my limbs, accelerate my heartbeat, and force adrenaline through me, and then I turned and ran straight at him. There was a moment of confusion on his face. Yes, fucker, I got you. I slammed into him with every ounce of force I had.

He went down, hitting the ground with a *thunk*. I straddled him, pinning him down, muscles burning with the effort of restraining him.

“Uriel, fight it. Damn it. Uri!”

The malignant around me wailed as if egging their leader on. Uri bucked, veins in his neck bulging as he fought me, trying to throw me off.

“No!” I pushed back, eyes hot with anger and frustration. “I will not lose you, dammit. Fight!”

My hands began to glow where they made contact with him, and the malignant inside let out an angry cry. The two spirits attached to him let go, and Uri’s body shrank back to its regular size. The light spilling from my hands intensified, and Uri’s struggles became weaker.

Yes. “Uri, fight it.”

I wasn’t sure what was happening, but it was working. The crimson in his eyes bled away, and then it was Uriel looking up at me with ember eyes, bright with desperation.

“Can’t hold him,” he said. “Go, please.”

There was no time to argue. “How do I access the ether?”

He winced as if in pain.

“Uri, the ether, how do I access it? Can I do it here?”

“Yes. Just want it. Will it. Fee...Oh God. I’m so sorry, I don’t... understand.”

His body arched violently, and I was thrown off. The malignant rushed toward me, their mouths open hungrily, but they didn’t attack. I scrambled away, summoning my scythe and breaking into a run. I needed space to connect with the ether.

Come on. Ether, I need you. I need...I came to a stop and squeezed my eyes closed as my scythe pulsed. The energy within it was a palpable force tingling up my arm. Aunt Lara’s remnant was a swirling confusion spiraling up and into the blade, and then there was something else—a dark expanse filled with stardust at the periphery of my consciousness. The ether.

Go.

I willed Aunt Lara.

Go now.

My heart ached as she left me, and then something crashed into me from behind. I hit the ground hard, face scraping dirt and rock. Warm liquid stung my eyes. Blood. I was bleeding. Uriel flipped me onto my back, and his hands went back to my throat.

“You’re not the reaper for this job,” the malignant said. “And this will be a message to you all.”

His eyes glowed, black veins blooming to life beneath them and clawing down his cheeks.

There was only one thing left to do. “I’m sorry,” I choked out.

And then I stabbed him in the side with my obsidian dagger.



URIEL’S GRIP on me tightened painfully, and then he let go, sliding off me as he tried to get away from the blade sticking out of him.

I yanked the dagger out and shoved him off me. He stayed down, clutching his side as his minions closed in.

“Stop,” he said. “She won’t risk killing him.”

His voice was strained and tight with pain as he swayed on his feet. The thing inside Uri was hurt. It had probably forgotten what that was like. But if he was going to inhabit a corporeal form, it was only fair that he got to experience all the perks.

Time to use this to my advantage. I kicked him in the face before summoning my scythe and raising it, ready to stab.

“What? What are you doing?” The malignant sounded genuinely perplexed. “You’ll kill him.” His eyes widened as it dawned that I might be serious.

“Maybe, but I suspect he’d rather be dead than play host to the likes of you.”

I swung. He screamed. His minions attacked, but they were too late. My scythe buried itself in Uriel’s thigh.

“Time to vacuum you up, fucker.”

The blade glowed and turned crimson. Uriel threw back his head in a silent scream, and then his body sagged and he slumped onto his side,



unconscious. I yanked the blade out and turned to face the other malignant.

“Your leader was wrong. I *can* take you. I *can* vacuum you up and spit you out somewhere ten times worse than this place. So, tell me, what’s it gonna be?”

They lingered for a moment, but when I took a step toward them they scattered.

I stared at my scythe’s crimson blade and then down at Uriel’s unconscious form.

Fuck this place.

It was time to go home.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER FOUR

---

Luckily it was nighttime by the time we got out of Purgatory and back onto the train. People steered clear of the large bleeding man and the woman with the lethal glares – yeah, that was me. I was done with the celestials’ bullshit and lies.

So fucking done with the lot of them.

Uriel could have died back there, and I...I had no idea what had happened in the Edge, but I did know that Cassius hadn’t given me all the information I needed to free the souls.

How the hell did Mal do this job? How did he control the malignant? How did he maintain such a chilled attitude when Purgatory was his domain? His shitty moods and his acerbic tongue when we first met made even more sense now. Fuck, working in Purgatory would sour anyone.

I’d ejected the malignant before we left Purgatory because there was no way I was carrying that fucker around with me, and now my focus was on Uriel.

He was pale from blood loss, but he was healing, thank goodness. Still, he needed Petra’s attentions to speed things up.

The train rocked on the tracks, and I supported Uriel, slipping under his arm to take his weight and hooking my free arm around a pole to keep us upright. The contact felt strangely intimate and yet perfectly natural, and it hit me again how close I’d been to losing him.

I’d known him for as long as I’d known the guys, but we’d only had a handful of moments together, and yet the thought of losing him had panic blooming in my stomach. There was something pure and good and

compelling about Uriel. He soothed my soul. And it wasn't just his aura that was addictive.

"Fee? Are you all right?" he asked.

Was *I* all right? Fucking hell. He was the one that had been hurt. I'd hurt him. "I'm sorry." I looked up, and my nose brushed his jaw.

"You saved me," he said. "You have nothing to be sorry about."

"I stabbed you. Twice."

His chuckle ended in a cough. "Worth it."

I couldn't help but smile. His attention dropped to my mouth before flicking away quickly. There was something in that gaze, something new, and it made my pulse pick up.

I covered my fluster by clearing my throat. "Let's hope someone hasn't called the police."

"In this part of Necro? Unlikely."

I'd forgotten how well he knew the city, and how much he loved parts of it, but there was no forgetting the fact that he'd been possessed.

"Uriel, we need to figure out why the malignant was able to possess you."

He gripped me tighter and rested his chin on my head. "I know. I know."

Cassius, buddy, I'm going to be paying you a visit. Soon.



GRAYSON PICKED US up at the station, bringing the van and Petra with him. Thank goodness for the mobile phone Dean had picked up for me a day ago. By the time we got back to the house, Uriel was unconscious, and Dean and Bastian had to carry him into the house. Keon stepped out of the lift with Cora as Grayson and I entered the lobby.

"What happened?" Cora asked.

I flopped down on the sofa. "So much shit." I filled them in on the trip, the archive, and how I'd been ejected without knowing how.

"Poor Uriel," Cora said. "He hasn't had the best luck, has he?"

"But he lives," Keon said. "Thanks to your quick thinking."

Quick thinking that involved stabbing him with my scythe.

“I guess not just any Dominus can navigate Purgatory freely,” Cora said with a grimace.

“The scythe chooses its wielder, and each scythe comes with a domain,” Keon said.

“Malachi was chosen specifically for his resilience to that accursed place. However, you were able to siphon a malignant, even though it isn’t your calling. That takes great force of will. The fact the malignant inside Uriel didn’t kill you means the celestial was fighting it, which also takes immense force of will.”

There was respect in Keon’s eyes as he looked down on the celestial. “The mander root the shaman is using will speed up his healing. He will be back to normal in the morning.”

Petra tutted. “And what do you know of herbs, boy?”

Keon blinked at her. “I could teach you a thing or two, old lady.” He smirked. “If you ask nicely, I may even bring you some medicinal roots from the Underealm.”

She sucked in her cheeks. “Could you now? In that case, maybe I’ll brew you some sincture tea.” She shrugged. “To be nice, of course.”

Keon looked confused.

It was Petra’s turn to smirk. “A little concoction that will mask your true appearance to the human eye, at least for a few hours.”

Keon’s eyes narrowed to slits, and I wasn’t sure if he was offended or considering her offer.

“There’s nothing wrong with his appearance.”

Cora stared at me.

Wait, had I said that?

Now everyone was looking at me. I cleared my throat. “He’s a daemon. That’s what daemons look like.”

God, what was wrong with me? He didn’t need me to stand up for him, especially not in this situation where it was obvious Petra was trying to do something nice for him.

My brain was obviously fried from my trip to Purgatory. A wasted fucking journey where I’d only been able to save one core and almost got my backup killed. Urgh.

“The tea could come in handy,” Cora said. “Allow Keon to come out with us during the day.”

Keon’s brows shot up. “Yes, I want this tea.”

“It’s a deal then,” Petra said. “I’ll make you some tea, and you bring me roots from the Underealm the next time you go.”

We fell into silence, and my attention went back to Uriel, sleeping peacefully on the sofa. The guys had stripped off his jacket and shirt, and his side was swathed in bandages. Someone had slit his jeans, and Petra had bandaged his thigh wound.

He looked like a designer angel with his mussed dark hair and unwittingly stylish stubble. The knot in my stomach loosened as the last of the adrenaline that had flooded me dispersed.

It could have been so much worse, but, “It shouldn’t have gone down like it did. Uriel shouldn’t have been possessed. The fact he was means that he isn’t full celestial.”

Grayson padded over and handed me and Cora each a mug of coffee. “I have to head out on patrol,” he said. “We got a lead on a vamp nest, and we’ve been staking it out in the hope that the super vamps will attack.”

Yeah, we needed to make sure business as usual didn’t slide. I nodded wearily. “I’ll down this and get changed, then we can go.”

He smiled and leaned in to kiss my forehead. “I think you can sit this one out.”

I didn’t even have the energy to argue. “Thanks.”

He left with the pack a few moments later.

“The celestial didn’t know,” Keon said. “He wouldn’t have risked your life by going with you if he thought he could be possessed.”

“I know.”

“So, what now?” Cora asked.

“First thing tomorrow, I pay Cassius a visit.”



GRAYSON WASN’T BACK from the stakeout yet, and the bed looked too large and empty without him. I was bone-weary, and if I was going to face Cassius in the morning, I needed to be on form.

I changed into my sleep shorts and vest and was about to climb into bed when Cyril slid into the room.

“Where the hell did you come from?” I glanced about. “Don’t tell me this place has nooks and crannies too?”

“You’d be sssurprised,” he said.

There was movement behind him and then Delphine joined us. She was smaller than Cyril, but her body shimmered pink and coral with an inner glow that was pure magic. She was beautiful.

“I wanted you to meet Delphine,” Cyril said.

“Nice to meet you officially.” Delphine’s voice was a sibilant purr.

“Likewise.”

“Cyril speakss highly of you.”

Strange to think they chatted about me. “Um, thanks.” I sat on the bed, suddenly curious about this creature that lived on a daemon’s back. “So, Delphine, how does this work? You and Keon? Are you real?”

Delphine flicked out her tongue. “That would depend what your definition of real is. I belong to Keon, and I live because he livesss. We are symbiotic, and we are autonomous.”

Interesting. I guess she was as much his eyes and ears as Cyril was mine. I made a mental note to ask Keon about her. “And how are you liking Necro City?”

“It’sss noisy and the air is always wet,” she said. “But we are adjusting.”

We? Was she talking about Cyril and her, or Keon and her?

“We’ve found a nesting nook,” Cyril said. “The acoustics are optimal. Ssso if you need me, just call. I’ll hear you.”

Nesting? “Um, okay.”

They slid away into the shadows and were gone. Nesting...why did that ring a bell... I was too tired to think right now.

I climbed into bed, ready for sleep to take me.

I WAS IN MY VISTA, running through the trees. The air was filled with the fragrance of the forest after rainfall, but my paws left no prints in my wake. I flew over logs and wove between tree trunks.

A mournful howl filled the air, and my step faltered.

I knew that tone.

Not Grayson.

Hunter.

I altered my path and headed toward the sound, heart pounding in my chest. This was it. This was a way to communicate with him and let him

know it was okay to come back. My way to tell him we *needed* him back. I broke out of the tree line into the huge clearing where the lake gleamed with a thousand shards of the huge full moon.

Hunter sat on his haunches, his dark silken coat kissed by silver rays of the moon.

I stopped, afraid to get too close, afraid I'd spook him.

*You came, he said. I didn't know if this would work.*

*Hunter, you need to come back, there are things you don't—*

*No time, Fee. Listen, you need to—*

Hunter's body bucked, his golden eyes flaring wide for a second, and then he vanished.

What the hell?

I WOKE to Grayson's arms around me and the scent of an impending storm in my nostrils. I turned to face him, snuggling against him as I surfaced from the dream. The pulse in my throat was beating hard, and apprehension was a coil in my belly.

"Fee, what's wrong?" Grayson held me tighter and smoothed back my hair. "You're shaking."

"I think Hunter's in trouble."



"SO, HUNTER JUST VANISHED?" Petra asked.

We were gathered in the kitchen as dawn broke. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee was heavy in the air, and someone had pulled out a box of breakfast muffins. Normally I'd have devoured at least two by now, but my stomach felt all squiffy, and my appetite was gone.

Dean, Grayson, Petra, and I sat around the island, speaking in hushed voices so as not to wake Uriel, who was still asleep on the sofa. He'd be fully healed in a few hours, and I wanted to have answers for him by then, but now I had Hunter to worry about too. My mind was engaged in a tug of war, part of me wanting to focus on finding my mate, the other adamant I needed to stick to finding a power source for the Beyond.

Yes, okay, so the Beyond was logically more important, but fuck, it didn't feel that way right now.

"Hunter was trying to tell me something urgent. He said there was no time. He was going to tell me I needed to do something, but he never got to finish his sentence."

Petra sucked in her cheeks. "A Tribus Vista is accessible only to the Loup who are a part of it. You have control of when you enter and when you leave. If he vanished abruptly, it means that his connection to you is being both interfered with and disrupted."

That's what I was afraid of. "We have to find him."

"We will," Grayson said. "I'll speak to Eldrick and borrow some Loup to track him. We'll start back at the cabin and take it from there again."

Impotence writhed in my belly. I wanted to be out there looking for my mate too, but with Mal and Azazel gone, I was the only one who could get into the Beyond to speak to Cassius about Uriel and the potential power source hidden in the Underealm.

"You need to focus on the Beyond's problem," Grayson confirmed. "Leave Hunter and the super vamp issue to me."

Cora and Keon exited the lift together and joined us in the kitchen.

Dean poured my best friend a mug of coffee, and she took it with a smile. "You off to the Beyond?" she asked me.

"Yes."

Keon didn't look pleased. "You keep going to places I can't follow."

I knew what he was thinking. That he could be in the Underealm helping with the search for Lilith, but instead, he was stuck here with me, making sure I stayed alive.

Something scratched at the back of my mind, a thought I tried to latch on to, but it was gone too quickly.

I wanted to tell him I'd be safe there, but heck if I knew that to be true. "I'll be fine. I'll get the information we need and head straight back, then you can come to the Underealm with me."

He nodded. "I'll go to the Academy and continue training the cadets."

"Good call."

He made a sound of exasperation. "Dammit, I'll need to wait till the sun sets."

"No, you won't." Petra pulled a pouch of herbs from her pocket. "Not once I've made you some of my special tea."



Keon's eyes lit up, and he inclined his head. "Thank you."

My comm beeped, and my heart shot up into my mouth because only Azazel or Mal ever contacted me on the comm.

**FORWARDED message from Azazel comm**

**Missing humans in sector 3 Necro City, contact me ASAP Ursula.**

CRAP, Azazel's outlier role still needed to be filled while he was gone. I was supposed to contact his deputy, some guy named Dillon, but I hadn't had the chance, and I didn't have access to his reaper team via my comm.

"What is it?" Cora asked.

My head ached. "Missing humans flagged by Magiguard. Outlier liaison business. I need to go find Azazel's deputy, Dillon, and let him know what's going on."

Cora shrugged. "I'll deal with it. Forward me the message and go. I got this."

"Really?" The weight in my chest eased a little.

"Yes, really. We're all gonna have to chip in. I'll contact Dayna and get her to help me track down this Dillon guy."

"You're a lifesaver." Another thought occurred to me. Something I'd promised to do and forgotten. "Cora, there were ghosts at the underground station. Unregistered, lost. Can you please tell Dayna to organize pickup?"

Her expression was serious. "Yes, of course. Now go."

"I'll keep an eye on the celestial," Petra said.

I drained my mug. It was time for a tête-à-tête with a Dominion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

---

Celestia greeted me at the Beyond's reception desk. Her face was empty of expression, as usual, mercury eyes fixed straight ahead. The forest around us flickered and wavered like a picture on an old television with bad reception.

"Welcome, S-Seraphina D-Dawn. How may I-I assist you today?"

Fuck, had she just stuttered? "I need to speak with Dominion Cassius."

Silence.

"Celestia?"

"How m-may I-I help you, Sera—"

I stared at her frozen form. And then she flickered too. Oh, fuck. This was bad. This had to be a power issue.

"Celestia, can you hear me?"

"Seraphina Dawn." She said my name in a drawn-out way, her voice warped and deep. The forest flickered and went dark for a moment before coming back online.

"I need to see Cassius. Celestia, send an urgent message. Can you do that? Do it now."

For a moment, nothing happened, and then her mercury eyes began to flicker, rainbow ripples moving across the surface of the orbs. She was doing something.

And then the forest vanished, and I was standing in absolute darkness. My breath came out in shallow gasps as I waited for my eyes to adjust, to see something, but there was nothing but the blanket of oblivion pressing in on me.

“Celestia?” My voice sounded reedy and warped. “Celestia, let me out of here. Now.”

A blinding white light split the dark, widening a fraction. I rushed toward it, afraid it would close at any moment, and then I was squeezing through the gap and falling into light.



IT TOOK a moment for my eyes to adjust to the brightness. I was in a corridor that ended in a set of double doors. A red light blinked above it in warning. This was some kind of access route to the reception and into the Beyond proper. I'd asked Celestia to let me out, but she'd let me in.

There was no going back now. I strode down the corridor and tried the door. It opened without resistance.

Fuck. This place was totally falling apart.

I made to step through, then stopped as Azazel's voice filled my head. His words from a week ago. He'd said we couldn't go into the Beyond properly as it would burn us up because we weren't pure celestial, but... Uriel had lived in the Beyond, and he was definitely not pure celestial. Unless the celestials lied about whether they could be possessed or not.

Fuck.

Okay, think.

If I didn't go forward, I'd have to go back into the darkness and be trapped there. There was no guarantee that I'd find my way out of the portal. If I went back, then I'd be leaving without answers. Time was ticking by too fast. What if Cassius had met the same fate as Uriel when he'd demanded answers?

No, I had to go forward.

And what if you burn up and die?

*You have to try.*

The thought pierced through everything else.

*Just do it.*

I stepped through the door quickly. No fire raced over my skin. No power cut me down. Nothing. Relief flooded me. Thank fuck. Right, so I was in another corridor, wider than the last, and there was an intersection up

ahead. The lights flickered, giving the place a broken, creepy vibe, and silence reigned.

Where was everyone?

Only one way to find out. I set off, taking a left then a right, past signs written in a language I couldn't understand, the written version of Enochian probably. Light spilled out from what looked like an elevator. Yeah, not going in there with the power on the fritz.

There had to be some stairs somewhere.

Left or right. Which way? Surely I should have come across a celestial by now.

A scream sliced through the silence. Movement to my left. My body reacted by going into fight mode as the blood-spattered figure ran at me, blade glinting in the flickering lights.

Dread.

My hand tingled, signaling the arrival of my scythe.

*Don't.*

*Wait.*

The tingle stopped.

No, what the hell? I called my celestial weapon, swinging it in time to eviscerate the Dread. He fell back, and I swiped again, this time taking his head.

Another scream from behind me.

Shit.

I spun to face two more Dread. But two metal-winged figures rushed out of the corridor in front of me and cut down the Dread with fiery swords. They turned and advanced on me.

Dominions like Cassius.

They thought I was one of the Dread.

“Whoa!” I held up my hands, sans scythe, because the damn thing had gone out once the threat was gone. Except these guys were a threat.

I pulled my daggers out instead, backing up, ready to fight. “Listen, I’m not one of them.”

They attacked.

“Stop!” a male voice bellowed.

The Dominions immediately fell back and parted to let a third one through. This Dominion was larger, blood-spattered, and feral.

“Cassius?”

He sheathed his sword and glared at me. “What are you doing here? I said I’d come to you once I had the information we needed.”

“Yes, you did. But it’s been three days and—”

He blinked sharply. “Three days?”

“Yes.”

He ran a hand over his face. “We’ve been fighting them for three days... How?”

“Cassius, we’re running out of time. The foyer is gone, and so is Celestia. You’re losing power rapidly.”

His jaw ticked. “The Dread’s presence is draining our reserves quicker than anticipated.”

“Then you need to speak to the Righteous and get me answers so I can help.”

The power in the corridor went out, leaving us standing in darkness. If not for the light from the elevator, I wouldn’t have been able to see shit.

The questions surrounding Uriel and the cores in Purgatory would have to wait for now. We needed the location of the power source, and we needed it stat.

Cassius must have realized this too because his jaw hardened and he nodded curtly. “Come with me.”

# CHAPTER SIX

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

CORA

**P**lexus Gymnasium is a dive. It looks like a drug den from the outside, the kind they show in movies, but yes, this is the address Dayna gave me. Dillon owns this place, and when not working on reaper stuff can be found here. Apparently, most of the reapers have regular jobs and live in Necro, finding it easier to stay in the city than travel back and forth from the Underealm.

But this part of the city is less than pleasant. We're in Crimson Pack territory. Biker gang, Loup domain. Why would Dillon choose here to open a business?

A car swerves way too close to the curb as it passes me, and someone lets out a wolf whistle, and then there's silence again.

There are only a few stores on this block, and business is slow. Not a soul on foot, well, no live soul anyway. I do spot a young man hovering outside the 7-Eleven holding out his hand for loose change. I can see the sandwich board and the words *buy one get one free* through him.

The dead sometimes get stuck re-enacting moments of their lives, and it seems that this one never registered. I'll need to let Dayna know about him too.

It begins to snow as I cross the street, and by the time I'm at the doors, it's a full-on blizzard.

Bloody hell, the weather in this city has a mind of its own. I push on the thick glass and step inside. It's warm, and the smell of sweat and rubber hits me.

Nice.

There's no reception. No foyer. Just a huge, high-ceilinged, open-plan space filled with workout equipment and gym mats. There's even a boxing ring in the center where two guys are sparring.

Grunts and pants and the whirr of machinery fill the air.

Now, where is Dillon?

Is he one of the two guys in the ring? Or one of the couples wrestling on the mats. There's a man on the treadmill, and then there's another punching the shit out of a punching bag hanging from the ceiling.

Fuck this. "Dillon?" I walk into the room. "I need to speak to Dillon."

The guy at the punch bag halts its swing with the palm of his hand and looks over at me.

"Yeah? And who the fuck are you?"

I guess this is Dillon.



HE DOESN'T LOOK like a reaper. He's not built like Azazel, Mal, or Conah. But there's an air of power about him. His body is lithe, compact muscle, the kind you find on a sprinter. His face is lean, and he looks kinda mean.

He reads the message on the comm and shrugs. "Nothing new there. Humans go missing all the time."

"You need to meet up with Ursula."

"Where's Azazel?"

"Underealm on important business."

His mouth twists, and something dark crosses his face. "Saving Lilith."

My heart stills in my chest. No one knows about Lilith. The guys are keeping it under wraps so as not to incite panic, so how the fuck does this reaper know?

Dillon slings a towel around his neck and crosses his arms. "My days of dancing to Azazel's tune are over, and soon demons everywhere will be free to make their own choices, to be the gods we were meant to be and have"—he opened his arms—"everything and anything we fucking desire."

"A Mammon supporter."

He inclines his head. "And I'm not the only one." He turns his back on me. "Now get the fuck out of my gym."



I make it outside before the anger can make me do something stupid. Mammon has supporters here in Necro City. Sleeper agents ready to be activated when the time comes. The news Azazel and Mal are trying to keep under wraps is already out. Mammon could have reapers loyal to him on every reaper team.

Oh, fucking hell.

He could have them at the Academy too!

I need to get a message to Keon. Now.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER SEVEN

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

KEON

I wasn't sure about the celestial joining me at the Academy to help with the training, but I think he needs this. Needs to feel back in control after everything that's happened.

He's fast. He mastered the tails easily.

Maybe he will be useful, after all.

The cadets seem star-struck by him, a celestial amongst them. Fighting alongside them in the arena Master Luena has set up.

I watch the monitors, count the kills, and make mental notes on what needs to be worked on for each cadet.

Master Luena sits tensely beside me. I look down at her hands, which are clasped tightly in front of her.

I can read people well, and she isn't herself today. "What's wrong with you?"

She stares at me in horror. "I'm sorry?"

"You're tense. Why?"

She presses her lips together. "War is coming and these cadets...my cadets... Many will die."

"Yes."

She closes her eyes, and I can see the pulse in her throat throbbing, and then the scent of fear hits me, and it's off. This woman is not a coward. What is happening?

She opens her eyes and locks gazes with me, about to speak, when the doors to the training room burst open and another tutor rushes in. Two more demons spill into the room. Academy security.

I don't understand what's happening. "What is this?"

“We just had communication from Deadside HQ letting us know that we may have sleeper agents working for Mammon in the building. We need to secure the cadets and investigate.”

He means interrogate.

Luena slowly stands, hands still clasped in front of her. “No need. There’s only one sleeper agent in this building... and I’ve just woken up.”

Master Jenkins stares at her as if she’s grown an extra head. “No. Not you.” He looks devastated.

The guards don’t hesitate. They don’t wait for orders. They move to arrest her.

She holds up her hands, eyes wide and earnest. “Before you lock me up, you need to hear me out. Every life in this building may depend on it.”



LUENA DOESN’T RESIST as she’s cuffed. The bands on her wrists glow with celestial enchantments to mute her demon abilities. The cadets have been sent back to their quarters. It’s just us in the room with her now: Uriel, Jenkins, the guards, and me.

“I took an oath decades ago,” Luena said. “Before I knew how things could be. Mammon was my lord. He is charming and persuasive, and his ideas sparked ambition and...greed.” She licks her lips. “I wanted to be the ruling species. To go where I wished and take what I wanted. He promises wealth and freedoms, the likes of which Lilith cannot. He promises the earthly realm.”

“So, you work for him?” Jenkins says as if he needs to hear her say it to truly believe.

“I do. I mean, I did.” She looks up at him, eyes brimming. “But I don’t want to. I stopped wanting what he offered a long time ago. I told myself it would never happen anyway, so what was the harm in continuing, and in truth, I wanted to protect the cadets I’d grown to love. I knew if he discovered that I’d gone soft, he’d send a replacement.”

He would do more than that. “He would kill you.”

“I don’t care about my life. But these cadets, these wonderful younglings with such promise...I could not let them be hurt.”

“So, you stayed,” Uriel says. “And now what?”

“Now, Mammon has Lilith, and he’s sent word to his agents. He’s mobilizing his forces. I had my orders yesterday.”

“And?” Uriel probes.

“I’m meant to take the cadets to the Underealm on the pretext of a field trip. Mammon wishes to add them to his army.” She gives me a level gaze. “Just as he wishes to add the rest of the cadets from the other academies.”

Fuck. “Jenkins, warn the other academies. Do it now.”

He rushes from the room.

“There’s more,” Luena continues. “He wanted me to set off an explosion on a timer to blow once we were clear of the place.” She shakes her head. “I haven’t set it up. I...I knew I had to come clean, but when I don’t arrive at the rendezvous point with the cadets, he’ll know I backed out, and he will send someone else to do his dirty work. Maybe more than one person.”

“Then we make sure we’re prepared,” Uriel says. “We’ll triple the wards on the academies.”

Luena exhales and nods. “Thank you. You can lock me up now.”

I grip her chin and force her to look at me. “Oh you’re not getting off so easily, demon. You’re going to tell me exactly where this rendezvous point is, and then we’re going to stage a little coup of our own.”

# CHAPTER EIGHT

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Cassius led me up two flights of stairs and into a plush part of the Beyond, where a bloodstained carpet led to a set of firmly closed golden doors.

A Dominion stood in front of the doors, shoulders slumped. He straightened as Cassius approached but didn't move out of the way.

"Semil, open the doors," Cassius demanded.

"I cannot," Semil said. "The Righteous have sealed the chamber from within, and the lock will only disengage once all the Dread have been slaughtered."

Cassius looked like he needed a few curses, but so far, I hadn't heard him swear.

I'd do it for him. "Fucking hell."

Cassius grunted in agreement. "Typical," he muttered. "Hiding away, saving their own skins." He walked away from the door. "How many left?"

Semil pulled out a tablet from his back pocket and studied it. "Forty on radar. Clustered in sector four, sublevel two."

"We best get back to work then." He pulled his sword from his belt. "Stay here," he ordered me.

"Like hell. I'm coming with you. I can help." And this time, my scythe appeared like a dutiful weapon to illustrate my point.

"Fine," he said. "But try to keep up."



SUBLEVEL TWO WAS smooth silver metal walls and gridded metal floors. Cassius stopped us at a set of swipe doors.

“Looks like Celestia locked down this area,” Cassius said. “She must have sensed an influx of signatures that weren’t meant to be here.”

“What about personnel?” one of the Dominions asked.

Cassius didn’t answer the question, but his face said it all.

If the celestials trapped in there weren’t warriors, then they were most likely dead.

I cleared my throat. “Can we get in?”

“I can try to override,” one of the other Dominions said.

“Do it,” Cassius ordered.

The younger Dominion set to work on the panel by the door. God, this was weird. The Beyond governed by technology—panels, sliding doors, and overrides.

Long minutes passed, and I could see Cassius was getting impatient from the way he kept tapping his foot.

But then the panel fizzed and made a popping sound.

“I think that should do it,” the Dominion said. “Just need your code.” He stepped back, and Cassius took his place.

“Be ready,” he said, and then he placed his palm on the panel.

The doors swung open and screams tore through the air.

Fuck, the door had blocked sound.

The Dominions moved fast, pouring into the corridor beyond.

Cassius gave me a stern look. “Do not get killed.”

And then he was gone. I took a deep breath, allowing heat to course through my veins in readiness for battle, and then I followed.

The next few minutes were a blur of blood and death. The Dominion swords glowed like my scythe, stripping heads from shoulders and eviscerating.

I stepped over dead celestials and bloody, torn wings to cut down the Dread responsible. Yes, they’d been given a dud deal, but this...This was bringing calamity on us all, and it had to be stopped.

The sublevel was made up of chambers lined with cells and linked by corridors. There were beings behind the doors. I could sense them. Prisoners like Uriel had been? No time to think. I fought on instinct, my body a weapon as I ducked and dove, evaded and attacked. I caught a



glimpse of Cassius to my right as he plunged his sword through a Dread's mouth so the end protruded out the back of the creature's head.

Nephilim and third-generation Dread were here, but soon they would be no more.

"Up there!" a Dominion shouted. "On the balcony." He ran for the stairs, wings flaring as he took off in the air. A Dread came out of nowhere and grabbed his wing, yanking him down.

The Dominion careened in the air, taken off balance by the weight of the Dread. I broke into a sprint and skidded to a halt, close enough to plunge my blade into the Dread's back.

The Dominion was free. He shot up after the other Dread. The one stuck on my blade pitched forward, pulling himself off the steel. He turned to me, hands in the air.

"You don't understand," he said. "If we die, they die. If we die, they starve."

I brought my scythe up, ready to make the death swing that would take off his head, but he moved fast, using some final reserve of strength, passing out of range but not away from me, toward me, and then his hands were on my head, gripping me hard.

"See!" he screamed in my face.

My vision went white, and something surged up from the back of my mind. No. Not this time. Never again.

"Fuck you!" I stabbed him in the face with my obsidian dagger.

I staggered back, suddenly free, and the silence registered.

Eerie and complete. Around me, Dominion flexed and folded their armored wings.

"Clear!" Cassius said.

I wiped my bloody hands on my pants. "Now let's get that fucking audience with the Righteous."



THIS TIME the Dominion guarding the golden doors stepped aside, and the doors swung open to admit us.

Cassius ordered his men to stay behind but didn't stop me from following him into the vast chamber beyond. It was a circular room with

several balconies, but the celestials were all gathered around an impressive-looking table on the ground floor. Silver goblets and trays of strange glowing fruits covered the surface.

My ire rose at the sight. While we were out there busting our asses to kill the Dread, they'd been cloistered in here sipping beverages and eating magical fruit.

The Righteous, my fucking ass. They were cowards. Look at them in their flowy robes with their pinched faces and silver hair.

"Cassius, the threat is averted. Well done," one of the Righteous said.

"Lianel, the Dread are all dead, but we're losing power fast," Cassius said.

The Righteous exchanged glances. "Yes. We are aware. Which is why we have decided to initiate protocol Flagship."

Cassius went very still. "You wish to abandon our home?"

"We are at a juncture where there is no other alternative. Seats are limited. Righteous, of course, will be given priority. You'll select twenty of your best men, and the rest of the seats will be filled with domestic celestials. We will use the last of the power we have to propel the Flagship into the ether."

Wait a fucking second. "You're leaving? You're running away?"

Lianel transferred his pale, wishy-washy gaze to me. "You have not been given leave to speak, demon."

"Dominus." I glared at him. "I'm a Dominus, and I can't believe you're giving up."

"Cassius, why does it continue to speak?" Lianel sounded genuinely confused.

"Seraphina Dawn is a descendant of Samael," Cassius said.

Lianel's brows twitched upwards. "Is she now? It explains her insubordination."

"Last I checked, I worked for Lilith. *You*, we work with. And giving up is the coward's way out."

Lianel sighed. "There is no other way, child."

"That's not what you thought centuries ago when you sent a troop of Powers to the Underealm."

His lips pinched, and he turned an icy gaze onto Cassius.

Cassius didn't flinch. "If there is a power source out there, however dangerously placed, we need to know. We have to try."

“Celestials died,” Lianel said. “Have you any idea how difficult it is to snuff out a celestial?”

“And more will die when you abandon them here and fly off in your flagship.” I stepped forward, sweeping my gaze over the gathered Righteous. “Whatever you were after is still out there. I can get it for you. All you need to do is tell me where it is. Give me a chance to save this world and mine.”

“Lianel, what do you have to lose?” Cassius asked.

“Time,” Lianel said. “We are short on time.” He sighed and studied me for a long beat, and then he closed his eyes. The other Righteous did the same, and their foreheads began to glow.

I leaned in toward Cassius. “What’s happening?”

“They’re conferring.”

Long seconds passed, and then Lianel opened his eyes. “It is agreed that considering our predicament and your offer of aid, you will be privy to classified information. You are already aware that the divine abdicated his role here a long time ago. But he left writings, ramblings that held secrets, and in them was mentioned a power to rival his own hidden in the Underealm. You have seventy-two hours to retrieve that power source. Once the time elapses, we will drain what is left of the power in the Beyond to propel our departure from this plane of existence.”

It was real. There was hope. “Where is it?”

Lianel’s expression was grave, almost as if he was imparting a death sentence. “A place they call Limbo.”

Limbo? The no-man’s land filled with ancient spirits that the Beyond had decided to forfeit.

“I know it. We can leave now.” I looked up at Cassius, who nodded curtly.

“You misunderstand,” Lianel said. “The Beyond has its plan, which we will execute in seventy-two hours. The potential of a power source is too slim for us to expend any resources on it.”

Wait, was he saying what I thought he was saying? “You expect me to do this alone?”

“We do not expect you to do anything. You wished to have an opportunity to save your world, and this is it.”

My world. Not theirs. Mentally, they’d already left.

“Lianel,” Cassius said. “If we send a team then—”

“Silence!” Lianel’s voice was a boom. “You will follow your orders, Cassius. You will prepare the Flagship.”

Cassius inclined his head stiffly. “Lianel.”

“Seventy-two hours’ grace,” Lianel said to me. “That is all we are willing to give you.”

Cassius’s jaw ticked, and then he grabbed my arm and tugged me from the room. The door closed behind us, and he towered over me, eyes blazing.

“Are you sure you wish to do this?” he asked.

My stomach trembled, but I raised my chin. “I have to.”

He clenched his teeth. “For the first time in eons, the desire to ignore orders is a burn in my veins. This feels wrong.”

It wasn’t the only thing that was wrong. I needed to tell him about the Edge, and I needed answers about Uriel. “Cassius, I wasn’t able to save the core souls. I didn’t have access to retrieve them from the librarian.”

He frowned. “Was I wrong to assume that you have Uriel?”

“He didn’t make it into the Edge.”

“You were allowed admittance to the Edge alone?” He looked confused. “The system must be glitching. Only pure celestials can command the librarian.”

Which was why he’d told me to take Uriel with me. Made sense now. Shit, I hadn’t even considered that when I’d leaped into the shimmer.

“Uriel would have been able to access the core souls,” Cassius said. “Why did you not take him into the Edge?”

“We were attacked by malignant, and he stayed to fend them off, and when I was ejected from the Edge, Uriel was possessed.” I studied his expression, noting the confusion clouding his eyes.

“That’s impossible. A pure celestial can’t be tainted by malignant.”

“I know, but he was, which means...”

“No. That can’t be right. Our celestials are pure, born of divine light.”

“Right, okay, maybe, but there’s something different about Uriel. There has to be, or a malignant wouldn’t have been able to take control of him. He deserves answers.”

Cassius placed his large hand on my shoulder. “Succeed in your mission, and I’ll get you the information you want.” His eyes narrowed. “I promise you.”

I believed him. “Thank you.”

He nodded curtly. “In the meantime, I’ll do what I can to stall Lianel and give you a few extra hours. I can’t ignore orders, but I can take my time executing them.” He smiled, and it transformed his somber face. “Good luck, Seraphina Dawn.”

I was going to Limbo.

And I’d be doing it alone.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER NINE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

The Magiguard offices are in Central Necro masquerading as a generic office building. The streets are buzzing with people as I cross the road and head for the main doors.

Dayna warned me I may not get past the reception desk. The masquerade is real, and Magiguard security is top-notch, but I promised Fee I'd take care of this, and I don't intend to let her down.

I pass a young couple on the way to the entrance. They stand with their heads together, poring over a piece of paper.

"They're paying for blood donations," the woman says.

"There's no address," the guy says.

"There's a phone number."

The door to the building is the thick glass kind with a metallic vertical bar to be used as a handle. I push it open and stride into the foyer. My heels clip on the tiled floor as I make my way to reception with a huge smile on my face.

The man behind the counter glances up at me and does a double-take. Yeah, I have a million-dollar smile when I decide to use it.

He puts down his pen and blinks at me. "And how may I help you today?"

"I'm here to see Ursula Mann."

His expression smooths out, and he rakes me over. "I think you have the wrong building. We don't have anyone by that name here."

Dayna warned me about this. The Magiguard run a front business with real human employees, but this guy *is* Magiguard, and he knows every other Magiguard by sight.

I'm not one of them, and I'm not an entity known to them, which makes my knowing Ursula's name a red flag.

"Look, my name is Cora Dawn. I'm a friend of Seraphina Dawn, who's a Dominus. Tell Ursula we got her message to Azazel. Can you do that? Please?"

He shrugs, impassive. "Like I said, we have no one by that name here."

Oh, bloody hell. "Fine, then you can chase up on your missing humans issue yourself because all the Dominus are tied up on other matters."

He stares at me levelly, unmoved.

I throw up my hands. "I tried."

I turn and head for the door. There's nothing else to be done here. At least I managed to get a message to Keon at the Academy. Not a total failure then. The crisp midday air slaps me in the face, and the smell of coffee and bacon fills my nostrils. My stomach rumbles. I need food, and there, like a beacon beaming at me from across the street, is a greasy spoon café.

"Cora?"

I pause at the curb and look over my shoulder to see a slender woman standing behind me.

She smiles thinly. "I believe you wanted to see me?"



I POLISH off my bacon sarnie while Ursula watches. The greasy spoon café does excellent bacon sarnies, and the coffee is pretty good too.

I wipe my hands on a napkin. "You sure you don't want one? They're delicious."

She smiles thinly. "I'm not hungry, but thanks. You said all the Dominus are busy." She gives me a skeptical look.

At least she's waited till I finish eating. Polite of her, which means having to lie to her will probably make me feel a little bad.

Okay, no, it won't. "Yep, all busy doing very boring Dominus type things."

The Dominion have been clear about us keeping the whole world-ending thing under wraps. There is nothing anyone could do to stop it. Only a power source can do that, and Fee is already on the case.



The Underealm issues are nothing to do with the Magiguard. My job is to deal with business as usual and make sure Fee doesn't come back to a shit load of jobs in need of completion, because with Azazel in the Underealm looking for Lilith, all the Dominus shit falls on her.

"And Azazel asked you to take over his role?" The skeptical look hasn't left Ursula's face.

I sigh. "Look, if you don't want the assist, then that's fine. I have other things to be getting on with. You can explain to Az why you didn't let me help when he gets back."

Her brow pinches slightly. "No. That's fine. I know you're Fee's best friend and honestly, we need the help. Magiguard aren't exactly inconspicuous in the outlier community. They see us and they clam up. It's why we only show up when the crime has been committed and nab the perpetrator. Investigations are handled by Azazel and his team." She frowns. "Where did you say his team was?"

Ha, trying to catch me out, huh? "I didn't. They're working on Underealm business right now, hence the reason I'm here." She looks as if she wants to ask more questions, so I forge on quickly. "Tell me about these missing humans?"

The drop in her shoulders tells me she's conceded that it's me or nothing. "The Magiguard keep tabs on human crimes and assess to make sure the crimes aren't supernatural in nature. We intervene where need be. There are wards set up all over Necro to alert us to outlier crimes against humans. Over the last few days, those alarms have been tripped several times, but every time we arrive on the scene, there's no evidence of any crime."

"Okay...maybe your wards are glitching?"

"That's what we thought, but then we ran a check through the human police case files and came across a spate of missing persons reports that roughly coincide with our wards being tripped."

"You think the missing people are victims of an outlier kidnapping?"

"We suspect as much. So far, human law enforcement has no leads. These people just upped and vanished. The only time that ever happens is if Mouths are involved, but we keep track of Mouth activity separately, and right now, the creatures seem to have gone underground." She sips her tea again. "Strange."

Not really, considering their masters, the Dread, have either fled to the Beyond or been slaughtered trying. But that's another thing I can't tell Ursula, not without bringing the Beyond into it and inviting a shit load of questions I won't be able to answer.

"I'll look into it, but I'll need the locations of the suspected kidnappings and the names and addresses of the missing people."

"Do you have a comm?"

I hold up my wrist.

"I'll get you added to our system as Azazel's representative and get the data sent to you."

I drain my tea. "Great. I'll keep you updated."

She leaves the coffee shop, and I tap a message to Fee. It's been almost five hours since she left for the Beyond and my gut is all squirrely. I need to know she's okay.

My comm beeps before I can type.

**BACK AT THE HOUSE. MEET ME THERE, STAT – FEE**

I look around. The place is empty, and the owner has her back to me. Fuck it. I make the jump to Fee.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER TEN

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

**W**e gathered in the lounge with the Christmas tree lights winking at us. I really needed to take that thing down, but I didn't have the time. None of us did.

Grayson and Dean perched on sofa arms, and Cora sat on the single-seater. Uriel had gone to the Academy with Keon, and they weren't back yet, but I didn't have time to waste.

Seventy-two hours. That was all I had. I needed to leave for the Underealm ASAP, but I needed the people I cared about to know where I was going just in case...Just in case I didn't make it back.

"Fee, what happened?" Dean asked. "I smell blood."

Fuck, I'd showered off the Dread blood and changed out of my battle-stained clothes, but there was nothing to rival a Loup nose.

Grayson was out of his seat, nose buried in my neck as he inhaled. He jerked away. "Dread blood?"

"I may have helped clean up the Beyond."

"You had to fight?" Grayson's mouth turned down. "What the fuck happened?"

I filled them in as quickly as possible. "So, I have the location of the power source, and I'm leaving for the Underealm within the hour. I just... I wanted to see you before I left."

Grayson paled, but he nodded. "The last team they sent in didn't make it back. Be careful, stick with the Dominions, and if shit gets hairy, you get out of there."

Ah, crap. He didn't know I was going solo. This was the part where I bit my tongue and smiled and let him believe I'd have backup, but my poker

face was always shit.

“Fee?” Grayson looked wary. “What is it?”

“Oh fuck,” Cora said. “You’re going alone, aren’t you.”

I winced.

Grayson looked from Cora to me. “What? No. Why would they ask you to do that?”

I puffed out my cheeks, ignoring the squirming in my belly. “Because they’ve already given up. They have an escape plan. A flagship. And in seventy-two hours they’re going to drain what’s left of the power in the Beyond and propel their getaway vehicle into the ether to pastures new, leaving us to burn.”

Silence filled the room.

“We can’t get into the Underealm, can we?” Dean asked, even though he knew the answer.

“No.” I gave him a small smile. “Trust me, I’m shitting myself, but I have to do this. There is no other way. If I don’t, then we all die.”

“I’ll go with you,” Cora said. “I can get into the Underealm just fine; it’s getting out that’s usually an issue, but you can fly me back.”

“Not if I’m carrying a power source. Besides, you need to look into the missing humans.”

I still couldn’t believe Azazel’s deputy was a Mammon supporter. Cora had alerted Keon about the possibility of spies. Was that why he wasn’t back yet? Had they found spies?

Cora made a sound of exasperation. “Missing humans won’t matter if the world ends. You can’t do this alone, Fee. You shouldn’t have to.”

“She won’t.” Keon entered the room with Uriel in tow. “Because we’re going with you.”



I ABSORBED the information Keon recounted. Mammon, the sneaky bastard, had sleeper agents in all the academies, and Master Luena had been one of them. Bloody hell.

I glanced over at the daemon and the celestial standing by the Christmas tree as if they were getting ready for a festive snapshot to be taken, except they weren’t exactly dressed for festive.

Keon had managed to snag a new outfit, more Dominus and less... naked. Black cargo pants that allowed his tail to be free and a black long-sleeved V-neck top that hugged his lithe, muscular torso like a second skin. He'd braided his hair, but navy tendrils had come free to kiss his high cheekbones. The markings on his face seemed to stand out darker against his blue skin today. Uriel had been kitted out in a similar fashion, but he was bulkier than Keon, and the shirt stretched tighter across his shoulders. His dark hair was tousled by the elements, and his ember eyes looked like jewels framed by thick, dark lashes. They both looked dangerous and kick-ass, and they were coming with me.

Relief was a live thing sucking the panic out of my chest. I wouldn't be going alone, and that meant I could finally breathe.

"Sleeper agents aren't just at the Academy," Cora said to Keon. "Azazel's deputy is one too, and he was pretty cocky about it."

Keon hissed.

My temple throbbed with the threat of a headache. "We need to let Azazel and Mal know."

"Already done," Keon said. "I sent out phoenixes. We'll meet them at the Hog and Boar on the far side of the Enmity River. We can spend a few hours and rest after our flight. We'll hand over the coordinates to the cadet drop-off and fill them in on what Mammon is doing. Master Luena is meeting us there with a few chosen senior cadets."

"She's going to go through the motions, isn't she?" Cora asked.

"Yes, and Azazel and Mal will be there with their men to capture the demons who come to collect the cadets."

"Smart," Grayson said. "What about the sleeper agents at the other academies?"

Keon's mouth turned down. "Two academies have already lost contact with cadets who left on a field trip. The other two have identified and arrested the spies in their midst. It turns out that the drop-off was meant to occur in two batches. Our Academy was in the second batch."

So Mammon already had some of our cadets. Fuck. Still, we were lucky we'd cottoned on to Mammon's plot when we did.

"You won't be alone," Uriel said. "I promise I will protect you with my life."

All this time, I'd believed that the Underealm was a no-go area for celestials. Conah had sent Uriel a message by phoenix when we'd needed to

contact him, so I'd naturally assumed he couldn't come into the Underealm. But the Powers had gone into Limbo centuries ago, and Seraphim had patrolled the nine circles back in the day, so my understanding of how things worked was obviously flawed.

"I always thought celestials couldn't come into the Underealm. I mean, you never visited."

"You never invited me," he said with a wry smile. "Although, in honesty, I would probably have declined. Too much time in the Underealm taints a celestial."

"You don't know that."

"I was possessed by a malignant, Fee, so I think we can safely assume I'm tainted. But even if I wasn't, I'd still come with you." There was a warmth in his voice that was different from his usual sincerity. His throat bobbed, and the corner of his mouth lifted. "So, yes, I'm with you."

Keon's plan could work, and if it did... "Azazel and Mal will be able to find out where Mammon might be holding Lilith."

"It could be just the break we need," Keon said.

"But what if Azazel and Mal don't get the messages you sent?"

Keon's eyes narrowed. "Then we hope the three of us will be enough to keep the cadets safe and capture one of Mammon's men."

Seventy-two hours was beginning to look smaller and smaller.



"I HATE THIS," Grayson said. "I hate that I can't come with you."

I pressed my cheek to his chest, memorizing the feel of him and filling my lungs with his scent. He stroked my hair and pressed his lips to my temple, infusing me with a sense of security.

"Keon and Uriel will be with me. I'll be fine."

He didn't say anything, and he didn't need to. We both knew that a team of celestials had failed at what I was about to attempt. I was merely a reaper. A Dominus with only a fraction of celestial power, and I was headed into Limbo, a place that even the demons who resided in the Underealm chose to avoid.

Not even Keon knew what we could expect when we got there.

I'd found home in my guys' arms. Grayson, Mal, and Azazel. They were my everything, and the possibility that I might not see them again made my chest ache with loss.

I held Grayson tighter. "You'll find Hunter. You'll make peace with him."

He pulled away from me. "Stop it. Stop talking as if you aren't coming back from this, because if you don't, there'll be no me or Hunter. If you fail, there'll be nothing." He cupped my face. "You have to succeed, Fee, and to do that, you need to stay alive. Do you understand?"

His husky eyes were bright with passion, and my heart swelled with love for him. Love.

"I love you, Grayson." My words were a whisper.

He stilled. "What did you say?"

The words swelled in my chest like a live entity, making me breathless. "I love you. I fucking love you, Grayson, and I need you to know that, okay?"

He kissed me hard on the mouth, and my eyes grew hot with emotion. He broke the kiss, his nose brushing mine. "I love you too, Fee. So fucking much. Promise me if you can't find this power source, you'll come back to me before the end. If we have to end, then I want to do it together."

I kissed him softly. "I won't fail. I can't."

But even as I said the words, something clawed at the back of my mind, and ice filled my stomach because there was a part of me that didn't believe those words.

And that. That could be lethal.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

---

**K**eon carried Uri into the Underealm. Turned out that although celestials could fly back and forth from the Underealm, they couldn't jump in. However, once inside the Underealm they could jump out if they wanted.

Uriel dangled in Keon's grip as we hurtled through a river, colors swirling about us like a kaleidoscopic rainbow. My stomach twisted and flipped—excitement at the promise of seeing Azazel and Mal warring with the terror of heading into Limbo.

We exited to a night sky filled with diamond stars and a biting wind that clawed at my skin, desperate to peel it from my bones.

I always forgot how cold it was in the Underealm.

Keon flew ahead of me, hugging Uriel to him, wings beating the air as if he was punishing it. Below us, the River Enmity cut through the earth like a snake winding its way north. It wasn't iced over as one would expect based on the sub-zero temperature, but then the human rules of physics didn't always apply here.

The water was smooth, though, unmoving like glass. I knew on instinct that a person could be lost in its depths forever.

An urge surged up from the depths of my consciousness. The urge to swoop, to dive into the cool depths of the river and be lost, flooded me. I tipped forward, ready to take the plunge and find out what oblivion would feel like.

"Up ahead!" Keon shouted.

The urge to dive into the water shattered, and I pulled up sharply. What the hell had I been about to do? My pulse fluttered, and dark foreboding

crept across my skin. The river... It had to be this place. I was probably reacting to it in some way. I bet it had some mystical pull or something.

Oh, fuck, if Keon hadn't called out...

Focus.

Lights winked to life to the far right of the river. A village. Probably what Keon had been alerting me to. He veered toward it, and I followed, shaking off the strange tingling sensation that had taken over my limbs a moment ago.

Azazel and Mal were at the tavern waiting for me. Fine, so they might not have made it yet, hell they may not have gotten the message Keon sent, but I needed to believe they had.

Positive thinking had power, right?

They would be there to greet me. I was going to see them again after what felt like forever. Okay, fine, so it had only been three days, but still. I'd missed them way too much.

Uriel winked out of Keon's grasp and appeared on the riverbank, and then Keon picked up speed, landing a few meters from him. I came in next, tipping back fluidly to land lightly on my feet.

"Good," Keon said appraisingly. "Good landing."

"Thank you."

I glanced back at the water, serene and unthreatening now, and then quickly walked up the bank away from it before it could work its weird river mojo on me.

Keon rolled his shoulders and looked over at Uriel. "I thought you'd be lighter."

Uriel was too busy studying his environment with a frown. "The air smells familiar," he said.

"You never forget what the Underealm smells like," Keon said.

Uriel frowned. "But I've never been here before."

"You've never been to the Underealm?" Keon looked surprised. "Not even to liaise with the Dominus?"

"Only ever to the bridge," Uriel said. "And that's not part of the Underealm."

Keon frowned. "Strange."

I wanted to get going. I wanted to see my guys. "Which way to the tavern?"

Keon shot me an unreadable look, narrow-eyed, almost speculative, and then he shook his head.

“Follow me.” He set off, his footfalls muted by the snow.

Uriel and I fell into step behind him.

“I can’t believe I’m here,” Uriel said. “I can’t believe how normal it feels.”

“Yeah, I was expecting fire and brimstone too the first time Conah brought me here. I was surprised by how normal it felt. It’s actually quite beautiful.”

We stepped onto a winding path bordered by trees and heavy with the fragrance of winter blooms I couldn’t identify and headed toward the lights up ahead. The village was on a rise, and the tavern was set apart from it—a travelers’ inn surrounded by land to park carriages on. There were several drakes and carriages already stationed here.

I scanned them, looking for a fancy royal one, but then kicked myself. Would Mal and Azazel come in a royal carriage? No.

“There’s the Academy carriage.” Keon pointed out a dark blue one with two crimson-eyed drakes attached. “Luena and the cadets are here. They may be under surveillance, which is why we’ll be meeting Malachi and Azazel in the Den.”

I jogged to catch up to him as we rounded the tavern and veered away from the cheery light, tinkling music, and delicious smells.

“I thought we were meeting at the tavern?”

“The Den is part of the tavern, the part where demons of lesser repute go to play games, eat, drink, and rest.”

We left the tavern behind and approached a low, squat building that had its doors open. Yellow light spilled out onto the gravel drive, and a couple of drakes were tied to posts outside. They pawed the ground as we approached. Wait. These weren’t drakes. They had no wings.

Keon gently gripped my arm and steered me away from the creatures. “Clipped drakes,” he said. “Some demons like their steeds grounded.”

“They cut off their wings?”

“They do it when the drakes are foals. These poor creatures have never known what it feels like to fly, and their aggression levels are much higher than regular drakes.”

“You think it’s because they can’t fly?”

He looked down at me, his cat eyes gleaming in the gloom, mouth tilting up slightly. “Their wings were taken before they knew they had them, but the need to soar never leaves. It’s in their blood, they just don’t understand it, and it breeds rage. It’s a missing piece. A hollowness they can’t understand.”

His lip curled slightly, showcasing a fang. Was he thinking about Lilith? About the holes she’d left in his memories all these years? About the emptiness he’d felt? The urge to hug him washed over me. I took a step toward him.

He tensed, his mouth parting as he looked down at me. He touched my chin lightly with his fingertips.

“Don’t pity me. I don’t like it.”

“I don’t pity you, Keon. I empathize because I care.”

His eyes flinched. “Then you’re a fool.” He touched my bottom lip, featherlight. “Because I won’t hesitate to kill you if my queen orders it.” He leaned in. “Never forget who and what I am, Fee.”

His mouth was so close I could smell his breath...cinnamon. He would kill me. Slit my throat, quick and clean. He’d end me for Lilith. I searched his cat eyes, noting the way his pupils darkened and flared, and then reached up on impulse to touch his cheek. He flinched but didn’t pull away.

His skin was cool and silken beneath my fingers, and although a part of me said I should not be touching him like this or at all, I couldn’t stop. A low purring sound rose between us as his chest vibrated. He was enjoying this. My pulse sped up at the knowledge. Fuck, what was I doing? I pulled my hand away quickly, but he grabbed my wrist, holding it inches from his face, eyes locked on mine in unrelenting contact.

I swallowed the fluttery feeling in my throat. “You do what you have to, Keon, and I’ll do what I feel is right.”

A strange pained sound shattered the moment.

Uriel stood staring at the drakes, face twisted in torment.

Oh, God.

His wings.

They’d taken his wings.

Keon exhaled. “I’ll be inside.” He strode off before I could stop him.

Shit.

Uriel took several steps toward the drakes. They blew smoke from their nostrils, clearly agitated by his proximity. They pawed at the ground harder,

as if urging him to come closer, to get into range so they could attack.

“Uriel?” I laced my fingers through his before tugging him away from the drakes and toward me. “Hey, look at me.”

He tore his gaze away from the drakes and dropped it to our joined hands before raising it to my face.

His mouth parted as if he wanted to speak, but then he closed his eyes and took a breath. “I’m fine.”

No, he wasn’t. He’d been mutilated, and he hadn’t grieved. He’d picked himself up and gotten on with it. He’d acted like it didn’t matter, but it fucking did. His wings were a part of him. They were a part of who he was.

I placed my palm on his cheek. “It’s okay to grieve the loss of your wings. It’s okay to be angry and want to hurt the celestials who did this to you. It’s okay to rage.”

He covered my hand with his. “No, Fee. It isn’t, because if I allow myself to *feel* any of that, I’m afraid I’ll fall apart.”

I stepped closer. “You’re allowed to fall apart, Uriel, because I’ll be there to put you back together when you do.”

He opened his eyes and seared me with his ember gaze. The pupils dilated, drawing me in and eliciting a tugging inside my chest.

“Thank you,” he said.

I dropped my hand from his cheek with a smile. “But let’s wait till *after* we get that power source.”

He let out a surprised chuckle that warmed my heart. I gave his hand a squeeze and released him.

“Fee?”

My heartbeat accelerated. There was no mistaking that voice.

I turned to see Azazel standing in the Den doorway. To anyone else, he may have looked huge and forbidding backlit by amber light, but to me, he was anything but. To me, he was my heart.

He held out his arms, and I flew into them. He lifted me off my feet, crushing me to him, one palm cupping the back of my head and the bar of his other arm around my waist.

I was peripherally aware of Uriel slipping past us into the Den, but I was enraptured by my soulmate, by the connection that thrummed between us, reminding us how irrevocably we were linked.

Azazel’s gaze was hungry, devouring my features as if seeing them for the first time, and then he kissed me, claiming my lips with expert passion

that made my heart swell and my core melt.

I sank my fingers into his hair and savored the shape of his lips and the taste of bitter ale on his tongue. He was mine, and I was drowning in him, desperate to be swept away. Azazel groaned into my mouth, deepening the kiss for a delicious moment of abandon that made my head spin and my body clench in anticipation of more. But then he pulled back, breaking the kiss with a soft curse. His lips skated down my neck, and his tongue flicked out to taste me.

“Do you need to feed?” My voice was a rasp.

He shook his head. “I’m fine.” His chest heaved as he pressed his forehead to mine. “I fucking missed you.”

I blinked back tears. “I missed you more.”

He set me down almost reluctantly, but he didn’t let go of me.

I pressed a kiss to his hard jaw. “Where’s Mal?”

“Inside,” Azazel said. “Sulking because I beat him at rock paper scissors and the right to greet you first.”

“I don’t sulk.” Mal stepped out into the night to join us. “I get even.” He grinned at me, lopsided and totally Mal.

He looked too good in his travel clothes of soft leather and dark cloak. His hair was ruffled and fell across his forehead in a roguish manner, and his emerald eyes were sharp and intensely fixed on me.

“My turn,” he said. Azazel kissed the top of my head and released me. “I’ll order us some food. Five minutes.” He shot Mal a warning glare as he went past.

“Uriel’s at the bar with Keon,” Mal called out without taking his eyes off me.

It was like being in a predator’s sights. It was like the air was being slowly sucked out of my lungs. There would have been a time I would have been tempted to back up. To put distance between us, but not any longer. Instead, I canted my head coquettishly and crooked my finger, beckoning him to hurry up.

He bridged the distance between us and stopped inches from me.

I tipped my chin up. “Did you miss me?”

He shrugged a shoulder. “A little, I guess.”

I bit back a smile. “A-huh? Yeah, I’ve been super busy too.”

His mouth turned down as if he was considering this. “I get that. No time to dwell, really.”

“Right. So just to get this straight...” I pushed up on tiptoe, so our lips were a hairbreadth apart. “You had no time to think about touching me?”

“No.”

“Kissing me?”

His hands strayed up to bracket my hips, fingers digging in slightly. “Not a moment.”

“Of being naked on top of me?”

One hand swept up my spine, fingers raking up into my hair.

I bit back a moan. “Of being deep inside—”

He twisted a fist in my hair and crushed his mouth against mine. The kiss was bruising and intense, salt and ale as his tongue rasped against mine. He grabbed my ass and yanked me flush against his arousal. Heat spiraled down to the juncture of my thighs and settled in a deep throb.

I tore my mouth away from his. “Mal—”

He cut me off with another kiss, his grip unrelenting and filled with intent as he propelled us backward into the shadows and up against a tree. He broke the kiss and dropped his mouth to my neck. His fangs grazed my throat, and my nipples tightened painfully in anticipation of his bite.

“Fuck.” He pulled away and released me. “Fuck, Fee.” He ran a hand through his hair. He let out a bark of laughter. “I really missed you.”

I sagged against the trunk. Why did he do this to me? How could he make me lose my mind like this?

He took several steadying breaths and then held his hand out to me. “We should get something to eat and catch up.”

I laced my fingers through his, and he pulled me to him, wrapping me in the perfect Mal hug.

I relaxed against him, reveling in the contact. “I missed you.”

“I missed you more, Fee. I missed you more.”



THE DEN WAS LIT by lanterns dotted around the room, giving it a seedy air, which was apt considering the clientele. Rough-looking demons played cards and dice games. Blades sat snug on hips, ready in case a throat needed cutting. But overall, the atmosphere was relaxed and almost pleasant. Food was consumed and ale drunk, and no one batted an eyelid at the sight of a

female accompanied by four hulking males. Keon, on the other hand, drew a couple of curious glances, but he bared his fangs and hissed, and that was that.

“Aren’t you worried someone will recognize you,” Uriel asked him.

“In this den of uncouth souls? No. To them, I’m just a filthy daemon.”

And it wasn’t long before we became part of the furniture. Keon had been right. This was the perfect place to blend in and hold a super-secret important meeting.

I sat between Mal and Azazel with Keon and Uriel opposite. My belly was full of stew and bread, and the ale had gone down nicely too. Stories had been swapped, and pertinent information traded, and we knew what needed to be done.

It felt like a last supper before we went off to potential death because none of us knew what to expect. Limbo was a mystery, and Mammon’s pickup could involve a number of nasty surprises. Azazel and Mal had come with a troop of soldiers ready to fight if need be. They were stationed a fifteen-minute flight from the rendezvous point, and Limbo was a fifteen-minute flight from this tavern.

It was almost time for us to part ways, and my heart sank. I wasn’t ready for this moment to end. I wasn’t ready to dive into danger just yet.

Mal’s hand slipped onto my thigh. He squeezed gently and then drained his tankard of ale. “I hate this. There’s a reason no one goes into Limbo. It’s one of the most dangerous spots in the Underealm.”

“And the power source is our only hope at saving our worlds,” Keon added. “This affects us all.”

Azazel’s jaw ticked. “We have no choice. Lilith must be found and rescued.” He looked down at me. “Because once Fee saves our worlds, we’re going to have to be ready for a war.”

He had faith in me, and that gave *me* faith in me.

“We meet back at quarters in forty-eight hours,” Mal said. “No matter what.”

In other words, if I failed to find the power source, we could face the end together.

I had no idea how long earth would take to die once the Beyond shut down. No idea how long the demons would survive without their connection to the celestial power the Beyond allowed them, but however long it was, we would experience it together.



I picked up my tankard and held it up on a toast. “Forty-eight hours.”

“Forty-eight hours,” the others echoed.

Mal and Azazel left first, and a hollow sensation bloomed in the pit of my stomach.

“They’ll be fine,” Keon said. “Both are ruthless on the battlefield.”

I nodded. “I know. I just...” Missed them already. Worried that I’d never see them again. “Nothing.”

We left the sweaty, crowded confines of the Den and headed out into the crisp night air.

I asked the question that had been plaguing me for hours. “What if we don’t succeed? I mean...What if we don’t make it out?”

Keon gripped my shoulders. “You will make it out. I’ll make sure of it.”

I believed him. It was his job to keep me alive for Lilith’s sake. Except now...Now I felt he *wanted* to protect me.

That was good. Because I was not ready to die.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

---

The entrance to Limbo was marked by a towering stone arch etched with symbols I didn't recognize.

"This is the gateway. The only way in or out," Keon said. "But those confined are allowed no exit."

"The ancient souls that the Beyond abandoned here?" I looked to Uriel.

The celestial's brow pinched. "Why would the Beyond leave any human souls here?" He pursed his lips and stepped closer to the arch to study the symbols. "Enochian. But I can't...I can't seem to read them." He rubbed his eyes and studied the symbols again before shaking his head. "Strange, almost as if they don't want to be read."

"Was the divine about when the circles were disbanded and the souls were recalled?"

"I don't know," Uriel said. "I didn't even know the divine was gone until recently."

Of course, he was a lower circle celestial, not privy to that information. "No worries. Let's just get this over with. If this power source is here, then there will be some kind of clue or energy signature we may be able to pick up on."

I was clutching at straws, and we were technically going in blind with no plan, but it made me feel better to say words that made it seem like we knew what the fuck we were doing.

I pulled a dagger from my holster and stepped through the arch. Fog closed in around me, damp and cold. The chill seeped through my clothes to kiss my skin. The world here was gray, black, and muted. We were in an

open space, and trees were visible through the fog. This was a path of some kind, made of white pebbles.

“Stay on the path,” Uri said. “I think the path is safe.”

Made sense. The fog was thinnest here, but it hovered thickly on either side of us as if eager for us to come closer so it could smother us.

“What if the power source isn’t on the path?” Keon asked.

He had a point, but my gut told me to stick to the pebbled track. “There has to be some clue.”

Whispers filled the air, and then the hairs on my arms stood to attention. We weren’t alone.

“Who’s there?” Uri demanded.

*One of them,* a lilting female voice said.

*Here?* a male voice replied.

*Again.*

*It’s been a while.*

*Too long,* the woman said.

*Then maybe we should play our song?*

Foreboding bloomed in my stomach just as the haunting notes of a melody rose up in the air. The foreboding morphed into panic, then terror as primal instinct blared a warning.

Keon stared at me, shaking his head. His mouth moved, forming words I couldn’t hear.

“Don’t listen!” I cried out.

He covered his ears, and behind him, so did Uri. The tune was muted now, barely there.

I jerked my head in a let’s-move gesture. Keon nodded, but Uri was a few paces behind him, expression dazed. His hands slowly slipped from his ears.

“Uriel. Don’t—”

He dove off the path and into the fog.

“No!” I made to run after him, but Keon grabbed me around the waist, pulling me to his chest.

He yanked my wrist, forcing me to unplug one ear. “It’s stopped. Although I don’t think it was for us anyway.”

“They wanted him.”

“Yes.”

“We have to go after him.”

“No.”

Had I heard him right? “What?”

“We came here for the power source. We have to stay on mission.” He grabbed my hand and tugged me away from the edge of the trail.

“No.” I twisted my hand out of his grip. “We don’t leave a man behind.”

“We don’t have time to go chasing after him and whatever has him,” Keon said. “In case you’ve forgotten, we’re on the clock. Tick. Fucking tock.”

He was right, of course. We had to put the greater good first. I had to focus on the mission.

*You’d let your friend die? Tut, tut.*

I shook my head slightly. That voice...

“We leave now,” Keon said.

I couldn’t let my friend die. “And if *I’d* been taken, what then?”

Keon’s jaw ticked.

“You’d have taken the time to come after me, wouldn’t you?” I took a step away from him and toward the edge of the path. “You’d have tried to save me.”

“Fee, don’t do this.” Keon bared his fangs and advanced on me.

I turned and ran into the fog.



“URI? URI, WHERE ARE YOU?” I ran through the fog, boots crunching on stuff I couldn’t see.

“Fee!” Keon was hot on my heels. “Damn you, woman.”

Crap, if he caught me, he’d drag me back to the path. This was my only shot at finding Uriel and getting him out. I wouldn’t lose him. I couldn’t.

“Uriel!”

A strange silence descended on me, pressing down on me, its weight a palpable force pushing me to my knees.

“What?” My voice was a gasp. I couldn’t breathe. “Keon...” The word was a vise trying to squeeze the life out of me. I was going to die. “Please, God...”

The pressure eased suddenly, and air rushed into my lungs. I fell forward, hands braced on the earth, gasping in lungful of sweet air. Oh,

God. I... Fuck. Wait...What the hell?

The fog was gone, leaving me in a clearing by a river. Slender trees stood proudly around me, the canopy of dark, lush leaves reaching for a night sky dappled with stars.

“You shouldn’t be here,” a male voice said.

I scrambled up, dagger at the ready, to find a man dressed in rags sitting on a fallen log by the tree line. In his hands was a pipe...A flute or some kind of musical instrument.

Wait a second... “*You* played the music?”

“Come closer, child,” he said.

“Not likely.”

“Now, is that any way to speak to someone who just saved your life?”

He’d stopped the vise?

He canted his head and smiled. He had a pleasant face, a trustworthy face, but his eyes were dark pools of sorrow, and his shoulders slumped as if he was carrying the problems of the world on them.

His brows flicked up slightly. “Well? Gratitude is a humble emotion.”

“Thank you for saving me, but you took my friend.”

He sighed. “No, child, that wasn’t me, and this?” He held up the flute. “Isn’t mine. I found it here. The spirits love mischief, and it seems they’ve taken a liking to your friend. They enjoy new playthings.”

“He’s not a plaything, and I want him back.”

He studied me for a long beat. “Why are you here?”

“Why are you here?”

He let out a bark of laughter, then pressed his lips together as if shocked by his reaction. “I asked first.”

Maybe if I played nice, he’d help me. “Fine, if you must know, the Beyond is dying, and I need a power source. Rumor has it there’s one here.”

“Here?” He looked amused. “In this place filled with the ancient dead?”

“So I’ve been told, and I’m running out of time.”

“Yet you came after your friend?”

What? “Yes, of course. I can’t just abandon him?”

“Even if it means the world might perish.”

“Oh God, you sound like Keon.”

“Your daemon companion.”

“You’ve been watching us.”

“Maybe. But answer me this, is he not right? Are the souls of the many not more important than one soul?”

“It doesn’t work that way for me. Every soul matters. Every soul has worth. I won’t sacrifice one to save another. I refuse to do it.”

His dark eyes lit up with excitement. “And what if you have no choice?”

“There is always a choice.” What the heck? Why was I having this conversation with this...whoever he was. “Who are you?”

He sighed. “No one. But.” He held up a finger. “I can help you. The power source you seek is due east.” He pointed left. “Follow the river, and you shall find it.”

Oh, thank God.

“And your friend was taken due west.” He pointed right. “The spirits move fast, but if you hurry, you might catch him. However, I cannot say if he will be intact when you do. The ancients like taking souls apart, especially celestial ones. But I should warn you that time works differently here. Sometimes it moves forward, and sometimes it stumbles back upon itself. Sometimes a day can seem like a month, and at others, an hour is a minute. Right now, we are in accelerated time.”

Oh fuck. If Keon were here, we could have split up, so one of us went after the power and the other after Uriel, but now it was up to me. I needed to make a choice, and I needed to decide fast.

The man on the log watched me from beneath his lashes while fiddling with the flute in his hands.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. It was my fault Uriel was here. He was my responsibility. I had to try and save him first.

“If my friend Keon comes this way, please tell him which direction the power source is in.”

I turned and headed west.



THE FOREST GREW THICKER around me as I jogged, calling Uri’s name. He had to be close by. The fucking spirits were going to pay when I got hold of them. Had Keon made it into the clearing? Had he gone after the power source?

Shit, what was I doing? This was insane, but it felt right. It was the right thing to do. I had to try.

I caught sight of movement up ahead. "Uriel?"

I broke into a sprint, weaving through the trees in an attempt to catch up to whoever was up ahead, and then the ground dipped, and I careened out of the tree line into a clearing. A river wound away from me, and a log sat on its side to my left.

What the actual fuck?

This was the same clearing I'd started in. Panic flared in my chest, and then the crunch of boots had me falling into a defensive stance. Keon appeared behind the log and skidded to a halt at the sight of me.

He held up his hands. "Fee, stop. We have to go after the power source."

My head felt suddenly fuzzy. "What took you so long?"

"What?" He looked confused. "I was right behind you."

"No, you weren't. I was here, and I met a man, and he...he...Fuck. This place is fucking with us."

"Let's get back to the path." Keon beckoned me.

I looked east, upriver, the direction that the man had told me the power was. He'd also told me Uriel had been taken west, and all that had done was spit me back out here. But maybe that was this place playing tricks. Maybe his information was correct.

"Fee?" Keon approached warily.

"I'm not going to bolt, okay. But we're not going back to the path. We go this way. The power source is this way."

Keon pressed his lips together and nodded. "And Uriel?"

I swallowed the lump in my throat. I'd tried to get to him, but this place was a bitch, and if the man was right, then hours could have passed already. We couldn't waste more time.

"We'll get him out. Once we find the power source and deliver it, we'll come back for him."

With a final look west, I headed upriver toward what I hoped was our salvation.

Please be safe, Uriel. Please hold on.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

---

The river either went on forever or time was fucking with us. I wasn't sure which. There weren't many landmarks to go on. Everything looked the fucking same here, and the gloom and shadows didn't help. The stars might be bright above us, but their light didn't seem to make it down here.

Keon walked beside me in silence. He had a fluid way of moving, as if he could launch himself into a run, or leap or pounce at any moment. I got the impression that the clothes he was wearing were an encumbrance, and I was totally distracting myself from the fact that he was pissed at me. I was damned if I'd apologize for going after Uriel, though.

He needed to understand that where I came from, we didn't walk away from the people we cared about.

"I'd have done the same for you." I glanced across at him to catch the slight flinch to his features. "I would have gone after you too."

"You're an idiot," he snapped. "You could have been hurt. Killed."

"And Lilith would have been affected. I know, I get it, but I had to try."

He was silent for a long beat. "You could have been hurt..." His tone had dropped, and there was a slight edge of uncertainty to it as if he was testing out the words and examining their meaning, and it hit me that he'd been worried about me. *Just* me, and not what my demise would do to his queen. For some reason, that made me feel warm.

"Keon?"

"Don't. I can't like you, Fee. It will make everything more difficult."

I grasped his hand and pulled him to a halt.



He blinked down at me with his beautiful cat eyes and sighed. “Now I have the urge to kill a rodent and offer it to you,” he said with a flash of annoyance. “Why you?”

He was talking about his courtship, about the fact that pheromones made him want me, and a week or so ago I’d been horrified by it all. I’d been horrified by him and his strange ways, but now...Now those same strange ways were graceful and beautiful and compelling. He’d just calmly told me it would be difficult to kill me, and I was focusing not on the killing part but the part where it would be difficult.

There was no denying that I was beginning to care about this complex man.

“Why you?” he asked again. Softer, this time.

I gave him a small smile. “Why not?”

He frowned, and then his eyes narrowed. “If you think you can take advantage of my primal instincts and convince me not to kill you, then you’re mistaken.”

I shrugged and let go of his hand. “I know.” I began to walk again. “Keep up.”

He sighed. “I can understand Lilith’s conflict over you now.”

“Oh?”

“She won’t enjoy ordering your death once she finds a way to nullify Eve’s curse. She believes you worthy of her son.” He flashed a look my way and then fixed his attention on the ground ahead.

But he was her son too, long-lived like Azazel, except Azazel had no idea he had a half-brother who was still alive.

“Will you tell Azazel who you are to him?”

Keon’s lip curled. “And have him pity me?”

“He wouldn’t do that.”

Music drifted toward us, the same lilting melody that had taken Uriel. “Can you hear it?”

Keon nodded. “This way!”

We fell into a sprint, veering away from the river and into the forest. The music got louder and louder until it was all we could hear, and then we broke into a large clearing with a log cabin in the center of it, and on the porch sat the man in rags from earlier.

The music stopped.

Seriously? “You... What is going on?”

“Your friend?” He looked to his left, and I followed his gaze to find Uriel strapped to a tree. By the looks of it, he was unconscious.

I took a step toward him, and mist bubbled out from behind him. It swirled into fog and rushed toward me, cutting off my path to him. For a moment, it was impossible to see anything because the fog was everywhere, reducing visibility.

“Fee?” Keon called out.

“I’m here.”

And then the fog dropped, so it was a sea of churning smoke at ankle height. The cabin was gone, and so was the forest. Instead, I was surrounded by stone statues in various poses. The air was still as if holding its breath.

“Keon?” Where was he?

Fuck this place and its mind games.

I wove between the statues, hoping there weren’t any traps beneath the fog. The stone was moss-covered here and there, and the back of each statue was cracked and broken as if someone had taken a hammer to each one.

Limbo sucked, and I was so done with it. “Keon!”

A figure stepped out from behind a statue up ahead, and I sagged in relief. “Thank God. Keon, we need to find Uriel.” I walked toward him. “There has to be a way to get back to that cabin.”

Keon drew his daggers, eyes narrowing as he fell into a fighting stance.

“Keon?” My step faltered, and then he rushed toward me. It took a moment for my brain to comprehend that he was attacking me. “Keon, what the fuck.” I dove out of the way and rounded on him. “What are you—” Shit, I rolled to avoid him again.

“Die, beast!” he hissed, and lunged at me.

Fuck this place. My scythe bloomed to life, and I used the staff to block his assault and shove him back, but I caught a good look at his face; his eyes were glazed as if he was in a dream. Like a sleepwalker. Like someone who was seeing something that wasn’t there.

Shit. I needed to wake him up. My scythe winked out, and I punched his jaw. Pain jarred my arm and had me stumbling back.

Were his bones made of steel?

He moved fast, accelerating his attack, and it took everything I had to evade his slashes and blows.

“Keon, it’s me.”

Fuck he was relentless. I broke away from him, launched myself over the statues, and took flight, but he was in the air after me. I soared up and met an invisible barrier that knocked me back, slamming me into Keon. We both hit the ground together, and then I was pinned beneath him. His hand on my throat, dagger arching down toward my face. I grabbed a fistful of earth and threw it in his eyes.

He cursed and released me in favor of his eyes, and I twisted, flipping us both so he was under me. It was a matter of a split second and I had him pinned, his dagger hand immobilized, but it wouldn’t last. He was stronger than I was. I needed to wake him up, and a punch to the face hadn’t done it.

I slapped him.

He hissed at me, pulled his hand from his face, and went for my neck. Crap. I knocked his arm away, grabbed his chin, and kissed him hard.

He stilled beneath me, every muscle in his body tensing. I kept my mouth on his, lips pressed to his, and slowly released his dagger wrist. He didn’t move. Okay, this was good. I brought my hand to his cheek and laid my palm against it. A sigh rattled his chest, and his mouth softened beneath mine. Was it working?

“Keon?” I spoke against his mouth, maintaining contact. “It’s me. Fee. You awake now?”

His hand was on my hip, and then he was pulling me closer, and yes, yes, he was definitely awake and hard, very hard, and—

He pushed his hips up into me, rubbing against me.

My eyes rolled at the sensation. No. Shit. I needed to pull away, but his hand was on the back of my head, holding me immobile. His lips parted, and his tongue flicked out and dipped into my mouth.

My moan mingled with the steady vibration of his chest. My body clenched, thighs squeezing his hips reflexively as his flavor invaded my mouth. Cinnamon. He tasted positively edible. And I was kissing him, licking the inside of his mouth and sucking on his long thick tongue before the chill of reality seeped past the heat in my limbs to bring common sense back online.

I pulled away from him, sitting up to look down at his parted mouth and heavy-lidded eyes.

“I almost killed you,” he said.

“Yeah, but you didn’t.”

“You fought well.” He swept his tongue across his lips. “You kiss better.”

My cheeks heated, and I quickly scrambled off him. “I needed to wake you up.”

He stood in a fluid motion and adjusted his erection. “It worked.”

I looked away, cheeks hot. “We need to find Uriel.”

A light bloomed up ahead, and Keon and I exchanged glances.

“Could be another trap,” Keon said.

“What choice do we have?”

“I go first,” he said, and then he slipped ahead of me, tail swishing as he led the way into the light.

The gray cemetery of statues melted away as if they’d been a dream, and the light engulfed us. It spit us back out in the clearing with the cabin, the tree holding Uriel captive, and the man in rags.

He was standing on the ground by the porch steps now, his expression closed and unreadable. Wraiths made of silver smoke drifted out from the tree line to surround us, cutting off our exit.

I was tired and fed up, and anger rushed through me. “Why are you doing this? I don’t want to hurt anyone. I just want to save my world.”

“And you think this kind of power comes without a price?” He looked...frustrated. “You think that you can walk in here and just take what you want?”

I didn’t have time for his questions because I needed answers to mine. “Do you know where it is or not?”

“Oh, I have it. It’s mine to keep and mine to give.”

A guardian, maybe? “Tell me what I need to do to take it, please. No more games.”

He gave me a pitying smile, as if I’d already failed, as if he was done with this whole drama. Done with going through the motions. “To obtain the power, a sacrifice must be made,” he said.

“What kind of sacrifice?”

“A soul must burn.”

What? I turned to Keon for counsel. He took a step toward me, but then his eyes rolled back in his head, and he toppled forward. I caught him before he could hit the ground and lowered him carefully onto his side.

“What have you done to him?”

“Choose,” the man snapped. “A soul must burn for the power to be released. Pick quickly. Do it now. Which will you give me? Him?” He pointed at Keon. “Or him.” He pointed toward Uriel.

Keon was out cold, and Uriel remained tied to the tree, his chin resting on his chest, breath even as he slumbered. There would be no discussion. The choice was mine. The burden was mine.

How could I make this choice? “Why are you doing this? There has to be another way.”

His mouth turned down. “Choose one, or you all die.”

Is this what had happened to the Powers? They’d refused to make a choice, and so they’d all perished? Oh, God...The statues with the cracked backs...Were those the Powers? Someone had broken off the stone wings to disguise what they’d been. Would he turn us to stone too?

“Make your choice now,” he boomed.

My chest ached as the decision formed in my mind.

I rolled Keon onto his back. He was beautiful when asleep and unguarded. The harsh planes of his face softer somehow. I brushed his hair back from his face, reveling in the silken nature of the strands that slipped through my fingers. He’d kissed me, and I’d kissed him back, and it had felt...right.

“We would have been friends until the day you killed me. We may even have been more...I’m sorry, Keon. There is no other way.”

“You choose him?” the man asked.

“No.” I stood and walked over to Uriel. I cupped his face and lifted it so I could look at him, and a revelation bloomed in my heart, one I’d neglected to examine until now.

“I think...I think I would have loved you one day.” My eyes pricked, and I leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to the corner of his mouth.

“Ah, you choose the celestial.”

I carefully released Uriel and turned to face the man, this guardian of the thing our worlds needed the most.

“No.”

He ground his teeth. “You must choose.”

The spirits closed in, and the air crackled with menace.

“Choose now,” he ordered. “Or I will take you all.”

What I was about to do might end another life, but then it might not. All I knew was that if I did anything else, I wouldn’t be able to live with

myself. There was only one choice.

“I choose me.”



THE MAN STARED at me for a long beat. “What did you say?”

“I said, I choose me. Take my soul and let the others go. Let them take the power to the Beyond, please. Just do it quick. Now.”

I fell to my knees and closed my eyes, blood thundering in my ears at the enormity of what I’d just done.

I pictured Azazel’s smile. Imagined Mal’s laughter and felt Grayson’s arms around me. Cora would be so pissed. I knew she would, but she’d understand eventually. Hot tears pricked my eyes, but I squeezed them tight.

I would not cry.

I was going to miss them all so fucking much, but this was the only way to keep them safe.

I swallowed the lump of twisted emotion in my throat. “Please. Just do it.”

There was a whoosh. His blade, no doubt, arcing toward my neck. My insides twisted, and terror grabbed me by the neck. I was about to die. I was about to—

My eyelids bloomed pink as if the world beyond my closed lids had lit up with bright light. Was it about to happen? Why was it taking so long?

“Open your eyes, child,” the man said.

“What?”

“You can look now.”

I stared up at the man. He was taller now, bulkier and no longer dressed in rags, but in a neat brown tunic and black pants. His dark hair was pulled back off his pleasant face, and his dark eyes were filled with tiny slivers of mercury.

“Seraphina Dawn, please stand.”

He held out his hand to me, and when I took it on autopilot, an overwhelming feeling of belonging rushed through me—the conviction that everything would be all right.

“What is going on? Who are you?”

“I am what you came for, and your choice has set me free.” He turned his hands over, and the veins glowed with inner light. “I am the first.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Sit.”

Huh?

He pointed to my left, and there was a chair waiting for me. “How did you... Never mind.”

I sat down, and when I looked at him, he was also sitting, and there was a table between us laid with tea things. I looked over at Keon still passed out on the ground and then to Uriel asleep tied to the tree, and then at the spirits that hovered around us as if eager for story time.

The man smiled. “Don’t worry, your friends will be fine. Drink your tea.”

He handed me a cup. The tea was strong and sweet, just what I needed after the shock of almost dying. Shit, I was so confused, but I was alive, and this man was...He *was* the power, and my gut told me he was about to explain everything.

He watched me for a long beat before picking up his own cup and drinking. “I am one half of the divine,” he said finally. “The older twin. Although we may have looked alike, our ideals were very different. It’s why we disagreed so often, even as we worked together to create worlds. Our last disagreement resulted in my being incarcerated here, although back then, this was not Limbo, and the fallen hadn’t made this world their home.”

A twin? Another divine? “Your brother trapped you here?”

“Yes. I made it easy. I was...naïve. We quarreled about the nature of man even as we forged them. I believed in humanity’s ability for self-sacrifice while my brother thought them to be ruthless survivalists that would do whatever it took to live.”

I snorted. “Well, humans have done some pretty awful things to each other in the name of power and resources.”

He nodded, his eyes suddenly sad. “I know. My brother was right, but I’d created man in my image just as he had done so in his, and I was convinced of my philosophy. So much so that when he suggested a test, I agreed. I would allow myself to be bound to this place until a self-sacrificing soul found his or her way to me. He promised to send me souls, and he did for a while, but when given a choice, these souls chose to

sacrifice another—a friend or a lover...Each chose to let the other burn. Each chose to save their own skin.”

The ancient souls around me moaned.

Oh, God. “These were the test subjects?”

The divine’s brother smiled wryly. “They have been trapped here for a long time. As the world around us changed and the fallen built their home here, the land was named Limbo. I’ve been bound and waiting. When the Powers came, I was sure I would be free. I realized my brother was gone and that the Beyond needed me. I was ready, but the Powers chose a sacrifice—not a volunteer, but a celestial chosen by ballot. An unwilling soul.”

“So, you turned them into statues?”

He sighed. “I was...upset.”

Okay. “And now? Now what? You’re free because I chose to die?”

“Yes!” He reached across the table and grabbed my hands in his. “You are what I envisioned, Seraphina. A soul worthy of saving.” His smile was beatific. “Because of your sacrifice, the world will continue to thrive.”

Is that what he thought? That there was so little love in the world. “There are others out there, you know? Mothers and fathers who would lay down their lives for their children. Lovers who would die for each other. Your brother sent you the souls he knew wouldn’t. He kept you here.”

A flash of anger crossed his face, and then he closed his eyes and breathed, letting it go. “I had suspected as much. My brother was...ruthless in his pursuit of what he desired.” He looked up at the sky. “I can feel it dying. The Beyond is in pain.”

“Then go. Save it.”

He reached out and touched my cheek. “I could take you with me. You could be a celestial of the highest order.”

The idea of being trapped in the Beyond, confined by their rules, having to associate with the pinched-faced Righteous, wasn’t appealing.

I smiled to soften my rejection. “This is my home, and now that I’ve saved yours, I need to focus on saving mine.”

“You know I cannot intervene. The laws of creation prohibit it. But if I could, I would.”

“Thank you.”

He stood and walked over to Uriel. “This one is mine,” he said. “I remember him, but he...He does not remember himself.”



“What do you mean?”

His smile was enigmatic. “The universe has a way of smoothing out wrinkles. In time all will be revealed.”

His body began to glow. “I hope to see you again one day, Seraphina Dawn.”

And then the world erupted in a blaze of light.

When I opened my eyes, I was standing staring at the stone arch that marked the entrance to Limbo. With Keon and Uriel on the ground either side of me.

*He was gone.*

*It was over.*

“What the hell just happened?” Keon sat up.

“My head.” Uriel pulled himself off the ground. “I was...There was music.”

“The spirits!” Keon leaped up. “We have to—”

“Go home.” I turned away from the arch. “We go home. It’s done. It’s over.”

A shadow blocked out the moon, and then a reaper landed a few meters in front of us. He was bloody, and his left wing was slightly torn. He limped over to us.

“Blade, I have a message.” He handed a piece of paper to Keon and then promptly keeled over, hitting the ground with a thud.

Keon scanned the scrap of paper and cursed.

“What? What is it?”

“It was a trap,” Keon said. “Luena tricked us. Mammon ordered her to tell us the location of the pick-up. It was an ambush.”

Oh, shit. “Azazel and Mal?”

“Mammon’s men have them. Their caravan is headed west.”

I locked gazes with Keon. “Then let’s go get them back.”

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## AZAZEL

**I**t was a fucking trap. How could we have been so stupid? The carriage rocks, drawn by clipped drake. The same drake that was parked outside the Den. I didn't consider the possibility that Mammon's spies might be in the Den with us. That this whole thing might be a plot.

I didn't wonder why everything was going to plan. I was still high from my contact with my soulmate. I don't blame her. This is on me. My mistake.

They attacked from the sky, drawing us into the air, and then more came by land, shooting arrows and picking us off out of the sky.

Too many of them.

Way too many for it not to have been pre-planned.

This had been an ambush, and now they had us.

My head is still fuzzy from the drugged darts that mute our abilities. The same drug they used on Conah all those weeks ago. Of course, Mammon would have it in good supply. He'll need it to overcome Lilith's army. Another factor to consider when we finally raid his hideout. This drug needs to be destroyed.

"How long before this shit wears off?" Mal asks from across the carriage.

He sits with his back to the wall, one leg up, arm braced on his knee. He looks relaxed, as if we're voluntarily locked in a box and on a nice sojourn somewhere.

I don't know how he does it.

"I don't know. Could be hours."

“And they’ll probably drug us before then.” He sighs as if being drugged is a mere inconvenience.

I grit my teeth and take a breath through my nose. I’m being unfair. This isn’t his fault, and this...this is just Mal dealing in the way Mal does.

“I don’t recognize any of the demons Mammon sent.”

“Grunts,” he says. “Faceless fucking grunts.”

“Well-trained grunts.”

They have the cadets, and Master Luena, the traitor, is in on this. I recall her smile as we were dragged, semi-conscious, to the carriage. She will die for this. I’ll make sure of it.

Mal caresses the wood. “It’s laced with obsidian,” he says. “Won’t be easy to get out of.”

“It will once we have access to our scythes.” Which might be never if they keep us drugged. I peer through a gap in the wood out at the dirt track and then up at the moon. “I think we’re headed east. They’ll need to stop soon to rest the drake.”

“That could be our chance to escape,” Mal says.

I do value his optimism. It fuels my determination, because I know if we fail, if these bastards get us to Mammon, then nothing will save us.

“I kinda wish I’d stayed longer with Fee,” Mal says softly.

We’re both thinking the same thing: what if we never see her again?

“Can you get a message to her?” Mal asks. “Let her *feel* we’re alive?”

I shake my head. “The drug’s messing with the soul bond right now.”

He sighs and drops his head back against the wood. “Yeah, makes sense. Let’s hope the messengers we dispatched made it out.”

I don’t have the heart to tell him I saw one take an arrow to the leg and the other...I watched several of Mammon’s demons chase him.

If either made it out, it would be a miracle. But maybe a miracle is just what we need right now.

“Fee will have made it, though,” Mal says. The moonlight lancing in through the gaps in the wood highlights his wistful smile. “She’ll fucking make it, Az. That woman is resilient as fuck.”

I close my eyes and picture her face. I can’t give up. I won’t.

I will find my way back to you, Fee. Or I’ll die trying. And then an idea forms in my mind, so obvious I want to kick myself for not having thought of it sooner.

My eyes snap open. “We need to move about.”

“What?” Mal asks.

“Metabolize this shit in our systems. Come on.”

“There’s not exactly much room in here.” Mal’s eyes light up. “But all we need to do is get our heart rates pumping. Exertion will do it.” He grins. “Fancy an arm wrestle?”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

“I’m not leaving you,” Uriel said. “I let you down in Limbo, I know, but I won’t let you down again.” His expression was a mixture of determination and shame.

Oh God, did he think that was the reason I was sending him back? “Uri...” I grasped his hand and looked up into his face searchingly. “You did not let me down. That is not why I’m asking you to head back.”

“It isn’t?” He looked confused. “Then why?”

“I need you to let Grayson and Cora know what went down. They need to know the power is free, and they need to know what Keon and I are about to do in case...in case we fail. I need you to make sure that the power is doing what he’s meant to and that the Righteous keep their end of the bargain.” His shoulders dropped, and I lifted his hand and clasped it to my chest. “I need you to do this for me.”

“Of course,” he said. “But if you’re not back in a few hours, I’m coming after you. I’ll find a way into the Underealm.”

I believed him. I pushed up on my tiptoes, wrapped my arms around his neck, and hugged him, allowing his aura to roll over me. He went still, but I didn’t care. I needed this hug. He needed this hug. We all needed hugs, but then his arms were around me. Me, and he was hugging me back. My heart bloomed with joy.

“Keep her safe.” Uriel’s chest vibrated against me as he spoke.

“It’s what I do,” Keon said.

Uriel pulled back and looked down at me, his ember gaze a soft caress. “What *did* happen while we were unconscious?”

I kissed the corner of his mouth, savoring his magnolia scent, and then stepped away from him.

“I’ll tell you over coffee and donuts when this is all over.”

He gave me a pointed look as if to say, *I’ll hold you to that*, and then he winked out.

“Come on,” Keon said. “Night’s still young, and there’s blood to be shed.”

“Or you could just say we have saving to do.”

“I like my way better.”

Figured.



KEON MADE sure we approached the crossroads tavern from the opposite direction he believed Mammon’s men would arrive. We landed in the shadows by a creek behind the tavern and crouched in the darkness.

“Stay here,” Keon said. “Let me scope out the place.”

I nodded and he set off, moving so sinuously he was one with the shadows and I lost sight of him. How the fuck did he do that? I guess that’s what made him an excellent assassin.

Would I see him coming when I was his target?

No, don’t think about it. That day might never come.

But the squirm in my gut told me it would and that I was playing with fire and that I needed to stop moving forward with Keon and take several steps back. But that kiss...

The crack of a twig had my head whipping around to search the shadows behind me. “Keon?” I whisper-hissed.

A shadow rushed me, and my pending scream was cut off by a hand over my mouth. My instinct was to fight, and I inhaled through my nose, ready to do just that, and froze as my attacker’s scent permeated my senses.

My eyes grew hot, and I sagged back against him. He slowly removed his hand and gripped my shoulders gently.

My body trembled as I turned to face him. His sapphire gaze lit up as it scanned my face, and then the corner of his mouth turned up slightly.

“Hello, Fee.”



“Conah...” I swallowed the lump in my throat. “What are you doing here?”

“I received a message from Azazel. I figure the caravan will head this way.”

I nodded mutely.

“Is Keon with you?”

I nodded again. God, I’d forgotten how beautiful he was. I’d forgotten what his voice could do to me.

“Keon’s scouting.”

“Good,” Conah said. “I have a small group of men with me. We’ll get them back.”

I wanted to ask him how he was doing? I wanted to hug him, but the last words he’d said to me lingered in my mind.

He’d made it clear we wouldn’t be friends, that all we could ever be was colleagues.

I pushed back the emotions and tore my gaze from his face, fixing it on the tavern in the distance. I caught a flash of movement so quick I would have thought I imagined it if I didn’t know Keon was out there.

Conah sucked in a sharp breath, and I turned to find a dagger at his throat. He grimaced.

“I could have killed you,” Keon said. “I thought you were trained not to be distracted by the shiny stuff?”

Shiny stuff, as in me?

Conah dropped his gaze. “Keon, what did you find?”

“The caravan just pulled up. There are three carriages. I believe one holds the cadets, and the one laced with obsidian holds Azazel and Malachi. The final one must be for Mammon’s men.”

“The fact that Az and Mal haven’t broken free means they’ve been incapacitated,” Conah said.

Oh shit. “You don’t think they’ve been drugged with that stuff...The stuff they used on you last time?”

Conah pressed his lips together and nodded.

Shit. “Okay, so what’s the plan?”

“We cause a diversion,” Keon said. “Draw the guards to the tavern, and then one of us sets them free.”

“How many guards?” Conah asked.

“Six have been left behind to guard the two carriages. No sign of Master Luena; she may be in the carriage with the cadets. The rest of Mammon’s men are inside the tavern. I counted six more.”

“There had to have been more men,” Conah said. “They probably left by air.”

“So we create a distraction.” I looked from Keon to Conah. “What kind?”

Keon fixed his yellow eyes on me. “There are no females in the tavern.” Conah’s brows went up. “That could work.”

I was suddenly afraid to ask.



CONAH STEERED me into the musty, warm confines of the tavern and then wrapped his arm around my waist possessively, pulling me against him.

“Where do you think you’re going, woman,” he said boisterously. “You stay close.”

“Get off me.” I pulled away, glaring at him. “You don’t own me.”

“I paid good coin for you.”

“Fuck you. You can have your coin. I’m sure there are better demons in this place than the likes of you who’d willingly set me free.”

I looked about, zeroing in on the table to the left of the door, the one that housed Mammon’s men. They were dressed in black, cloaked, and trying to look inconspicuous, which made them stand out even more.

“You there!” I strode over to the table. “You’ll help me, won’t you?” I pouted prettily and fluttered my lashes at the nearest demon. His stern gaze softened a little. “Please, don’t let him take me. He has no idea how to please a woman.”

The demon’s companion nudged him.

These demons had no clue who Conah was. He wasn’t in the public eye like Azazel, and his features weren’t as distinctive as Keon’s.

“Please.” I made a grab for the demon closest to me and Conah hauled me back against his chest, wrapping his arms around me and nuzzling my neck.

“You’re mine.” There was a growl to his tone that sent a delicious shock through me.

Even though I knew this was an act, my body obviously hadn't gotten the memo because it reacted to his proximity like a moth to a flame by leaning into him.

Conah gripped me tighter, punishingly, reminding me what role I needed to play.

I gasped and pulled away from him. "Please," I pleaded with the demons at the table.

According to Conah, most demon males were instinctually programmed to protect females. Yeah, they could be chauvinistic at times, but females were prized, and the reasoning was that these rogues that worked for Mammon wouldn't be able to turn their backs on a demon female in need.

Sure enough, two of them pushed back their seats and stood. "Let go of her," one of them said.

The other pulled out a dagger. "Or we'll make you."

Conah gave me a squeeze as if to say, *it's on now*, and then he released me and stepped around me to face the demons.

"Oh?" he said. "You think you can take what's mine?" He drew his sword, obsidian and gleaming, and then grabbed my arm and tugged me behind him. "Come and get it."

This was the part I didn't like. The part where Conah took on six demons. But this was where part two of the plan came into play.

As the demons attacked Conah, I turned, grabbed a clay jug, and slammed it into another patron's head. He was huge, red-eyed, and pissed, and as he leaped to his feet with a growl, I shoved him into the table behind him. It started a ripple effect, and suddenly, everyone was on their feet, and the place was one big brawl.

I rushed to the door and flung it open. "Fight!"

I caught sight of movement by the carriage parked a few meters away, and then demons were rushing toward the tavern.

I backed up, eyes scanning the room, which was now in an uproar, to spot Conah blade to blade with one of Mammon's demons. I ducked through the fray, dodging fists to reach him. I came up between the two guys and punched the demon in the face.

His head whipped back, and Conah grabbed him and hauled him toward the exit. Shit, the other demons were pouring in. I shoved Conah against the wall. Pressing him to it while the rest of Mammon's men joined the brawl.

Fuck, it was as if the aggression was contagious, or maybe these demons just needed a reason, any reason, to kick ass.

The demon I'd punched groaned, coming to.

"Shit," Conah said. "Move."

We dragged the demon out of the tavern and into the night.

Keon was by one of the carriages, the one with no windows and huge wheels.

"I can't get in," he said. "My daggers won't cut it."

My scythe flared to life as I strode toward the contraption. We had minutes, if that, before the demons realized the brawl was a distraction.

My blade arced toward the carriage, but before I could slice it open, the wall cracked outward and blinding light seared my eyes. I blinked away the dots in time to see Azazel climb out of the aperture.

I rushed toward him, and he swept me up into his arms, crushing me against him with a sigh. I wanted to stay there in his arms, but there was no time.

I pulled away. "We need to move."

Mal took my hand, and we broke into a run, away from the tavern and across the road, headed for the tree line for cover. Keon and Conah lugged the demon who was barely semi-conscious. I think Conah may have punched him again.

We hit the tree line and kept going for long minutes. Mal tugged me along, his grip tight. I wanted to stop and hug him. To tell them both how fucking relieved I was to have them back, but we weren't out of the woods yet, pun intended.

"Can you fly?" Keon asked Azazel.

"I think the drug is mostly out of our systems, but I wouldn't risk a flight."

"This run should help metabolize," Mal said.

"There's a barn a quarter of a mile up ahead," Keon said. "We can regroup there."

We picked up the pace. I had my guys back, now all I needed to do was keep them safe.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

---

The barn was isolated and abandoned, but it kept out the worst of the chill, and the acres of land around it meant that the demon's screams wouldn't be heard by anyone but us. I stood by the doors as Keon worked on Mammon's man, unable to watch him slice and remove talons.

"Are you all right?" Mal asked, joining me by the doors to look out at the night.

I leaned my head against his shoulder. "I'm fine. What about you?"

"Better for seeing you." He slipped his arm around my waist. "For a moment there, I thought we were fucked. That I'd never see you again."

My mind drifted to Limbo, to my sacrifice. "You have no idea."

"Huh?" He nudged me to look at him. "What happened in Limbo?"

"Tons." I filled him in on the weird nature of the place, on the man, and on how Uriel had been captivated by the music. I told him about Keon and how he'd tried to kill me and what I'd done to bring him out of his trance.

"You kissed him." Mal's jaw tightened.

I licked my lips. "It felt...right."

He searched my face. "Fee...not him. Please tell me you don't have feelings for that creature."

I wanted to tell him exactly that, but the words wouldn't come. I shook my head. "Look, it doesn't matter. What matters is that the power is free. It was the man all along." I recounted what the divine power had told me. "So, the end of the worlds has been postponed."

Mal touched my face. "You offered your life?"

Ah, yeah, I'd glossed over that part, hoping he wouldn't dwell.

"Fee..."

I shrugged.

He looked pained. “When will you learn how much your life means to us? Did you even stop to consider what your loss would do to us?”

“I did. I considered it all, and I couldn’t sentence another soul to burn. It just isn’t who I am.”

He wrapped his arms around me and hugged me to his chest. “I fucking love you, Fee. More than I’ve ever loved anyone or anything. Please, don’t put yourself in the line of fire like that again.”

His tone was calm, but his heart was thundering against my cheek.

I slipped my hands up his back and clasped him to me. My breasts were squished against his hard torso. The contact was warming and soothing, and for a moment, I allowed myself to imagine we were back at quarters and everything was in order—no looming war, no quest for a queen, nothing but the regular grind.

Keon’s victim’s shrill scream of pain pierced my head.

I pulled sharply away from Mal, stomach churning as the scream tapered off into a gurgle. “How can he do it? Hurt someone so coldly?”

“He’s not Lilith’s Blade for nothing,” Mal said.

But I’d seen the vulnerable side of him, the soft side, the side that could save a life, not take it. “It’s just so brutal. He’s so brutal.”

“I have something,” Keon said from behind us. His tone was even and cold.

I looked at his blood-spattered face. He leaned his head to the side and regarded me evenly.

“He’s a grunt. Doesn’t know details but had a location. Something he overheard.” He dragged his attention from me to Mal. “The pit.”

“Fuck.” Mal blew out an angry breath.

“What? Wait...Weren’t the circles called the pit?”

“Maybe as a nickname a long time ago,” Mal said. “But the real pit is several hundred miles north from the keep. It’s a no-man’s land. Nothing survives there, and the air is toxic.”

“Sounds like the perfect place to hide out.”

Azazel and Conah joined us.

“We never considered it as an option,” Conah said. “Not many daemons or demons can process the air there.”

“Mammon obviously can,” Mal said.

“Lilith would be able to,” Keon said.

“And he could have the others on Limarax,” Conah said.

“Oh, shit,” Mal added.

“What’s Limarax?”

“A rare herb that can counter the effects of the toxic elements in the air,” Conah explained. “We’ll need to harvest and create a tincture.”

“How long?” Azazel asked.

“From what I recall, it can take a week to steep; that, coupled with the time it would take to locate and harvest...probably ten days to two weeks.”

Two weeks? “We can’t do nothing for two weeks.” I looked from Conah to Keon. “Mammon has Lilith. He could attack Imperium at any time.”

“We don’t have a choice,” Conah said. “We need the tincture to go after her.”

“I might not need it,” Azazel said.

Mal rolled his eyes. “You’re not a one-man army, Az. We need to play this smart.”

Azazel made a sound of exasperation. “Fortify the city and find plans of the pit.”

“I’ll get on it,” Conah said. “You should get back to quarters. Rest up, and I’ll send a phoenix when the tincture is ready.”

Azazel’s jaw clenched. “I’m not sure I can fly just yet.”

“Me either,” Mal said.

“I have a group of men stationed east of here,” Conah replied. “I’ll bring them to us. That should give the drug time to work its way out of your bloodstream, and then we’ll have an escort out of here.”

“You can’t go alone,” Mal said. “Mammon’s men are out there. They’re probably looking for us.”

“I’ll go with him,” Keon offered, wiping his bloody hands on his pants. He caught my eye. “I’ll take my brutality with me.”

Oh, shit. “Keon, I didn’t mean—”

“Yes. Yes, you did.” He shrugged. “But I’m fine with that. It’s who I am. You’d do well to remember that.” He turned and headed for the door. “I’ll deal with the body when I get back.”

The body? He’d killed the man?

He shot me a cold smirk over his shoulder, and then he was gone. He hadn’t needed to kill the man. He’d done it to prove something. To show me he was a killer. To push me away.

Conah was watching me with a focused expression, as if he was trying to decipher the interaction between Keon and me, and then his eyes flared.

“Fee...”

“Don’t. Just go and get your men.” I turned my back on him. I didn’t need his judgment.

He left, and I was alone with my guys.

“Fee?” Azazel said softly. “What the hell is going on?”

Azazel was waiting for an answer, and I didn’t have one to give him. Keon had gotten under my skin, and I hadn’t even realized.

I wasn’t ready to talk about it, because I wasn’t sure there was anything to talk about.

“She kissed him,” Mal supplied on my behalf.

Azazel’s nostrils flared. “Fee...”

“I did it to snap him out of a trance. He was trying to kill me at the time.” I waved a hand in the air. “I’m tired. I don’t want to talk about it again.”

Mal closed the barn door. “Sit down.”

Azazel pulled a crate across the room. “Here.”

They’d gone from being annoyed to nurturing in the span of a second, and I couldn’t help but be relieved.

I parked my butt on the crate. “I just want to go home now. Climb into my bed and sleep.”

“We could wrestle,” Mal suggested to Azazel.

“What?” I looked up at them in confusion. “Why would you do that?”

“Work the drug out of our system.”

The drug, of course...wait... “What about feeding? Would drinking blood help?”

Azazel and Mal stilled, and then both turned to look in my direction.

I’d take that as a yes. “So, um, who wants to go first?”

Azazel and Mal faced each other, fists out. Wait, were they about to—

Yes, they were going to play rock paper scissors. Oh boy.

Azazel won the first round, and Mal won the second, and then they drew on the final one. They went again, and this time Mal won.

Azazel inclined his head and walked out of the barn, leaving us alone. Feeding was an intensely private thing and often sexual in nature, but there was a dead body on the upper level of the barn, so there was no way this was going to get sexual.



But then Mal was crouched between my thighs, his hands on me, brushing my hair back to expose my throat and grasping the back of my head to tilt it to the side. I bit my bottom lip and closed my eyes in anticipation of his bite. It came a moment later, pain followed by the flood of endorphins that had me moaning softly. I gripped his shoulders and abandoned myself to the sensations rolling through me. My body heated, and my core tightened, expecting and needing more. I gasped as his hand found my breast through my shirt, thumb gliding and snagging on my hard nipple. He flicked it over and over, drawing on my neck.

“Mal. Fuck.”

He retracted his fangs, laved the wound, and claimed my mouth with the coppery tang of my blood and his sweet tongue. I wanted him inside me so bad it was painful. He broke the kiss, looking down on me with a dazed expression.

“When we get back home...”

I wanted to nod, but my neck refused to cooperate, so I settled for giving him a drunken smile.

“My turn,” Azazel said from behind Mal.

Mal released me, and Azazel took his place. But my soulmate didn't kneel. Instead, he lifted me into his arms and sat on the crate with me straddling his hips.

He cupped the back of my head. “Fee? Are you all right? Dizzy? Weak?”

“I'm fucking awesome.”

“Mal, what the fuck?”

“I can't control how she reacts to my endorphins,” Mal said.

Azazel made a sound of displeasure and focused on me. Damn he was pretty. Pretty eyes, pretty mouth, such fucking pretty hair.

Mal let out a choked laugh. “She thinks you're pretty.”

Wait, had I spoken out loud?

“Leave,” Azazel said to Mal.

I touched his bottom lip. “Kiss me.”

His pupils dilated, and his fingers splayed through my hair. He tilted his chin up and obliged. It was a soft kiss, tentative and testing. He was worried about me. I needed him to not be worried. I wanted him to take me.

I wrapped my arms around his head and deepened the kiss, opened for him. His arousal swelled between us, and I began to rock against it. My

body was still buzzing from Mal's feeding, every synapse on high alert, every sensation heightened. I was slick, wet, and hungry to be filled. I undulated against my soulmate, until I was swollen and throbbing and ready to come.

"Fuck." He tore his mouth from mine, fisted my hair, and yanked my head to the side. He bit me, hard.

I cried out, clenching my thighs around him as my body exploded in an orgasm. He fed on me as I rode the wave, rocking against him, reveling in his grunts and the vibration of his chest as he took what he needed.

He finally retracted his fangs and closed the wound with a sweep of his tongue, but he didn't pull away. He held me, hugging me to his huge frame for long blissful seconds as my body recovered from the orgasm.

"Well..." My voice was hoarse. "I was not expecting that to happen."

He pulled back slightly to look at my face. "A whole day and night," he said. "When we get back, you're mine for a whole day and night."

I wasn't going to argue with that.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

---

I rolled onto my back and stared at the familiar ceiling. It took a moment, but then it hit me. I was home. Back in my room at the Dominus quarters. The Beyond was restored, and we had a rough location for Lilith's whereabouts.

It was time for a rest.

The guys were here. My guys were back. I sat up quickly. I needed to shower and get on with the day. I needed to spend as much time with them as possible before I had to don my Loup hat and get back to Necro.

There was still the super vamp issue to resolve, and Hunter needed to be found. It wasn't fair to leave it all up to Grayson, but today... Today would be about Azazel and Mal.

The door opened, and Iza bustled in with a pile of fresh towels. She beamed at me and then hurried into the bathroom. I heard the tap come on.

Was that beautiful imp running me a bath? The scent of jasmine filled the air. Yes, yes, she fucking was.

"Iza, I love you."

"I know," she called back.

Last night, I'd flopped into my bed, dirty and exhausted. Flying, even without wings, was bloody exhausting. The concentration required to stay airborne was draining. Azazel and Mal had taken it in turns to carry me the latter half of the way back. I'd been too wiped.

I guess allowing them to feed off me hadn't helped. I must have fallen asleep straight after sending Cora a comm message. Shit. I checked now for a response.

**GLAD YOU'RE SAFE. ON THE CASE FOR MAGIGUARD. SEE YOU SOON?**

**COR**

I typed a message back.

**MEET YOU AT THE PACK HOUSE TOMORROW. TELL GRAYSON I LOVE HIM.**

My body was fully awake now, and my stomach rumbled.

Iza stepped out of the bathroom. "All ready," she said. "Masters Azazel and Malachi have said to meet them in the kitchen in half an hour for breakfast."

I threw off the covers. "Bacon. I need bacon."

She grinned up at me. "And you shall have it."

She left me to get ready. I climbed out of bed, and my foot hit something. A book. The journal Aunt Lara had given me. It was on the floor. Weird.

I picked it up and set it on the dresser. Time to strip off these icky clothes.



I BATHED QUICKLY, pulled on fresh clothes, and hurried to the kitchen. Voices drifted up the corridor to greet me, and my stomach fluttered in anticipation. I loved how the guys made me feel. How the excitement and chemistry never waned.

The smell of bacon was in the air too, along with the delicious aroma of coffee. I stepped through the doorway to find Azazel and Mal seated at the table and Conah by the stove.

He was scrambling eggs with his back to me, dressed casually like Azazel and Mal in joggers and a plain T-shirt. They all three looked like they'd just rolled out of bed. Mal had that sleepy vibe that made me want to crawl onto his lap, and Azazel's long silver hair was unbound and tousled, making me want to rake my hands through it, tip back his head, and claim his luscious mouth.

That luscious mouth tipped in a smile, and he pulled out a chair for me as I approached.

Conah's shoulders tensed slightly, telling me that he knew I was in the room, but he didn't turn around to acknowledge me.

Mal poured me a mug of coffee, adding milk and sugar just the way I liked it.

"A phoenix came with a message," Azazel said. "Addressed to you." He handed me the scroll that was lying by his plate. I hadn't even noticed it. "It's probably from Uriel."

I unrolled it.

**SERAPHINA DAWN,**

**YOU HAVE MY THANKS FOR GIVING ME MY FREEDOM. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT THE BEYOND IS IN REPAIR AND THAT THE SOULS YOU DELIVER WILL NOW FIND TRUE PEACE. I HAVE DISPATCHED CELESTIALS TO PURGATORY TO RELEASE THE REMNANTS TRAPPED THERE. URIEL WILL RETURN TO YOU SHORTLY. HIS TIME IN THE UNDEREALM HAS CHANGED HIM, AND HE NO LONGER BELONGS IN THE BEYOND. I TRUST YOU WILL ACCEPT HIM INTO YOUR FAMILY.**

**A HUMBLE SOUL.**

"It's not from Uri." I rolled up the scroll. "It's from the divine. He wants us to know that the Beyond is being repaired. He's sending Uri back to us and wants us to accept him into our family. I think what happened to him in Limbo changed him somehow."

The guys exchanged glances, and then Azazel cleared his throat. "Would you like it if he stayed here with us?"

Why was he asking in that tone of voice? Like he was offering me a candy bar or something. Wait...My cheeks heated. Did they think Uri and I...

"You like him," Mal said. "We both picked up on it, and we discussed how we'd feel if he...joined our family."

"He's a warrior," Azazel said. "And he's a good man. An honorable man."

"So..." Mal said. "Whatever happens..."

I ducked my head, my neck on fire. This was too weird, like my two lovers were setting me up with another guy, and then it hit me how hard this must be for them. I knew they loved me, but this...This selflessness made my heart ache. It made me wonder how I could ever crave more than them.

"It's all right," Azazel said. "Love doesn't diminish when you share it. It grows. All we ask is that you be honest with us."

Mal snorted. "Geez, Az, did you get that out of a greeting card? Look. Fee, we made a commitment to make you happy, whatever it takes."

"But I have to make you happy too and—"

"You do that by existing. We've lived long enough to know how rare what we have with you is. You've brought us together in a way we would never have imagined, and if you decide you want Uri to be a part of our family then so be it."

I had no idea what to say. I mean, I was pretty sure that Uri only thought of me as a friend.

Conah put a plate of bacon and eggs in front of me. "You should eat. Restore your strength."

He shot Azazel and Mal a pointed look.

I sat back and frowned. "You don't like Uri?"

Conah pressed his lips together. "Your relationships aren't my business."

"Then what?"

Mal sipped his coffee. "He's pissed we both fed off you."

"In hindsight, it probably wasn't the best idea," Azazel said.

"What gave it away?" Conah said sarcastically. "The fact that she could barely keep her eyes open on the flight back, or the fact she almost dropped out of the sky twice before that?"

It was weird to have him defending me, especially when I didn't need it. "I'm fine. Azazel and Mal take care of me, and I take care of them. It's how things work between us." My words came out sharper than intended in a clear back-off tone.

Conah's jaw tightened. "Of course. It's none of my business."

Mal winced in my direction as if to say, *ouch, Fee*.

Azazel didn't even flinch; he simply picked up the coffee pot and refilled his mug.

Conah nodded curtly. "I have messages to send."

He left the room.

Okay, now I felt bad. Conah was still healing from the loss of his soulmate Kiara. He was trying to be nice, and I'd snapped at him.

"I should go talk to him, right?" I looked from Azazel to Mal.

Azazel set his mug down. "Do you want to?"

The last thing Conah had said to me after Kiara was murdered was that he wanted nothing to do with me. That we would never be friends, only colleagues, but he wasn't acting like he wanted to be just colleagues...Did he want to be friends?

"I think I need to smooth things over."

Mal plucked a strip of bacon off my plate. "Fine. Eat first, then speak to Conah. You'll think better on a full stomach, and then you're mine for a few hours."

"I have to check in on my team," Azazel said, his mouth turning down.

I'd told him about his deputy Dillon's duplicity on the way back from the Underealm. He knew Cora was looking into the missing humans case. But I knew Azazel, and I knew that Dillon was in for some pain.

"I'll cook for us this evening," Azazel said.

"Oh, Az, you don't have to do that," Mal simpered.

Azazel shot him a flat look. "You'll be elsewhere."

"You know," Mal said, "you're taking this General thing a little too seriously." He said it good-naturedly, and Azazel's shoulders relaxed.

"You're right," he agreed. "We only have a couple of days before we need to head back and begin organizing the troops for a journey into the pit." He covered my hand with his. "I want to make the most of that time."

"So do I." I turned my palm up, so we were holding hands, then held out my other hand to Mal. "Today and tonight is about us."

Mal held up his mug. "I'll drink to that."



I FOUND Conah in the library, a room I hadn't visited since the first few weeks when Conah had been teaching me about all the different outlier species. We'd shared laughter here. Heated looks. But it felt like another time, like it had happened to another person.

Too much had changed. Too much had happened between us.

Conah looked up from the parchment he was scrawling on as I closed the door behind me.

“Hey.” I walked over to the table but didn’t sit. “Look, I’m sorry for snapping at you.”

He put his quill down. “No, Fee, I’m sorry. I said some awful things to you when Kiara died.”

“I get it. You were grieving. You needed someone to blame.”

“No, it’s more than that. I was guilty. I was in love with you, and I wanted you, and I wished so many times for a way out of my betrothal with Kiara, and then...She was gone.” He looked away, throat bobbing. “My wish was granted, but in the most awful manner.”

I stared at him, stunned by his confession.

“I was riddled with guilt and pain,” he continued. “But the cardinal helped me work through it. He helped me to accept that my wanting out hadn’t been what killed Kiara. Mammon did that. He was the only one to blame for her death.” He set down his pen. “I can’t help but wonder, though...if I’d left Kiara...if I’d broken off the engagement...would she still be alive?” He shook his head. “Not to be with you, of course...I know now that would never have happened.” His smile was sad. “You wouldn’t have hurt Kiara like that.”

He was right. I wouldn’t have. “We can’t dwell on the past. On what we could have done. We can only live with what we have done and move forward. Kiara was a wonderful woman, and she was a part of you, but she’s gone, and you need to continue to live. I want you to know that I’ll do whatever it takes to help you with that. If that means staying away from you, then so be it.”

He looked up at me, stunned. “No. No, Fee, I don’t want that. I want us to be friends like we could have been. Like we should have been. Can we do that? Can we start again?”

His words were a rock being lifted off my chest. “Yes. Yes, I’d like that a lot.”

His gaze lingered on my face for a moment longer, and then he dropped it to the parchment. “I should get these done.”

Shit. “Of course. Yeah. I’ll see you later?”

“I’m headed back to the Underealm tomorrow,” he said. “But once this is all over. Once Lilith is safe, maybe we can...I don’t know, catch a movie?”



He sounded so awkward saying it that I couldn't help but chuckle. "How about lunch at Lumiers instead?"

He looked relieved. "Sounds perfect."

I left him to his work and headed off to look for Mal. I was excited to spend the day with him. I was almost at the stairs when a hand snagged my elbow, and I was yanked into the storage closet Iza used to keep her cleaning supplies. It smelled of floral disinfectant and cinnamon.

Shit.

Keon's yellow eyes gleamed in the gloom as he pushed me up against the wall and pinned me in. He leaned in so his body was so close it might as well have been pressed against mine. His hand went to my neck, thumb on my jaw as he forced my chin up. Heat rushed from the tips of my toes to the top of my head.

"You tried to sacrifice yourself," he said.

Oh, crap. Mal must have told him.

"Asked that *thing* to end you..." His voice was a lethal purr.

The kind of voice you expected a villain to have just before he shoved a dagger in your gut, and the fact it was making me wet was a testament to my obvious insanity.

I kept my breathing shallow, not wanting my breasts to swell too much and brush against his pectorals, because any more contact and I would lose control.

"I did what I had to do, and Lilith is fine because I'm fine, okay?"

His eyes narrowed. "You think I'm worried about Lilith?"

His pupils dilated, huge, dark, and hungry, and then he kissed me. I gasped into his mouth and arched into him on reflex. His tongue was long and thick, and his kiss was a punishing rasp against my sensitive mouth. He kissed me like he was licking me out, and before I could stop myself, I was hooking a leg around his waist, sliding my hands up through his long locks and gripping his horns.

He growled into my mouth, and his chest began to vibrate. I held on as his hips began to move against me, his arousal at the perfect angle to drive me crazy. Pleasure was a wave rolling through me and setting me ablaze with yearning. His hands slid over my body, expertly kneading and squeezing to send lances of desire through me.

But just as suddenly as he'd attacked me with his mouth, he released me and backed away. His chest heaved, and there was no ignoring the huge tent

in his pants. His hand went to it, massaging it even as he kept his gaze fixed on my face.

My stomach flipped hard, and I took an involuntary step toward him, but he bolted, leaving me standing in the storage cupboard alone, like a creepy fool.

What the fuck was wrong with me? I didn't need another man in my life. I had three...four if you counted Hunter, although, with Hunter, it was going to take time to build the trust that I had in my other relationships.

Uri's face filled my vision. He was coming home soon...Home.

The guys would accept him, but Keon...I knew in my gut they wouldn't.

Guilt twisted in my chest.

I would be honest about what had happened with Keon just now.

I'd have to tell them how I felt.

What was the worst that could happen?



“WHAT. THE. FUCK?” Mal's jaw was tight, and his eyes were dark with anger.

I looked down at his hands curled into fists at his sides. “Mal...I...”

“No.” He breathed in and out through his nose and closed his eyes. “I'm going to kill him. Who the fuck does he think he is?”

He turned away, and I grabbed his arm. “Don't. Wait. Listen to me.”

Mal's chest heaved. “What is it? You feel sorry for him? What?”

“I—”

“It doesn't even matter. He doesn't touch you again. You stay away from him, and whatever you do, don't mention this *encounter* to Az. You get me?”

My face grew hot. “But—”

“The kiss in Limbo...” He caught his bottom lip between his teeth. “I thought that was just you doing whatever it took to save Keon's ass, but this...” He shook his head, emerald eyes sharp and cutting as they landed on me. “No. You need to put a cap on it. Now.”

My heart was pounding way too hard against my ribs, part indignation, part shame, and that sparked my anger. “I thought you guys wanted me to

be honest?”

He rubbed a hand over his face. “Fuck, Fee, of course we do, but this is Keon we’re talking about. He’s a fucking monster.”

My nape grew warm as the rising anger pinched my throat. “He’s not a monster. Just because he looks different—”

“Whoa.” Mal gripped my shoulders, his brows pinching. “This is not about the fact he’s a daemon. This is about the fact that he works for Lilith. He *will* kill you if she asks him to.”

He didn’t know the side of Keon I’d come to know. He hadn’t looked deep into the daemon’s eyes.

I bit the insides of my cheeks. “I don’t think he will.”

Mal’s face contorted in pity. “Fee...You don’t understand. He won’t have a choice. If she orders him to kill you, he will be compelled to do it. Keon is dangerous because he isn’t his own person. He’s a possession, and he already belongs to someone else.”

Oh, God...Keon... I hadn’t realized the extent of the chains that bound him. My chest ached for him. No wonder he’d bolted earlier.

“This isn’t fair.”

Mal’s smile was wry. “Life isn’t fair, Fee. Az, Grayson, and I swore to keep you happy, and all Keon can bring you is pain. Trust me. Don’t go there. He can’t be one of us because he can never put you first.”

I sucked in a breath and nodded. He was right. This was for the best, for me and for Keon.

I smiled, shutting down the feelings that were threatening to bloom for the beautiful blue daemon. “So, where are we going?”

He studied me for a long beat and then pulled me into a hug. “Come on. Let’s get the fuck out of here and grab some carbs.”

“I could kill for a cinnamon swirl.”

“I’ll buy you a whole fucking box.”

I should be happy. The Beyond was safe, which meant our world was safe. I wanted to be happy, to enjoy this time with my guys before they left for the Underealm, but there was a worm of dread in the pit of my stomach that told me there was something on the horizon. Not the war with Mammon. Not the search for Hunter or the super vamps or even the hooded figures. Something...else.

Something that lurked at the back of my mind.

Something that wouldn’t be beaten back so easily.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

CORA

The small office space looks like it's been disinfected and scrubbed. It's so clean I could probably eat my dinner off the floor.

"This is a waste of time," Jasper says from behind me.

I ignore him and carry on scoping out the place. It's a rental. The company who owns it says that it was leased for a month, but it looks like it's been empty forever.

The name and details the company have for the renters are duds. Ursula confirmed it twenty minutes ago, so I'm looking for clues. Anything that can tell me what the fuck happened to the humans that went missing.

"There is nothing here," Jasper says. "Except the stench of your desperation."

I want to tell him to shove it, but talking to him means acknowledging his presence, and I don't want to do that. I want him to piss off and leave me alone.

This is my fourth stop today. Four alarm locations, and all clean of any clues. Too clean, which suggests foul play. The human police have no idea about these locations, they think there's some kind of cult recruiting acolytes. I mean, this many people can't go missing without some kind of trace. There are no dead bodies, no sign of struggle or foul play, and then we have to consider the numbers—forty humans missing in two weeks. It's strange, and they have their people working on it.

But they won't solve it. Not without Magiguard help, and that's where I come in, except I don't have shit.

"You don't have shit," Jasper says, annoyingly echoing my thoughts.

I whirl to face him, angry words hovering on the tip of my tongue, and lose my train of thought because for a moment, I don't recognize him. He's wearing a black V-neck, long-sleeved top and black skinny jeans, paired with hiking boots, and his hair...He's gone and cut his hair, and now every angle and plane of his beautifully ruthless face are on display. His cruel mouth lifts in a thin smile.

"What's the matter, Cora? Cat got your tongue?"

Like hell. He can dress like us, walk and talk like us, but he will never be one of us. He's something else, something evil, and he's my curse.

"What are you doing here, Jasper? I didn't call for you."

His lip curls as he advances toward me. "I'm not a pet that needs to wait to be summoned."

I hold my ground, keeping my gaze locked with his cold one. "You don't intimidate me."

"No?" He reaches out to run his icy finger down the curve of my neck. "No, I don't suppose I do." My breath hitches at his touch. He leans in closer, crowding me with his taut body. "I excite you."

I clench my teeth to staunch the quiver in my chest and control the surge of heat in my blood and smile at him coldly. "You're a good fuck, Jasper, I'll give you that. But that's all you are."

I turn my back on him and close my eyes, expecting him to attack at any moment. Expecting his hand on my arm, waiting for the aggression that is his prelude to sex.

But it doesn't come.

He's still here, though. Still behind me. Watching me. What am I doing? Why am I even entertaining this fucked-up dance?

I turn to face him again. "What do you want, Jasper? Why are you here?" I'm not mad anymore. Just tired, and it bleeds into my tone.

The harsh lines of his face soften a fraction. "You're upset. Agitated. I came to check on you."

Check on me, my ass. He just wants to make sure his anchor to this world is safe. I'm just a possession to him, and why does that bother me?

"Yeah? Well, I'm fine. I'll be even better when you piss off."

He shrugs. "I'll see you tonight then." His eyes gleam, and desire shoots through me.

"Wear the blue panties and bra," he says. "I want you on all fours."

My body responds to his words by sending pulses to the apex of my thighs.

Urgh. I close my eyes. "Please leave."

When I open them, he's gone.

I take a moment to allow my heartbeat to slow to resting pace and then survey the room one final time.

Jasper is right. This is a waste of time.

Fuck, I hope Grayson's having more luck with his search for Hunter.



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



Grayson

“This is the place,” Bobby says from the passenger seat of the van.

I kill the engine and look across the street at the small American-style diner. Our search for Hunter has led us here, a half-hour drive from the pack house in Regency Pack territory. His credit card was used at a hotel a few minutes away, and according to the owner of the bed and breakfast Hunter stayed at, he’d come here.

“He stayed close,” Bobby says.

“Yeah, he did.”

The mating. Fee. He can’t help himself. I get that. I don’t like it, but I understand.

“Thank you for bringing me with you,” Bobby says for the third time.

He thinks I’m doing him a favor. I sigh. “You’re here because you’re smart and you’re diplomatic, and Hunter won’t be threatened by you.”

He nods. “I know. I’m still grateful for the opportunity.”

It hits me that maybe I need to look at Bobby’s role at the pack house. He’d been brought in as a grunt, but that was before...before Fee opened my eyes to the wrongness of it. Bobby is bright, and intelligence is a powerful weapon.

I pop the lock on the door and climb out of the van. The diner looks empty, but then breakfast has just finished, and it’s a weekday; most humans will be at work.

There are posters stuck to the windows advertising rental space and screaming that help is wanted. My gaze slides over a call for blood donations. The logo is strange—a snake eating its own tail.

The bell above the door rings as we step through. It smells of bacon, coffee, and muffins. There’s a waitress wiping tables and another behind the counter. They both stop to stare, and then they exchange glances and the one wiping tables beams at me and strolls over, hips swaying.

I stifle a sigh because I recognize flirty when I see it, and I’m in no mood, but I need information, and I’ve been told my smile has magical properties.

I relax my facial muscles and show her my pearly whites. “Hi, I was hoping you could help me.”

“Of course, anything.” She doesn’t even look at Bobby.

“I’m looking for a friend of mine. I believe he came here a few days ago.”

She makes an O with her mouth. “We get a lot of customers.”

“Oh, you’d recall this one,” Bobby says. “Tall, dark hair, intense dark eyes, and Adonis vibe, dripping with sex appeal...”

What the fuck? I stare at Bobby. Who is this person?

The waitress tears her gaze from me and focuses on Bobby with a grin. “Oh, yes, I remember him. Sweet guy.”

Sweet?

“He sat in booth four. He tipped well. He had three teens with him.” She winces. “They looked rough, like they’d been sleeping on the streets. He bought them breakfast, and I heard him call a shelter on their behalf.”

“Do you know which one?” Bobby asks.

She looks sheepish. “I think I may have heard him say Finley Street. It’s a couple of blocks from here.”

Thank goodness for nosy waitstaff. “Did he leave with the teens?”

“No, he left first. The teens left afterward, but they spent a while reading the posters on the window. I had to ask them to move on, they were blocking the door, you know.”

I nod. “Thank you.”

“Can I get you some coffee?” She beams up at me. “I’m on break in five minutes...”

It’s an invitation, and I allow my smile to drop. “No, thank you.”

“But thanks for the help,” Bobby says as I head for the exit.

“Excuse me,” the woman behind the counter says.

I look over my shoulder.

She smiles tentatively, her gaze flicking to the waitress before coming back to me as if she’s nervous about speaking.

“Yes?”

“They did leave with your friend. The teens did.”

“No, they didn’t, Mimi. He left first.” The waitress rolls her eyes.

Mimi ignores her, in what I sense is a small act of defiance, and focuses on me. “Your friend left first, but he was by his car across the street on his phone, and when Lisa asked the teens to move, they wandered over to him. They talked, and then he let them get in his car, and they left.”

“Thank you.” I smile at her, and she ducks her head, blushing.

“No problem. Glad to help.”

Back at the van, Bobby runs a search for the shelter's contact details. I tap my fingers on the steering wheel as he dials. Agitation runs through my limbs. The search for my twin and the absence of Fee, both grate on me.

She's back.

She came back yesterday, but she's with them.

I close my eyes and exhale. No, I won't let the jealousy, the possessive urge take control. She doesn't belong to me. She doesn't belong to anyone. Her heart is free to give to whomever she wishes. It's what Az, Mal, and I agreed, and I need to remember that.

Fuck, why didn't she come home?

"Thank you." Bobby hangs up the phone.

I realize that he's been having a conversation with the shelter that I've completely missed. "What did they say?"

"The guy who runs the shelter knows Hunter. He said he spoke to Hunter, who told him three teens would be dropping in. He made space for them, but they never showed."

"And Hunter?"

"He hasn't seen him."

This is the last spot Hunter was seen, and he left with the teens. Teens who may also be missing.

It has to be more than a coincidence.

It's also the end of our breadcrumb trail.

What the fuck do we do now?

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

---

I was insatiable when it came to Azazel. His touch evoked a hungry fire in my blood, the rumble of his voice teased a storm of emotions to life in my chest—longing, desire, and the undeniable urge to become lost in him, to become one with him. He made love to me like it was our first time, exploratory and deliciously slow, but also like it was our last time, with a searing passion that spoke of no tomorrow.

When we were alone together like this, limbs entwined, bodies slick with perspiration as we moved together, it was as if we'd been born for each other. Our soul bond flared and consumed us, pulling us into each other's heads, shattering the shields and melding our minds so that his emotions washed over me, his craven hunger became mine, and my desperate need to crawl under his skin became his. The connection throbbed and ached between us, heightening every sensation so I was putty in his hands.

His mouth slanted over mine, hips thrusting to meet mine over and over, slow, leisurely, and delicious. He swallowed my moans, one hand on my hip to hold me steady as he picked up the tempo, angling me so he was hitting the spot that undid me. I clung to him, desperate for more, for everything, for every inch, and when the world shattered we coasted the stars together, mouths inches apart, breath mingling.

We lay tangled together afterward, pulses thudding hard as the world melted back into place.

I stroked his chest, lingering over his abs and down to the V that held so much promise. He sucked in a breath and laughed.

“You are insatiable.”

“You love it.”

“I do.” He pulled me close. “I love you.”

I would never tire of hearing him say those words. I propped myself up and looked down into his face. “I love you more.” I would never tire of saying them either.

“How was your day with Mal?” he asked.

I grinned at him. “Oh, now you ask?”

He gave me his upside-down smile. “I’m feeling magnanimous now.”

I traced patterns on his chest. “It was good. We went ice skating, and we got some food, and then we came home.”

I left out the part about the shower sex. That part of our relationships remained private to each guy. They were happy to share me, but we had our own individual dynamic.

There was a knock at the door, and Azazel frowned. “What the fuck?”

“Are you decent?” Mal called out.

Azazel, bless his heart, pulled the covers up over me even though there was nothing on display that Mal hadn’t seen.

I clutched the sheet to my chest and bit back a smile as he called out for Mal to come in.

Mal entered the room, his nostrils flaring, attention zeroing in on me.

“Hey,” Azazel said. “Eyes on me.”

Mal gave him a look that said, *seriously?*

“What is it?” Azazel snapped.

My soulmate didn’t like his Fee time being interrupted. I gave Mal an apologetic look.

“We have to go,” Mal said. “Phoenix just arrived. Two troops close to Imperium have been attacked. Minuel is holding shit together by a thread.”

“Fuck.” Azazel shoved off the covers and started to dress.

“Conah’s coming too.” Mal looked at me. “And Keon.”

Azazel pulled on his shirt. “Keon? He’s supposed to keep Fee safe.”

“My first duty is to the queen,” Keon said from the doorway. I tensed, but he didn’t even look my way. “Keeping Fee safe is keeping Lilith safe. Now retrieving the herb is the main way to save Lilith. I’m the only one who can do that.”

He strolled into the room and leaned against the armoire by the door.

What the fuck? Was everyone going to come in and stare at my naked ass covered only by a thin sheet? Not that Keon was staring, in fact, he was actively not looking at me, which would be slightly insulting if I didn’t get

where he was coming from. Wait, that made me sound like I wanted him to ogle me.

Conah appeared behind Keon.

Mother of pink frosted donuts.

“The herb is in old daemon territory,” Conah said. His gaze flicked my way, and then he turned his back to the room. “We have no right of access. Lilith was unable to conquer the land there.”

“No,” Keon said. “She could have conquered it, but she chose to leave it.”

“And now you all need to leave my chambers,” Azazel said.

They trooped out of the room, and Azazel closed the door, shaking his head. “I’m sorry. That was...weird.”

My heart sank as I realized they’d all be leaving me. “Be safe out there, please.”

He sat on the bed by my hip and brushed my hair off my cheek. “Will you be all right by yourself?”

“I’ll be fine. I’m going to sleep, and then I’ll head to Necro.”

He nodded. “Good. Stay with the pack. With Grayson.”

He kissed me lightly on the mouth. “I’ll see you soon.”

I curled back up in his bed and crushed the sheets to my nose, inhaling his scent. It wasn’t long until sleep took me.



“FEE!” My teeth rattled as someone shook me.

My eyes snapped open and chill registered, seeping into my bones. Uri’s amber eyes blazed bright as they peered at me. My attention slipped over his shoulder, stunned by the huge silver-white wings cutting a silhouette against the night sky.

His wings.

He had them back.

“Fee, can you hear me?” Uri demanded.

What was this? How was he here? Where was I? Reality filtered through the haze clouding my mind.

I was outside...I was standing on the edge of the pinnacle, barefoot and in my underwear.

What the actual fuck?

Uri scooped me up and carried me toward the open doors into the quarters.

I found my voice. “What happened?”

His jaw was steely as he walked me down the corridor and into the kitchen, and the part of me wondering how the hell he knew where to go was squashed by the bigger part that was still reeling over the fact that I’d been outside in my knickers and bra.

He set me in a seat and busied himself at the stove.

I was suddenly conscious of how naked I was.

As if reading my thoughts, he pulled his shirt over his head and handed it to me, keeping his gaze averted.

I slipped it on gratefully. It was warm from his body heat and smelled of magnolia; it also covered my ass, so that was good.

“What happened? How did I get outside?”

He put the kettle on, then pulled up a chair to sit in front of me. “I don’t know,” he said. “I flew here, and I saw you on the pinnacle...Fee, you walked straight off the edge.” He scanned my face. “I caught you and flew you back up.”

I’d stepped off... “Oh, my God.”

“Fee...What were you thinking?”

Wait...He thought I’d done it on purpose? “No. Fuck, no. I was sleeping. I...I don’t know...” My head felt heavy and strange. “Uri...”

“Sleepwalking?”

“I don’t sleepwalk.”

He pursed his lips as if to say, *you do now*.

The kettle boiled, and he set about making tea. “This will help.”

“Tea makes everything better, huh?”

“It’s what I hear.” He gave me a small smile, but his eyes were sharp, shrewd, as if he was assessing me.

I clasped my hands and squeezed. This was real. I’d done this. I’d jumped off the pinnacle while asleep.

“I was asleep, Uri.”

He handed me a mug. “Drink up. It’s decaf, so it won’t keep you up.”

“I don’t want to go back to sleep. What if I try and walk off the pinnacle again? I mean, why would I do that?”

“I don’t know,” he said softly. “But you’ve been under a lot of stress. You almost died at Deadside, then you went to Purgatory and then Limbo. It’s a lot. Trauma can cause psychological problems.”

“So, I try and sleepwalk myself off a ledge?” I gave him an incredulous look. “I’m not suicidal.”

“I know.” He took my hand in his, his face earnest. “And I’m here now. I’ll make sure you’re safe.”

I wanted to say I could take care of myself, and maybe that was true when I was awake, but I obviously couldn’t be trusted when asleep, and something about Uri saying he’d keep me safe gave me warm fluffy vibes. The fact that his bare chest was staring me in the face didn’t help. I couldn’t stop looking at his golden skin and the way it stretched over his muscles.

“Drink the tea, and then you need to sleep.” He reached up and touched my cheek lightly. “You have dark circles under your eyes.”

His touch sent a shiver through me, but I masked it with an indignant look. “Not nice to point out a woman’s flaws.”

He gave me a half-smile. “I didn’t mean it that way. I think you’re beautiful, no matter what.” He ducked his head.

He thought I was beautiful? “Thank you.”

He peered up at me with a sheepish squint. “I...I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“You didn’t.” His eyes were speckled with golden flecks I’d never noticed before, and his pupils were super dark against the irises. They expanded so I could see myself in them. “Will you stay with me while I sleep.” My words came out as a husky whisper. I cleared my throat and sat back to clear my head. “I mean to watch over me?” Wait. “Oh, unless you need to sleep. I mean, do celestials sleep?”

He sat back with a small amused smile, probably elicited by my obvious fluster. “Celestials don’t need sleep, but we do indulge from time to time.”

“You’ll sleep with me then?”

His gaze fell to my lips for a second before he tore it away.

Fuck. “That came out wrong, I mean—”

“I know what you mean. And yes, I’ll sleep with you.”

My stupid mind focused on the words *I’ll sleep with you*, and heat crawled up my chest and hugged my neck. I took a gulp of hot tea to cover my sudden shyness and bit back a wince. “What happened at the Beyond?”



I glanced over his shoulder to the spot where his wings had been a little while ago. “You got them back?”

He sat back in his seat. “*He* gave them to me, and then he told me to leave.” Uri clasped his hands together. “I’m too tainted for the Beyond.”

“He said that?”

“He didn’t have to. I saw the pity in his face. He told me I could best serve by working with you.”

“The Dominus?”

“No, you specifically.” Uri’s expression was warm. “He likes you, and he wanted you to know you can come visit him any time.” He leaned his head to the side. “What happened, Fee? What happened between you two in Limbo?”

I took a gulp of my tea and then proceeded to fill him in.



I PADDED over to the bed and kicked something on the floor. The damn journal again. It must have fallen onto the floor when I went sleepwalking. I popped it back on the dresser and climbed into my bed, already sleepy again. I guess the sleepwalking had exhausted me, not to mention the lecture Uri had given me on sacrificing my life to save him.

Yeah, he hadn’t been happy about that part.

“I’ll keep watch,” Uri said. “Just sleep.”

There wasn’t anywhere for him to sit aside from the dresser chair, which wouldn’t be very comfortable. I mean, he wasn’t exactly delicate, and that chair was tiny.

I patted the bed beside me. “Come lie down.”

He hesitated. “I’ll be fine on this chair.”

I gave him an *are you kidding me* look. “I promise not to compromise your virtue, okay.”

He looked like he wanted to say something but decided against it.

I gave him a stern look. “I’ll sleep better knowing that you’re comfortable.”

He nodded and approached the bed, kicked off his boots, and then stretched out beside me, making sure to leave a gap between us. I was tempted to shift closer and throw an arm across his torso, but I held back.

We were friends, that was all. My deepening feelings for him didn't mean he reciprocated, and the last thing I wanted to do was make shit awkward. Besides, I was knackered.

I closed my eyes and exhaled, falling into slumber.

I awoke what seemed like minutes later to predawn light and the steady thud of a heartbeat against my ear. Uri lay on his side, his arms around me, his chin resting on my head while I remained tucked snugly against him, my arm around his waist and my head on his chest. I didn't want to move. Didn't want to risk waking him because his deep, steady breaths told me he was asleep, but my body was buzzing from being this close, from the intoxicating effect of his aura. I wanted to rub myself against him like a cat, to lick his naked chest and take his nipples in my mouth. Oh, fuck. He was there, right there, exposed for me to have.

Nope.

Not doing it.

I wriggled, trying to slip out from his embrace.

He moaned softly, and then my pulse skipped as his hands slipped into my hair. He nuzzled my temple, then trailed the tip of his nose down my cheek, and I stopped breathing. His exhalation was warm, and his moan heavy with sleep, but I was awake, aware, and totally turned on.

I needed to put distance between us. He didn't know what he was doing, and it was wrong of me to take advantage, but instead, I lifted my chin so that my lips grazed his jaw. He smelled divine, like magnolia and honeysuckle, like sunshine and rainbows, and now I needed to back off.

I pulled away, and his grip on me tightened.

"Seraphina..." One of his hands slipped down my spine to cup my ass and haul me against him, and what met me there gave me no doubt as to whether he was awake or not.

"Uri?" I looked up and was snared in his amber eyes filled with heat, longing, and need. "Uri..."

He cupped my jaw with his hand, tipped my chin up with his thumb, and kissed me deeply. His lips were pillowy soft, molding to mine perfectly as he claimed my mouth. He tasted of marshmallows and sunshine. My mouth was alive with sensation, tingling and throbbing as I kissed him back, hands raking up through his hair to grasp him to me, leg sliding over his hips so our bodies were flush against each other. He breathed me in, devouring my mouth. His hands left a trail of heat in their wake as they

roved down my back and slipped under the hem of the T-shirt I was wearing. I gasped as his palm met my bare flesh.

He tensed and then pulled away, closing his eyes and shaking his head. “I’m sorry. I—” He climbed off the bed and stood with his broad back to me, hands on his slender hips as he composed himself.

“I’m sorry,” he said again. “I crossed a line. It won’t happen again.”

Thing was, I wanted it to. Mal and Az had called it before I had. But Grayson was clueless.

I wanted Uriel, but there was no way I could take that step without talking to my Loup mate about it.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER TWENTY

---

The time change from day to night when going from the Underealm to Necro didn't bother me anymore, but there were times, like today, when it was jarring to leave one place in the morning and arrive at another as the sun was about to set.

But Cora's embrace dispelled the surreal sensation and grounded me. She gave the best hugs, and tonight was no different.

"Hey, Uri." She beamed at him, then looked past him. "Where are Az and Mal?" she asked.

"They had to go back to the Underealm."

"Shit went down, huh?" She nodded.

"Yeah, I'll tell you all about it later." I glanced about, and she grinned.

"He's not here."

"Who?" I affected innocence.

"Grayson. He's on a Hunter hunt."

"You'll need to tell him about the sleepwalking," Uri said. "So he can watch over you at night."

Because here, at the house, Grayson was my bed mate. I'd need to speak to my mate and let him know about my feelings for Uri, and my stomach trembled. Azazel and Mal may have given me the green light, but Grayson hadn't.

"What sleepwalking?" Cora asked.

"It's nothing." I waved it off, not wanting to talk about the fact I'd jumped off the pinnacle. "I'm fine."

Uri glared at me, and I winced.

"Uri?" Cora looked to him.

Uri arched a brow in my direction. “Fee?”

“Fine, so I sleepwalked off the pinnacle last night.”

“What!” Cora stared at me in horror. “You walked off it? But...how?”

“Uri caught me.” I smiled up at the celestial. “I was lucky he turned up when he did, and then he watched over me while I slept so I wouldn’t sleepwalk again.”

Uri’s amber gaze warmed me like honey as it tracked across my face, and the memory of his mouth on mine had my cheeks heating.

Cora cleared her throat. “Um, Fee...I need some help with... stuff.” She grabbed my hand and tugged me across the room toward the lift.

“Make some coffee,” she called out to Uri. “We’ll be right back.”

She hit close on the lift doors and then crossed her arms and glared at me. “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“You and celestial boy out there. Something happened between you, didn’t it?”

I could never get anything past Cora. “We kissed, but that’s all. I wouldn’t take it further, not without the guys agreeing to it.”

“You’re going to speak to them, though, right?”

“Mal and Az have already given me the green light with Uriel, but I thought they were being ridiculous. I mean, I have feelings for Uri, but I thought he saw me as a friend.”

“Friends don’t kiss with tongue,” she said. “Wait, there was tongue, right?”

I covered my face.

“Omg, you’re fucking blushing. What the hell? You don’t blush.”

“I know!”

She grinned. “So, this is the Uri effect.”

The lift opened, and she led us down the corridor toward her room. “And Grayson?”

“I need to speak to him.”

She pushed open the door, and I stepped into an explosion of pink and purple. “You...decorated.”

She shrugged. “Grayson said it was cool, and I spend so much time here.”

Did that mean she wasn’t leaving?

She pressed her lips together. “I know I said I needed to spread my wings, and I will. That doesn’t mean I can’t put my mark on this place.” She threw herself onto a beanie chair. “What will you say to Grayson about Uri?”

“I’ll tell him I have feelings for Uri.”

“How do you think he’ll take it?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. Az, Mal, and Grayson have an understanding. They came together for me, and Hunter...we have no choice about him because he’s part of our Tribus.”

“You’re worried Grayson will reject the idea of Uri.”

“Yeah. I wouldn’t blame him if he did. I mean, he’s an alpha Loup, and they don’t share, and I can’t help but feel like a selfish bitch for asking.”

“At least you’re not banging first, asking questions later,” Cora said. Her expression sobered. “Mal and Az are okay with it, but what if Grayson says no.”

I ignored the tightness in my chest. “Then, no. I won’t go there with Uri. I’ll add some distance so that this thing blossoming between us can’t flourish. Right now...Right now, we’re on a precipice. I can allow myself to fall or turn and run the other way.”

“You’re right, babe. Grayson has resolved himself to Mal and Az. I guess his Loup can accept them because they were with you first, a part of your life, like a package deal.”

I covered my face. “Why am I such a hussy?”

She sighed and pulled me into a hug. “You’re not a hussy. You have a lot of love to give, and you just happen to have found several guys you have a strong connection with. Just be prepared for resistance from Grayson. He won’t like this. It’ll take time for him to adjust, but I can’t believe for one moment he’d make a decision that would make you unhappy.”

“And I won’t do anything to hurt him.” Which made me wonder. “Am I being selfish for even asking?”

“No, Fee,” she said. “You’re being true to yourself. Too many people sacrifice their happiness for others, and as long as you don’t expect the men you love to sacrifice their happiness, then there’s no harm in wanting more.”

“And what if they want more?” The thought made my chest ache. It made me wonder how they could share me when the thought of sharing them made me want to cry. “Oh, fuck, I am selfish.”

“Stop it!” Cora said. “You went through shit for these guys. You were hurt, and you got back up, your heart was battered, but you carried on, and now when they’ve finally come to an arrangement to share your heart, you’re doubting it?” She cupped my shoulders. “Your problem is that deep down, you always think you’re not worth it. But you are. So shut the fuck up and accept the love you’re offered. Trust me, if any of the guys ever feel they can’t hack it anymore, they’ll let you know.”

She was right. Of course, she was right. “I’ll speak to Grayson as soon as he gets back. I have to be honest, whatever the outcome.”

She studied my face. “Damn, Fee, you need more sleep. You have dark circles under your eyes.”

“I did sleep. A lot.”

“I think Cyril must be doing the same. I haven’t seen him in days.”

Come to think of it, neither had I. “You know what...I think Keon left without Delphine. I think her and Cyril are holed up somewhere here. He did say something about nesting.”

Cora sighed. “Even the fucking python is getting some love. He’ll show up when he’s ready. Come on, let’s get you some healthy food.”

We headed for the door. “How is the Magiguard mission going?”

“It’s not. I’ll tell you all about it later, and you can fill me in on the Underealm escapades.”

We headed back downstairs and stepped out of the lift into an atmosphere charged with tension. I smelled Grayson before I saw him. He was standing in the kitchen, face to face with Uri, lip curled, husky eyes in Loup shift mode.

“Answer me,” he said. “Why do you have Fee’s scent all over you?”

Uri kept his hands loose at his sides, his stance non-confrontational. “I slept in her bed.”

Oh fuck.

Grayson’s chest rumbled in a growl. He was about to attack. I ran across the room, and his head whipped my way. I skidded to a halt, my Loup instinct warning me to back away. He strode toward me, and the alpha in me kept me rooted to the spot in defiance. His nostrils flared, and then I was scooped off my feet and slung over his shoulder.

Heat coursed through me as my Loup recognized her mate, acknowledging the fact he wouldn’t hurt her, but the demon and the human

sides of me trembled with fear. Because this was rage. This was crazy. And Grayson was in their grip.

I barely registered the lift ride, and then we were slamming into our chambers, but he didn't stop there, he took me straight into the bathroom and set me down.

"Grayson?"

He wouldn't look at me. Instead, he turned on the shower.

"Grayson, look at me."

"Take off your clothes and wash him off you," he growled through clenched teeth. "Do it now, please, Fee, before I lose my shit and tear his head off."

I wanted to explain that he had the wrong end of the stick. That Uri and I had only slept together, not *slept* together. But he was on a knife's edge, the beast warring for control, and I needed to remove the trigger.

I stripped quickly and got under the spray of water. His shower gel was at hand, so I lathered up and began to wash, heart thundering in my chest like an epic storm.

So far, I'd seen many sides of Grayson, but this...This was new. It was frightening and exhilarating, and I was so totally fucked up. I caught movement through the frosted glass of the cubicle, and then Grayson slid back the door and stepped in with me. He pushed me up against the wall and pressed the length of his powerful body to mine.

"You fucked him?"

"No. I didn't."

"He reeks of you. He said he slept with you."

"He did sleep with me. *Sleep*, Grayson, not fuck. I sleepwalked off the pinnacle, and he saved me. He was making sure I didn't do it again." I kept my gaze locked with his. "We kissed. That's all. Nothing else happened. I wouldn't take that kind of step without speaking to you first."

He gripped my jaw and forced me to look up at him. "But you want him. Your heart wants him."

"I care about him...More than a friend."

His chest rumbled. "And if I say no. What if I say you can't have him?"

I swallowed the lump in my throat and blinked back hot tears. "Then I'll understand, and I'll let him go."

His harsh, punishing expression softened. "Dammit, Fee." And then he kissed me.



I was expecting a punishing kiss, bruising even, but it was soft and pleading and filled with longing.

I wound my arms around his neck and pushed up on tiptoe to kiss him back properly. He tasted of bacon and coffee and something sweet I couldn't put my finger on. I devoured his mouth with teeth and tongue, raking my fingers through his wet hair and pulling him closer. The water battered against our skin, blocking the world out as he hoisted me up, wrapped my legs around his waist, and entered me. A gasp tore from my throat as he filled me, and he pulled back to lock gazes with me. His hand went to my nape, gripping firmly.

"Mine," he growled. "Say it."

"Yours." My voice trembled with need as he flexed inside me. "Grayson, please."

"Please, what?"

"Fuck me, dammit."

His gaze dropped to my lips, and he rolled his hips against mine.

My moan barely kissed air before he captured my mouth in a bruising kiss. And then he began to thrust, hard and fast, pressing me up against the tile, trapping me there and branding me with the heat of his arousal. This was a claiming our Loup understood, and my body spiraled fast, eager, and ready for release.

"Mine," he growled in my ear as he came. "Mine."



"I WANTED TO HURT HIM," Grayson said. "I would have torn him to shreds and I don't think he would have fought back." He shook his head.

"He's a good guy."

"I know that, but the beast doesn't care about how good a guy is if he's carrying its mate's scent."

"I'm sorry I put you in that position." Guilt was a boulder on my chest bringing tears to my eyes. "I feel awful."

He gathered me to him and kissed the top of my head. "Don't. This thing we have, it's new to us all. We're all adjusting and learning, but the premise hasn't changed. We all love you, and we want to make you happy."

I pulled back. "But I made you unhappy. That isn't fair."

“I wasn’t unhappy. I acted on instinct. Loup don’t like to share.”

“But you do it for me.” I stared at him in wonder. “You all give yourselves to me fully, and it’s time I do the same. No more. Our family is complete, and my heart belongs to you guys. There will be no one else.”

He sighed. “Fee, that isn’t how it works. You can’t shut off your heart. We know that, and if at any time we can’t cope, we’ll let you know, but thank you.” He twisted a tendril of my hair around his finger. “If this thing with you and Uriel matters, if you have a connection, then I’ll accept it. But when you’re here with me in our pack house you’re my mate. You can’t come here reeking of another male. The pack won’t stand for it.”

He had a point. “It won’t happen again. I promise.” I snuggled against him and closed my eyes. “I thought I’d lost you for a moment.”

“You’ll never lose me,” he said. He stroked my hair. “But I’m worried that if we don’t find Hunter soon, we might lose him.”

I sat up. “You have a lead?”

“We did, but it went cold. I think he’s in real trouble, and as much grief as he’s given me in the last decade, all I want is to have him home.”

“It’s the Tribus, isn’t it?”

He nodded. “There’s more. Petra did some research on the Tribus. It isn’t as simple as we thought. The female Loup in a Tribus must mate with each male in human and Loup form to seal the Tribus. You’ve mated with me in human form and Hunter in Loup. If we don’t find Hunter soon, if we don’t complete the Tribus, the Loup who hasn’t completed the mating will die.”

I ran my hands over his chest. “But I haven’t mated with you in Loup form yet. Does that mean—”

“Yes.”

I climbed off the bed. “Get up. We need to go, now.”

He sat up, his expression confused.

I swallowed a sob. “Dammit, Grayson. You need to mate with me as a Loup. I can’t lose you. I won’t.” I took a shuddering breath. “I’m worried about Hunter, of course, and we need to find him, but we do this first. Once we’ve made sure you’re safe, we’ll reach out to Hunter. If we do it together, maybe we can find him in the Vista.”

Hunter was my mate too, but I loved Grayson. I loved him with every fiber of my being, and right now, if I had to choose between him and Hunter, he’d win, hands down every time.

I held out my hand and he grasped it, allowing me to tug him out of bed.  
“Now. We do it now.”

He grinned down at me, his expression feral and hungry. “I know a place we can run.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

“I t’ll be fine.” I pat Uri’s shoulder. Ooh, he has some muscle going on there. “Fee and Grayson will sort it out.”

He stands with his palms braced on the table, his expression stony. “This is my fault. I should go speak to them and—”

“Nope. No, you do not want to do that right now.”

“She’s right,” Dean says. He flicks the kettle on, then leans back against the countertop, arms crossed over his chest, biceps bulging enticingly. “Have some tea, sit.”

Uri pulls out a chair and does just that, but he looks troubled. “I should have known better than to come in here with an alpha mate’s scent on me.”

Dean grabs mugs and makes tea. “They’ll work it out.”

The confidence in his tone gives me hope. I know how much Grayson means to Fee, and I know how much Uri is starting to mean to her, but it isn’t my place to matchmake. Not when it comes to the delicate dynamic of Fee’s relationships.

I don’t envy her, that’s for sure. Three guys are a lot to handle. I’ll be happy with one.

My gaze flicks to Dean again, and I catch him watching me, and the urge to walk over to him and kiss his sexy mouth rushes through me.

Instead, I step away from the counter. “I’m going to shower before dinner.”

I head upstairs to my sanctuary and straight into the bathroom. The shower is temperamental in this room, one of the reasons no one has claimed it. There’s no tub, just a stall, but I haven’t had any issues with it.

Until today.

It clanks and clunks but nothing more. No water. Not a drop.

Fuck.

I stride out of my room and smack bang into Dean. He grabs my shoulders to steady me.

“You okay?” His rumbling voice sends shivers down my spine.

“My shower won’t work.”

“Use mine.”

He makes it sound so easy, but to me, it means being naked in his room. Okay, so it’s in his bathroom, but still. Naked.

He’s looking at me with a slight smirk as if he can read my mind, and I’ll be damned if I let on that the idea of showering in his room gives me tingles down there.

I nod curtly. “Thanks.”

He strides off, and I follow.

His room is dark wood, beige and brown throws, and cedarwood scent. No, don’t focus on the bed. I head straight into the bathroom, turn on the shower, strip, and get in, and then realize I forgot my fucking clothes.

Shit. I shower quickly, using his shower gel that smells of...well, him. And then wrap a towel around my body and tentatively open the door. My plan is to make a mad dash to my room, but I’m confronted with Dean’s naked back. He’s stripped off his shirt and is doing bicep curls with some weights.

Macho thing to do, but does he have to do it now?

I tiptoe out of the bathroom, intending to slip by him.

“You forgot to bring clothes,” he says.

Fuck. I cross my ankles, holding the towel close. “Yeah. I’ll just go get changed in my room.”

He’s looking at me as if he wants to strip me with his gaze, and I’m tempted to drop the towel. I mean, why the fuck not? I want him, and he looks like he wants me.

He scoops his T-shirt off the bed and prowls closer. Heat skates over my body at his proximity.

“You still owe me a date,” he says, his voice low and intimate.

“Oh, the Italian place?”

“Yes, although right now, I’m tempted to forgo the date and fast forward to afters.”

“What makes you think there’d be afters?”

He smiles, his dark gaze sweeping over my face and lingering on my mouth. "A Loup can only hope."

I'm so focused on his face, the neck of his shirt is over my head before I realize. He urges me to thread my arms through and then surveys me with satisfaction.

"I like you in my clothes." He reaches up to touch my mouth lightly with the tips of his fingers. "I like you a lot, Cora."

My heart melts, and I bridge the distance between us, grab his nape, and pull him in for a kiss. Stubble rasps at my skin, a contrast to the softness of his lips as they slant over mine.

He tastes like sweet coffee, and I tip my head back, throwing myself flush against him to deepen the kiss. His hands slide into my wet hair, fisting and holding me captive as he plunders my mouth. Heat spirals down to the apex of my thighs, wet and throbbing.

"Cora?" My name is a question slipped in between kisses.

I know what he's asking. "Yes."

He tugs the towel down, leaving me bare underneath the T-shirt. Yes, I want him to touch me, to slide his hands under the cotton and skim his palms over my skin.

I want his fingers, his mouth, and his cock.

I grind against it now, letting him know just how much I want him.

Ice blasts the backs of my legs, and then I'm yanked away from Dean.

He stares over my shoulder in stunned horror, and then thunder clouds his expression. "What the fuck?"

Jasper hugs me to him, his arms bands of steel. "Not tonight," he bites out. "Tonight, her wet cunt is mine."

Dean takes a menacing step toward us and stops, immobilized by Jasper's power. "Let her go," he demands.

Jasper's grip on me tightens so that the ridges of his abs are pressed into my back.

"Oh, but we have a deal, Cora and I. She traded her body to help her *friend*, and tonight it belongs to me."

Dean's face wrinkles in disgust; it's a fleeting expression, but I catch it before he can smooth it over. My throat seizes up.

Dean's eyes widen as if he's realized his faux pas. "Cora...I..."

I turn my face away. "Let's just go."

I can't look at him. Not anymore.



WE MATERIALIZE in my room in the pack house. Jasper releases me abruptly, and I stumble forward, righting myself stiffly. My limbs are hot with fury, and my eyes burn with the threat of tears of shame.

I face him, lifting my chin and meeting his piercing eyes. “You want my cunt, huh? You want to fuck me because of our deal. Fine. Let’s get it over with then.”

My chin wants to tremble, but I clench my jaw. Like fuck will I cry.

I grab the hem of Dean’s T-shirt and make to tear it off. Jasper blurs, and then his fingers are around my wrist, holding me immobile. Holding the T-shirt down.

“What?”

He grips my jaw with his free hand and pulls me closer, so our mouths almost touch. “Stop it,” he says. “Stop crying.”

I blink back tears. “I hate you.”

His mouth turns down, and his eyes darken. “I know.”

And then he’s gone.



# CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

**G**rayson and I returned to the pack house exhilarated but exhausted. The world was turning gray when we climbed back into bed with the night scents clinging to us. We curled around each other, skin moist with dew.

“Are you ready?” Grayson asked, his voice already thick with sleep.

I ran my fingers through his hair and kissed his jaw before snuggling close. “I am.”

We drifted off together, bodies entwined, and slipped into our Vista.

It was a moonlit night as always in our special place. A time for us to run, play, and be free, but not tonight.

Tonight, we needed to find Hunter.

Grayson shook himself and jerked his nose up into the air. I did the same, searching for Hunter’s scent and listening for his howl.

All was silent, and his absence was a gaping wound.

*We need to go to his spot,* Grayson said.

I nodded and then set off. The route was engraved into my soul, and I took the trail quickly, weaving through trees and leaping over logs, paws crunching on bracken. The moist earth and the woodland creatures that lived here wouldn’t be a distraction to me tonight.

The clearing came into view up ahead, and my heart leaped with hope, expecting to see Hunter sitting on his rock looking out at the lake, his dark coat kissed by silver rays, but the rock was empty.

Grayson prowled forward, sniffing the earth until he was at the base of Hunter’s rock, and then he stopped and stared.

*Fee, look.*

I joined him and studied the markings clawed into the stone. A symbol, a circle scratched into the surface by desperate claws.

*It looks like a snake,* Grayson said.

*A snake eating its own tail.*

*I know this symbol,* Grayson said. *I've seen it.*

I turned to him to ask where he'd seen it, but a wind howled in my ears, and then a strange voice filled my head.

"Now, do it. Do it now."

Grayson and the Vista faded away, and darkness flooded my mind.

One more step. Just one more.

My feet shuffled forward. Feet, not paws. Wait, what was happening?

"NO!" the disembodied man screamed.

The darkness rushed away, and then I was looking out at the city laid out before me, bathed in early dawn light. I was high up. High up on... On the fucking roof.

Oh, shit.

I looked down to see one foot half off the ledge of the roof and the other firmly planted on it.

Panic flooded me in a rush of heat just as arms wrapped around my torso and pulled me back to safety.

"I've got you," Uri said. "I've got you."

I panted against him as the enormity of what had just happened cut through my body's instinctual panic. I'd heard a voice in my fucking head, and it had... It had wanted me to jump.

"Fee!" Grayson came barreling across the roof toward me, stark naked and glorious.

Fabric kissed my skin as Uri tugged his T-shirt down over my head to cover my nakedness.

"She was on the ledge," Uri said to Grayson.

My mate's jaw ticked as he scooped me up into his arms and cradled me to his chest. "Thank you," he said to Uri.

I curled into him, mind reeling. What the fuck was happening to me?



“WHAT THE FUCK is happening to her?” Cora demanded. “This is bullshit. It has to be magical. Those hooded bastards have done something. They couldn’t kill her the regular way, so they’ve put some kind of mojo on her.”

It made sense. They wanted me dead for some reason, and what better way to do it than to control me in my sleep. “But how? When?”

We were clustered around the kitchen island, our go-to place when shit went down. Dean had joined us a moment or so ago, alerted by his alpha’s agitation. He poured more coffee into willing mugs, his face grim.

“When did it start?” he asked me.

“Last night....” But had it? “I sleepwalked last night, but I’ve felt off for a few days. There’s this scratching at the back of my mind. These thoughts...I think there’s been something off for a while.”

Dean looked at Cora as if trying to catch her eye, but she studiously avoided his gaze. I noted her shirt for the first time. A man’s shirt, too large for her. More Dean’s size, and I wagered if I sniffed her, she’d smell like my beta. Something had happened between them. I could feel it.

I caught her eye and arched a knowing brow, and she shook her head as if to say, *not now*. But anything was better than dwelling on the fact that I’d tried to kill myself. Again.

“I didn’t sense you get up,” Grayson said, looking into his mug. “If Uriel hadn’t found you...” He took a deep breath and fixed his husky eyes on Uri. “Until we fix this, I’d like you to watch over Fee while she sleeps. Will you do it?”

Uriel inclined his head. “Of course.”

Grayson looked relieved.

“It has to be the hooded figures,” Cora said again. “I need to speak to Elijah. He must have dug something up by now, and if not, then I’m going to give him a nudge.” She tapped a message into her phone and hit send. “The missing humans will have to wait.”

“Actually,” Grayson said. “I think I may have something on that.”

She looked surprised. “You do?”

“Fee and I went into our Vista to look for Hunter, and he left us a clue—a symbol etched into a rock.” He grabbed a napkin and a pen off the counter and drew the symbol of a snake eating its own tail. “I’ve seen it before on a flyer for blood donations.”

“I saw those flyers,” Cora said. “But how does that connect to the missing humans?”

“Hunter was helping some teens. The teens were seen taking one of the flyers, and then they left with Hunter, and now they’re all missing.”

“You think the people who put these flyers out are taking people?” Dean asked.

“It’s a possibility,” Grayson said.

“You’re right,” Cora said. “There is no address, just a phone number. What if the location they have to go to changes each time?” Her eyes widened as the idea took hold. “It would explain the many alarms the Magiguard have had tripped. The humans get told to go to a different location, and then they’re taken for some nefarious reason.”

“Hunter isn’t human,” Dean said.

“Maybe Hunter was in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Grayson said.

“We need to find one of those flyers,” Cora said.

“I’ll get on it,” Grayson said. “You speak to this Elijah guy.”

Bobby padded into the room, rubbing sleep from his eyes, and I had to resist the urge to ruffle his hair.

He grabbed a mug and poured coffee into it before taking the seat beside Grayson. It was amazing how relaxed he was with his alpha now.

His gaze fell on the napkin, and his brows flicked up. “Why are you drawing the ouroboros symbol?”



ACCORDING TO BOBBY, the ouroboros symbol was related to a host of meanings related to life, death, rebirth, and an eternal cycle of renewal but most notably with alchemy.

“Isn’t that chemistry?” Dean asked.

Bobby’s eyes lit up. “It can be, but it can also be spiritual. It’s about change and transmutation, which can relate to matter or the spirit.”

“Or it could simply be an organization doing experiments on innocents,” Uriel said. “There have been many over the course of this world’s history.”

“Then we need to stop them,” Grayson said.

Cora’s phone buzzed, and she glanced at the screen. “You deal with that. I need to jump. Just got a beep from Elijah, he wants to meet.”

Grayson scraped back his chair. “Bobby, Dean, you’re with me.”

I was just about to ask where the hell I fit into their plan when my phone beeped with a message from Eldrick inviting me to lunch.

I held up my phone. “Eldrick asked me to meet up.”

“Good,” Grayson said. “While you’re there, you can get an update on the safe location Eldrick promised to find for the vamps in our garage.” Grayson pressed his lips together. “They can’t stay here for much longer. It isn’t safe for them. They may have been altered by Bliss, but they’re still vamps, and vamps and Loup don’t mix. We’re programmed to hunt them, and the pack is getting antsy with them here.”

It was unfair to ask the pack to stifle their instincts for an extended period. “I get it. I’ll find out what’s happening.”

“Uri, will you go with her,” Grayson asked him, and then to me, “If these hooded figures are acting up again, I’d feel better if you weren’t traveling alone.”

Uri nodded. “Of course.” His amber eyes settled on me with warmth.

I had a voice in my head urging me to jump off ledges, and Hunter had probably been kidnapped by alchemists. Mal, Az, and Keon were probably headed into the pit to find Lilith, and here I was with butterflies in my stomach from the warm way Uri looked at me.

I needed to get a grip. Fast.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

The diner Elijah gave me the address to is a three-story affair with dim lighting more common to a fancy restaurant. It's pretty empty after the breakfast rush, just a few patrons sipping beverages. I can feel I've jumped several miles, maybe more. Having the address of the place is all I needed to get here. I have no idea how my power works. How this magic inside me seems to have a GPS all of its own, but it sure comes in handy.

I nod in greeting to a couple of waitstaff, and a woman heads over with a smile. "Hi, table for one?"

"I'm meeting someone, actually. Not sure if he's already here."

"Oh, you're Mr. Blackwood's guest."

Looks like Elijah is known in these parts. "Yeah. He's here?"

"Follow me." She leads me up a flight of steps, carpeted, which is kinda weird for a diner, I mean, what about spills? Maybe these waitstaff don't spill? Whatever.

The second floor is more intimate with booths and tinted windows. Honestly, I'm beginning to think I've walked into some kind of mafia scene when I spot Elijah sitting, back to the wall, sipping from a teacup. His turquoise eyes zero in on me, and his lips curve in a small smile.

I've forgotten how handsome he is, the silver-haired fox. I steel myself against it and approach with a small smile of my own.

"Hey." I take a seat. "I'll have a hot chocolate, please."

The woman looks to Elijah. "Anything else for you, Mr. Blackwood?"

"No, thank you, Jean. This is perfect."

His smile is like a hug, and she practically simpers before heading off.

"Charmer, aren't you?"



“I can be,” he says over the lip of his cup. “I’m glad you messaged. I was about to call you, actually. The timing is apt.”

“Also necessary. We have a problem, one which I feel could be huge.”

“And I have some information, also huge.”

“So we both have huge...things to discuss.”

Okay, this is headed into double entendre territory, not my intention. “Fee has started sleepwalking and trying to kill herself while doing it.”

He sits back and steepled his fingers. “Tell me more.”

“It started a few days ago, a scratching at the back of her mind, then the episodes of sleepwalking. Both times she ended up on a ledge about to jump. No, let me amend, the first time she *did* jump, and luckily for her, there was someone to catch her. Oh, and she heard a voice in her head, urging her to do it. To jump.”

Jean returns with my hot chocolate, sets it down, and then beams at Elijah before leaving.

I take a sip. It is just the right temperature, sweet and thick just the way I like it. “I think it’s the hooded figures. They tried to kill her and failed, and so this is their new tactic. They must have done something to her.”

“It sounds like a reasonable explanation,” Elijah says. “But it would help more if we knew why they wanted your friend dead, and I have a theory about that.”

“You do?”

“Yes, but to understand my theory, you’ll need to understand a little about the world I come from.”

Um... “Okay...”

“I work with the Grimswood witches.”

“The super coven up north?”

His smile is wry. “The very one. We’re different. Our magic is... unique.”

“Not miasma?”

“Not exactly. The coven gains its power from the power of the stars, from the zodiac, and particularly the constellation of Ophiuchus. We call it the Thirteenth sign.”

“Last I checked, there are only twelve signs.”

“Yes, astrologers wanted the signs to fit with the months in a year, so Ophiuchus was forgotten...deliberately, we believe, because a witch born under the sign of Ophiuchus has the potential to be extremely powerful.

There are only a handful born every century, and the Grimswood coven relies on them to act as an anchor for the coven. They keep an ancient threat at bay, and they have been hunted by the Grimswood adversaries for centuries. Cut down before they can reach their full potential.”

“You think Fee is one of these Ophiuchus witches? You think that’s why she’s being hunted.”

“No,” Elijah says with a smirk. “Fee isn’t the Ophiuchus. You are.”



I STARE AT HIM, UNCOMPREHENDING. “WHAT?”

“When were you created?”

“I don’t know...I found Fee the first week of December. I guess...I guess then.”

“It’s the time of Ophiuchus, and you took Fee’s witch power. You don’t require a connection to a coven to access miasma, and you don’t need to use blood, sex, or pain.”

“I—”

“You’re an Ophiuchus, created by a witch born of an Ophiuchus.”

My heart is thundering hard in my chest. “Wait, you think Fee’s mother was an Ophiuchus.”

“I am certain of it. The fire you spoke off, burning so hot it turned bone to ash, that is Bone flame. The Grimswood adversaries have scouts with this ability.”

“Hooded figures? Tulpas?”

“I think maybe they’ve found a new way to scout...Maybe they have someone strong enough to control tulpas. It would make sense. It would fit. The current Grimswood anchor is weakening. Her time is almost up, and we must have a new anchor. Our adversaries have been hunting potentials for years. We’ve managed to find most of them and are working to bring them into the fold, and now...Now I’ve found you.”

“Wait... You want me to be an anchor?”

“I’d like you to come and take the trials. This could be your destiny, Cora. Your higher purpose.”

I’m all for a higher purpose. Heck, I want my own thing, my own mini destiny, but being an anchor sounds awfully permanent and static. I don’t

want to be tied down, I want adventure and to see the world. I want my destiny to be motile.

“Thanks, but no thanks. I’ll pass.”

He frowns. “You’ll pass?”

“Yep. I don’t want to do it.”

He looks momentarily thrown. Maybe he thought telling me I was special would have me jumping up and down, eager to be tested and elevated, but that wasn’t me.

“These adversaries...Do they have a name?”

“You can’t go up against them,” Elijah says. “Trust me. Stay out of it.”

“Make up your mind. One moment you’re inviting me into the fold, and the next you’re telling me to back off.”

“Right now, they think your friend is the Ophiuchus. We need to keep it that way.”

What. The. Fuck. “You want me to use my friend as a scapegoat?”

He stares steadily at me. “Your life is more important.”

Okay, so no one has ever said that to me before, and yes, it’s kinda nice, but, “Fuck you, asshole. Fee is not dispensable. Tell me how to stop what’s happening to her.”

“And you’ll test as a potential?”

Anger races through my veins. How dare he try and blackmail me. I lean forward, eyes hot with rage. “Let me explain something to you, Mr. Blackwood. I don’t take kindly to extortion. In fact, it makes me extremely antsy, and when I get antsy, shit goes boom.”

He doesn’t flinch. If anything, his eerie gaze becomes more intense, and for a moment, I imagine I see flecks of silver swirling in his eyes, but then he sits back with a curt nod.

“An unwilling anchor is a danger to the coven. If you truly don’t wish to be a potential, then so be it.”

I ignore the stab of guilt. The Grimswood coven will be fine, they have several potentials to work with. “How do I help Fee?”

“The curse on her sounds like a Demise curse. Usually, a curse of this kind leaves a mark on the infected. If the mark is visible, you need to remove it.”

“Remove it.”

“Cut it out.” His eyes narrow.

“And if it’s not visible.”

His gaze is pitying. “Then the mark is on her soul, and in that case, there is nothing you can do. I’m sorry.”

“In that case, I’ll be back, and I’ll want the names of these adversaries.”

“You don’t understand. If the mark is on her soul, it can’t be removed, not even by the person who placed it. The curse will see its course. If it wants her dead, it won’t stop until her heart stops beating. Right now, it’s confined to her subconscious, but when it slips into her conscious mind, then it will be too late.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, it will drive her insane, and even if by some miracle you did find a cure at that point, her mind would never recover.”

I need to get to Fee, and I need to get that mark off her. Now.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Uri could have jumped us both into Rising Pack territory, but as if in unspoken agreement, we took the bus. It was strange sitting together on the uncomfortable seats watching the city go by.

“I’m sorry about what happened with Grayson.”

“It’s not your fault, and it’s fine. I understand why he was upset. We’ve spoken since and cleared the air.”

Huh? Grayson had spent all night with me, when could they have spoken? Oh, shit, Grayson had gotten us a snack in between our lovemaking sessions. He must have spoken to Uriel then.

I wanted to ask what was said, but it felt like an intrusion.

He tucked in his chin. “I want to be honest with you, Fee. I feel more for you than I should, which is probably evident now, but I need you to hear me say it.”

The bus rumbled, and I was glad that there weren’t any passengers sitting close by so he could speak freely.

“If you want more,” he continued, “then I’m happy to give it, but if you don’t, then I’ll step back, and I’ll be a friend and nothing more.”

“You could do that? Shut off your feelings like that?”

The corner of his mouth lifted. “We’re created to love humans but never fall in love. Some of us are guardians, others are forbidden to intervene in human affairs, but all of us have a fascination for humanity. You’re not entirely human, and yet I’m drawn to you in a way I’ve never been drawn to another being. I want you in ways I’ve never wanted anyone else. Not just your body but your soul. But I have enough control to lock those feelings away if that’s what you want.”

What I want? I wanted him, and thank God my guys were okay with that. I couldn't love them more for allowing my heart this freedom.

"I don't want you to lock your feelings away."

He turned his head to look at me properly. "You don't?"

"No." I slipped my hand onto his thigh. "I want you to feel. Everything." My voice was an intimate whisper.

His mouth parted on a sigh. "Everything?" His gaze dropped to my mouth.

"Yes, everything."

We were still a few blocks away from our destination, but Uri rang the bell to be let off anyway.

"What are you doing?"

"Let's take the scenic route," he said.

He held out his hand, and I took it, allowing him to tug me out of my seat. The bus came to an abrupt halt, throwing me into him. His arm went around my waist, and he held me to him, solid and immovable for a brief moment before the doors swished open and we could exit.

The world was still white with snow, but it was beginning to melt now, slushy in places. We walked side by side, breath puffing up in the air in front of us.

A man on a bike whizzed past, and Uri grabbed my hand to pull me out of the way. He didn't let go. Shit, we were walking down the street holding hands, and my face was on fire like a fucking teenager.

I wanted him to keep holding my hand. I slid a glance his way, and he looked down at me.

"I wanted to do this the last time we went for a walk," he said.

I recalled how the back of his hand had brushed against mine several times.

"I didn't want to cross a line," he continued. "Celestials aren't permitted to have relationships. But now... Now I'm free to do as I wish."

"Will you stay with me, Uri?"

He gave my hand a gentle squeeze. "There's no place I'd rather be."



ELDRICK WELCOMED us into the penthouse suite. If he was surprised at seeing Uri with me, he covered it well, and when he discovered what Uriel was, he was all questions.

Lunch was a surprisingly cheerful affair, and it was only when we were taking coffee in the lounge that I noticed the worry lines and dark shadows under Eldrick's eyes.

"Is everything all right?"

Uri took his coffee cup and wandered over to the windows, looking out at the city, discreetly giving us room to chat.

"Just pack business." Eldrick's smile was tight.

"The traitor hunt?"

He nodded slowly. "It's not going well. I hate to say it, but if Hunter were here, this would go much faster. The more I dig, the more corruption I find. Honestly, I'm not sure who I can trust any longer."

"I'm going to get Hunter back for you. We have a lead."

He sat up straighter. "You do?"

"Grayson is on the case. We will get him back. Soon."

I wanted to tell him about the sleepwalking, about the voice in my head, but he already had so much on his plate. I didn't want to burden him with it all.

"Grayson wanted to know about the safe house you said you'd organize for the vamps?" I winced. "I'm sorry. I know it's probably the last thing you've been worried about."

"Ulrich is dealing with it. I'm seeing him later today. I'll call you after."

"Thank you."

"There's a ball in a few weeks," Eldrick said. "I usually decline, but this year I wondered if you'd like to come with me."

"A ball, as in poufy dresses and tuxes?"

He wrinkled his nose. "Not your thing?"

If it meant quality time with him, then, "I'm in."

We settled into chatting about other stuff. Uri joined us, and soon our laughter echoed around the room as Eldrick recounted tales of his youthful exuberance as a Loup in training to be an alpha. For an hour, I was just a daughter getting to know her father. For an hour, life was almost normal.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

---

I stood in my bedroom at the pack house while Grayson and Cora studied every inch of my body.

My naked body.

Yep, I was standing here, starkers, not a fucking stitch on as they examined me like scientists checking out a specimen under a microscope.

Yeah...Not strange in the least.

Cora stepped back, hands on hips. "I don't see anything unusual. You checked her inner thighs?"

Had he checked my inner thighs. *Pffft*. More times than I could fucking count. Not that I was complaining...Shit, don't think about Grayson gripping your thighs and parting your legs. Don't think about it.

"Nothing," Grayson said.

I lowered my arms, my heart sinking. Yeah, I was being all mentally flippant about this, but it was a big deal. I needed them to find something. If they hadn't, then...

"It's a mark on my soul then."

"Wait," Cora said. "Your head. She hurried over and parted my hair. Her fingers began to crawl across my scalp as she checked it. "Grayson, check her pubes."

I covered my lady bits. "Whoa!"

Cora tutted. "It's not like he hasn't been up close and personal with your vajajay before, and it's not a huge bush anymore, so he won't get lost in it."

Grayson made a strange snorting sound.

Wait, was he laughing? And then his fingers were on me, gently exploring. I stilled, ignoring the tingles that his touch evoked and focusing

on the enormity of this situation. This had to be done. I had to know.

“Nothing,” Grayson said. He stood, and there was no mistaking the dark edge of desire in his eyes. My stomach flipped, but he walked away, turning his back to give himself a moment to calm down.

Cora made a sound of exasperation. “No. Fuck, no.”

She stepped back, her face set in a mulish expression. “This is bullshit. Elijah has it wrong.”

But the sheen to her eyes told me she didn’t believe that. I set my shoulders. “It’s fine. We can fix this. We’ll figure it out. If there’s no cure on earth, then there might be one in the Underealm.”

She latched on to that thought, nodding eagerly. “Yes. Right, in the meantime, we take it in shifts to watch you sleep.”

“I have rope,” Grayson said. “We can tie you to the bed.”

Cora rolled her eyes. “Yes, and I bet you’d love that, wouldn’t you.”

Despite the direness of the situation, I couldn’t help but snicker.

Grayson gave me a flat look.

I composed myself. “Let’s have a nice dinner. The whole pack. Okay?”

“You think that will help?” Grayson asked. “After we struck out on finding a cure for this curse or any damn flyers about this blood drive?”

My chest felt hollow. Hope of locating Hunter was looking thin. Every flyer had been taken down. There was no way to trace him. Bobby was looking into the logo, trying to find a reference online. A company, an organization...Something. But there was nothing we could do right now. Right now, we needed normal.

I smiled up at him, injecting cheer into the action. “Yes, I think it will help. We don’t give up, and we don’t let shit get us down. We enjoy every moment we have together as a family.” I stepped closer to him. “Trust me, I know how shit things are right now. I know there are too many things that can go wrong. Az and Mal are in the Underealm waiting to head into one of the most dangerous parts of that world. Hunter is missing, and I can’t sleep without freaking us all out. So yeah, I get it, but we have no control over those things. We do, however, have control over how we deal with them.”

“Lasagna and wine.” Cora clapped her hands together. “Garlic bread—cheesy preferably—and a crisp side salad for effect, because I won’t eat that leafy shit.”

God, I loved her.

“I’ll grab Dean and get supplies,” Grayson said.

Dean... My gaze flicked to Cora.

She rolled her eyes. "For God's sake, woman, put some clothes on."



"NOTHING HAPPENED," she said. "I mean, I wanted it to. It was getting hot and heavy, and then fucking Jasper turned up."

"Oh, shit."

"Yeah." She fell back onto the bed and then wrinkled her nose. "Fuck, you two need to change your sheets." She jumped up and dusted herself off.

"Do I have sex juice on me?"

"Cor!" I laughed and hauled her up. "Focus. Dean. What happened?"

"Jasper cock-blocked and basically told Dean that he'd need to get in line to fuck me."

"That bastard!"

"Urgh, you should have seen Dean's expression. He looked... disgusted." She covered her face. "He thinks I'm disgusting."

Anger flared in my chest. "Fuck that. If he thinks that, then he's not worthy of you. You saved my life, Cor. You saved Mal and Az. You sacrificed yourself for us over and over." I didn't even bother to blink back my tears. "I owe you everything. We all do, and if Dean's going to let skanky Jasper get in the way of having a relationship with you, then it's his fucking loss."

We fell into a hug, rocking from side to side.

"Thank you, babe," she said. "But I would do it all again in a heartbeat. I love you. As for relationships, I don't think I'll be having a normal one anytime soon with that malevolent asshole linked to me."

"Then we get rid of him. We find a way. Tell Elijah about Jasper. Maybe he can do something."

She tensed.

"Cor? What is it?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me."

"Elijah has his own agenda, and I'm not playing into it. I'll figure something out once we have this curse off you and we have Lilith back."

“No. No, we don’t wait. We figure it out now. We start searching now.” I pulled back to look at her properly. “You don’t get to come second.”

“Fuck, Fee, I know that, but my love life isn’t an urgent matter, your situation is. I can live with Jasper for a little longer. We need to focus our energies on the other stuff.”

I opened my mouth to argue when the door burst open and Bobby fell in. His face was bloody, and he was holding his left arm to his chest.

“Bobby, what the hell!” I ran toward him, grabbing him before he could topple and holding him to me. “Bobby!”

His eyes flared bright as his wolf roused, healing him. “Vamps. There are super vamps downstairs.”



CORA JUMPED US INTO CHAOS. The lounge was a mass of bodies beating the shit out of each other. My Loup up against men in black combat gear. A flash of fang here and there told me these were the vamps, but they fought as an organized unit. They wielded batons that emitted charges that had my Loup convulsing and falling to their knees.

There was no sign of Grayson or Dean. They must still be out.

I caught sight of Bastian and Uri fighting back to back against three super vamps.

Right now, it was six up against eight.

It was time to even out the odds.

Cora and I leaped into the fray. I had no weapons, but my Loup rose up to give me claws and tear-the-fuck-out-of-you teeth. I allowed her to take over, to rip and shred and slash, falling easily into beast mode and allowing my territorial rage to consume me.

How dare they come into my pack house, onto my fucking territory, and attack my Loup.

How fucking dare they.

“Fee, the vamps!” Cora grabbed my arm, and we jumped to outside the garage where more super vamps were dragging the refugee vamps out of our garage.

I charged and tackled the nearest one at the waist, lifting him off his feet and then slamming him into the side of their getaway van. There was a

snap, and the vampire howled and collapsed to the ground, his body limp. His spine...I'd broken his spine but not his spirit. He hissed at me, and I caught a good look at his face.

Mother fucker. I knew that face. It was more filled out now, less on the pasty side, but even though I'd only met him once at the Dominus quarters when he'd come to deliver intel on the Dread hangout, his face was etched into my memory.

"Fee, watch out!"

I turned my head in time to catch the sight of a black baton headed for my shoulder and hear the fizz of electricity a moment before my body lit up with pain, twisting and contorting.

I lost control of myself and hit the ground in a convulsion.

Cora's scream was eclipsed by a roar of rage, and then I was being lifted off the ground. Dean's cedar scent filled my head as he dragged me backward. My senses were coming back online. The pain receded as my body dispelled the effects.

A huge golden wolf attacked the super vamps spilling into the yard in a frenzy. Blood sprayed, howls ripped the air, and throats were torn open.

Grayson was in his own version of berserker mode, and fuck was he glorious, but he needed to stop. We needed intel. We needed one alive, and I knew just which one.

I grabbed Dean's shirt by the collar and pulled myself to my feet as Grayson came to a standstill, his powerful golden body spattered with blood. Vamp parts were strewn around him. My pack growled and snarled in triumph as Grayson turned on the vampire crumpled by the van. His haunches bunched as he prepared to attack.

"NO!" I blur-ran, coming to stand in front of the super vamp.

Grayson's jaws snapped closed inches from my face, his eyes wide with shock at what he'd almost done. He fell back, and I dropped down beside the vamp and grasped his jaw, forcing him to look at me.

"We've been looking for you, Kristoff."



THE VAMPS we'd been protecting were back in the garage, snug and safe. The dead bodies of the super vamps had been piled into our van, ready for

disposal, and Kristoff was chained to the post in the pack house with the rest of us gathered around him. His spine had healed, so the chains were a necessary precaution.

“This is your hybrid witch-vamp contact?” Dean asked. “Are you sure? He isn’t what you described.”

Thin with a Béla Lugosi vibe? No, he wasn’t any longer.

He was bulky and muscular beneath his combat uniform, which strained against his biceps and thighs. They’d changed him. Whoever *they* were.

“He looks different. I mean, his body...It’s bulkier than it was before, but it’s him.”

Kristoff stared straight ahead, ignoring us.

Grayson stepped into his line of sight. “Who are you working for?” he asked.

Kristoff’s expression remained impassive.

“We should make him talk.” Bastian cracked his knuckles. “I’ll do it.”

Kristoff didn’t even flinch.

I joined Grayson in Kristoff’s line of sight. “I don’t think that’ll make a difference.” I snapped my fingers in front of his face, and he didn’t even blink. “I don’t think he’s home.”

“He’s in lockdown,” Cora said. “Some kind of shutdown.”

“She’s right,” Uriel said. “Those vamps were trained professionals, sent here with an objective, and that mission was compromised. This... Whatever it is that’s happened to him, must be some kind of failsafe. A way to prevent anyone getting intel.”

“Why not just put in a kill switch?” Dean pondered.

“Maybe there is one,” Grayson said. “Maybe it’s on a timer.”

“No.” Uriel crouched by Kristoff, his eyes narrow with speculation. “A kill switch would have been activated by now.”

“Maybe they’ll send more super vamps after him,” Dean said. “They didn’t get the cargo they came for. They could attack again.”

“They might,” Grayson said. “But would they risk losing more soldiers?”

“But they know we’re onto them now,” Dean said. “I doubt they’ll just let that go.”

He was right. “We need to fortify the house and call in the civilian pack to act as guards.”

“To guard refugee vamps?” Bastian snorted. “You think they’ll go for that?”

I pinned him with a glare. “They’ll do what their fucking alpha asks of them.”

As much as I wanted to run my pack as a democracy, there would be times when an alpha had to pull rank, and now was one of those times.

“I’ll send out the bat signal,” Bastian said.

Uri was still studying Kristoff. “If they don’t come for him, then he might reactivate at some point and try to run. Or maybe this is it for him. He’s been abandoned and will remain locked in his own head.”

But we needed the information in his head. We needed someone who could crack the code and get inside.

Shit. “We need Conah. He can read memories of the dead and the living.”

Cora nodded. “I’ll jump into the Underealm and find him.”

“No. It’s too dangerous with Mammon so close to Imperium. It’s safer to send a phoenix. It’ll find him, and if he can get away, he’ll come. In the meantime, contact Vi and see if there’s any witchy shit she can do. I’ll fly back to quarters and send the phoenix.”

“Fee?” Uriel said tentatively. “Do you know how to send a phoenix?”

Crap. “You better come with me.”

Grayson pulled me into a hug and kissed my forehead. “Stay the night.” He locked gazes with me. “If...if you want to.” He looked to my left to where Uri stood waiting.

“Grayson...”

“I love you,” he said. “All of you.” He released me. “Take care of her,” he said to Uriel. “The rest of you, let’s clean this fucking place up.”

With a final look at our trashed home, I headed out the busted front doors.

I had a phoenix to send.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

---

**I**t was strange entering the Dominus quarters, knowing it would be empty of the guys. But Iza was there to greet us.

“Fee, you’re back.” She looked so happy to see me that I didn’t have the heart to tell her I wasn’t staying. “I put fresh sheets on your bed,” she said. “Will Masters Azazel, Malachi, and Conah be back soon too?”

“I don’t know, Iza. I think things will be...quiet around here for a while. In fact, I think you and the others should take some time off.”

Her eyes went wide. “You want us to leave?”

“Just for a few days. Go see friends and family. I’ll send a message to the tavern when things are...normalish.”

“So, the rumors are true...” She wrung her hands. “Lilith has been taken.”

Oh shit. Now was the time to lie to her, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. “Iza, can I trust you?”

She looked offended that I’d asked. “Have I ever given you cause to doubt me?”

I bit back a smile. “No, which is why I’m going to tell you the truth.”

She held her breath.

“Lilith *was* taken.”

She let out a sharp cry and staggered slightly. Uriel caught her, and she shook him off indignantly and flung herself at me.

I hugged her to my thigh. “It’ll be okay. Azazel, Mal, and Conah will find her, and everything will be fine, but you cannot tell anyone, do you understand? We can’t add fuel to the rumors, or it will incite fear and panic.”



She tipped her head up, eyes brimming with tears. “Our poor queen. Taken by the usurper.”

Oh, God. I hadn’t realized how dramatic imps could be. “I promise you we will fix this. But you need to keep this to yourself. You’re in the circle of trust now. You mustn’t break it.”

She shook her head vehemently. “I vow it.”

“Okay, good. Gather the others and take a holiday, tell them...tell them it’s a boon for doing an excellent job. You’ll be paid, of course...double pay.”

She nodded. “Yes, Fee.”

“Good. But before you go, do you know where the guys go to send a phoenix?”

She stared at me in surprise. “Please don’t tell me the Masters haven’t shown you the aviary.”

We had an aviary?



THE AVIARY WASN’T AN ENCLOSURE, it was a garden on the other side of the quarters set on a ledge below the roof. It was a huge space with a dome over the top to keep out the elements. It was heated with windows here and there to let in the phoenixes, and what wondrous creatures they were.

Majestic birds that came in shades of red-orange and black, they ranged in size from the size of my forearm to the size of my thigh.

I stood amidst the blooms and the flora, staring at the creatures whirring up ahead. One moment they were there, the other, they winked out of existence.

I gripped Uriel’s forearm, my gaze still on the spot where the birds had just been. “What just happened?”

“They cloaked themselves,” he said. “They can do that. Wait. Watch.”

A gust of air brushed my cheek, and then a phoenix landed a meter away from me. It stood watching me.

“Wait,” Uriel said softly. He crouched and made a soft tutting sound.

The phoenix opened its beak, and a low whistle echoed around us.

“What does that mean?”

“It means it’s ready for your message. There should be scrolls and ink here somewhere.”

I found the items laid on a table to our left, which was almost obscured by plants, and wrote out a simple note asking Conah to come to the pack house if he could spare the time. There was a metal container designed for the scroll, so I rolled it up and pushed the paper inside.

“Now what?”

“Now you feed it to the phoenix and tell it who you wish it delivered to. A phoenix is a messenger, with the unique ability to find anyone whose essence it has tasted at least once. Every phoenix here has been fed essential essences.”

“Even yours?”

“Even mine,” Uriel said. “I’ve been the contact for the Dominus for a while. Hold out the scrolls to the bird and say the recipient’s name, and the phoenix will find him.”

Okay. I stepped forward and held out the scroll. “Please take this to Conah, blood of Lilith.”

The phoenix blinked lazily, and then its head shot forward, and the scroll was gone. It launched itself into the air and vanished.

I stared at the spot where it’d been a moment ago. “Now what?”

“Now, we wait.”

With the phoenix gone, it was time to head back, but we’d only made it to the third floor when I knew for sure that wasn’t what I wanted.

I wanted more time alone with Uri. I wanted to get to know him. To talk, to connect. Who knew what tomorrow would bring, and this mark on my soul...I had no idea how long I’d be able to avoid its effects or where I’d need to go to remove it.

The future was always uncertain, and the only thing I had control over was the now.

We made it down to the second floor before I gently took his hand and brought him to a halt.

He looked down at me with a small smile. “Are we staying?”

I nodded. “Yes. We’re staying.”



I POLISHED off the cheese on toast and licked my fingers. “That was the best!”

Uri reached out and swiped his thumb across the corner of my mouth. “I have my skills.”

He certainly did. I was lucky to have guys who could cook...Not that Uri was one of my guys...yet. Almost.

Shit, I wanted him.

We’d been camped on the rug in front of the fireplace in the main lounge chatting, eating cheesy toast, and drinking tea for the past hour.

I’d always loved the sound of Uri’s voice, and it was becoming addictive. He’d seen so much, knew so much, and his stories of the time before filled my mind with wonder.

He’d walked among the people of the past, and yes, I knew that Az, Mal, and Conah were old too, but they reaped souls and killed monsters. It wasn’t their job to get close to humanity, but Uri had. He’d watched and learned. He’d felt humanity’s pain and rejoiced in its triumph, but despite his knowledge and experience, there was a purity and innocence about him that drew me to him.

I wanted to corrupt him. Fuck, maybe that was my demon nature. As he spoke, my gaze drifted to his neck and down to the V of his shirt. His golden skin stood out against the navy material, begging to be touched. My attention flicked to his biceps and toned forearms then down to his hands, perfectly formed, beautiful hands that I wanted all over my body.

Was it weird that I wanted to suck on his fingers?

I shook my head. Shit, it was his aura again, messing with me and heightening everything.

“Fee?” He lifted my chin with the crook of his finger and studied me with concern. “Are you okay?”

I smiled up at him. “A little aura drunk.”

The concern in his eyes melted to liquid heat. “Too aura drunk to consent to a kiss?”

The pulse in my throat jumped with excitement. “Not too drunk for that.”

His mouth brushed mine, once, twice, teasingly, but my body was wound up so tight I couldn’t take the slow path. I gripped his nape and claimed his mouth. He gasped, and that sound shot straight to my core as I

reared up and pushed him back, slanting my mouth across his, licking and sucking on the vanilla flavor that his body seemed to exude.

He groaned and pushed me back so he could sit up.

I broke the kiss, panting. “Shit. I’m sorry. I—”

His wings materialized with a *whoosh*, and he bowed his head, shoulders heaving. Thank God we weren’t sitting too close to the fire. But we were close enough for the light of the flames to turn his silver wings orange and red. He looked like an avenging angel of fire, like a phoenix rising from the ashes. He was fucking gorgeous.

But he wasn’t looking at me. I’d done something wrong. I’d pushed too hard too fast. Fuck.

“Uri?”

“Give me a minute,” he said. “This happens sometimes when a celestial is...aroused.”

I’d done this. I’d brought out his wings, and they were magnificent. My fingers itched to touch them. I *needed* to touch them, so I did. I ran my hands over the silken feathers, reveling in the sensation against my sensitized palms and fingertips.

He shuddered and made a strange guttural sound that made me want to press my thighs together to quell the ache.

I stroked him again, down to his shoulders, running my fingers along the ridges of muscles that melted into his back.

“Fee...” He grabbed my hips and hauled me against his groin, up against his arousal, and held me there for a long beat, pulsing against my core, before burying his head in my cleavage. His tongue lapped at my skin, licking the curve of my breast, desperate for purchase.

I gripped his wings and rolled my hips against him. His hips jerked to meet me, two hard taps that had me crying out, and then he tore my shirt off. His hands found my breasts, his mouth found my nipples, and I lost my train of thought. There was nothing but heat, wetness, and friction, in all the right places.

But I wanted control. I wanted to taste him. I gripped his head and pushed him away before grabbing the neck of his shirt.

“Take it off.” My words were a hungry growl.

His amber eyes, like dark honey, fixed on my mouth. His wings vanished, and he closed his eyes as if in pain before peeling off his shirt to reveal golden, smooth perfection.

“My turn.” I pushed him onto his back and dropped my head to his neck, sucking and licking my way down to his chest. I pinched his nipples, and he thrust his groin up in reflex.

“Fee...Fuck.”

The curse word falling from his lips was an aphrodisiac. I needed more. I wanted to make him lose control, to curse and groan and pant. I moved down, tracing the ridges of his abdomen with my tongue until I hit the waistband of his joggers. I looked up at him to find him watching me, his expression tight, his eyes like desperate flames. I pulled the joggers down inch by inch, and he sucked in a sharp breath as they snagged on his arousal for a moment.

Ah, there he was, trapped in black boxer briefs, the ridged length of him visible through the thin fabric. I freed him with my mouth, peeling the cotton down his thick length, and then licked a trail back up to the tip. I swirled my tongue over the head of his cock, and he cried out, a thick guttural sound that had my clit throbbing.

I took him into my mouth.

He was sweet nectar, honed muscle, and taut flesh. He was light with the dangerous edge of darkness I craved. I worked him, reveling in the sounds he made and the way his hands grasped at the rug on either side of him, as if he was desperately trying to hold himself together, as if he was trying not to unravel.

I wanted him to fracture for me.

I held him captive, feasting on him until his fingers dove into my hair, and he hauled me up, crushing his mouth to mine. He flipped us so he was on top, his powerful body pinning me to the rug as he explored my mouth with his tongue.

I was on fire for him, melting against him, needing to get closer, needing him closer.

He softened the kiss and broke it. “Too many clothes,” he said against my mouth, then proceeded to strip me of my leggings until I was naked except for my knickers.

He sat back, and I caught the flash of doubt in his eyes.

A little of the fire in my blood died. “Uri?” I tried to sit up. “We don’t have to do this if you—”

He kissed me hard on the mouth to silence me. “I want to. I want you so much it scares me.”

Wait...Did celestials have sex? I mean, was that even a thing? Was this his first time?

“Uri...have you done this before?”

He pressed his forehead to mine. “No. Celestials aren’t permitted to... Although some do...I just...I’ve...I’ve seen it done.”

Oh, God. He was a virgin. A celestial virgin. “I would never have guessed.” I stroked his cheek. “You’re a natural.”

He chuckled, and our breath mingled. “Thank you, but I don’t think I am.”

“But you are. You know how to touch me. To kiss me. Uri, you turn me on so fucking much. I want you so bad.” I reached down between us and stroked him. “I want you inside me.”

His mouth parted, and his sweet aura washed over me, heading straight to the apex of my thighs and making me even wetter.

“Touch me.” I lifted my hips and pushed down my knickers. “Feel how much I want you.”

He slipped his fingers between my fold and groaned. “Oh, fuck.”

“Say that again.”

“Fuck.”

I lifted my hips, and he slid his fingers into me.

“Yes. Oh, yes. Like that, stroke me like that.”

He was a quick study, and I was panting hard and grinding against his hand, ready to come, but I wanted him inside me when I did. I flipped us again so that I was on top of him.

He looked up at me, his eyelids heavy with desire. I grasped his arousal, reveling in the eager pulse that ran through it.

I pushed up on my knees so I was straddling him. He looked down my body with a gaze hooded with desire, and then reached out and touched my panties. The material vanished, leaving me slick and bare.

Well, well. The celestial had moves. I gave him a wicked smile and then lowered myself onto him inch by inch, watching the play of emotion on his face as he entered me. His chest rose and fell erratically, and his skin began to glow.

“Oh, fuck. Oh...” He gripped my thighs and rolled his hips, pushing up into me. I bit my bottom lip, forcing myself to remain still and give him a moment to adjust to this sensation of my body closing around him.

He locked gazes with me and licked his luscious lips.

“You ready?”

He nodded.

I began to move.

I rode him slow to start, captivated by the wonder in his eyes at the sensations shooting through him, but I couldn't take it slow for long, my body wanted more. I threw back my head and picked up the tempo. His hands slid up my thighs to grab my hips, and then he was thrusting up into me, and the orgasm that had been hovering hit hard.

He cried out with me, our bodies meeting over and over as we reached climax. I fell forward onto his chest, and he rolled with me, taking the top spot, thrusting hard and deep even as the orgasm ripped through us. We rocked together, our mouths inches apart, breath mingling as we came down from the high, and then Uri smiled—a beatific sight that made my heart ache.

“I see now why so many celestials break the rules,” he said. He nuzzled the base of my neck and kissed his way up and across my jaw to my mouth. “How long before we can do it again?”

He was mine, and with that knowledge, an overwhelming foreboding washed over me, but I squashed it and held him tight. Not tonight.

Not now.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



CORA

I finish sweeping the broken glass into a corner and head to the kitchen to look for a dustpan and brush. The place is a fucking mess. I glance at the mess in the lounge. The tree is on its side, and there are smashed baubles and decorations everywhere. Well, if this isn't a fucking prompt to pack away the festive season, I don't know what is.

"Cora?"

I tense at the sound of Dean's voice and then sigh and turn to face him. "What?"

"I'm sorry," he says.

I don't want to revisit our Jasper incident, so I wave away his apology. "Forget it. You know where the dustpan and brush are?"

I'm about to turn away, but he takes my hand. "I was taken by surprise, that was all. I'm sorry."

I hate it when people don't say it how it is. "You were disgusted, Dean. I saw it on your face. Surprised disgust, and I get it. It's cool. Let's just move on."

He opens his mouth, then closes it with a nod. "Yes. Okay. I was. But I was wrong to be. I know that now. The deal you made was to protect others. He's abusing you, using you, and we have to stop him."

My throat is tight because he doesn't know the half of it. He doesn't know how much I crave Jasper's touch and how much that need disgusts me. He'll never understand the fucked-up dynamic between me and the spirit attached to my soul. Which highlights just why I can't do this with him. Yeah, he hasn't said anything, but I can see it in his eyes. He wants to pick up where we left off. He wants dinner and romance and me. He wants

me, but there can never be an us. Not while I'm linked to Jasper. The malevolent spirit won't allow it.

"I've got it under control." I tug my fingers from his grip and place both hands on my hips. "Let's forget it, and let's just move on as friends."

"Friends?" He frowns. "Cora, I'm not going to be scared off by that thing."

Irritation flares in my chest, and I'm not entirely sure why. "That *thing* is a part of me. Probably will be for the foreseeable future."

His frown deepens. "Cora...do you...do you care about that thing?"

"Of course I don't fucking care for him."

He looks like he's about to say more, but we're interrupted by Bobby when he places a box on the island.

"Phew," he says. "I think I found all the batons. Can't let them get into the wrong hands. On a human, a blast from one of these could stop a heart."

Wait... "What did you say?"

Bobby blinks at me warily. "I said I'm glad I found all of them."

"No, after that."

"That we don't want them getting into the wrong hands?"

"No, the other thing about the heart."

"Oh, the electric charge could stop a human heart."

*The curse will see its course. If it wants her dead, it won't stop until her heart stops beating...*

Elijah's words fill my mind, and I know what I have to do. "Bobby, what would we need to stop an outlier's heart and then restart it?"

# CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Grayson was on the phone outside the pack house when Uri and I returned. I spotted several unfamiliar faces stationed around the building, and one was even on the roof. Looked like the civilian Loup had arrived. There was also a guard outside the garage where our vamp guests were being kept.

Grayson ended his call, raking us both over. His nostrils flared as we approached, but he wouldn't smell Uri on me or me on him. We'd made sure to shower, separately, because the first time had ended in him inside me and my back up against the tile.

Uri was a fast learner.

Grayson seemed satisfied with his sniff test, and he inclined his head in Uri's direction as the celestial passed.

"I'll see you inside." I grazed Uri's hand as he passed and looked up at Grayson to find him staring at my hand. "Are you okay?"

"Are you?" he replied.

"Yes."

"Then so am I."

I wanted to hug him, to hold him, but Uri was like a barrier between us. Had I made the wrong decision? It hadn't felt that way when I'd been with Uri. I'd wanted him, and it had felt right, but now, seeing the clouds in Grayson's eyes made my heart ache. He'd told me he was okay with me and Uri, but he didn't look okay.

"Grayson, did I make a mistake?"

He blinked as if coming out of a daze. "What?"

"You said you were okay with Uri, but you look upset."

“Uri?” He looked at the entrance to the house, then back to me. “I’m not upset. I’m worried.”

Something had happened. “What is it?”

He pulled me into a hug and squeezed me tight. “Cora may have found a solution to your curse problem.” He stroked my hair and then pulled back so he could cup my face. “And it scares the fuck out of me.”



I STARED at Cora as I absorbed her words. “You want to stop my heart?”

Cora nodded eagerly. “We stop it for a minute, and then we restart it.”

“So...I’ll be dead.”

“Yes. The curse will be done.”

“We’ll use a combination of magic and science to do it,” Cora said.

Like magnets we’d gathered around the island: Uri, Grayson, Cora, Bobby, and me. The rest of the pack were all over the house. Kristoff was still chained to the post, but he hadn’t spoken or moved according to Bastian, who was keeping watch on him.

“I’ve called Vi,” Grayson said. “She has a spell to stop your heart, and they have a physician the coven uses on a regular basis who will be able to start it again.”

“There’s no spell to restart her heart, is there?” Uri asked.

“No,” Cora said.

Uri looked to Grayson, but my mate had his attention on me.

“You don’t have to do this,” Grayson said.

They were all forgetting one huge fucking problem with this plan. Eve’s curse. “If I die, it’ll affect Lilith. I can’t die.”

“You won’t be dying properly,” Bobby said. “Your heart would need to be stopped for at least five minutes, maybe ten, for it to be considered proper death. Scientifically speaking,” he said. “I spoke to Petra, too, and she agrees that as long as we can bring you back within a couple of minutes, your soul will remain connected to your body, so you won’t technically be dead.”

But my heart would stop beating, which would stop the curse... “It’s still too risky. What if you can’t bring me back. Lilith will—”

“Fuck Lilith!” Grayson snapped. “All I care about is you. It’s risky because I could lose *you*.”

“He’s right,” Uri agreed. “We can find another way.”

There might be another way that wouldn’t risk both my life and Lilith’s welfare. “Maybe we should wait. I mean, I can manage this if someone watches me while I sleep. You guys can tie me down. We might find another solution in the Underealm.”

Cora closed her eyes and sucked in her bottom lip as if struggling with some inner dilemma, and then she looked right at me. “You might not have the time to wait, okay.”

“What do you mean?”

“I didn’t want to scare you, which is why I didn’t tell you before, but Elijah says a curse like this will eventually slip into your conscious mind, and when that happens, it’ll be too late to do anything.”

My conscious mind? “What do you mean?”

“I mean, it will drive you crazy, and at that point, even if we did remove it by stopping your heart and bringing you back, your mind...Your mind would be broken.”

“How much time?” Grayson asked.

“He didn’t say,” Cora replied. “But this is the only way. Right now, the curse is confined to your subconscious. Right now, we can stop it.” She looked at me. “Babe, I’m just as scared as the guys, but I know you. I know how fucking strong you are, and I know you can do this, we can do this. I won’t lose you to a fucking curse.”

It looked like this was the only way. The alternative was to go insane. “I’ll do it.” Cora’s shoulders relaxed. “But Azazel and Mal will need to know.”

“Azazel will be obligated to stop you,” Cora reminded me. “He’s cursed to keep you alive. He won’t be able to let you take the risk.”

“And if he doesn’t let me do this, then he risks losing me anyway. It’s damned if he does, damned if he doesn’t situation. I’m not doing this without saying goodbye to Azazel and Mal.” I gave her a what-the-fuck look. “If it goes wrong...”

“We don’t have time to go chasing after them,” Cora said. “There’s too much at stake right here.”

She was right, we still had to find Hunter and the super vamp puppeteers. “Fine, if Conah comes to help with Kristoff, I’ll pass along a

message. If he doesn't, then...Then I'll do it without them being here."

"Leave it to fate," Uri said softly.

Cora didn't argue this time even though I could see she wanted to.

"I'll be back in a bit." Grayson strode around the counter and headed down the back corridor toward the training room.

I didn't need to drop my shields to know he was freaking out. "Excuse me, guys."

I followed my mate.

I found Grayson beating the shit out of the punch bag with his bare fists, no wrap-up. He'd taken off his shirt, and his muscles rippled with every swing.

"Give me a minute," he bit out as he continued to punch.

I locked the training room door, tugged off my shirt, and unbuttoned my pants. He faltered and slapped a hand onto the punch bag to halt its swing.

I kicked off my boots and shimmied out of my jeans.

"Fee..." His voice was thick.

I strode toward him, trailing my hand from my breasts down my abdomen to my pubic bone. "If you want to hit something, then I'd rather you hit this."

He bridged the distance between us with a growl, and for a little while, there was only the two of us.



GRAYSON and I emerged from the training room to find Cora and Uri flanking Bobby at the island while he studied his laptop screen.

"I found something," Bobby said to us. "The symbol you drew...I did a search for recent sightings of it on any buildings or any locations, and I got a hit. Look."

He turned the laptop to show us a grainy photograph of a signposted track where he'd blown up the sign. There were regular town names on the sign and if you weren't looking for it, you'd totally have missed the tiny circular symbol on the bottom left-hand corner of the sign.

"It's a lead," Grayson said. "And it's not too far from here, either."

A lead to finding Hunter. "Let me change clothes and grab my weapons belt, and we can go."

“Wait,” Uri said. “We have no idea what we’re walking into. We need to scope out the area first.”

He didn’t look at me, his attention focused on the laptop screen. “Can you pull up a map?”

Bobby tapped buttons, and Uri nodded. “Yes, I know where that is.”

“We’ll check it out,” Cora said. “We can jump to the location and jump back out once done. We won’t be long. If Vi turns up, do the thing and get it over with.”

But a thought occurred to me, something we’d neglected to consider. “If Vi stops my heart and for some reason we can’t restart—”

“Don’t say that,” Cora cut in. “We will bring you back.”

I locked gazes with her. “But if something goes wrong and you can’t, then Hunter will die. Even if you bring him back, he’ll die because I won’t have completed the Tribus mating.”

“Fuck,” Grayson said.

“I can’t go through with it until we have him back, and I’ve...You know.”

The thought of mating with Hunter evoked a cocktail of contradictory emotions. I didn’t have a soul connection to him like I did with my guys. Our connection was purely primal, purely physical. But it was all we had for now. It would have to do.

Grayson laced his fingers through mine as if to say, *it’ll be okay*.

“In that case, we better work fast,” Cora said.

She winked out, but Uri hesitated a moment, his gaze on me. I strode over and wrapped my arms around his waist in a tight hug.

He sighed and hugged me back. “I’ll see you soon.”

He released me, and then he was gone.

I leaned back against the counter, suddenly deflated. Fuck, why did life feel like I was on a fucking hamster wheel right now?

“I’ll make us some food,” Grayson said.

“I’ll do it,” Bobby insisted. “You guys rest.”

I didn’t have the energy to argue, and all I’d eaten for hours was cheesy toast. “Can we have chicken or steak?”

“We can have both,” Bobby said with a smile.

Grayson took my hand and tugged me into the lounge. He sat and pulled me onto his lap where I curled up and closed my eyes.



Uri and I hadn't done much sleeping, and my body clock was totally out of whack from going back and forth from the Underealm. Had Conah received the phoenix? Would he come? The poor vamps in the garage deserved to feel safe. What if we got attacked by super vamps again?

"Fee." Grayson's chest vibrated soothingly beneath me. "Stop thinking and sleep. We can sort it all when you're rested. Sleep. I've got you."

As I slipped under another thought occurred to me. If they stopped my heart and I didn't wake up again, I might end the Underealm's hope of escaping Mammon's rule, but if I was honest, that wasn't the worst fear in my heart. The worst fear was that I'd never see my guys again. I needed to see them one last time.

I needed Conah to come here.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

**T**here is death all around us. So many demons slaughtered, too many injured. Mammon struck hard and fast, and the fucker left carnage in his wake. The south barracks held by my battalion is in pieces. The building where my soldiers live has been decimated, and dead bodies strew the flatlands as far as the eye can see. The sky is gray and churning, reflecting my inner turmoil.

Fresh troops will be here soon; in the meantime, the handful of survivors drag the dead into piles ready to be burned while the injured sit around small campfires nursing their own wounds. Feathers litter the ground, black and red, like a carpet.

Yes, fresh troops will come, but for what? To meet the same fate as the ones that came before them. I should have been here.

I should have been here to lead them. We've had too many years of peace, and we've grown complacent.

Something has to change.

"Daemons," Conah says from beside me. "I'm not sure what breed yet, but I've taken inventory of the wounds, and I will find out."

"Mammon's recruiting from the fringes of the Underealm."

"From the daemons that were pushed out of their homes by the fallen and their offspring," Conah says. "There's obviously enough resentment and animosity left for them to fight against Lilith."

"He must have promised them lands."

"And he'll renege on his promise," Conah says. "Mammon won't share. It isn't his style."

A gentle breeze at odds with the climate of this scene brushes my cheek. I inhale the coppery scent of blood, and my gums ache with hunger. I should feed, but any blood that isn't Fee's tastes like ash. I think I might have replaced one addiction for another.

"How are our numbers looking?" Conah asks.

We've lost the cadets we'd trained to Mammon. He has them, and goodness knows what he's doing to them. We've lost three battalions of soldiers, and we've lost our queen.

"Crap." I sigh. "Are we going to win this war when it starts?"

Conah snorts. "The war has already begun."

He's right. Mammon is chipping away at us. While we push our efforts into recovering Lilith, he's slicing into our defenses. We're going about this all wrong, and suddenly I know what we need to do.

"We have to stop looking for her."

Conah frowns across at me, his sapphire eyes bright against the grime and blood that smears his face. "What?"

"It's what he wants, don't you see? He wants us to focus on finding her. That way, we leave our troops without the commanders they need. That way, he slowly disables our defenses."

I can see from the tightening around Conah's eyes that he's considering this too.

"We need to change strategy."

His chest heaves, and he doesn't argue with me, so I continue.

"We stop searching, and we start fighting back. Lilith put her blood, sweat, and tears into raising Imperium, into ruling the Underealm. We can't let Mammon get the throne. We can't let him win."

"There is no Imperium without its queen."

"And if we don't change tactic, there will be no Imperium for the queen to come back to."

"Azazel won't like this," Conah says.

"Azazel is a warrior, a general, but right now he's thinking like a son. I'll speak to him when he gets back from the east barracks."

I don't even want to think about what we found there. There were no survivors. Nothing but ash. Whatever attacked the barracks razed it to the ground. The fact it didn't come south means that the firepower is limited. Still, the east must be fortified, and Azazel is busy setting up new troops

and building traps. These barracks are our first defense for Imperium, and if they fall... Well, we're not going to go there.

"If he kills her..." Conah says.

"Lilith is an original. It won't be easy."

"But not impossible," Conah says. "But you're right, Imperium has to come first. The people need to be protected. It's what Lilith would want."

"Which means it's time to tell them the truth."

Conah's jaw is tight as he scans the vista of death. "I think it's too late for that. I think the truth might already be out."

A gust of air pushes my hair back off my forehead, and then a phoenix lands in front of us. I recognize its blue and purple plumage instantly.

It's one of ours from the quarters.

Conah and I exchange glances, and I know he's thinking the same thing as me.

Fee.

The phoenix's throat convulses. It spits out the silver cylinder that contains a message and then flies off.

Conah is quick to retrieve the cylinder, wiping it on his pant leg before flipping it open to get to the scroll inside. He scans the message and then chews on his lip.

"What is it?"

"It's from Fee," he says.

As suspected. "For me?"

He shakes his head. "No, for me. She needs me."

I can't help the stab of jealousy that pricks at my chest. "Does she say what for?"

"No."

I know Fee wouldn't message unless it was urgent. "Go."

He looks momentarily torn, and I want to slap him. "This is Fee we're talking about. If she'd called me, I'd already be gone."

"But she didn't call you. She called me, and weren't you just saying we needed to think like generals. Didn't you just say Azazel was thinking like a son?"

I know where he's going with this, and I stop him with a look. "You can be back by sundown tomorrow, and I can hold the fort until then. Your absence at this moment won't turn the tide in Mammon's favor. Look around, he's already done that."

Conah tucks the scroll into his belt. “Fine. I’ll go help Fee, and you speak to Azazel, and when I get back, we’ll make a new plan, one where we strike back at the bastard that did this.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER THIRTY

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

GRAYSON

Fee's breathing grows even and heavy as she slips into slumber on my lap. I cradle her to me and kiss her head.

She smells of strawberries, which is perfect. If she'd come back smelling of the celestial, I might have lost my shit.

He's a good guy. A decent guy, and I know he'll be good for her, but I can't help but wish I could keep her to myself.

Mine.

It's the nature of the beast.

I'll have to share her with Hunter soon, too, which makes me tense up. Knowing my twin isn't a sociopathic asshole is one thing, but having a connection to him is another. I'll need to learn to like him. I'll need to learn to accept him. For the Tribus. For Fee.

It won't be easy, but I'll do it for my mate.

I'll do anything for her, and I can't lose her. It'll break me.

She moans softly in her sleep and rubs her cheek against my chest. Her hand is on my abdomen, and it curls into a fist now. I stroke her arm and kiss her head again to soothe the bad dreams.

"You're okay, Fee. I've got you."

Long minutes slip by where the only sounds are the clatter of pans as Bobby cooks, and then Fee's breathing grows shallower and faster.

"Hush, it's okay." I hold her tighter to lend her a feeling of security, and it seems to work.

Her breathing slows, but as I relax my hold on her, she arches suddenly, smacking her head against my chin.

Her eyes open, wide but unseeing.



“Fee? Fee?” I grip her shoulders.

She ignores me, glancing about. “Where is it. Quick, I need to find it.”

“Fee, wake up.” I shake her.

“Where is it?” For a moment, I think she’s looking right at me, but then a film falls over her vision again. “I need to—”

She cries out and slumps against me.

“Fuck.”

Bobby has rushed over and is standing a few feet away, ready to assist if need be.

“I think we’re okay.” I nod at him. “I think it’s ov—”

Fee tears out of my grip and runs into the kitchen. I’m already in motion, but she has a knife at her throat before I can get to her, and when she locks gazes with me, it isn’t her looking back. It’s something else. Something cold and alien.

The tendons in her arm flex in preparation to draw the blade across her throat. I hear Bobby’s cry of alarm and sense the presence of my pack as they rush to the lounge, alerted by their alpha’s distress, but I know I won’t make it to her in time.

I know I’m about to lose her because a wound like the one she’s about to inflict won’t heal in time, not for a Loup, and not even for a Dominus. But still, I try, leaping toward her, hands outstretched to stop her.

The blade drags across her flesh, leaving a bloody trail in its wake, and then a body blocks my path, and I skid to a halt.

Golden hair and the scent of a foreign ozone.

Conah.

There’s a clink as the knife falls to the ground, and then Fee’s scream of impotent rage fills the room.

Conah turns to face me, holding her to his chest in a vise-like grip, his expression stunned shock that clearly says, *what the actual fuck*.

She thrashes and gnashes her teeth, wild and feral. “No. No. My time. Mine!”

“Fee!” My voice is a whiplash. A command from an alpha to his mate.

She stills, and then her eyes flutter closed, and she slumps forward in Conah’s arms.

We stand, face to face, chests heaving, surrounded by my pack, and then Conah finally breaks the silence.

“Grayson, what the fuck is going on?”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Waking up was like swimming through treacle. Confusion clouded my mind, leaving it sluggish. There were voices, people. I knew these people.

“How long?” Conah asked.

“Ever since you three left for the Underealm,” Grayson replied. “Uri saved her.”

“When she jumped?”

“Yes.”

“And this heart stopping is the only solution?”

“The only one we have, and we’re short on time,” Grayson replied.

A female voice joined in. One I recognized as Petra. “She used a knife, which means the curse is gaining more control. Up until now, it simply managed to get her to a ledge and try and make her walk off. Making her use a blade to slit her throat shows much more control.”

“It was as if she was someone else,” Grayson said. “I looked into her eyes, and she wasn’t there.”

I forced my eyelids open, dragging myself out of the arms of sleep. “It happened again, didn’t it?”

I focused on the faces around my room. Grayson sat on the bed by my hip, Petra stood by the dresser, and... Yes, that was Conah by the window. He’d come.

“What did I do?”

“You tried to slit your throat,” Conah said. “I got here in time to stop you.”

“I wouldn’t have made it to you in time.” Grayson’s tone was low, his voice hoarse as if he’d been crying, but Grayson wouldn’t cry...would he? “You would have bled out.”

There was torment in his eyes that I desperately wanted to soothe. “I’m fine, though. I’m okay.” I took his hand. His fingers were cold to the touch. Chilled. “Grayson?” He made a strangled sound and then pulled me into his arms, breathing me in. “I’m fine.”

I caught sight of Conah’s face over Grayson’s shoulder, and I knew that look. It was a we-just-escaped-a-fucking-dire-situation look.

I’d tried to slit my throat... I felt the tightness on my neck for the first time. “How bad was it?”

Grayson kissed the spot by my ear and then pulled back. The tears in his eyes were a slug to my chest because Grayson didn’t cry. I mean, I’d never seen him lose his shit. This must have been a close call. Right in front of him. If Conah hadn’t turned up...

I reached up to touch the dressing that was pressed to my skin.

“It’s healing,” Petra said. “It was deep. You were lucky you didn’t nick your artery.”

“Lucky? I’m sorry.” I wasn’t sure what else to say. Sorry felt right.

“It’s not your fault,” Grayson said. “Fuck, Fee, none of this is your fault.”

“No, it isn’t.” Petra handed me something...My journal. “We found this open on the floor. You should read it.”

“My journal? But I haven’t written in it yet.”

“Please,” she said.

A shiver rushed up my spine to settle at the nape of my neck as I took the open journal from her. All eyes were on me as I looked down at the marred pages. The writing was a scrawl, overly large and rushed, but there was no mistake...this was my handwriting. I scanned the short sentences, repeated over and over.

**CAN’T LET HIM OUT.**

**CAN’T SET HIM FREE.**

**MUST NOT LET HIM OUT.**

**MUST NOT LET HIM WAKE.**

And amidst it all, one word was scribbled across the page almost angrily.

## **PURGATORY**

There was that scratching at the back of my mind again, that feeling there was something vital I was forgetting. I focused on the sensation, trying to tease it to the forefront of my mind. A sharp pain lanced through my head. I cried out involuntarily and released the hidden thought. My temples throbbed as the pain eased.

“Fee, what is it?” Conah asked. “What happened in Purgatory?”

Yes...Something happened. Something...behind the wooden door...I went... Pain hit me again, claws unfurling in my brain, shredding and tearing.

“No!” I grabbed my head to stop it from exploding, and like before, the pain melted. “I can’t...Every time I think about it, there’s pain.”

“A hidden memory,” Conah said. “Probably a block placed by whoever put this curse on you.”

Was this the key to what was happening to me? To this curse placed on me? “Can you remove it? Can you get to the memory?”

“I can try.”

He stepped forward, and Grayson released me and climbed off the bed so Conah could take his place.

Conah sat facing me, his hip by my thighs. “Close your eyes and relax.”

I snorted. “Closing my eyes and relaxing is a huge problem right now.”

But I did as he asked.

His fingers were cool and firm on my temple. “Relax,” he repeated. “This won’t hurt.”

Long seconds ticked by, and then pressure bloomed at the back of my skull. A strange vibration filled my head, and then there was a crack like thunder, and the pressure of Conah’s fingers was gone.

Petra cried out in alarm, and my eyes snapped open to find the space where Conah had been a moment ago empty. My Dominus friend was crumpled on the floor against the far wall of the room.

He pulled himself up with a wince and shook out his arms. “Well, that was interesting.”

“What the hell just happened?” Grayson asked.

“I was expelled,” Conah said, rolling his shoulders. He ran his hand through his golden hair and fixed his serious sapphire gaze on me. “Whoever did this to you put a powerful block on those memories.”

“Cora spoke to Elijah, who believes it’s a group of outliers who want to kill witches born under a certain zodiac sign. He thinks this group is controlling the tulpas that are the hooded figures.”

“You’re not a witch,” Conah reminded me. “Cora has your power.”

“Yeah, but they didn’t get that memo.” I filled him in on the Grimswood witches and the potentials.

“But wouldn’t that make Cora a potential?” he asked.

I froze. Fuck. I hadn’t thought of that, and she hadn’t elaborated. I’d been too caught up in my curse problem. But if Cora was connected to Grimswood, what did that mean for us?

“Fee,” Conah said. “I get the wanting to kill witches, but this seems a little extreme.”

“They failed to do it any other way,” Grayson said.

“But Purgatory?” Conah shakes his head. “How did they get into Purgatory. It makes no sense. Only a celestial or a Dominus can get in or out.”

I massaged my temples, trying to soothe the low-grade headache that had taken up residence behind my eyes.

I didn’t have the answers, and that made me sick. “Maybe the Purgatory thing is a separate thing...I don’t know. We don’t have time for this right now. Cora and Uri will be back soon with intel on the ouroboros site, and we still have to find out what Kristoff knows.” I looked up at Conah. “Which is why I called you. I need you to read his memories.”

“Kristoff? I don’t understand.”

“I think it’s better if I showed you.”

# CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



CORA

The signpost with the ouroboros symbol points to a trail that's beaten down enough to tell us it gets regular use. We're on it for about three minutes before two wider trails link to it, and the sound of an engine forces us into the bushes.

My hands get scratched to fuck by brambles, and I think I might have swallowed a bug. We crouch and wait for the motor to pass.

It's a minivan, black, no number plates. Dodgy as fuck.

Uri's eye whites gleam in the gloom as he looks my way. "I think we're on the right track."

"Agreed. Let's scope up ahead a little."

It's too risky to jump. We have no idea what lies up ahead. We have no idea who has Hunter and the humans or why.

We slip back onto the trail and keep to the left, close to the bushes, as we make our way after the van. It isn't long until the trail spills onto a field, ground all churned up by wheel tracks, and up ahead, sitting silent and alone in the middle of the flatlands, is a farmhouse, dead and empty-looking. But the two vans parked outside it and the winking lights at the gates tell me this is the place we're looking for.

Whoever has the missing humans and Hunter has them here.

"What do you want to do?" Uri asks.

"We need to get a lay of the land."

"I'll go in."

"No." I grab his arm. "I'll do it. I'm smaller. I can hide better."

Uri looks torn, but I can see that the strategist in him knows that out of the two of us, I'm the better scout.

“Don’t be a hero,” he says. “Scope and get out.”

“I’ve got this. But if I’m not back in fifteen, you need to go.”

I expect him to argue, but he nods. “Fifteen.”

I give him a mock salute and then jump to the fence surrounding the building. I’m in the cover of shadows, which is perfect for sneak-peeking into the drive where the vans are parked. It’s dead. No sound, no signs of life. Eerie as fuck. I jump into the drive using the vans for cover and wait. Did anyone see? Is anyone coming?

Nothing.

Okay. I jump again, right up to the side of the house so I’m pressed to the wall, and wait for long seconds. There’s a lawnmower parked not too far from me, rusty and broken. A trough that’s filled with slushy snow water and a wellington boot.

The place feels deserted, but it can’t be.

Vans don’t drive themselves.

There’s a window to my left, and I take a breath and peer in. The glass is grimy, but I can see enough to know the place isn’t lived in. Dustsheets cover furniture and cobwebs cling to the inside of the window frame.

Okay, the moment of truth.

I jump into the house.



Uri

Five more minutes and I'm going in after her. Leaving her behind is not an option. I count down the seconds, watching the house and looking for signs of movement. There are none.

This feels wrong.

Like a dead end.

Like a lure.

Maybe a trap.

Damn it. If anything happens to Cora, Fee will never forgive me. I'll never forgive me. I should have gone in first.

I catch a flash of movement. A figure pressed to the side of the house, but it's hard to tell for sure from here.

Then the figure vanishes.

It has to be Cora.

Three minutes left, but I'm not waiting any longer.

Two minutes.

One.

There's a flash of light in an upstairs window, but it's gone so quick that for a moment, I think I've imagined it. But the thud of my pulse and the thunder of my heart tell me different.

My instincts kick in.

Something's wrong.

I jump into the house, into the musty interior that screams neglect. The world feels smothered, like pillows are being pressed to my ears. The air is thick with dust motes and leaves a funny taste on my tongue. The room is dark, lit only by the weak rays of moonlight that make it through the grime-encrusted windows. Sheets that were probably once white, but are now brown and ragged at the edges, cover the furniture.

Unlived in.

This can't be right.

Cora? I resist the urge to call out her name and fall into stealth mode, studying the room around me. Footprints in the thick layer of dust on the ground lead out the door.

I follow her trail and peek out into the bare hallway. There is a staircase facing the door leading up to the first floor. The trail leads to them. I follow,

wincing at the creak of the floorboards, way too loud in the silence. My boot kicks something. A wooden peg.

I could jump to the top of the staircase, but something holds me back, warning me to be wary, and then I feel a buzz against my skin that teases the hairs to attention.

Stop, it says. Stop now. This is my celestial power. My instinct for danger, for power unseen.

There is something up ahead.

Something hidden.

I look down at the steps, at Cora's footsteps pressed into the dust that's collected on the bare wood. They stop here. Right here, as if...As if she jumped.

I keep my eyes on the top of the staircase and reach down to pick up the wooden peg. I clutch it tight, and then I throw it as hard as I can to the top of the stairs. It whizzes through the air, and then a blinding white light steals my vision.

My eyes recover quick enough to see the aurelia of power shrink back to nothing and vanish.

There is a doorway up ahead. A portal, and Cora's jumped right into it.

# CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Conah stared at Kristoff, disbelief etched onto his face. “How...” He approached and crouched by the vamp. “Kristoff, old friend. Can you hear me?”

Kristoff’s face remained as smooth and unmoving as glass.

Conah pinched the vamp’s chin and turned his head from side to side. “Kristoff?”

“He won’t respond,” Bastian said gruffly. “Hasn’t moved or spoken since we took down his team.”

“Can you get in his head?” Grayson asked. “We need to know who sent him. Anything about the organization running the super vamp show would help.”

“Are the Magiguard involved?” Conah asked.

“They’ve been informed, but their main duty is to the humans. Vamps being taken isn’t a priority to them. That one falls to the outlier chain of command, and in Necro, that’s the packs and the covens.”

“Of course. Well, I can try to read him. See what’s locked in his mind.”

He pressed his fingers to Kristoff’s temples and closed his eyes.

Long seconds passed as he worked. Grayson put his arm around me and hugged me to his side while we waited.

My throat itched under the bandage as it healed, and the patter of rain hitting the windows filled the silence.

Finally, Conah sat back on his haunches. “Paper and pen. Please.”

Bobby rushed to find the items and was back in less than a minute.

Conah scrawled something on the notepad. “It’s a mess in there. A jumble. But there was one image I saw over and over. I believe Kristoff was

trying to communicate with me. I believe he's still in there." He finished scrawling and handed the notepad to Grayson. "I saw this. I'm sorry it isn't more."

Grayson cursed softly and then tipped the pad toward me. I stared at the circular image of a snake eating its tail.

"Mother fu—"

The air crackled, and Uri appeared by the lounge. His mouth was tight, eyes too dark in his face.

"We have a problem," he said.

I waited for the second pop. For Cora to appear, but it didn't come.

"Where's Cora?"

"That's the problem," Uri said. "She's gone."



"A PORTAL." I paced. "Like when we went to the club." I turned to Grayson. "Like when the vamps took you."

"They took me through a portal, yes," Grayson confirmed. "Bright white light, and then we were in the museum."

"So, we need to go after her."

"It's not that simple," Uri said. "The fact she didn't come back out means wherever she is, she's stuck. No jumping out once in, which suggests powerful wards."

"Jasper...She has Jasper. He'll get her out. He got her out of a vault that was magicked to keep intruders in."

"Then why isn't she here?" Conah said. "We have to consider the possibility that something's gone wrong, interfered with their connection, maybe even trapped Jasper in there with her."

"They could be anywhere," Bastian said.

"And when we go in after them, we'll be trapped," Grayson added.

I loved that he said *when*, not *if*.

"I don't understand it," Dean said. "They took vamps, and then they took humans, and they took Hunter too..."

I looked down at Kristoff, and the process was suddenly clear. "I think they're turning the regular vamps into these super vamps."

"And the humans? Hunter?" Dean pressed.

“I don’t know... Humans could be a blood source for the super vamps, I guess...”

“Blood drive. Blood donations,” Grayson said. “Fuckers.”

Oh, shit. It was all clicking into place. The only piece that didn’t fit was Hunter.

It didn’t matter. We needed to focus on getting them back. “The humans are involved, so we need to contact the Magiguard. They’ll want in on this now.” I didn’t have Ursula’s number. Cora did, but... “Conah, can you please contact Ursula for us before you leave.”

He looked torn, and I knew he was struggling over the dilemma of whether to go to the Underealm or stay to help us.

He was needed there more than he was needed here. “Look. We’ve got this. You need to focus on Lilith and stopping the war.”

“I’ll speak to Ursula now.” He winked out.

I focused on Bastian and Dean. “Put together two teams. One for extraction and one for backup.”

Bastian and Dean headed off to round up the Loup, and I was left with Grayson, Uri, and a catatonic Kristoff.

My stomach churned. My best friend was in danger...and my fated mate...I’d pushed my feelings about his missing status aside over and over because they came from a primal place, a place deep within that didn’t connect with my human psyche, but there was no ignoring the alarms bells my Loup was blaring right now.

I couldn’t shut off the panic and the need for action. I had to get Cora back, and I had to save Hunter.



# CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

CORA

“**W**hat the actual fuck?” I stand on an outcrop of rocks and look out at the churning gray sea. From my vantage point, it’s clear I’m on an island. A small, rocky island in the middle of nowhere. There’s cover behind me and a trail that leads into it. My bet is that the real HQ of these ouroboros fuckers is that way.

Time to tell the others.

I make the jump.

Pain slashes across my skin, and an unseen force slams into me. I land on my ass, jarring my tailbone.

“Shit.” No, no, no, this cannot be happening.

I take a breath and try again.

Pain and the same slug to the chest, throwing me back.

I’m trapped.

Okay, this is okay. Uri will go back and tell the others, and they’ll come looking and...Fuck, they’ll fall into the same trap.

Focus, Cora. Think.

Jasper! “Jasper!” Come on, where are you? You always sense my distress. I’m distressed, damn you. “Jasper, I need you!”

That should do it. He’ll come get me so that he can gloat.

Seconds pass, the wind tears at my clothes, howling in laughter at my predicament.

No Jasper.

My blood goes cold in my veins as it hits me that maybe he can’t sense me. Maybe whatever’s stopping me from jumping out of here is interfering with our connection. I’ve wanted to get rid of the fucker ever since he

latched on to me, but right now I'd give anything to have him here. His snide, cocky attitude and his I-own-you grip would be most welcome this moment. Anything to get the fuck off this rock.

But he isn't coming, and so I need to get my shit together and deal. I'm here, and if there's a way onto this rock, there's a way off it. Another portal probably. Probably through the woodland and at whatever facility lies within. Okay, I may not be able to jump out of this place, but I can jump down from this rock.

I land on my ass, stunned and disorientated for a moment. Seriously? What the fuck? It looks like using that ability is totally off the table on this island.

Okay, no worries. I still have my legs.

I climb down the rise and head for the tree line. I'm beginning to hate forests just as much as Fee hates alleys. I'm almost under cover of the canopy when a sharp click has me stopping in my tracks.

I sense a presence behind me, and then a voice booms over the wind.

"Put your hands up, nice and slow."

My hands, huh? I raise them slowly, prepared to blast whoever with a nice ball of lightning. I turn and fire.

Knives stab my palms, but no power shoots from my fingertips. The miasma that's been accessible to me so easily is suddenly absent.

I'm fucking cut off. Totally and absolutely cut off from my power.

My stomach feels suddenly empty and hollow as the three humans dressed in black watch me down the barrels of their guns.

Oh, fuck.



Hunter

I can't feel my Loup. I can't connect with it. It's pushed deep into slumber. The power of this place has finally subdued it. But we fought. We fought hard, and I succeeded in leaving a message for Fee and Grayson.

Have they found it?

I don't understand how I can connect to them, but I can, and that's the only hope I've had since I was captured.

Captured.

Me.

Fucking ridiculous.

Thinking about it makes my blood boil. I sensed something was off when the human teens showed me the flyer for blood donations. I should have made them drop the idea. Instead, I offered to fucking chaperone.

I should have taken backup.

Ha. Backup.

I'm packless, for fucksake. Mated to a Loup who hates my guts and chose my brother.

Fee...

Thinking about her makes my chest ache. The way she looked at me when I took her, the vitriol in her tone, so at odds with the way her body responds to mine.

I close my eyes and summon her face and heat blooms through my limbs. My Loup is suppressed, but it isn't dead.

The memory melts, and I sigh. Nothing can distract me from the fact I'm trapped in a cage, a fucking guinea pig for human experimentation. Fucking humans!

The gall.

They're building soldiers. Vamps juiced up on fuck knows what. I've seen them.

And the human prisoners they've collected are a food source for their army.

But what do they need an army of vamps for? What are they planning?

I need to know.

I rub the needle marks in my arm. I'm not healing as quickly as I usually do. This place is saturated with magic, and it's blocking my Loup

power. I wager it'll render an outlier mortal. Clever humans.

This evens the playing field, except that the juiced-up vamps seem to retain their strength. Which leads me to conclude their power doesn't come from magic, it comes from biological tampering. I've seen the vials in the lab where they work on me every day.

They'll come for me soon. It's almost time. I can feel it. They have me in a lone cell, in an empty block away from the human prisoners and the vamps they've rounded up, ready for altering, but I've seen the other blocks. They drag me through them every time they need more samples from me. Up a staircase and past a door, which screams no access. I can feel power radiating off that door. There's something behind it. Something important.

My hand goes to my neck, but I don't touch the chafed and bruised skin. The fucking collar they use is brutal. Able to administer electroshocks if I get out of line, and in the first days, I got out of line, a lot.

No point in fighting it, though.

Best to lie low and gather intel until they come for me.

*If they come for you.*

My stomach twists. No. I'm not hearing him. He isn't real. Fee will come for me.

*Right, because you mean so much to her.*

I'm her mate.

*A mate she rejected.*

She isn't the kind of Loup to turn her back on someone in trouble.

*But when the someone is you... Face it, Hunter, no one wants you. No one has ever wanted you. Needed you, yes, but wanted...Nah. This is where you belong. This is what you deserve. Your father knew it. He knew you were bad luck from the moment you pushed your way out of your mother's womb, squalling like a little bitch. Your mother died rather than stick around to suckle you.*

Anger races, hot and potent through my veins. Fuck off.

*Not this time. I clawed my way back, and I'm not leaving.*

I'm not listening to you.

*You can't not.*

I stand tall, fighting the tremor that wants to take over my body. You're not real.

*Oh, Hunter, I'm real, all right. I'm all the shit you hate about yourself pressed together and given life. I'm self-loathing, and buddy, I ain't going nowhere.*

Boot falls echo off the stone walls, and I back up into the shadows, waiting, hoping for a chance to pounce. All these fuckers need to do is make one false move. I know my way around this facility and—

*Yeah, even if they do, you won't get far. This place is a fortress.*

I ignore the inner voice, barely breathing as the guard appears, but he isn't alone. He has someone with him. A blindfolded and cuffed female. Anger radiates off her like a furnace.

I like her already.

Another guard joins the first and unlocks my cage. My legs ache to pounce, but I know I won't make it past the woman. They have her blocking my exit. The guard holding her uncuffs her, shoves her into my cell, and slams the door closed.

She throws out her arms to catch herself and cries out in pain as her knees hit the ground. "I hope your dicks fall off!"

Yes, I like her.

"Have fun with your new roomie." The guards sneer at her before sliding their glances into the shadows where I stand.

The woman tenses and then rips off the blindfold. Her gaze zeroes in on the exact spot I'm standing.

The guards leave, chuckling to themselves.

She pulls herself to her feet slowly. "Listen, fucker, you try and put your hand on me, and I will rip off your balls, you got that?"

"Loud and clear." My voice sounds strange, raspy and alien, to my ears. It's been days since I spoke.

Her eyes narrow. "Step into the light."

There isn't much of that. Just a single bulb fixed to the wall a few meters up the corridor outside my cell.

I roll my shoulders and oblige.

She stares at me for a long beat, and then her shoulders sag. "You have the same bone structure."

"Excuse me?"

"You and Grayson. I didn't notice it last time we met, but I see it now."

The last time we met? "Who are you?"

“The woman who’s going to get you out of here.” She shrugs sheepishly. “Fine. That’s not true, but it sounded good. I’m Cora, Fee’s—”  
“Tulpa.”

She glares at me. “Best friend. I’m her best friend. We met at your kidnapper’s hideout, remember? I came for Fee, and now she’ll be coming for us.”

Of course...I recall now. Hope blooms in my chest.

*Not for you, for her. She’ll come for her.*

I push the voice aside. “How did they get hold of you? They’re after humans. I was a lucky mistake.”

“They didn’t catch me; well, not until I got here. Fee sent me to scope out a location. The plan was for me to gather intel and go back so we could plan an extraction.” She sighs and leans against the wall. “Things didn’t go how they were meant to, but my partner will have reported back. They’ll find us. They’ll come. Fee won’t give up on us.”

“On you.” The words were out before I could stop them.

She frowns at me. “Hey, *I’m* only here because we were looking for *you*. That symbol you left... Yeah, we used that to find this place.”

Fee was looking for me. The hope flares again. She cared enough to look.

“Only problem is when they do come, they’ll be completely defenseless because I don’t think magic works on this island,” she says.

She has that right. “It doesn’t. Even the Loup is suppressed.”

“The humans have guns and super vamps.” Cora begins to pace. “Fee will be walking into a trap. With this ward running, they’ll be fucked.”

With the ward running... The door with the buzz of power radiating out from it...Could it be?

A plan forms in my mind, risky as fuck, but our only option.

“Then we need to make sure the wards are turned off.”

# CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



The farmhouse was crawling with Magiguard. They had the whole place under lockdown. They'd even found a second portal and put it under guard.

We stood at the foot of the staircase, ready to head inside.

Me, Grayson, Uriel, and Bastian along with six other Loup and a team of six Magiguard.

"You remember how to use the comm?" Ursula asked me.

I tapped the tiny radio clipped to my hip. "Yes. Are you sure this will work?"

"Positive. We use them for portal-link communication all the time." She stared at the portal, lit up bright now because of the activation runes her guards had drawn into the air. "Whoever did this knows their stuff." She jerked her chin at the Magiguard team. "Bring them in if you can. If the perpetrators are human, use non-lethal force, otherwise...whatever goes."

Non-lethal force if the bad guys were human. They couldn't be... Could they?

"Remember," Ursula said. "Activate the tracker as soon as you go through. It's the only way we'll be able to find you." She tapped the gun at my hip. "Red for lethal, green for stun."

"I've got it." I also had my daggers and scythe for any non-human wankers who got in my way.

Grayson and I started up the steps together. He took my hand as we reached the top.

"You ready?" he asked.

His face was lit up by the bright light of the portal, golden hair ablaze as if he was backlit by a halo. My heart squeezed with love for him.

“I’m ready.”

We stepped through together and landed on dark rocks slick with water. The wind howled, and the air had bite.

“What the fuck?” Grayson said.

The crash of waves mingled with the moaning of the wind, and the sea churned below, dark and forbidding.

“It’s an island!” Uri called out from above us.

He was on a higher outcrop of rocks just above us, and then he vanished.

“Uri!” I ran toward the rock face, scrambling to get up it.

“I’m all right!” His voice was whipped away by the wind. “I can’t jump, though. The wards must be tampering with my ability.”

Unease prickled my nape. I held out my hand and summoned my scythe, waiting for the tell-tale heat that signaled its arrival.

Nothing. “Um...Grayson, I can’t access my scythe.”

But Grayson was rubbing his chest, his expression grim. “My Loup...It feels...distant.”

One of the Magiguards ran toward us, her black ponytail whipping about in the wind. “Magic is down,” she said. “Looks like a suppressor spell is woven into the wards.”

Fuck. “This is bad.”

“It is,” she said. “But if we don’t have magic, then neither do they.”

They, the perpetrators. “An even playing field?”

She gave me a closed-lipped smile. “Exactly. Use the guns, stick together, and let’s get this done.” Her gaze dropped to my hip. “Put the tracker on.”

I flipped the switch on my radio. “Done.”

“It’ll take a couple of seconds for the signal to transmit, but we can get moving. I see a track up ahead. I say we split into two teams and follow the trail, sticking to cover.”

“Sounds like a good—”

“Fee!” Uri cried out.

My head jerked up to see a man a few feet away with a gun pointed right at me. I caught movement in the periphery of my vision—Grayson leaping toward me to shove me out of the way. But I didn’t need my outlier

powers to know it was too late. There would be no bullet dodgery for me this time.

The slug hit me hard, and the world went black.



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Cora

Hunter's pacing is driving me insane.

"Will you please stop pacing."

"It helps me think," he says.

"You know what helps me think? People who don't pace."

"They'll be coming for me any minute," Hunter growls.

"Uh-huh?" I cross my arms under my breasts and look up at him from the ground. I'm leaning against the wall, legs stretched out in front of me. "You said that an hour ago." He glares at me, dark eyes like obsidian shards. *This* is Fee's other fated mate. "I would never have put you two together, you know."

"What?"

"You and Fee. I'd say this fated mate shit was bollocks, but then Grayson is also her fated mate, and that kinda makes sense to me, so there's got to be something to it."

He goes very still, his eyes narrowing. "What did you say?"

His voice is lower, almost threatening. Thing is, he doesn't scare me. Only one entity does that, and he's not here. "Grayson is also Fee's fated mate. You guys are in something called a Tribus."

His brows flick up as he absorbs this. "They've completed the full mating?"

"Pfft, I dunno, they mate...a lot."

His mouth tightens, and his hands curl into fists at his sides. Maybe I shouldn't goad him.

"This explains things." He begins pacing again.

I want to kick him. Instead, I fix my gaze on the cell door. Any minute now. "Run me through the plan again."

"I get into the lab and get hold of a vial of super juice and inject myself. Then I kick ass, get to the door where I believe the wards are being powered from, and shut them down."

"Uh-huh. And you know all about magic wand wards, right?"

He glares at me again.

"Oh, for fucksake, I'm not trying to needle you. It's a genuine question."

"No," he admits. "I know nothing about magical wards."

“So, let’s amend your plan. You kick ass, then you come get me out and we go to the room together, and *I* shut down the wards.”

“That could waste precious minutes.”

“And so could you not knowing how to deactivate a ward.”

“And you do?”

“I’ve been doing my research. Reading the books. I think I’ll have more of a shot at it than you.”

“Fine. Be ready.”

The echo of boot falls tells us that our time is now.

Any minute now.



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Fee

Fire ate at my side. I couldn't breathe. Oh, shit. Oh, fuck. I was dying.

I clutched the wound, wet and warm.

Hands were on me. The tear of fabric was followed by pressure.

"It's a flesh wound. The bullet grazed her. We just need to patch it up."

The voice was familiar...The Magiguard with the ponytail.

"Argh!" Sobs wracked my body as she pressed down on my wound.  
"Fuck!"

"Derek, med kit. Now."

"Grayson? Where's Grayson?"

"He's okay. He took down the gunman. "You're going to be okay, Fee, just breathe."

"Mother forker, that hurts!"

"Good. If it hurts, it means you're alive," she said with a grim smile.  
"All patched up." She held out a hand to me. "Can you stand?"

I gritted my teeth and allowed her to pull me up. Fire lanced through me, making me wish for my Loup healing.

Uriel and Grayson strode toward me, expressions like thunder, while two Magiguard tied up the shooter. There were two more guys laid on the ground, already restrained.

"He needs to die," Grayson growled. His gaze zeroed in on my side, then up to my face, and then he spun toward the human he'd just walked away from.

Uri grabbed him around the waist to halt him. "We can't. Grayson. You know we can't."

"He's human," Ponytail snapped. "We can't kill him. Besides, we need intel."

"He probably radioed for backup," Uri said. "We took down three, but there could be more on their way."

She picked something off the ground. My radio. It must have fallen off when I got shot.

"Busted," she said. "Let's hope Ursula got a lock on the signal before it died."

"Then we move," Grayson said. He hooked an arm around me and took my weight. "I got you, Fee."

I shook my head and pulled away. “No, I won’t be a liability.”

“Here.” Ponytail held up a metal contraption that looked like a dart gun.  
“This will help.”

She pressed it to my arm, and a sharp sting followed, and like magic, the pain ebbed. It was still there, but it wasn’t all I could think about.

“You good?” Ponytail asked.

“I’m good.”

“Okay, so let’s get to work.”



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Hunter

I don't fight when they stick the collar on me, and I don't fight as I'm led to the labs.

The stone and the chill tell me we're below ground, at least until we climb the first flight of metal stairs, and then the terrain is all hardwood floors and magnolia walls. The scent of disinfectant fills the air. I don't look at the lab to my left, and as we turn right, I don't bother to check out the vampire holding rooms. There are several. They keep the creatures in twos and threes.

"Meek today, aren't we?" one of the guards says to me.

"Maybe the Loup has lost his bite," the other one said.

One of them shoves me, and I pretend to stumble.

They laugh.

Let them think I'm weaker than I am. My Loup may be suppressed, but that doesn't mean I'm powerless. My body is a honed machine, but I've held off on using it because I know I'll only get the one shot. I can't blow it.

There's static, and then a voice fills the hallway.

ALL ACTIVE UNITS TO SECTOR C. INTRUDERS DETECTED.

SHIT. Fee, it has to be.

"Should we go?" one of the guards asks.

"No, you idiot, they have the fangers for that shit."

"Oh, yeah."

"Yeah."

The super vamps are going after Fee.

The lab comes into view, and the white doors swish open. The guards shove me inside, and the doors close behind me. I surreptitiously scan the room. Yes, the vials are where they always are, and there are two syringes on the tray filled with the same amber fluid that's in the vial. My pulse quickens.



My needle-happy host turns to me with a smile. “Ah, hello there. Did you sleep well?”

The bastard always does this. Small talk, as if I’m here voluntarily. As if this is some kind of fucking summer camp.

I don’t usually engage, but today is different. “I could do with a mattress.”

His brows shoot up. “You don’t have a bed?”

“No. Look.” I sigh. “I get it. I’m stuck here for...however long you decide. I’m not human, I get that you probably think of me as a beast, but even a dog is given a comfortable place to lay its head.”

He frowns. “Yes, well. This won’t do. I’ll look into it. Please, have a seat.”

A seat? He means the tormenter chair, of course. As soon as I sit, the metal bands will engage, and I’ll be trapped. I need to act now and fast.

The control to my collar is on the table to his far right. The vials on the table to my right. Several are already in syringes. I might be able to grab the syringe, but then he’ll incapacitate me by grabbing the collar control.

There is only one thing to do.

I lunge at the table where the control is, knocking it to the ground with a clatter. Mr. Needle-happy bellows, but I’m already across the room, and then I have a syringe in my hand.

Guards enter the room, guns pointed at me.

“Don’t shoot him!” Needle-happy says, his eyes on me. “Put the syringe down, and no one will get hurt.”

“Really? Funnily enough, I don’t believe you. I have the scars to prove it.”

His eyes flinch at my words. “That formula is specifically designed for the vamp species. It could kill you.”

A few minutes ago, I might have reconsidered, but Fee is here. I know she is. She’s on the island, and she’s defenseless without her outlier power. I have no choice.

“I guess we’ll find out.” I slide the needle into my skin and push down the plunger.



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Cora

Okay, so now *I'm* pacing. Where the fuck is Hunter? Did it work? Did he get the juice he needs?

Fuck. The announcement comes again.

ALL ACTIVE UNITS TO SECTOR C. INTRUDER ALERT.  
LOCKDOWN IN PROGRESS.

It's Fee and the gang. It has to be. We need to shut down the wards, and we need to do it fast.

The sound of boots running down the corridor has me flying toward the cell door. I know it's him before I peer out of the tiny window.

There's blood on his face, but I doubt it belongs to him. Shit, has he killed humans? Not the time to quiz him.

The door opens with a clang, and I'm out.

"This way. Stay close," he orders.

I'm not about to argue. He's the one with the special juice in his system.

We get to the end of the stone corridor and take a left. There's a door up ahead with a guard slumped to the floor beside it at a funny angle. We get closer, and I see that his keycard is slotted into the wall but still attached to his hip by a length of plastic.

Hunter shoves the door open, and then we're clambering up a flight of metal steps where another door awaits with another unconscious guard keeping sentry.

Jeez, dude.

"Move," Hunter says. "Right now, it's all hands on deck outside, dealing with the intruders."

"Fee."

"Yes. They have guns. Lots of them. I doubt Fee and the pack came similarly equipped."

Of course, they'd have relied on their powers.

I follow Hunter through a maze of corridors. We pass labs, and I catch sight of people laid out in beds with drips attached to them feeding blood bags.

“The vamps they intend to turn are down that corridor,” Hunter says. “I haven’t come across any super vamps yet.”

“You think they’re outside?”

He doesn’t respond. Instead, he presses a bloody card to the door we’ve stopped in front of. I feel the buzz of power coming from the room, and my body reacts to it like a nympho in a cock store.

There’s a beep, and we’re in.

It’s dark, or it would be if not for the glowing silver symbol etched into the ground. The air above it wavers and shimmers.

“Can you deactivate it?” he asks.

I’ve seen this symbol before. I’ve seen it in a vault under a fake store, and I know just what to do to shut it down.

“Yeah...yeah, I think I can.”

# CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

The building was a monolith of black stone. I couldn't see any windows. If it had windows, they were hidden or shuttered. It was getting too dark to see, to be honest, and without my Loup ability, my eyesight wasn't outlier sharp.

We crouched behind a rise, watching the building below, looking for signs of life. There was forestland all around it, and to get to it, we'd need to track through the woodland, but so far, aside from the three humans who'd accosted us on arrival, we hadn't come across a single soul.

But this was it, the place linked to the super vamps and the missing humans. It had to be. Cora was in there somewhere, and so was Hunter.

I had to get them out.

Grayson crouched to my left and Uri to my right. Their presence was reassuring. We could do this, even without our superpowers. Crap my side ached. Had the bleeding stopped? I was too scared to check. I didn't feel lightheaded. That was a good sign, right? Hard to know when I'd never been shot before.

"We're going to head down," Ponytail said – I really should find out her name. "You stay here until I give the signal."

"What's the signal?" Grayson asked.

She tapped the radio at her chest and then pointed to the one Grayson was carrying. "Listen for static."

She slipped away with two other Magiguards, making for the trail to our left that led down into the woodland. The plan was to get to the edge of the forest and then scope from there. Maybe send in a unit.

"Ursula should be here by now," Uri said.

“She’ll come.” Grayson sounded confident.

Me? Not so much. My radio with the tracker was busted. I doubt there’d been enough time for her to catch the signal, let alone lock onto this location. Why in the hell hadn’t she given Ponytail a tracker? Why me?

It didn’t matter. It was done.

We were on our own.

We could do this.

Long minutes passed, and then Grayson’s radio buzzed, and Ponytail’s voice came through.

“We’re clear,” she said.

And then the radio went dead.

My nape pricked in a warning I didn’t understand.

The remaining Magiguards were around us, ushering us to move.

I glanced back at my Loup team, unease a worm in my belly.

“We move,” a male Magiguard said. “Brit’s orders.” He led his team away from the rise and around it, heading for the narrow trail that led down toward the building.

Grayson signaled our Loup to move, and then we fell behind the Magiguards as they took the trail. My stomach began to knot.

Something was wrong.

The Magiguards continued down the trail. There was a bend up ahead, and they disappeared from view.

A sick feeling bloomed in my stomach. The fucking gunshot wound effects, no doubt. Urgh. We rounded the bend next to find all the Magiguards gathered in a clearing. I caught sight of Brit’s dark eyes. Her jaw was clenched, and her brows were pinched.

Why were they on their knees?

And then the full picture formed, accompanied by Grayson’s curse and the click and clack of weapons being engaged.

Not ours, but the enemies’.

Huge, hulking figures in black materialized out of the shadows on the other side of the clearing, and I didn’t need my outlier senses to know these weren’t humans.

The flash of fang and the gleam of crimson-ringed irises told me that just fine.

“Move!” someone barked from behind us.

How the fuck had they gotten behind us?

Grayson grabbed my hand and pulled me toward him, shielding me with his huge body.

Ponytail glared at us. "I said static was the signal, not speech."

Fuck, so that was why my alarm bells had rung. Damn it.

The Magiguard male who'd ushered us to follow orders looked sheepish.

"Get on your knees," another voice ordered.

My heart sank as I dropped to the ground and finally got a proper look at the shadows around the clearing.

Shadows that moved and weapons that gleamed dully in what little moonlight found its way into this clearing.

We were surrounded.



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



Cora

Dammit, this would be so much easier if they hadn't taken my phone off me. I had a picture of the page from the binder in the vault, and the instructions were clear. Sure, I'd read it and stuff, but I was obviously missing something.

"I thought you knew what you were doing," Hunter says.

I ignore him and continue to circle the, well, circle. I need to remove the anchor symbol. There's only meant to be one, but there are several here. Do I remove them all? Do I have to pick the right one?

"Do something," he growls.

I glance up at him, ready to unleash with some cutting words, and change my mind.

He looks...bad. Like I'm-about-to-keel-over-and-die bad.

"Hunter?"

He shakes his head, one hand going to his abdomen. "Please, just do it."

"Hunter, what's happening to you?"

"We could get interrupted at any moment. The super vamps could get hold of Fee at any moment and—"

He breaks down in a cough, and blood sputters out of his mouth.

Motherfucker. "Hunter!"

He holds up a hand to ward me off. "The fucking wards, Cora."

Shit. I need to do something. Fuck it. All the anchors need to go.

I work fast, using a rock I've found to scrub at the paint so that each anchor symbol is broken. The light begins to dim.

Yes. It's working.

I disrupt the final symbol and stand back.

Any second now.

Nothing.

"Cora?" Hunter rasps.

"I don't get it. It's supposed to be deactivated. I disrupted all the anchor symbols."

Hunter coughs wetly. "The middle."

"What?"

"The one in the middle," he enunciates, glaring at me while wiping at his bloody mouth.

Fuck, shit. How did I miss that one? I climb into the circle and hit the final symbol. The lights flicker and go out, and then a hot wave of power surges up from the tips of my toes to the roots of my hair.

“Powering up, baby.” I turn to Hunter. “Do you feel—Fuck!”

He’s on the ground.

I rush over and pull him into my lap. He’s barely conscious and there are blue smudges beneath his eyes.

“Hunter, what the fuck.” I shake him.

He opens his eyes. “Save Fee.”

“What did you do? What... The serum? It’s the serum you took, isn’t it.”

His eyes flutter closed.

I want to jump to Fee, but I can’t leave Hunter to die. He’s her mate. I need to get him help. The lab might have a solution. But Fee...

Oh, God. Yes. “Jasper!”

The air crackles and my tormenter appears. His face is dark like thunder, and he advances on me, ready to claim me and take me out of here. It’s so fucked up how I can read his face.

“No!” I grip Hunter tighter. “You need to find Fee. Help her and whoever came with her. Please.”

“I don’t give a fuck about Fee,” he says.

“But you give a fuck about me, so, please. Do it for me.”

He looks like he’s about to tell me to go fuck myself too, but then he takes a deep breath and nods.

“I’ll do it. But then you’re mine. For a whole week.”

His...I know what that means. I have no choice. “Deal.”

He winks out, and I hug Hunter close and make the jump to the lab.



Fee

The super vamps closed in. Barrels of their guns pointed at our heads and hearts. One move and they'd shoot—the warning was written all over their faces. They were fast and strong even with the magic being muted.

The evidence lay on the forest floor to my far right in the broken body of a Magiguard who'd tried to fight back.

The super vamp broke his spine.

How was this possible?

How were they retaining their abilities, unless...Unless it wasn't magical. A genetic modification, maybe? Then why use vamps? Why not humans? I was so confused, and there was no time for this train of thought because I was pretty sure we were about to be executed.

"Who wants to go first," one of the super vamps said. He stepped forward, and moonlight bathed his features—cold dead eyes, sharp cutting cheekbones.

"Boss, orders were to mass execute," another super vamp piped up.

Cold Eyes turned his head to the other vamp with an icy look. "If I want your input, I'll fucking ask for it. This is my show, and I'll run it how I fucking want."

The other vamp snapped his mouth closed and nodded curtly. "Boss."

Cold Eyes stepped up to a Magiguard and held the gun to his head. "I think this one will be a headshot."

"No!" Brit cried out.

The shot was a soft pfft, and the Magiguard keeled over.

He'd done it.

He'd pulled the trigger.

The Magiguard was dead. Eyes open, unseeing dead. Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck!

Brit tucked in her chin, shoulders heaving as she fought to keep her shit together.

The super vamp unscrewed the silencer off his gun. "This should make a more satisfying sound."

No one spoke. No one tried to reason with him, to stall him, because his dead eyes told us that there was no stopping this. To run would mean to be gunned down. To attack would mean to be gunned down. We were fish in a

barrel, and he had his gun pointed at one of my Loup. Dexter, that was his name. He was quiet. Kept to himself but was a mean fighter.

Cold Eyes lowered the gun to Dexter's chest.

"Stop!" The word was out before I could check myself.

The super vamp turned his head to look at me. "Did you want to go next? Is that it?"

Grayson tensed beside me, but before he could speak, Dexter lunged at Cold Eyes. The super vamp spun, and a shot screamed into the night.

For a moment, there was only the rush of blood in my ears, the heave of my breath, and then Dexter's gurgling death throes filtered through the whooshing in my head. My vision blurred, and I blinked back tears, maintaining eye contact with my Loup until the light in his eyes died.

Super vamp toed Dexter's body and then moved up the line, skipping another Loup to stop at a Magiguard.

There was no preamble this time. He shot her in the head.

Brit bit back a cry. She was next. Oh, fuck.

He aimed the gun at her chest and then took a step to the left, coming to a stop in front of...Uri?

Oh, shit.

"No!" I lunged toward Uri, but Grayson snagged my waist and hugged me to his chest.

The super vamp's mouth curled up at the corner. "Oh, you really care about this one, don't you?" His eyes narrowed. "How does it feel to know you're powerless to save him?"

"Please don't." I struggled against Grayson, but he held me firm.

"Fee, don't," Uri said. He shook his head. "Don't... Don't look."

Grayson tried to force me to look away, but I fought him, and he had no choice but to settle for holding me to him.

"You ready, little woman," super vamp said. He kept his gaze on me while I locked eyes with Uri.

The gunshot was like a slug to my chest, knocking the breath from my lungs and bringing fresh tears to my eyes. It choked me, squeezed my heart in a vise, but I didn't look away, even as Uri toppled onto his side. I didn't look away as the life bled from his eyes.

I didn't look. Away. I... I couldn't...I

A keening sound filled the air, surrounding me.

"Hush, hush."

Grayson rocked me, and I realized that the low keening sound that filled the air...it was me.

Super vamp strode over and held the gun up to Grayson's forehead. "Almost broken, but not quite," he said. "I wonder if this will help."

A chill swept over my body, and then a loud crack cut through the air.

I jerked, ice blooming on my chest as for a moment I thought he'd pulled the trigger, but he was looking off to the left, at the ground where one of his team lay dead, head at a funny angle.

A figure stood over the dead vamp, brushing off his hands as if he'd touched something unsavory.

Jasper looked right at me and smiled thinly. "Don't worry," he drawled. "The cavalry has arrived."

Wait, if he was here, then—

The heat of my power exploded like a tsunami through my veins as my Loup roared to the surface.

The super vamp looked down at me, confused.

"You ready, little man." My words were garbled as my mouth shifted to wolf fangs. "My turn."

I attacked.



Cora

The weaselly science guy stares at me with round eyes. Okay, so I've just materialized in his lab and killed two guards with ejections of power from my hands, but like fuck has he not seen magic before. He works for a secret group experimenting on vamps for godsake.

"Fix him." I point to Hunter, who's propped up against the wall. "You must have an antidote."

The flicker of his eyelids tells me he does.

"I'm going to give you till the count of three to comply, then I'll assume that you're useless to me and fry your ass." I light up my hands with electrical power. "One. Two."

He moves fast for an old guy and is across the room by a cabinet in less than a second. "I have it. I have something that might help."

"Might isn't good enough, buddy."

He holds a vial out to me like a sacred offering. "I can't guarantee. The serum is for vamps, not Loup, and I told him that. I told him it could kill him, but he took it anyway."

Fuck... I look down at Hunter. Why the fuck would he...Fee. He did it for Fee. Damn if that isn't the perfect redemption arc.

"This might help," scrawny scientist dude says. "It could neutralize the effects. Right now, the serum is tearing apart his genetic code and attempting to rebuild it. This should halt and reverse the process."

"Give it to him, and just know if he dies, you die."

He nods and hurries over to Hunter, grabbing an empty syringe on the way. He administers the new serum and then quickly steps away from Hunter.

Tick tock. "Well?"

"It should be working by—"

Hunter takes a lungful of air, his body arching on the inhalation. I stop myself from rushing over to him; there's no way I'm taking my eyes off bozo science guy.

"Hunter? Hunter, can you hear me?"

He takes several breaths. "What happened? Fee?"

"Jasper's gone after Fee. The wards are down. How are you feeling?"

He rubs his chest. "Like I got kicked in the chest by a rhino."

“Hey, blinky!”

The scientist looks at me.

“Check his vitals.”

“Um...I’d rather not get too close.”

“Would you rather I incinerate your ass?”

Yeah, that gets him moving.

Hunter growls as the scientist gets closer.

I glare at the Loup. “Stop it. Let him check you over so we can get the fuck out of here.”

“I’m fine.” But he holds out his wrist for a pulse check.

The scientist does pulse and eyelids and nods. “Good. I think it’s working.”

Hunter shoves him away and stands. “I need to get out there and...” He sways and grabs the wall.

“Not okay, blinky.”

“I don’t know,” the science guy says. “I don’t understand. Weakness isn’t a side effect, but Loup aren’t vamps, so...”

“I’m fine,” Hunter growls. “Get me to Fee. Now.”

I want to say I don’t take orders from anyone, but it kinda feels redundant considering getting to Fee is what I want too.

I let the fire wink out and grab hold of scientist dude’s collar. “You’re coming with us.”

I hold my hand out to Hunter, and once he has a grip, I focus on Fee and make the jump.



Fee

My fangs sank into Cold Eyes' face with a satisfying crunch. His scream was a symphony to my ears, and then I set to work tearing him apart.

Uri's face bloomed in my mind. His eyes filled with regret the moment before and then after...

Rage was a red-hot monster taking over my body, and I succumbed to it, allowing it to drive me. To bathe in hot blood and slide its claws through warm entrails. I tore and I ripped until there was nothing but mush, and then I zeroed in on the next dead-eyed fucker and went in for the kill.

The snarls and howls of my pack echoed around me like a battle song as we allowed our fury to reign.

I was the beast.

I was the Loup.

I was wrath.

Gunshots pierced my side but the pain barely registered before I was healing and the fucker who shot me was dying.

Magic whizzed through the air, lighting up the night and burning holes in the super vamps. I caught the scent of death with a metallic undertone that was less copper more iron to my left. This was their scent. My boot snagged on something. I looked down, and the rage that was fueling me melted.

Uri.

He lay on his side just as he'd fallen. His amber eyes dark and unseeing. My Loup retreated, and I fell to the ground beside him, slipping out of half shift.

Around me, the battle raged, but I didn't need to look to know we were winning. No. I needed to stay here. Right here with Uri.

I carefully lifted him and dragged him onto my lap. His torso was dark with congealed blood.

His body was cold to the touch.

I stroked his face and ran my fingers through his silken hair. I was going to buzz cut it for him. He'd said I could. I closed my eyes, and his warm laughter rang in my ears. We'd had so little time. Too little, and still, he'd made an imprint on my heart, one that nothing would erase. I just wished... I just wished I'd had the time to tell him...



I opened my eyes and leaned down to kiss him. His lips were ice as I pressed mine to them. Hot tears slipped down my cheek to kiss his.

The pain in my heart was acute, spiraling, never-ending, and it hit me. I loved him. I'd fucking loved him.

Heat kissed my brow. Light. What? I sat back and stared at Uri's body as it began to glow from the inside out. Wait...wait a second...

He sucked in a sharp breath and then cried out in pain, hands going to his chest as the wound began to knit.

I gripped his face. "Uri? Uri, can you hear me?"

"Fee..." He groaned. "Aw, fuck, that hurts. Back away."

He slid off my lap and tried to put distance between us. My instinct was to go after him, but I did as he asked and backed away. He was glowing brighter and brighter, and the world around us was cast into darkness, and then the light exploded outward in a shockwave, knocking me onto my ass.

I held up my arm to shield my face as the world dimmed again.

"Fee..." Uri stood a couple of meters away, whole and glorious, shining with an inner light that slowly seeped back into his skin.

"You're alive." A sob pinched my throat, and then I was on my feet and running toward him.

He swept me up into his arms and squeezed me tight. I let him for a moment, and then I pulled back, grabbed his face, and peppered it with kisses.

His chuckle warmed my heart and brought fresh tears to my eyes, this time, ones of relief.

"I thought I lost you."

"He sent me back," Uri said.

I pulled back. "The divine?"

"Yes."

"Looks like I owe him."

"He said he owed you."

I pressed my forehead to his jaw. "Thank you. Thank you so fucking much."

"Fee!"

Cora? Uri released me as Cora came striding into the clearing.

"Motherfucker, look at this mess," she said.

Super vamp body parts littered the clearing, and my Loup stood about, naked and bloody. I spotted the Magiguard huddled in a corner, and then

there was another flash of blinding light as a tear opened up in the world. Ursula led the charge of Magiguard, coming in hot.

Ponytail ran up to her to give her the lowdown, no doubt.

“Great timing,” Jasper said coolly, appearing by Cora’s side.

Grayson joined me. He was naked, but he didn’t give a shit, and neither did I. It was the nature of the Loup to be untethered and free.

Cora’s gaze flicked to Grayson’s crotch then back up, eyes round. Fucking hell, even at a time like this, she could make me smile.

“Looks like you didn’t need us after all,” she said.

Us? My gaze slipped over her shoulder, and I saw him, Hunter, his hand around a scrawny human’s wrists. His dark eyes locked with mine, and he smiled, smug and cocky.

“Took your sweet time, didn’t you?” And then he promptly collapsed.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

---

“**W**hat’s wrong with him?” Grayson asked Petra.

“Is it the serum?” Cora asked. “I made the scientist give him an antidote, but the serum was never designed for Loup. It’s for vamps.” Her gaze flicked my way. “Hunter knew that it could kill him, but he took it anyway. He knew it was the only way to help you guys. Juice up and get me to the ward symbol.”

She said *you guys*, but she meant me. He’d done it for me. My throat pinched. He’d risked his life for me...again.

“Is it the serum?” Grayson asked Petra.

Petra shook her head. “The man you brought with you took samples of Hunter’s blood. It’s clean. The issue isn’t biological, it’s mystical.”

“The Tribus...” Grayson exhaled heavily.

“Maybe the stress he placed on his body kick-started his decline, or maybe he would have declined anyway; the fact is, now that it’s begun, he will continue to weaken and eventually pass on, unless...” She slid a glance my way. “The decision is yours.”

There was no decision. “It’s not a choice. We can’t let him die.”

“No,” Grayson said. “We can’t.” His throat bobbed.

“The curse removal?” Cora said. “Are we doing that today?”

With everything going on, I’d forgotten about the fucking curse. The wound on my neck had healed now, but the memory of Grayson’s devastated face was still sharp in my mind.

“Yes.” I nodded. “Can you call Vi?”

“I’ll go get her.” She winked out.

Petra patted my arm. “You’re doing the right thing, Fee. A Tribus is a rare and powerful thing. It’s considered a gift. Some say it only occurs in times where great turmoil is on the horizon. To spurn it would be foolish.”

“I get it. I’ll do what needs to be done.”

I’d hoped for more time to get to know Hunter. To help him get to a better place emotionally before we took the final step to bond, but saving his life trumped that.

Petra left Grayson and me alone outside Hunter’s room.

Grayson stroked my cheek. “You should do it now before he’s too weak to...”

I nodded quickly.

“It’s my duty to the Tribus.” My stomach quivered with nerves. “I’ll get it done, and then we can all relax and figure this thing out together.”

Grayson pulled me into a hug and held me for long minutes. “I’ll be in the lounge when you’re...When it’s over.”

He kissed my cheek and then walked away. Fuck, this was hard for him. Hunter was his twin, but they’d been estranged for so long that the bad blood between them would take time to clean up.

But there was no doubt in my mind that Grayson wanted to save his brother. They deserved a second chance at a relationship.

I took a deep breath, pushed open the door, and entered the room. The blinds were closed, but the gray light of predawn filtered in through the gaps, providing enough illumination for me to see Hunter propped up against several pillows in bed. His chest was bare, and a sheet covered him up to the waist.

He was awake, though. Dark eyes pinned on me.

I approached the bed, and then his lip curled. “What are you doing?”

“Completing the mating. You’ll die if we don’t.”

His throat worked for a moment, and then his eyes narrowed. “Always on hand to do the saving, aren’t you, Fee?”

Oh, boy. “Look, Hunter, I’m not here to stroke your ego, okay. Given the choice, I’d rather not do this right now. I’d have liked to wait and get to know you a little more...But we don’t have that kind of time.”

He looked up at the ceiling, his jaw tight. “So what? You’re going to hop on and ride me? You know I need to be hard for that, and right now.” He gestured to his crotch. “Nothing.”

I took several steps closer and allowed my Loup to swim to the surface. His scent filled my head. My skin pebbled with anticipation and heat swirled low down in my belly before slipping down to settle between my thighs. My body wanted him, and I'd let it have him.

The sheet over his crotch rose as he grew hard.

"Fuck," he bit out.

"Seems to be working now."

His chest heaved as I bridged the distance between us. He was beautiful. There was no denying that. His skin was a shade darker than Grayson's. His hair was ebony, drinking in the light around it. His eyes were fathomless pits of emotion I couldn't begin to comprehend.

I shimmied out of my jeans and knickers but kept my T-shirt on. He didn't need to see my breasts. I just needed to climb on top, slide onto his cock, and ride him until we were pulled into the Vista.

I could do this.

"Take it off," he said gruffly. "Take the shirt off too."

"I don't need to take it off."

He closed his eyes and turned his face to the side. "I'm a boobs man. It'll help get this over quicker."

He wanted this over too? A far cry from the Hunter of a few weeks ago. The one who couldn't wait to fuck me. He'd changed... We'd changed.

I considered arguing further but decided against it and tugged off my top. His mouth parted, breath coming faster and shallower. My nipples tightened to hard peaks beneath his hot regard. I wanted him to touch me, to take my nipples into his luscious mouth and swirl his tongue around them.

No.

This was sex that needed to happen.

I didn't have to enjoy it.

But my body was already singing, telling me I was going to have the time of my fucking life because we had a cosmic connection so deep it was woven into our souls.

Hunter pulled back the sheet to reveal his boxer-clad arousal. "Do you want to do the honors?"

I licked my lips. "You can..."

He pushed down the waistband of his boxers and freed his erection, palming it and working it up and down. I couldn't tear my gaze away from

the motion, the thickness, the length, and the glistening tip that told me he was more than ready for me.

“What are you waiting for, Fee? You want to do this or not?”

His tone was thick with desire, but there was an angry edge to it. I didn't care. He was part of my Tribus. Grayson's twin, my fated mate. This wasn't the order I'd have wanted to do things in, but I couldn't risk losing him over my sensibilities.

He wasn't evil. I just needed time to know him.

Time that would come afterward.

I climbed onto the bed and straddled him, reveling in the heat that crawled up my body as the beast inside stretched and filled me.

He didn't touch me. In fact, his hands were fists at his sides, dark eyes locked on my face as I reached down and gripped him at the base.

His breathing quickened. I didn't have to, but I couldn't help but stroke him. He was silk over steel. He was velvet and slick precum and my mouth watered with the need to taste him. I squashed that impulse. No need to go there. I needed him inside me.

“Fee...fucking just do it,” Hunter snapped.

His body was coiled as if he was ready to lash out.

I pushed up on my knees and finally guided the head of his cock to my core. I ran it up and down, sliding it between my lips.

Hunter threw back his head, breathing through his nose, his jaw ticking.

Oh, fuck. He felt good. Too good, and then I positioned him and lowered myself onto him slowly.

He groaned as I encased him, and I couldn't help but whimper as he filled me. He was thicker than I was used to, and the sensation, although pleasant, was slightly uncomfortable.

I rolled my hips, settling onto him, and then I began to undulate. The plan had been to get it over with quickly. The plan hadn't been for it to feel so fucking good. I needed to touch myself. I needed to... My hands went to my breasts, pinching my nipples, and then down to massage my clit. The heat was a building, tightening, sweet torment preparing me to come.

“Fuck!” Hunter growled.

His hands found my hips, and then I was on my back, and he was on top of me, thrusting hard, fast, and deep. My Loup swelled inside me, taking over, sharpening my vision, heightening each sense. The ridges of his cock inside me as he thrust and the callouses of his hands around my throat,

pressing down enough to keep me pinned but not enough to hurt. My Loup reveled in the domination. Pleaded for it, whimpering, panting, begging him to go harder, faster.

She pulled up her knees and dragged her legs over his shoulders so he could go deeper until my body was riding the pulsing wave of an orgasm so strong it stole my vision.

The scent of fragrant earth, the rumble of thunder, and the crackling electric threat of lightning surrounded me. My back pressed to the grass. Stars up above. Hunter deep inside me, we crested the rise together.

His orgasmic cry turned into a howl, and then he crashed down, palms either side of my head, his dark eyes blazing with an emotion I couldn't define. I rippled around him as he pulsed and stared into my eyes.

His mouth...His mouth was perfect. I wanted to claim it, to kiss him. To savor him. I lifted my head, eager to do just that, but he pushed me back down.

"We're here," he said. "It's done. Your pity fuck worked."

Pity fuck? "What?" I reached up to touch his cheek, but he batted my hand away. "I heard you, Fee. I heard what you said to Grayson. You've done your *duty* now. It's over. I'll play my role as part of the Tribus, but I won't touch you again." He climbed off me, leaving me empty and aching, and stood looking down at me, his body gloriously etched in moonlight. "I won't touch you, not until you fucking beg me to."

The Vista melted, and I was back on the bed and Hunter...Hunter was gone.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

---

I found Grayson and Uri in the kitchen, making dinner and chatting away like old friends. For a moment, I considered sneaking away and leaving them to bond, but there was no getting away from Grayson's sense of smell.

"You hungry, Fee?" he asked with his back to me.

My stomach rumbled in response. "Burgers?"

"And steak," Uri said. "I marinated them myself."

"I'm starving." I'd made sure to shower off Hunter's scent and put on one of Grayson's old T-shirts over leggings. "Steak for breakfast. I love it."

Uri chuckled. "After the night we had..."

He'd almost died. Wait, he had died and been sent back to me. I still had to wrap my head around that. Then there was the loss of Dexter, our civilian Loup, and the two Magiguard. "We lost good people today."

"Bastian's speaking to Dexter's family. We'll be holding a memorial service."

"Good. Yes. Tell me what I can do to help with that." I took a seat at the island. "Is Cora not back with Vi yet?"

"Oh, they got back a while ago," Uri said. "But we sent them out to get dessert. We figured once this curse is off your back, we can celebrate with something indulgent and sweet."

*They were sweet.* Neither mentioned Hunter or asked how it went. They knew I'd tell them if things had gone wrong; they appreciated it wasn't something I wanted to talk about.

They were right, and they were awesome.

My guys...But not all my guys... "I wish Azazel and Mal could be here too. Just in case."



Grayson turned away from the hob and fixed me with a stern look. “Nothing will go wrong.”

I took a deep breath. “You’re right. Vi knows what she’s doing.”

“And she has a medical professional with her.”

“Who you sent to get dessert with them?”

Grayson shrugged. “We said she could hang out with us.”

“She didn’t look too pleased about that option,” Uri said with a frown. “I’m not sure why.”

They were two hulking guys with charisma seeping from their pores. It could be overwhelming for a human.

Grayson passed Uri a plate, and he put two steaks on it then passed the plate to me.

“Eat,” they both said in unison.

They joined me a moment later, and for half an hour, it was just us and yummy food and conversation.

Cora materialized with Vi and another woman just as we were finishing up, and my stomach was instantly in knots.

I pushed back my chair and stood. “Let’s get this over with.”



VI and her doctor friend Missy had me lay on the couch. Missy attached electrode thingies to my chest. I’d had to take Grayson’s shirt off for that, but I was wearing a sports bra, so it felt pretty covered up regardless. They stuck electrode thingies to my temple too, and a machine read my heart rate and brain waves.

We were ready.

It was time for Vi to stop my heart.

A heart that was beating so fast I was afraid I’d pass out.

Uri and Grayson stood at the back of the sofa and Vi sat by my hip, while Missy sat on a chair with a beeping machine by her side. She was a petite human with a perpetually startled look about her and a soft, soothing voice.

“Calm down,” she said. “Your pulse is crazy.”

“I’m about to have my heart stopped...I think it knows.”

Vi rubbed her hands together. Her palms had inked patterns on them, and sparks flew off her fingertips.

“Oh, it’s working.” She sounded surprised.

“You had doubts.”

“I’ve never done this before.”

“You’ve never—” I tried to sit up, but Missy gently pushed me back down.

“Vi?” Grayson’s tone demanded an explanation.

“Look,” Vi said. “I’ve seen it done on several occasions and it’s foolproof. I charge up the emblems with a chant, drawing on my connection to miasma, and then I touch Fee and will her heart to stop. It stops. We wait a minute, and Missy brings her back.”

I looked up at Grayson. This was the part where he said something. Something like *we don’t have to do this, or maybe we can find another solution*. I saw the doubt play across his face, and then his gaze dropped to my neck, to the spot where I’d cut myself, and the doubt melted.

“Fee, if we don’t do this, that curse will take control,” he said.

He was right. This was the plan. The only loophole. “Where’s Cora, I need her.”

“I’m here.” Cora appeared by the fireplace clutching Hunter’s arm.

“What are you—” His gaze fell on me, flicking to my chest and then to the machine I was attached to. “What the fuck is going on?”

“They’re about to stop her heart,” Cora said. “I thought you might want to be here.”

He looked at me, then up at Grayson. “Are you fucking insane?”

Grayson groaned. “Hunter, this is none of your concern.”

Hunter’s expression smoothed out to something cold and lethal. “Not my concern? Last I checked I was the third wheel in this Tribus. She’s my mate too, and her welfare is the welfare of the Tribus.”

For a moment, I’d thought he go down a different route with that reasoning and say that my welfare meant something to him. I shoved away the errant thought. Since when did I care if I mattered to him anyway?

“I have to do this.” I took a deep breath. “I’m cursed, and this is the only way to end it.”

He looked like he was about to argue, and it hit me that this could be the last time I spoke to him. To any of them.

I couldn't do this without him knowing the truth. My gaze flicked to Cora, who I wager had brought him here for that very reason.

"Hunter. It wasn't pity, okay." I didn't want to say more. I didn't need to. "I'm sorry if it felt that way."

He snapped his mouth closed.

I looked up at Grayson. "I lo—"

"Don't," Grayson said. "Tell me when you wake up."

I looked up at Uri. "When I thought you were dead, I felt like my heart was breaking. I need you to know that I'm falling in love with you. I just need you to know that."

His throat bobbed, but he didn't say anything.

"Cora, if I don't—"

"No." Cora cut me off. "Enough with the speeches. You're going to wake up, and if you don't, I'm fucking coming after you."

There was no way she could do that, but hearing her say it and seeing the fierce look on her face was enough to give me the strength I needed to do this.

I looked at Vi. "Do it."

"Stop!"

The electric scent of a storm hit me, followed by a citrus aroma, and my pulse, which was already hammering, shot into my throat. I sat up so fast the electrodes tore from my skin, but I didn't even feel the sting.

"Azazel! Mal!"

They were here. They'd come.

They strode toward me, grime and blood-streaked, reeking of the elements, and then Azazel lifted me off the sofa, and I was kissing him, legs wrapped around his waist, hands in his hair. He tasted like smoky fires and freedom.

"Ahem?"

Azazel gripped me harder, deepening the kiss for one delicious moment before breaking it.

"Thank you," Mal drawled.

Azazel reluctantly set me on my feet, and I stepped into Mal's arms. He hugged me tight, his hands diving into my hair, lips grazing my cheek.

"I fucking missed you. I'll show you how much once this is over."

"Are we going to have a problem, Azazel?" Grayson asked.

Oh shit.

I'd almost forgotten about Azazel's curse. The one that made him keep me, the last descendant of Cain, alive.

Azazel's silver eyes dipped to me. "I'm compelled to keep her alive. Although there is a risk in this, doing nothing means certain death for her and consequences for Lilith." He took a deep breath. "I don't feel compelled to stop this. I think the curse, whatever it is, understands this is the only way to save Fee."

"And if he tries to act up, I'll put him out for a while," Mal said with a smirk.

Yeah, I bet he'd enjoy that.

Azazel stripped off his weapons belt and holster and handed them to Mal. "I'm ready. I'm here."

The fear, the nerves, the rock on my chest, they were gone. My guys were here with me.

I could do this.

There was no stalling now. Electrodes back on, the people I cared for most around me, I closed my eyes.

"Do it, Vi."

A fist gripped my heart, and then there was darkness.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

---

The darkness was absolute, but only for a moment, and then a light bloomed up ahead, and suddenly, I was moving toward it with no control over my body. Shit. Was this supposed to happen?

Didn't going into the light mean death?

Who knew when it came to us outliers. This was uncharted terrain.

Had it been a minute yet?

They were going to pull me out after a minute.

The light was a lamppost with a sign jutting out of it. There was a vehicle drawn onto the wooden sign...a bus. A shelter and a bench were stationed on the other side of the lamp, and two figures were already sitting under it. A man and a woman. They were talking animatedly. It was only when I sat down beside them that it was obvious that they were arguing.

"I told you, time and time again," the woman said. "Two pinches of citra, not three. Now look what you did."

"Then you should have made it yourself," the man retorted.

"If I'd known you were about to poison us, then I would have!"

"How many times do I have to say it. I'm sorry, okay? Sorry."

"You can say it until your face turns blue, it won't help now."

There was a rumble, and then a bright purple bus appeared out of nowhere and came to a standstill in front of us.

"Is this it?" the man asked.

"I assume so. Look." She showed him a piece of paper in her hand. "Didn't have this before."

He frowned and looked down at his hands. "I don't have one."

The woman's smile was sad. "Yes, that makes sense. You never finished the soup, did you?" She patted his cheek. "I think you have to go back, luv."  
"What?"

She stood, and he grabbed hold of her hand. "No. We go together. We're always together."

The doors to the bus swished open, and she turned to quickly hug the man. "Not this time, Timmy."

A light bloomed on his back, and then he was whipped away from her. She stood staring off into the distance for a moment and then climbed onto the bus.

Was this my way out of here?

I hurried to the doors and made to step on.

"Whoa!" a gruff male voice said, halting me in my tracks. "Not you."

I looked up at the driver, a creature so hairy I couldn't even see his eyes. "Um...why not?"

"You got no ticket." The doors shut in my face, and the bus whizzed off to be swallowed by darkness.

Shit, what now? I stepped back, and heat bloomed in my chest, sudden and sharp. I gasped, grabbing hold of my torso as the wave of heat came again.

What was this?

Scratch, scratch at the back of my mind.

What was happening? Where was I? I was at a bus stop... I needed to catch a bus.

I turned back to the bench to find it occupied by a guy. He looked young, maybe mid-twenties, but his eyes looked out of place in such a youthful face. They were too knowing. Too shrewd.

"You waiting for the bus?" I smiled tentatively at him before sitting back down as far away from him as possible.

"No," he said.

"Friends?"

"No. You?" He canted his head. "Where are you headed?"

"Me? I'm..." My mind was blank, and maybe that should have bothered me, but it didn't. "I...don't know. I guess I'll find out."

A tugging sensation lit up my chest again, momentarily stealing my breath.

"Someone wants you back real bad," the guy said.

“Huh?”

He studied me for a long beat. “I could keep you. In fact, I might.”

Keep me? “Look, you’re lovely and all, but you’re a little young for me.”

“Am I?” He sucked his bottom lip into his mouth. “How old are you?”

“Me? I’m...” Panic bloomed in my stomach. How old was I?

“Pretty girl like you must have a pretty name.”

“I...” What was my name?

I looked up to find him sitting right beside me, his eyes all pupil as he locked onto mine.

“Yes... Yes, I think I’ll keep you,” he said.

My hand tingled, and when I looked down, there was a ticket clutched in it.



Cora

“Again! Do it again!” Vi orders.

“I am. I am,” Missy says. “It’s not working.”

The room is in an uproar. Mal, Uri, and Bastian have Azazel pinned. He’s a fucking beast trying to tear his way to Fee, which confirms one awful thing.

She’s dying.

She’s fucking dying.

“I had her,” Missy says. “I had her, and then she flatlined again. Why is she flatlining?”

She sounds genuinely confused.

Grayson is on his knees by Fee’s head, his mouth moving silently. Is he fucking praying? Hunter stands by the fireplace staring, just fucking staring as if he’s frozen in time.

No. We need to do something. An idea forms in my mind. A fucked-up, crazy plan. I don’t know if I can do it. I don’t even know if it’s possible, and I have no clue if I’ll be able to make it back if I succeed.

But I have to try.

I step forward, grab Fee’s hand, and make the most fucked-up, biggest jump of my life.

Right into nothingness.

It’s dark. Like, can’t breathe, suffocating dark.

For a moment, panic overtakes my common sense, and I’m hyperventilating, fear a fist around my heart.

Fee. I came for Fee. I have to focus because I know without a shadow of a doubt that I don’t belong here. This place knows it, but it’s hungry, and I can sense its claws. If I’m not careful, I could lose myself. I could become a meal for the claws waiting in the nothingness. If I’m not careful, I know I can lose myself in here.

Focus, Cor. Focus on Fee.

A light blooms in the darkness, turning the world gray. I run toward it.





[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Fee

“You could ride the bus,” the young man said. “Or...” There’s a vroom and a huge bike appeared in front of us, silver and black. It revved its engine. “You could ride with me...”

The bike was hot. Like super-hot, and I’d always wanted to ride one...at least I think I had. “Where will we go?”

“Wherever you want.”

He stood and held out a hand to me.

The bus chose that moment to show up.

Shit. I had a ticket, but...the bike was so much cooler.

I reached for the young man’s hand.

“Fee!” A woman came running out of the darkness. Slender, fierce-looking with golden hair that came down just past her shoulders. Her gaze flicked from me to the guy with the bike. She gave him a wide berth and held out her hand to me. “Fee, come on. We have to go.”

She seemed concerned. Worried. “Um...Do I know you?”

“Dammit, Fee, snap the fuck out of it. If you stay any longer, you’ll die.”

“Die?”

The young man leaned back against his bike and studied his nails. “You’re too late,” he said. “She’s already dead.”

The heat that had my chest in a grip began to melt.

The woman stared at me in horror. “No. No. Fee. Take my hand.”

“It won’t help,” the guy said. “But I’m not a monster. I’ll let you say goodbye.”

He flicked a wrist my way and a weight settled in my head—colors, names, and places. Memories flooded me. I was Seraphina Dawn. I was...I was me again, and I didn’t belong here.

Fuck! “Cora!” I made a grab for her hand, but my fingers passed through hers.

Oh, God. It was too late. I’d stayed too long.

“No...” Cora shook her head. “Please.” She turned to the man. “You can change this, can’t you? You can give her back. There’s still time.” She looked from the bike to the bus. “There’s still time because she hasn’t taken a ride yet, right?”

He puffed out his cheeks. “Maybe.” He twisted his neck to look at her and arched a brow. “You know what? I’m feeling magnanimous today. Your passion, your connection has touched me. I’m intrigued. You gate-crashed into my domain, after all. That in itself deserves a prize.”

“Oh, goody,” Cora said. “I’m so glad; now give her back to me.”

She kept looking at me, and her expression told me what she was seeing wasn’t encouraging.

My skin was paler now, and my body felt lighter as if it was shedding a weight. Losing a connection. It was over. I was dead. The knowledge was a dark pit in my stomach. All the things left undone...All the people left behind. I looked at my best friend. The woman who’d stood by me time after time. Who’d somehow jumped into this prelude to death to drag me out, and pure love filled my chest. My throat pinched with an excess of emotion.

“It’s okay.” I smiled at her. “You can go now.”

She gave me a shut-the-fuck-up look and focused on the young man. “What do you want in exchange for her?”

I couldn’t have her making deals with this creature parading as a man. “Cora. You need to leave. Now.”

Her head snapped my way. “Like fuck am I leaving you. He can give you back to me.” She strode up to the guy. “What. Do. You. Want?”

He tipped his head back slightly and sucked on his lips, looking her up and down. “One kiss.”

Cora’s head jerked back. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me. You have an energy, an aura...I want to taste it.”

My stomach quivered in foreboding. “Cora, don’t.”

The man smirked. “Don’t worry, Seraphina Dawn. I won’t hurt her.”

“Fine,” Cora said. “One kiss, and then you let her leave with me, alive. Deal.”

“Deal.”

She grabbed his lapels and yanked him to her, crushing her mouth to his in a long, tongue-sucking lip lock that, frankly, was kind of unnerving.

It ended just as abruptly when she shoved him away and backed up, her step a little unsteady.

He reached up to touch his mouth, and his eyes, which had been as dark as twilight, lit up like the sunrise.

What had just happened? What had my friend given and what had this creature taken?

“So, we can go now?” Cora asked. Her tone was shaky.

He climbed onto his bike and revved the engine.

“Hey! Are we done?”

His lips curved in a smirk. “For now.”

This time when Cora reached for me, our hands connected. Her fingers wrapped around mine and she tugged me to her, hugging me close.

I shut my eyes and allowed the world to fracture.

I may be going back, but I’d died. I’d fucking died, and that would have consequences.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER FORTY

---

“Fee, fucking hell. Fee.”

I came to slowly, enveloped in heat and bound in an embrace. Not one embrace but three. Grayson’s husky eyes seared my soul, while Azazel’s powerful chest pressed to my back and Mal’s forehead touched my cheek. They cradled me between them, arms locked around me, uncaring that holding me like this meant holding onto each other. It was intimate and safe and warm, and in their arms, I was home. I was with my guys.

A choked sob rose up between us.

Mal.

He rolled his forehead against my cheek, and hot tears splashed my collarbone. “We lost you.” His voice was a ragged sigh. “Fuck. We lost you.”

“I felt it.” Azazel gripped me tighter. “The wrenching in my soul. I felt you die.”

“We all did.” Grayson scanned my face as if he couldn’t believe he was seeing it again.

I’d died?

A memory stirred at the back of my mind. I’d died and...Cora...Cora had held me together and brought me back.

Panic flared in my chest. Something had happened. Something to Cora. “Cora! Where’s Cora?”

“I’m here, babe,” Cora said from beyond the wall of muscle that surrounded me. “Alive and kicking. Just letting the guys do their thing.”

Yeah, the guys weren’t letting me go anytime soon, and I wasn’t complaining. My feet didn’t touch the ground, and my chest was kinda

aching a little from Azazel's epic grip, but I didn't care. Their scent, their heat was like a balm to a soul that felt frazzled and fractured.

I closed my eyes and reveled in the contact, and slowly, increment by increment, Azazel's grip eased. Mal kissed my cheek and stepped back, and Grayson did the same. But they didn't go far.

Uri slipped past Grayson and pulled me into a tight hug. His body trembled against mine.

I stroked his back. "I'm okay. I'm okay."

I was back from...wherever I'd gone. Somewhere...

Uri released me and Azazel to scoop me up and sat on the single-seater with me. Mal and Grayson gravitated toward us, crouching either side of the sofa as if they couldn't bear to be too far.

"I died..." I said the words out loud to test them, then looked up at Cora, who was leaning against the mantelpiece. "You...came for me?"

"Damn straight I did," Cora said. "Like fuck was I letting you ride that stinky bus or the over-the-top bike."

What? My mind was fuzzy. "Bus?"

Cora frowned. "You don't remember any of it?"

"She's not supposed to," Vi said. "No one who returns recalls anything." Her expression was speculative. "But you do..."

Cora shrugged. "I guess I'm special." She grinned. "It doesn't matter. All that matters is that Fee's okay."

There was a flash of movement to my left, and my head whipped around in time to watch Hunter stride from the room.

Uri locked gazes with me for a long beat, his ember eyes filled with relief and love, and then, giving me a nod, he headed after Hunter.

"Well." Missy pressed her hands to her thighs. "That was not fun, and I will not be doing it again, so if someone could take me home, I'd be very grateful." Her eyes rolled back in her head, and she passed out.

"Shit," Vi said.

I'd died, which meant Eve's curse had activated.

Shit indeed.



I WAS BACK. I was alive and my guys were ecstatic. But all I could think about was Lilith and what my dying had done to her. There was no time to revel in the victory of my survival, and not much time to connect with Azazel or Mal, because my dying had made it even more urgent that they get back and fortify Imperium. Still, the guys lingered for a day, taking every moment to touch me, to hold me, to tell me that they loved me. But even just a day was too long for them to stay away from the Underealm.

If Lilith was damaged in some way, Mammon would use that to try and wrest control of the Underealm.

But she wasn't dead. At least that's what Azazel said. "I'd know if she was dead. I'd feel it."

So, that was good news.

"We'll send word periodically with Conah," Azazel said. "Keep you updated on the situation in the Underealm."

I stroked his jaw. "I'm so sorry."

He looked confused. "What for?"

"For dying," Mal said. "She's sorry for dying."

"Dammit, Fee," Azazel said. "You had no control over that. I don't blame you. I blame the bastards who put the curse on you."

"Thank fuck for Cora," Mal said.

Cora had brought me back only to vanish with Jasper. She didn't have to spell out why. It was written all over his smug face, and it made me sick. I made me sick.

"She saved me, and there was a price, but it's fuzzy. All I know is that she's always giving pieces of herself for me." My stomach rolled as I accepted the truth. "She'll always give pieces of herself for me, and one day it will get her killed."

Azazel and Mal were silent.

My stomach churned with the revelation I'd been holding at bay. "I need to let her go. I need to *make* her leave me."

"You can't force Cora to do anything," Mal said. "The woman is a force of nature."

"And I want her to stay that way."

Azazel nodded. "We'll figure it out."

I smoothed back my hair and took a breath. "Go. Find Lilith."

"She's alive," Azazel said. "I'd know if she wasn't. Maybe whatever Eve did with the curse wasn't death...It was something else? Keon is tied to

her too. I'll speak to him."

He didn't know what Keon was to him, and even though I ached to tell him, it wasn't my secret to impart.

"I love you both." I took their hands. "Be safe. Come back to me."

"Always," they said in unison.

"Send a phoenix if you need us," Azazel added.

They each kissed me, and then they were gone, leaving me bereft and empty once again.

Arms wrapped around my waist, and Grayson hugged me to his chest. "It will be all right."

I closed my eyes and reveled in the contact. "Where's Hunter?"

"Has a meeting with Eldrick."

"And Uri?"

"On a donut run." He chuckled. "Having a celestial who can teleport comes in handy."

I laughed. "And you're okay with him staying here?"

Grayson turned me to face him. "Uri's a good guy. I like him. But maybe you'll want to spend a couple of nights a week at your quarters."

I blushed. "Okay."

I looked around the lounge, tidy now, and occupied by my pack as they watched TV together. We'd busted onto an island and saved a bunch of humans and vamps. Killed a bunch of super vamps and kidnapped a scientist who right this moment was in Magiguard custody along with Kristoff. I'd died and come back to life, and Lilith could be seriously affected by that. War loomed on the horizon in the Underealm, but right now. This moment. Life felt almost normal.

Grayson nuzzled my ear. "You want to go to bed for a bit?"

My body responded with instant eagerness. "Yes, please."

He took my hand, and we headed toward the lift. Grayson was about to press the call button when a gust of air blew through the house—warm and floral-scented.

The hairs on my nape stood to attention. Grayson had gone very still too, his grip on my hand flexing. He released me, and we both turned to the entrance to find a woman standing there.

She was dressed for summer, hair braided with flowers, feet bare, and totally out of place against the winter backdrop behind her. But what grabbed me by the throat and shook me was her face.



She had my face.

“Hello, Seraphina Dawn,” she said. “We have a problem.”

To be continued....

Grab the thrilling finale to Fee’s adventure, Reaper Unleashed  
HERE



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## OTHER BOOKS BY DEBBIE CASSIDY

### **The Gatekeeper Chronicles**

[Marked by Sin](#)

[Hunted by Sin](#)

[Claimed by Sin](#)

### **The Witch Blood Chronicles**

*(Spin-off to the Gatekeeper Chronicles)*

[Binding Magick](#)

Defying Magick

Embracing Magick

Unleashing Magick

### **The Fearless Destiny Series**

[Beyond Everlight](#)

Into Evernight

Under Twilight

### **The Chronicles of Midnight**

[Protector of Midnight](#)

Champion of Midnight

Secrets of Midnight

Shades of Midnight

Savior of Midnight

### **Chronicles of Arcana**

City of Demons

City of the Lost

City of Everdark

City of War

### **For the Blood**

For the Blood  
For the Power  
For the Reign  
For the Hunt (novella)

**Heart of Darkness**

Captive of Darkness  
Bane of Winter  
Fate's Destiny

**Deadworld**

Deadworld  
Dead City  
Dead Sea  
Dead End

**The Nightwatch Academy**

Shadow Caster  
Shadow Weaver  
Shadow Warrior  
Shadow Master

**The Nightwatch Series**

Ghost of a Chance  
Give up the Ghost  
Ghost at the Feast  
Lay the Ghost

**Deadside Reapers Series**

Reaper Unexpected  
Reaper Uninvited  
Reaper Untamed  
Reaper Unveiled  
Reaper Undone  
Reaper Unhinged  
Reaper Unleashed

**The Iron Fae Series**

Taste My Wrath

Feel My Power

**Dragon Guard Series**

Dragon Trial

Dragon Rising

**Survivor's Heart (Planet Athion World)**

*Novellas*

Rogue

Rebel

Survivor

**Standalone Novellas**

[Blood Blade](#)

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debbie Cassidy lives in England, Bedfordshire, with her three kids and very supportive husband. Coffee and chocolate biscuits are her writing fuels of choice, and she is still working on getting that perfect tower of solitude built in her back garden. Obsessed with building new worlds and reading about them, she spends her spare time daydreaming and conversing with the characters in her head – in a totally non psychotic way of course. She writes High Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Space Fantasy, and Reverse Harem. Connect with Debbie via her website at [debbiecassidyauthor.com](http://debbiecassidyauthor.com) or twitter [@authordcassidy](https://twitter.com/authordcassidy). Or sign up to her [Newsletter](#) to stay in the know.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)