

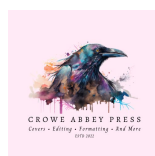
Right Hand ^{II F} The Reaper

— A G R I M T A L E —
BAILEY GRAYSON

Right Hand of the Reaper

A G.R.I.M Tale: Book One

Bailey Grayson



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1st Edition

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To Cristina, my alpha. This one is for you. Thanks for all the
support xx

Note from the Author



This story does contain potential triggers, dark humour, and mentions of past abuse. There are graphic sex scenes which include kink (such as BDSM, degradation, blood play and breath play). All the characters are consensual and practice RACK (Risk Aware Consensual Kink). The twins, Rafe and Rayne, while close, do not cross the line into incest. Their relationship is co-dependant, and they rely on each other for touch. Remember, consent is always sexy. Enjoy the ride lovely readers, Bailey x

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Prologue



Her

“**W**hat are you doing, little thief?”

The dark whisper caught me off guard. I was literally standing there with my hand caught in the cookie jar. Well, vault. And not just any vault. I was in the most secure vault of all the territories and its location was kept as the biggest secret in the Guild. It was supposed to be impregnable, but I’d never been one to back down from a challenge.

“Spring cleaning?”

My answer was met with a chuckle that was just as dark as his whisper. I turned in the direction that the voice had come from and found myself looking at nothing but thick black shadows.

“I don’t believe that for a second,” the dark voice whispered.

I reached into my backpack for my weapon. A modified taser fixed with enough voltage to knock out an elephant. I was a thief, not a murderer. I didn't play with guns. But if the taser failed, I always had my lucky knife with me so I could cause a little damage.

"Where are you?"

"Right here," he whispered by my ear. A pathetic yelp careened out my throat and my heart rate jumped. I spun on my heels to take a look at the guy who'd just made me jump out of my skin and my gaze collided with bright red eyes.

Shit. That meant vampire or demon. Why didn't my inside guy at the Guild mention this? To be fair, he probably didn't know. Barely anyone knew about this place.

"Are you nervous, little thief?" he purred. I tried to ignore how deliciously sultry his words sounded but, damn the guy had a sexy voice.

He stepped into the light and holy mother of chocolate cream donuts. The guy was huge. He towered over me with muscles upon muscles. I mean, jeez, the guy was solid. And gorgeous. His face was all harsh planes and sharp angles, with stubble that would probably feel amazing against my skin. His hair was dark, but there were too many shadows for me to tell how dark.

Fuck me.

His tongue ran over his beautiful mouth and his nostrils flared. "Is that why you broke in here?"

Um, what?

Ah, crap. I'd totally said that out loud.

"Nope. Funnily enough, I came here to steal something."
And why the fuck was I being so honest?

"That much I'd figured. It's not very often someone gets this far into the vault."

This job was legendary amongst the thieves of the Underbelly. No one had ever successfully stolen the Diadem and now I knew why. Shit. I was going to end up like Trent. He was the last person to attempt it, and no one had heard from him since. I guess I was looking at the reason why.

The pay out for stealing the Diadem was ridiculous. And I was desperate. I needed the money and the clean slate because I'd managed to piss off the wrong people.

"Well, this is great and all, but I'll just be taking the Diadem and be on my merry way."

A surge of power swam through the air. Fuck. He was definitely not a vampire. I don't even think he was a demon. That power felt like something else.

Something ancient.

Which was definitely something I didn't want to get involved with.

"I can't let you do that, little thief." His words were laced with a threatening rumble. The thunder before the storm.

Energy crackled in the air, and my eyes darted from his to the Diadem that stood in front of me. It was such a small little thing. So plain and unassuming. Twisted knots of gold and silver with black and white diamonds clustered in the centre.

“Don’t do it. I don’t want to have to kill you.”

Again, my eyes flickered between him and the Diadem. I knew it was stupid. I wasn’t going to be able to beat him. But I really needed that crown.

His hand shot out and captured my wrist before I had even blinked. Heat immediately burned through my flesh as his fingers wrapped tightly around me, but it wasn’t painful, it was comforting. Warm. Tender.

A gasp escaped my throat as it spread through me, igniting my nerves with a delicious hum that went all the way down to my toes.

“Not possible,” the monolith of a man gasped. His other hand gripped my chin and forced me to look at him.

As our eyes connected again and I felt something snap into place. It was like a revelation.

A goddamn epiphany.

Mate.

But that was fucking impossible. I was a human. And he was... what? I had no clue.

My body instantly became alive beneath his touch, and I suddenly craved everything he could give me. But I couldn’t

give in. I had a plan and I needed that Diadem.

“I’m sorry.”

His brow descended in confusion before his eyes widened in realisation.

My hand whipped out and I grabbed the delicate crown but whatever I was expecting, it wasn’t what happened.

Pain coursed through my body as soon as my fingers touched it. My vision blurred as a thousand knives carved the flesh from my bones. As the world faded to black, a roar of anguish and pain serenaded me on my way to death. My heart stuttered and broke for the man I’d only just met. I didn’t even know his name.

My last thought as I faded was wondering if it had all been worth it. Now, I guess I’d never know.

I was a fucking idiot.

Chapter One



Roux

Getting into a heated argument wasn't how I planned on spending my Saturday night, but when a rogue vamp was being a jackass to another woman, what's a girl to do?

I just wanted to enjoy my night at the hottest club in town. The music was thudding up through the floor from the basement below and I'd just been getting my first drink when I spotted this asshole pawing at a human woman. This was a vampire bar and a hotspot for humans who liked to make direct blood donations. It wasn't against the law – unless the vampire got a little too excited and drained the human – but it wasn't exactly normal, even by today's standards. Most vampires got their blood from the blood bank, unless you were filthy rich and could employ a human to see to your needs, but there was so much paperwork and red tape involved in

keeping your own human that not many vampires did that. Hence why this club was always teeming with humans and vampires.

I turned to the vampire who'd thrown a derogatory slur at me. A weaselly looking man with greasy hair and pointy facial features.

"Why did you have to go and ruin my night? All I wanted to do was have a few drinks, make a few friends, maybe get lucky, and you had to spoil it by hitting on a woman who clearly wasn't interested in you."

Said woman was still cowering in the booth behind the vampire. I hated that because this was a vampire territory, they thought they could just take what they wanted. No meant no in any damn territory.

"Who do you think you are?" the vampire whined. God, he even sounded like a weasel.

"I'm one step away from being your worst nightmare, pal."

He scoffed. Yeah, I wasn't much to look at right now, being only five foot three with bright red hair, pale skin that made me look like a porcelain doll and dressed in the skimpiest outfit I owned – this was my night off after all – but that smug looking smile of his was going to drop if he didn't piss off.

"You do know you're in a vampire bar?" He stepped closer, his cocksure attitude plastered across his face.

"I do actually, and you're currently giving them a bad name." Not all vampires were assholes. "Look, if you

apologise to the lady and leave now, I'll give your free pass for calling me an interfering whore. I mean, what is this, the nineteenth century? If you don't apologise, well, you probably don't want to find out what I'll do to you."

These vamps could tell I was a supernatural, they wouldn't know what type, because my kind were supposed to stay under the radar. If I were a human, he'd probably have tried to glamour me and move on.

Mikey, the bartender, was trying to catch my eye. Probably wanting to beg me not to make a mess. Again. I didn't get a night off very often, but somehow, I always managed to make them memorable.

"What you gonna do, bitch?" The weaselly vamp stepped closer again and slammed his hand on the bar next to me. The wood cracked beneath his fingers, and I heard Mikey mutter a few curse words.

My patience started to wear thin. "I'm the bitch that's going to drag your unconscious ass to your king if you don't do what I ask."

The vamp had the audacity to laugh in my face. "Really?"

"Mm-hm." I took a sip of my martini and held the guy's stare. His eyes flickered briefly before his bravado came back with a renewed force.

Another couple of vampires walked up behind him, no doubt his equally stupid buddies, and looked like they were prepared

to jump in and back him up in a fight. One was in a Hawaiian shirt and the other a dirty looking denim jacket.

I grinned. Bar brawls were my specialty. “Gentlemen, I’ll give you one last chance to walk away with all your limbs attached.”

“Frank, just do as the lady says,” Mikey grumbled, clearly trying to protect his bar. I’d helped him to get this place up and running a few years ago and in return he’d give me free cocktails and a place to blow off steam. Not many people were tolerant of my kind, but I had a feeling I was starting to make him regret letting me in in the first place. Maybe I should take this outside. I liked my free martinis.

Frank the Weasel snorted and let his fangs drop and his nails extend into wicked looking talons.

I sighed and cast an apologetic glance at Mikey. I slid off my stool and pointed a finger at Frank. “Come with me, Frank. There’s some cement in the alley out back with your name written on.”

Then I turned and walked towards the back exit with three pissed off vampires in tow.

The cool air of the night hit my shoulders. It was a balmy night which was unusual for this time of year. The moon was high in the sky, its lunar rays casting eerie shadows making me feel like I’d stepped onto a horror movie set. I blessed Nyx for a beautiful night and the joy that was going to come from breaking a few bones.

I looked at the trio of vampires and beckoned them closer with a curl of my finger and a smirk on my face.

They circled around me and there was a moment of silence before they launched themselves at me. They attacked together but they weren't a well-oiled team. They got in each other's way as they tried to take the glory of taking me down. Frank cursed as his cheek met my open palm. The Hawaiian shirt kicked out a leg, but I dodged it and swiped his other from under him. He fell to the ground with a thud and a yelp. Denim jacket aimed his right fist at my gut, but I blocked his attack before thrusting the heel of my palm into his nose. There was a satisfying crunch and he fell back a few paces leaving me with a small ring of space around me.

Again, they attacked and again I knocked them to the ground.

Out the corner of my eye I noticed a group of onlookers gathering at the entrance of the alleyway. Urgh. I hated creating a scene. Especially since I was dealing with vampires in vampire territory. Norman was going to throw a fit when he found out. He was going to have to handle a whole messy PR coverage and he'd just have one more reason to hate my guts. He was a ghost and handled all our PR. He'd probably quit just to haunt me over this.

Ah, well. Too late now. Better get it over with before it turned into an even bigger disaster.

I called the darkness to me and let it swallow me into its cool embrace.

“What the fuck?” I heard someone shout.

The air rippled around us, and electricity charged along my nerves as I felt the transformation taking hold.

“Oh, shit!” There was a scuffle of feet as someone ran out the alley.

My skin peeled away, and my dress morphed into a dark cloak of shadows. The material and my bright red hair swirled in a phantom breeze.

Screams echoed down the alleyway and the crowd dispersed as they realised what I was.

A Reaper.

I rolled my neck and looked at the pathetic heap frantically trying to crawl away from my feet. Not that there were really any feet under the cloak.

“I’m sorry,” Frank spluttered. “I didn’t mean to.”

I reached out my hand and grabbed his collar, dragging his face closer to my own.

“I gave you a chance, Frank. You’ve only got yourself to blame.” My voice had deepened and turned gravely with my transformation.

Frank turned his beady eyes up at me and I caught a reflection of my face in his wide eyes. Even after all this time, it still freaked me out sometimes. Half my skin had disappeared from my face, exposing the bone beneath. The surface was carved with intricate patterns and swirls, much

like a tattoo on skin. I had no idea where they had come from, or what they meant, just that they had always been there. One of my eyes was just an empty socket with a thick dark void of pure nothingness. As black and dense as the emptiness of space. It could send even the bravest of men to the edge of madness.

“I’ll leave. I’ll never come back. Please!” He begged.

“It’s too late for that. You’re lucky it’s my night off.”

The smell of piss permeated the air. Urgh. Pathetic.

“You’re lucky I’m in a good mood, Frank.”

“Please,” he whined. “I didn’t know you were a Reaper.”

“Well, isn’t that a shitter. Maybe you should take this as a life lesson.” Then I punched him in the face and knocked him out cold. His body went limp in my arms, and I called the shadows to me again. I had a vampire king to see, and he happened to be the biggest douchebag in the world.



I materialised outside Chateau Noir and sighed. I really hated this guy. Magnus Beauchard. King of the vampires and ruler of this territory, Midnight. He ruled with an iron fist, was devastatingly handsome, and just happened to be my ex.

I looked down at Frank who was still out cold. Best get this over with.

I trudged up the steps and rang the doorbell. Normally Reapers didn't get involved in peacekeeping topside but recently there'd been an increase in criminal activity, and we'd been roped in by the Guild to lend a helping hand on occasion. I also had a strong tendency to help those weaker than me which, to the annoyance of my boss Thane, usually landed me in heaps of trouble. Like this one that was no doubt going to earn me a reprimand from Thane.

The large wooden door opened, and I was faced with a short, fat vampire with thinning hair and a grim disposition. His face instantly soured when he saw me.

"Hello Foster. I need to see Magnus." I swanned across the threshold to the tutting sound of the butler's disapproval. He'd never liked me.

"His majesty is currently occupied and will be for the rest of the evening." He peered down his nose at Frank. "I suggest you come back tomorrow evening."

Well, that wasn't going to happen. I wanted my martini, dammit.

"Magnus! Get your butt down here!"

Foster growled. "I must insist you leave at once."

I stomped to the stairs and started heading up to the first floor. "Magnus, get your fangs and your dick out of your blood whore and come and talk to me."

I strolled down the hallway, annoyed at the fact I remembered the way without thinking about it, and slammed

open the door to his bedroom.

There was a yelp followed by a thud as someone fell out of bed. The girl stood up, took one look at me and screamed. Bloody humans. Honestly, supes had been out of the closet for years but they just couldn't get used to us Reapers. There weren't many of us, unlike vampires who seemed to be spreading like a bloody virus. I figured that humans didn't like us because they always assumed we were here to claim their soul. It wasn't like that was the only thing I did. Sometimes there were days when I just did boring old paperwork.

The girl bolted out the room completely butt naked.

Foster entered behind me. "I'm sorry your majesty. I tried to stop her—"

"That's quite alright, Foster. I will deal with the intruder."

Intruder? Seriously?

"As you wish, sire." Then Foster bowed and left me alone with the king.

Magnus stepped out of the bed and into the rays of moonlight streaming through the window. He was shirtless and his silk bottoms were slung deliciously low on his narrow hips.

Damn, he looked good. Hair as black as pitch, eyes bright ruby red, a jaw sharp enough to cut glass and fuck... I'd forgotten how magnificent his torso was. Nights of tracing those abs with my tongue flashed before my eyes and my traitorous body flushed at the memories.

“Hello, Roux. It’s been a while.” His voice was a deep sultry rumble. The perfect tone for whispering dirty words low in your ear. “You’re looking... vicious.” His eyes flashed in the low light, the wicked gleam causing my heart to thud a little bit harder. A wolfish smirk caressed his mouth. He knew exactly what he was doing to me.

He strolled closer and I got an eyeful of the blood dripping down his chin.

“You saving that for later?”

He swiped his thumb across his bottom lip before dipping it into his mouth. The red in his eyes darkened and a moan left his mouth. Such a wicked noise...

Focus woman!

Magnus stopped in front of me and placed his hands in his pockets. “You’d better have a good reason for interrupting my dinner.”

“Oh, sorry. How rude of me,” I drawled.

His eyes trailed my face, and I remembered that I was still in my true form. I let go of my shadows and felt my skin slither back over my exposed bones. Still wasn’t used to that sensation. I’d been a Reaper for years, but that sensation still creeped me out.

“Still fighting your true nature.” He shook his head at me. “Still hiding behind your thin veil of humanity.”

“That’s not a bad thing, Magnus. We can’t all be monsters like you.”

He chuckled darkly, like a soft roll of thunder. “True. What do you want? I’m hungry.”

I rolled my eyes. Still a selfish bastard then. “You need to have better control over your vampires.”

He frowned. “Do I?”

“Yes. They seem to think it’s alright to force a woman to feed them, even when she says no.”

“You think I condone this behaviour?” His voice was a lethal growl.

“Well, I don’t see you enforcing it. It’s not even the first time I’ve seen it in the territory. What’s the matter, Magnus? Losing your touch?”

Magnus charged at me, snarling and snapping his fangs as he slammed my back into the wall behind me.

Air rushed from my lungs at the impact, and I felt a sharp sting as his nails extended, pressing into the column of my neck.

“How dare you question my authority,” he roared.

Anger sparked in my core, and I saw red. I called my death magic to me and felt the energy coil warmly in my belly. Not many creatures could overpower a vampire like Magnus – the guy was as old as dirt – but I wasn’t like most creatures.

I slammed my hands into his chest, and he flew backwards, hitting the ground with a thud. I vaulted through the air and

landed on top of him. Vampires liked to think they were the top of the food chain, but they were no match for Reapers.

I slammed my forearm into his throat and pinned him to the ground.

He smiled up at me. "I always did love it when you played dirty."

I pushed my forearm harder into his neck and he let out a choked gasp. "I met Frank this evening. Lovely guy, if a little weaselly. Tried to force a human to let him feed from her without permission. And he ruined my night off. Do you know how long it's been since I've had a night off?"

He scowled at me. "No."

"Neither do I."

"Poor little Reaper. Did you kill my vampire?"

"Of course not." Murder was still punishable by the same standards of human law. I only collected the souls of the dead, sometimes the souls of the damned if they'd overstayed their welcome, but I definitely did not commit murder. "I left him in a heap in your hallway."

"How kind of you."

"It was. I think I showed great restraint considering he attacked me."

Something flashed in his eyes. But it was gone before I could decipher what it was.

I leant closer to him and stared deep into his eyes. “I won’t be so forgiving next time I see a vampire doing that again.”

“So much violence for someone who tries to cling to humanity.”

“Humanity was a long time ago. I just try and stick to good principles.” I didn’t know who I was before I became a Reaper. All my memories from the Before were gone. I woke up and I had no name, no idea where I’d come from, or who I really was. I could have been a murderer for all I knew, but the way I stuck to trying to be a good person made me think I couldn’t have been all that bad.

Unlike this asshole.

“I’ll make sure he’s suitably punished. You know I can handle that, don’t you?” His hands trailed over my hips until his thumbs hit the juncture of my thighs. “I seemed to remember that you liked the way I used to punish you.”

A delicious warmth curled through my body and heat gathered between my legs.

“I remember.” Shit. Why was my voice breathy?

“We were always so good together,” he purred. “I could make you feel good again.”

His thumbs ran slowly across my skin, tantalising me and making my body zing with desire. But I’d been here before, and I wasn’t falling for it again.

Quick as a flash, I pulled a short knife from my boot and hovered the sharp point over one of his eyes.

“No,” I said shortly. “We might have been good in the bedroom, but you were always too scared to commit. That’s why I found you with another woman sticking her tongue down your throat. You might have been a good fuck, Magnus, but you were never a good man. Now, remove your hands or I’ll remove your eyeball.”

He slowly peeled his hands away from my thighs and held them placatingly in front of me.

“I regret that you had to see that, Red.”

“Why? Because you got caught?”

He let out a deep sigh. “No, because I was a fool.”

Anger burst to life in my chest as the humiliation I suffered reignited. “You got that right,” I spat. “I still can’t believe that I—”

Nope. I wasn’t going there. Gods, I couldn’t believe I’d nearly told him that I’d loved him.

“That you what?” he asked, seeking for me to continue, a spark of something that looked like hope burning in those red eyes.

I jumped up off him and turned my back on him. I couldn’t look at him. Not when he looked at me like that. Like he regretted what had happened between us. He’d always said I’d jumped to conclusions, but I couldn’t deny what I’d seen. What he’d done or how that made me feel.

I heard him pick himself up off the floor and sigh deeply.

I clung on to the anger and the hate and gave him one last look over my shoulder. “Fuck you, Magnus.”

Before he could get another word in, I stormed out of his castle and back into the balmy night air.

I was not going to cry. Not over that asshole. I hated how he made me feel, like I’d meant nothing to him. This was why I never went to see him. It always made me feel like shit. Maybe I should have removed his eyeball. It might have made me feel a little better.

I turned onto the main road and headed back in the direction of the city. I could use my shadows to portal myself, but I wanted the walk to clear my head. My night off was ruined, and Magnus had reminded me of how small and shitty he always made me feel. When I got home, I was throwing a pity party for one.

As I reached Witches Row, a street full of shops and cafes catering for the local magic users, my phone blasted out ‘Don’t Fear the Reaper’. Corny, I know, but if I didn’t hold onto the small things that made me laugh, I’d be a miserable fucker like my boss Thane. He was *the* Grim Reaper and he seemed to take the grim part literally. I don’t think the guy had cracked a smile in 200 years.

I checked the caller ID and saw it was Lila, my handler and best friend. “Hey babe, what’s up?”

“You need to get back here. Immediately.” She sounded freaked out.

“Why? What’s happened?”

“Thane’s gone missing.”

Well, shit.

Chapter Two



Roux

I materialised back in Miseriae, the city of the Underworld where the GRIM (General Reaping Inc., Miseriae) headquarters were. Miseriae was one of the biggest cities down here, not quite as big as the capital, Infernum, but it was much better in my opinion. It wasn't as crowded, and the people were a lot nicer. I say people, but everyone down here was either dead, a demon or somewhere in between, like a vampire. Not quite dead, but not quite alive either. Capital city dwellers tended to be full of themselves and complete assholes. Just like the King of the Dead, Hades. He was a total self-absorbed jackass. I avoided him as much as I possibly could, which was pretty difficult when you were the right hand of the Reaper, but I'd discovered a talent for making up weird and wacky excuses to avoid the guy like the literal plague.

Our building was tall and modern, made from glass and steel that stood out among the surrounding buildings of old stone. We Reapers had moved with the human times and created a building that wouldn't have looked out of place topside. Although, since supernaturals made themselves known to the humans, topside had changed quite a bit. Midnight, the vamp territory, used to be the London but now it looked completely different. The entire world was different. And it wasn't always for the best.

"Where have you been?" Lila shouted as I entered the foyer, her silver blonde hair frazzled as if she'd been playing with it to ease her nerves. "The whole place is in uproar."

"So, Thane really is missing?"

"Yes! He's not been seen since yesterday."

"Shit." That meant no one had processed the souls for today. "Who's looking after the vault?"

"Rafe and Rayne."

Double shit. They were Hell Hounds. They couldn't judge the souls like a Reaper.

"Have you tried calling him? Been to his place? Called his cell?"

She gave me a flat look. "No, Roux. I completely forgot to do those really obvious things."

I rolled my eyes. I loved this girl but sometimes she was a right snarky cow.

“I’m going to have to do it, aren’t I?”

Lila nodded gravely.

“Fuck.” Judging souls was reserved for the Grim Reaper. I might have been his right hand, and I might have trained for this for if he eventually retired, but I’d never judged a soul in my life. What if I sent someone to the wrong place? What if I upset the balance of the Hellish Planes? What if—

“Are you Roux?”

A soft, rich voice pulled me from my inner panic attack. I turned to my left and met the most gorgeous pair of eyes I’d ever seen. They were a strange mix of navy blue and purple, swirling like a galaxy deep in space. Framed with thick dark lashes, they were deep and mesmerising, and seemed to be holding more mysteries than the universe itself. Midnight blue hair sat on his shoulders in dishevelled waves, at odds with the smart get up he was wearing. High cheekbones gave way to a deliciously full mouth, his lips pillowy soft and perfect for kissing. He was gorgeous, but there was no doubting what he was. A Metus demon, class five on the Underworld scale. Known for playing havoc with your dreams and turning your fears into reality. They were rare and super powerful, and my core clenched at the violence that was restrained beneath that exquisitely tailored suit. Oh, the fun we could have together.

What the hell was a rare demon doing here?

Lila jabbed her elbow in my ribs. Oops. I’d been full on staring. And the mystery man did not look impressed.

“Yes, I’m Roux. What can I do for you?”

“Excellent.” He reached into his suit pocket and pulled out a crisp white envelope. “As next in command here at GRIM, it is my duty to inform you, that following some serious accusations against Thane, we will be shutting down this facility and transferring all souls contained on the premises into the care of the Royal Guard.”

“You can’t do that,” Lila snapped.

“All soul collections will cease while the accusations are investigated.” The mystery guy extended his hand out towards me with the offending envelope in it. “All the details can be found in here.”

I took the envelope. “Who are you?”

“My name is Atticus Drake and I have been sent by the Guild to lead the investigation.”

I took the envelope and shoved it in my pocket. “You can’t cease soul collections. Do you know what will happen topside if the dead roam free?”

Atticus shrugged. “They won’t be running free. His majesty, King Hades, has requested that the Royal Guard handle all the current case files of GRIM. I suggest you get these shipped to Infernum immediately.”

I barked out a laugh. “Really? Those idiots can’t tell the difference between a human and a dog.”

“Not my problem. Now, I’d be grateful if you could show me up to Thane’s office. I’d like to get started right away.”

I raked him over slowly, making sure he knew I was sizing him up. “I don’t think you understand how serious this is, pal. If souls start wandering off or get missed because those wankers over at the Royal Guard fuck up, the whole world upstairs will go to shit.”

A dark eyebrow arched above his left eye. “Wankers?”

“Yes, wankers.” I refused to be embarrassed by my choice of word. It was entirely fitting for the demons Hades kept as his own personal guard.

Atticus sighed, a sound of exasperation and annoyance. “I get that you’re annoyed and that this is a pain in the ass, but I am here to do my job. Hate me, like me, I don’t care. I’m not here to be your best friend, and I’m not here to deal with any fallout my being here might bring. Contingencies have been made. *You* need to allow me to do my job. I don’t care if you’re a Reaper. I have a bag of tricks that will take you down if you stand in my way.” He smiled thinly. “Understood?”

“Fine,” I snapped. “But you’re right. I don’t like this one fucking bit.”



I left Atticus to set himself up in Thane’s office and headed down the corridor to my own. I had snagged the corner office with glass walls on either side and the best view of the city. I may have played dirty to get it, but I didn’t care. I walked out on my balcony and stared out at the setting sun. Hues of red

and orange played across the skyline, drenching the city in a warm glow.

I pulled the envelope out of my pocket. What had Thane gotten himself involved in now? I flicked open the seal and was just about to pull out the papers when Lila stormed into my office.

“That asshole. He can’t do this.”

I gave her a flat look. “Did you miss his little speech downstairs?” She huffed and folded her arms. “He can do this, and we will have to let him. It’ll be over quicker if we just let him get on with it.”

“Fine. But I don’t like it one bit.”

“Did you need me for something?” I wanted to go home and throw on my pjs. Seeing Magnus again had opened an old wound and if I didn’t go and drink myself into oblivion it was going to fester. I also wanted to figure out what happened to Thane. He might be a grumpy asshole, but he was still my friend. Well, sort of. I might have pushed my friendship onto him, and he just tolerated it. But I couldn’t shake the feeling that something really bad had happened to him.

“Yeah, the Royal Guard have just turned up and the Hounds won’t release the souls to their custody.”

“Shit.” I dropped the envelope onto my desk. I’d look at it later. “I’ll deal with it. Can you keep an eye on Mr. Drake? I want to know exactly what he gets up to.”

“Sure thing, Boss,” she replied with a grin. My stomach dropped. Without Thane here I was the boss. Fuck. That meant —

Bright white light burst behind my eyelids and a scream ripped itself from my throat.

I could hear Lila panicking in the background, but I could only focus on the white hot pain that I felt all the way down to my bones. It felt like a thousand knives were carving my bones and fire was burning my very soul. My eyes squeezed shut against the pain and my legs fell from under me. Instead of feeling the hard surface of the floor, something warm and soft captured me but before I could see what it was, unconsciousness chose that moment to claim me.

Chapter Three



Roux

Roux

The world came back to me with a grogginess that made my head feel fuzzy and my mouth feel like it was full of cotton wool. I opened my eyes and winced. It was so bright.

“Roux?” The voice was a soft caress that I could listen to all day. “Roux, I need you to open your eyes for me.”

I didn’t want to. I tried to turn away, to bury myself back into unconsciousness but my nose brushed something warm and solid. I took a deep breath. Which was a terrible idea. Waves of sandalwood and leather and thrilling adventures filled my nose, and I took another deep breath. I wanted to bury myself in that scent, it was delicious.

“Roux.” The voice was firmer now. A hand captured the side of my face and tilted it upwards. “Open your eyes. Now.”

My body was seemingly unable to resist the command. I opened my eyes and stared into swirling colours of blue and purple.

“Atticus?”

What the hell was he doing here? And why was I cradled in his lap?

Oh, yeah.

I looked at my hand and yep, I was clutching the Grim Reaper’s scythe. The thing was huge. Way taller than me and covered in ancient runes and symbols that contained its power.

It was only ever passed on with either the death or retirement of the current Grim Reaper so why was I inheriting it earlier? Thane wasn't dead, was he? No. I'd have felt that. This felt different. My usual scythe was so intrinsically woven into my being that it was a part of me. This just felt... temporary. Like I was holding it for safekeeping. Which meant Thane definitely wasn't dead. Although, when I found him, I might just kill him for all the shit he was putting me through. I scowled at the scythe and sent it into the shadows where my Reaper form hid. I was so not ready to deal with that.

“Do you think you can stand?”

I looked back at Atticus, and I was hit again with how good looking the guy was. His eyes were mesmerizing. I could stare at them for days and never see all the beautiful details in them. I roved the contours of his face until my eyes hit his mouth. His lips were made for kissing and for creating carnal screams and lingering soft caresses. They were sinful and my hand came up to touch him. Oh, Gods. I was touching this man's face without permission. My thumb was at the corner of his mouth and my palm rested along his cheek. His jaw clenched beneath my touch.

What the fuck?

He sucked in a sharp breath and his eyes narrowed with an intensity I felt all the way down to my toes.

“Roux,” a disgruntled growl snapped from the doorway. “You’ve got to tell these Royal Guard pricks that they can’t take these souls.”

The world shot back into focus. What the hell was I doing?

I scrambled off Atticus's lap and immediately put some distance between us. He grumbled something unintelligible and fled from my office.

I turned to Lila and found her gaping at me.

"Roux, what the hell was that?" Lila asked.

"I've got no idea. He just looked... really good."

She rolled her eyes. "I get that, because hey, I'm not blind, even if he is here to shut us down. But how've you got Grim's scythe? Does that mean he's dead?"

"No. At least, I don't think so."

"So why did you get the scythe?" she asked.

"No idea. Maybe it knows Thane is in trouble." I hoped not, I really didn't want to think of my friend in danger. He'd always been there for me, especially at the beginning when I'd struggled with coming to terms with being a Reaper. I hadn't found it easy and not knowing who I was or where I'd come from, had led me down some dark paths, but Thane had been by my side through it all. Now it was my turn to help him.

"What are we going to do about Hades taking all the souls?" Rafe asked. He was the guy who'd saved me from doing something stupid just moments ago. He and his twin Rayne were my personal Hell Hounds. Each Reaper was assigned a Hell Hound when they awoke and usually, we only got one, but when I'd travelled to Infernum to claim mine, I'd been drawn to the pen right at the back of the room. The keeper had

tried to dissuade me saying that these two were untrainable, that they'd constantly fought all the other Hounds, and that I'd be stupid to want to claim them, but I knew they were meant for me. I could feel a connection to them right in my very core. The three of us had been inseparable ever since.

Rafe's ever present scowl sat over his piercing blue eyes and his mouth was turned down in a grimace. The guy was a grump, always in a sour mood and always looked like he was on the cusp of going feral. But at least he talked. His twin barely said anything.

"We have to let the souls go," I said with a sigh.

"What?" Rafe exploded and closed the distance between us with long powerful strides. "You can't be serious."

"I don't want to do this either, but we have no choice. These orders have come direct from Hades, and I don't know about you, but I don't want to piss him off." Well, not with this. I might look for subtle ways to annoy the bastard to keep him on his toes, but they didn't carry serious repercussions. Ignoring his orders on this would have consequences and that would make it impossible for me to help Thane. So as much as I didn't want to follow orders on this, I knew we had to.

"This is bullshit."

"I know, Rafe." I pinched the bridge of my nose. I was not in the mood for a fight right now. "Look, go and oversee the removal of the souls with Rayne. I'm going to visit Thane's house to see if there's any sign of where he might have gone."

“You’re not going alone,” Rafe growled.

“He’s right, babe. There is no way we are letting you go anywhere without some protection. What if someone kidnapped Thane? You might unknowingly be a target.”

I scoffed. “We don’t know what’s happened to him. He might have just gone on holiday and forgot to mention it.”

Rafe gave me a flat look. “You really believe that?”

“No, but I don’t need a bodyguard. I’ll be fine on my own.”

“I’m sure you will,” he replied cupping my shoulders gently. “But I would feel better if we were with you. Please wait for us.” The ‘us’ being him and his twin. They never went anywhere without the other. Some people found that odd, but I just thought of them as two halves of the same person. Inextricably linked with an inseparable bond. Something that I’d never understand.

Rafe lowered his eyes to mine and a lock of his jet-black curls fell forward onto his brow. I couldn’t miss the plea that was blatantly begging me in his big blue eyes. Man, this guy nailed the puppy dog eyes.

“Fine,” I huffed. “I’ll read through these papers that Atticus gave me while you sort the souls out.”

Rafe’s expression hardened at the mention of the demon’s name. “I don’t like him.”

I laughed. “You don’t like anyone.”

Flecks of golden honey shone in his blue eyes and a growl reverberated from his chest and I realized, he *really* didn't like Atticus. His beast was pulling to the surface and that meant his primal instincts were trying to take control.

"Please don't kill him," I begged. "I do not want to have to clean up that mess."

He grumbled. "No promises."

I turned to Lila. "Help me out here."

"Honey, they won't listen to me," she said. "They're your pups."

Rafe snapped his teeth at her. "I am no pup."

She giggled. "Gods, you're so easy to rile up."

"Hey, pack it in you two. Rafe, deal with the souls and get back here so we can visit Thane's house. Lila, can you go and see Norman. I may have been filmed taking down a rogue vamp."

"Again?"

I gave her a sheepish grin and Rafe gave a low chuckle.

"Wait, does that mean you saw King Douche?" That was our nickname for Magnus.

I sighed. "Unfortunately, yeah."

"Need to talk about it?"

I looked at my best friend and yes, I wanted to talk about it, but I also didn't want to admit what happened.

“Not right now. We’ve got bigger things to deal with.” I walked back towards my desk and the offending envelope. “Rafe, meet me back here once the transfer is complete. Make sure Rayne doesn’t kill anyone.”

He grinned like a maniac. “Sure, no killing but maiming is on the table.”

“No, that’s not what I said.” He left my office laughing. “Rafe, you can’t. Come back. Rafe!” But he was gone. “Damn that dick-kicking asshole.”

“Honey, there is so much wrong with that insult.”

“I know, but it made me feel better. Let me know if I need to do anything for Norman to sort out the mess with the vampire.”

“Don’t worry, Roux,” she said with a smile and a wave as she walked towards the office door. “I’ll get it sorted. Let me know how you get on at Thane’s house.”

“Will do.” And with a final wave she was gone, leaving me along with the letter I’d gotten from Atticus.

I picked up the thick letter and opened it up. The Guild crest was emblazoned on the expensive white paper and I took in the words in bold at the centre of the page.

‘Thane, Head Reaper at G.R.I.M, is hereby accused of harvesting souls for his own personal use and energy transference.’

Oh, Thane. What have you got yourself into.

Chapter Four



Roux

Thane's house was dead. There were no lights on, no sign that anyone had been here in a while. It was eerie and quiet. Just so quiet.

"It doesn't look like anyone left in a hurry."

"No," Rafe replied quietly.

Nothing was out of place. If Thane had been kidnapped, it wasn't from here. But there was something lingering. Almost like a memory of something left behind. It was creepy and I felt like I was being watched.

I glanced at the twins. They were doing their weird silent communicating thing. After being with them for a few years, I'd figured out most of their gestures. Some were based on touch, others just a mere glance. I'd found it strange at first.

Rayne barely spoke, preferring to merely observe, but Rafe was a bit more impulsive. He'd leap into action before really thinking it through. That trait had landed us in hot water more than a few times.

They were an imposing pair and most people steered clear of them. I both loved and hated that they were overprotective of me. They hated Magnus for what he'd done to me and threatened to maim, torture and kill the guy. At the time, I'd almost been tempted to let them. They enjoyed that kind of thing way too much. And, while I knew what Magnus had done to me was definitely worth the moniker of 'asshole' there was always something about the way the twins growled every time his name was mentioned that made me feel that there was more to their hatred of him than the way he'd behaved towards me. There was a story there, a secret they didn't want to share, which always made me feel on edge because we shared everything.

"We don't think he was kidnapped," Rafe said. Not I. It was never 'I' with those two. Always we.

"I think the same. There's something going on here. The papers that Atticus gave me accuse him of harvesting souls for his own personal use and energy transference." That was a big no no. Reapers collected souls and then sent them on their way. Technically, we could absorb the energy of a soul to gain more power, but that practice was outlawed centuries ago. By Thane.

Rafe and Rayne's scowl deepened. Gods, they looked intense. And hot. They were total bad boys right down to the leather jacket and tattoos. Their tattoos were the only way to tell them apart from a distance. Rafe had a lot more colour. Rayne's were all dark, in both colour and theme.

So far, we'd done a search downstairs and found nothing out of the ordinary.

"I'm gonna head upstairs. See if there're any clues up there."

I didn't wait for approval from the twins. I didn't need it. I was their boss — shit. I was everyone's boss now.

I could feel the weight of Thane's scythe in my bones. It was heavy. A burden I didn't want.

I needed to find Thane, and fast. I wasn't ready to be the Head Reaper. If I had a heart, I was sure it'd be beating a panicked rhythm.

Thane's bedroom was just like him. Simple. Clean. Masculine. The walls were dark blue, the furniture all a dark wood and his scent lingered everywhere. There was some artwork above the bed. A minimalist piece with a black background and gold lines swirling.

Wait a minute. Were they...?

I walked towards it to get a better look. Well, hot damn. They were.

The gold lines that rolled softly over the black canvas created a sensual picture of two lovers getting down and dirty.

Well, I never. I'd always thought of Thane as a bit stuck up and reserved but that opinion was just blown out the water.

“Admiring the art?”

Rayne's deep raspy rumble caressed my ear and his hand snaked around my hip.

“It's not what I expected to find, that's for sure.”

“Hmm.” He kissed my temple and squeezed my hip before walking deeper into the bedroom.

Rayne had always been affectionate. To be honest, they both were. I liked that it was something that we shared but we kept it behind closed doors. In the Reaper world, it was considered taboo to even be friends with your Hell Hounds, let alone affectionate. They were servants. Not friends. And definitely never lovers. I'd just never seen them that way, our connection had always run deeper than master and servant.

Rayne started opening drawers and I went over to the other side where Thane had a walk-in closet. I threw the doors open and —

“Holy fuck!”

I was expecting shirts, suits, and ties, not whips, canes, and floggers.

“That explains a lot,” Rayne said as he took in the contents of the closet.

“Does it? This feels like a bolt out of the blue for me.”

He rolled his eyes.

“I know the guy is rigid, but I never expected anything like this. The guy is *kinky*, Rayne.”

“Who’s kinky?” Rafe called from the door before joining Rayne and me in the kinky closet.

“Thane,” Rayne muttered amused at my shock. “Roux is clutching her pearls.”

“I am not,” I said indignantly which caused the twins to chuckle. “I quite enjoy a good whipping. I just didn’t expect it from Thane. I mean, it’s *Thane*.”

“I’m not surprised,” Rafe said.

Was I missing something? “That’s what Rayne said. Why am I the only one who sees this as odd?”

Rayne looked at his twin and tilted his head toward me. He was encouraging Rafe to say something.

“The man is rigid, Roux. There’s no way he doesn’t enjoy being on the receiving end of a whip,” Rafe said with a chuckle before turning to Rayne with a raised brow. “I wonder where he plays. We haven’t seen him in any of our clubs, have we?”

“No,” Rayne mumbled, a deep sound that sounded like thunder escaping from his chest.

And just like that, I was imagining all sorts of kinky scenes with the twins taking turns whipping Thane and fuck... my boss had never looked so delicious. I mean, I’ve always found the twins hot but Thane... he’d always been *Thane*. Granted he had the face of an angel, blonde hair, baby blues and a jaw

sharp enough to cut glass, but I'd never seen him as anything other than my boss. Now I was thinking about what he looked like when he came.

"If you keep looking at us like that, Roux, we're going to do something about it." Rafe's mouth split into a wicked grin and I suddenly couldn't put a sentence together.

Well, fuck.

The silence stretched between us until Rayne touched his brother's hand, breaking the weird tension that thrummed between us.

I coughed nervously. I needed to get rid of this awkwardness before it became a thing.

"Pfft. As if you could handle me anyway. I'd eat you two alive." They both scoffed. "Come on Scooby and Scrappy. Let's see if we can find any more clues."

I walked to Thane's office and the same clean, dark aesthetic continued in here. Everything was so neat and orderly. It made me think about my own home and I shuddered. Mine did *not* look like this. Sheesh, even his bookcase was alphabetised and there were little tags on the bottom of each spine. Gods, had he catalogued them like a library? I laughed. He fucking had. It was so Thane. Everything had a place, and everything had a purpose. There was never anything out of place. Not even—

My eyes snagged on one of the books. It was upside down, the tag sitting at the top. I reached for the leather wrapped book and pulled it from the shelf. It was titled *The History of*

Reapers, the letters in gold foil and stamped into the rich warm leather. It was a well-worn and well-loved book and I opened the page to where the bookmark lay to find a chapter entitled *The Origins Of Reapers*. But it wasn't the chapter that caught my attention, but the white business card Thane was using as a bookmark. There was a single word printed on the front: DESTINY.

“Guys!”

Rafe and Rayne came sauntering into the room. They knew I wasn't in danger because we were bonded in a way that they could sense it if I was. They were there to serve me and aid me, which was bullshit, but that's how the Reaper and Hell Hound dynamic worked.

I held up the card to them. “Look. What would Thane be doing with the Fates?”

Rafe shrugged. “Does it say anything on the back?”

I flipped the little white card over and there was a handwritten message with a time and date from two nights ago. “They could be the last people to see Thane. We have to go.” The twins winced. “I know that the Fates are difficult creatures, but they have to know something.”

“But you know their information comes at a price. Are you sure you can pay it?” Rafe asked.

“This is Thane, my friend—”

“That's debatable,” Rayne interrupted, not maliciously but he kind of had a point. I don't think Thane had any friends, but

I always had a soft spot for him.

“Whatever. I can’t stand by if he might be in trouble. I’ve got this sinking feeling that something is going on, that there’s a change in the wind coming and I’m not sure whether it’s a good thing.”

The twins looked at each other, their gazes steady and sure. Rayne pursed his lips. He was unsure, which I understood. The Fates were tricky creatures and often extracted a higher price than their information was worth. Rafe cocked an eyebrow, egging his brother on. If I ever wanted the twins to do something they didn’t want to do, I found persuading Rafe was the best course of action. Being slightly more impulsive, he was more likely to drag his brother with him, making my job a little easier.

“Fine,” Rayne said with a roll of his eyes. “But we go together.”

“And we go tomorrow night,” Rafe added.

“But—”

Rafe put his index finger on my lips. “No buts. It’s already late and you’ve got to see Hades tomorrow.”

I groaned and pulled away from Rafe, ignoring how much I actually liked him touching my mouth. “Do I have to?”

“Yes. You need to make sure he’s looking after the souls, and he might know something about Thane.” Rafe turned to his twin. “Come on. We need to go. Albert will be wondering where we’ve got to.”

I chuckled. Albert was a ghost that lived in their house. They had a few, but Albert seemed to be the one in charge and he kept an eye on things.

Rayne pressed a kiss to the top of my head and Rafe gave my shoulder a squeeze. I both loved and hated their affection with me. I wanted more and I know they did too, but this was all it could be. Stupid rules and laws. Pfft. I'd spoken to Hades about it on many occasions, but he refused to change the law. Said it was there to protect people, that if Hell Hounds we're too wrapped up in their masters, then they couldn't make objective decisions. I got that. I did. But I didn't like it. And Hades was an asshole.

"Fine. My bed is calling my name anyway."

Chapter Five



Roux

Hades lived in a monstrous castle in the heart of Infernum. I mean the thing was fucking huge. And gaudy. And very Hades. He was an egotistical prick. Just because he was the most powerful being in the realm, didn't mean he had to swan it in front of everyone's faces. Urgh. What a dick.

I marched up the front steps and into the giant entrance hall. There was a reception desk where visitors were supposed to sign in, but I never bothered because I knew it pissed Hades off. It was one of the many ways I liked to entertain myself when I was here. The twins seemed to think that pissing Hades off, while amusing, was going to get me in serious trouble one day. But they also thought Hades had a thing for me, which was ridiculous. The guy hated me as much as I hated him. He

might be good to look at, but that's where my fascination ended.

As I approached the lift — yes, the guy had a fucking lift — the butler scurried out from his hidey hole and put himself in front of me.

“Welcome to Heart of Infernum. It is such a pleasure to see you.”

What the fuck. I never normally got this kind of reception. Usually, I was chased by security as I evaded their attempts to get me to stick to the rules. “Um...”

“His majesty has been expecting you and you will find him in his study. May I take your coat?”

I stared at the lanky demon in the household livery and frowned. “Harold. What are you doing?”

“Greeting you in a manner that is deserving of the Grim Reaper,” he said with a bow and a flourish.

I stepped back, narrowly avoiding being clipped by his arm as he swung it grandly in front of himself. Oh, yeah. I was *the* Reaper now. I really hoped this was temporary. How the hell did Thane put up with all this schmoozing?

I scooted around the butler whilst he was still bent in a bow and hurried to the lift. Thankfully there was a car on the ground floor, and I could make a quick escape. That whole interaction had made me incredibly uncomfortable.

Hades' personal quarters were on the top floor, far away from all the ceremonial rooms. It always surprised me that he

didn't sleep in the room next to his precious throne. I knocked on the large, ornate guilt doors and waited. He was still a King, and I was quite fond of my head where it was. I'd learnt the hard way that it was better to knock. The last time I entered without knocking he revoked my topside privileges for a *year*. A whole year. The bastard could be cruel.

“Enter.”

I took a breath – not that I really needed to, being dead and all – and entered the God's domain.

The room was flooded with light from the floor to ceiling windows. From here, you could see for miles across the city of Infernum. All the way to the Weeping Mountains and the Lake of Sorrows. Every time I stepped in here, that view stole my breath.

“Beautiful, isn't it?”

I turned to face the owner of the deliciously deep, melodious voice and smirked. “Meh, I've seen better.”

His eyes flashed with fire at my blatant lie. I never knew if he was pissed or if he enjoyed it when I lied, but the guessing was half the fun.

“Enjoying the soul collecting?” I asked as I stepped closer to his ridiculously large desk. It was a monstrous thing in a rich mahogany that shined in the sunlight. Hades sat behind it, his dark hair pushed back from his forehead in a fauxhawk, his long fingers steeped in front of his perfect mouth and a frown

dragging his perfect eyebrows down above his perfect eyes. His face was so perfect it was disgusting.

“It’s certainly been illuminating,” he replied.

I chuckled as I dropped into a seat opposite his desk and threw my feet onto the edge. His frown deepened into a scowl, but he didn’t say anything. “Not as easy as it looks, is it?”

“No.”

“You could always let G.R.I.M start handling it again.”

“I can’t do that. Not whilst Thane is being investigated.” He leant back in his chair letting his waistcoat stretch across his broad chest.

I shrugged. “Was worth an ask. Who do you have on the difficult ones?”

“The Deathwatch.”

Ooh. They were actually pretty good and, more importantly, reliable. They’d do a pretty decent job. The Deathwatch were created by Hades millennia ago to protect him from all the people he kept pissing off. They were terrifying, and legendary in the same way the Bogeyman was. Normally, the Deathwatch were sent on missions requiring finesse and assassinations which made them highly skilled. It surprised me that Hades was willing to spare his precious Deathwatch for something like this and a little bit of hope and happiness fluttered deep in my gut at the thought that he might have just done something nice for me. I’d never tell him that though. “So, you *can* make a sensible decision once in a while.”

He scowled at me again. "You do know I can have you executed, right?"

"Yeah, but who would annoy you then?" I smiled sweetly at him. "I think you'd miss me if I were gone."

"Like a hole in the head, maybe," he said harshly but there was a hint of a smile about the corners of his mouth.

"You really should smile more. It improves your face."

What little smile there was, vanished. "I have no need for smiles."

And there was the soft spot I had for him growing. It was moments like these, when I saw something a little more real, that stopped me from hating him completely. Only someone riddled with sadness would have no need for smiles.

"Well, at least the Deathwatch have more use than your Royal Guard," I commented, moving the conversation back into a safer territory.

"Roux," he warned.

"Hades," I mocked.

"What is it you want?"

"Freedom from your tyranny?" I said with a laugh. He didn't find that amusing if that heavy sigh was anything to go by.

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "How did I end up with you in my life?"

"You wound me," I said as I dramatically slapped my hand over my heart. "But seriously, do you think Thane did it?"

Hades stood from his desk and walked over to one of the many giant windows. He clasped his hands behind his rigid back and stared out over his kingdom. "I don't know."

My eyebrows acquainted themselves with my hairline. "You don't know?!"

Since when did Hades not know something. I joined him at the window and found him staring at nothing, lost in his thoughts, a crease of concentration marring his fine brow.

"You've read the docket from Mr. Drake. The energy has gone somewhere. If it wasn't Thane, then who was it?"

I placed my hand on his arm, drawing his focus to me. "But do you think it *was* Thane?"

He was silent for a long moment, and I nearly thought he wasn't going to answer. "No."

Relief flooded through me. "Will you help me find him?"

"I can't," he said, before turning away from me, putting an end to our conversation. Or that's what he wanted to do but I'd never been much good at walking away.

"Can't or won't?" I spat.

"I don't care, pick one."

"You're such an arrogant prick."

"Watch it," he snapped, his gaze angry and full of fire as he scowled at me. "I am still King, whether you like it or not."

"And Thane is still a God, and he needs your help." He might go by Thane now, but he was still Thanatos, God of

Death and essential in the hierarchy of the Underworld. I clicked my tongue at Hades. “If this is how you handle your subjects, no wonder there are so many of them wanting to rise up against you.”

“That is *enough!*” Hades slammed his power into my chest, hitting me like a sonic wave and pinning me to the window in front of him. His eyes were two blazing orbs of fire, his fingers sparking with lightning, and I didn’t care that I’d angered him enough that he was losing control.

“You think Thane is innocent and you’re going to stand there and do nothing. You should be ashamed of yourself.”

Hades wrapped his hand around my throat, his long slender fingers squeezing my jaw and forcing me to look at his anger. His voice dropped to a whisper. “There is more at stake here than you can possibly know, little Reaper.”

My body reacted to the deep rumble of his words, but I was going to ignore it. My core didn’t clench in time with his fingers around my throat. Nope. Definitely didn’t do that. Gah, who the fuck was I kidding? I liked making him angry because I always reacted like this. It was as if the threat of death by his hand was a fucking aphrodisiac.

“Hades.” Shit. Was that a purr? Oh, Gods. I think it was.

His gaze dropped to my lips, and he snarled. “Why do you do this to me?”

I had a feeling he was being rhetorical, so I stayed silent for once and just stared at the man. He lowered his forehead to

mine, and I felt his breath against my lips. A fraction closer and his lips would touch mine. Did I even want that?

He let out a deep sigh that tasted like fresh mint and black coffee, then he released me, his power falling from me and his fingers leaving my skin. It left me feeling cold without him pressing so close.

One day, whatever this was between us, was going to explode and it was either going to be the best thing to ever happen, or it would destroy everything.

“I know I can’t stop you from doing whatever it is that you’re going to do but be careful.”

Oomf, this was straying into a weird place where Hades was actually showing that he – gulp – cared. “You could always order me not to,” I offered helpfully.

He huffed a laugh. “And since when has that ever stopped you?”

I shrugged. It’d never stopped me but equally, Hades had never punished me for it. “The twins and I are heading to Destiny this evening. We think the Fates were the last to see Thane before he went missing.”

Hades flinched. He had always hated the Fates, but that was more to do with the fact that he couldn’t influence them or make them do what he wanted. The Fates saw what was, what is, and what was going to pass and there was nothing Hades could do to change that. I think it scared him a little, too.

“Don’t do anything stupid.”

“Aww, Hades, it almost sounds like you care.”

“I don’t. I just don’t want to have to deal with the fallout if you piss them off.”

“Why do you always assume that’s the outcome. I can be charming.”

Hades threw me a flat look. “Really? Then why haven’t I seen that?”

I smiled. “Because I have more fun antagonising you.”

Hades cocked his head and dropped his voice to a sensual rumble. “Perhaps you should try charming me. You might get more out of me.”

And that was my cue to leave. Angry Hades was hot, but this seductive version of his was going to burn me. His laughter echoed behind me as I fled the room. Damn him for being able to make such a beautiful sound. It made me want to curl up in his lap and do sinful things with him. Urgh, what an asshole.

Chapter Six



Roux

I headed back to G.R.I.M after my unsettling conversation with Hades. The man somehow always managed to twist me in knots. I hoped I left him feeling the same sort of confusion otherwise this would all be very unfair.

The building was super quiet. Usually, it was a hive of activity, Reapers running around, souls and demons drifting here and there, the odd ghost mingling. But today, there was nothing. Just the echo of my boots as I crossed the foyer. The sharp sound felt harrowing in the empty space, and it was so devoid of life. Which I knew was odd being as it was a building associated with death, but I'd never seen it so barren.

I trudged up to my office, the heaviness of the scythe and the weight of the responsibility of this place sitting on my shoulders and making their presence known. Lila was sat at

her desk in the office next to mine and she jumped to her feet as soon as she saw me coming.

“Roux! Oh, thank the Gods you’re alright.”

I was confused. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

She pulled to a halt in front of me. “I hadn’t heard from you since last night and with Thane going missing, I thought something had happened to you too.”

“I’m sorry. That was shitty of me.” I should have checked in but so much had been happening that I’d forgotten.

She waved her hand and pulled me into a hug. “Don’t worry about it, I’m just glad you’re okay.”

I squeezed her back and released her. “Has Atticus turned up yet?”

She grinned like she had secrets to spill. “I don’t think he ever left.”

Worry had me pursing my lips. “Do you think he found anything?”

“Nope,” she said with a shake of her head, her silver hair bouncing around her. “He looks thoroughly annoyed this morning. He went to get coffee, but I think Rafe did something to the machine because when he came back, he had no coffee and a thunderous expression on his face.”

I sighed. I did not have the patience to deal with this kind of shit today. I wanted this investigation over as soon as possible,

and the twins playing pranks on the one man who had the power to clear Thane's name, was not helping.

"I'll go fix the machine," I said wearily, and Lila's face fell. "Just tell Rafe and Rayne no more pranks. I need Atticus to solve this."

"Fine," she grumbled. "I'll tell them, but I doubt they will listen to me."

I walked into the common area in the middle of the floor and undid what Rafe had done. Then I fixed two coffees and headed towards Thane's office. Atticus was sat behind the desk, his head in his hands and looking slightly more rumped than he had been when he arrived yesterday.

"Knock, knock," I said, and he flinched as I pulled him from his thoughts.

His unusual eyes met mine and I didn't fail to notice the bags under them. He cleared his throat and ran a hand through his hair in an attempt to tame it, but it just made it look wilder. It was almost adorable really. "Roux. What, um, what are you doing here?"

"I thought you could use one of these," I said as I entered and placed a mug down in front of him. "Lila said you'd been here all night."

"Yes and thank you. I couldn't seem to get it to work earlier."

"It can be quite temperamental." I didn't have the heart to tell him about my Hell Hound's interference. Something about

the defeated look in his eyes made me warm to him a little.

I watched him sip at his coffee for a moment. He was quite fascinating to look at. I'd never met a Metus demon before. I'd seen one from a distance once, a giant, scary motherfucker that oozed evil, but I'd never been this close, let alone had an opportunity to speak to one. They were rarer than the Gods and kept to themselves. I imagined being able to slip into people's minds all the time made for some socially awkward situations. I couldn't feel Atticus' presence brushing against my mind so that either meant he was very weak and didn't have enough power to broadcast, or he was so powerful that he could mask it. My money was on the latter one. There was just something about the way he held himself, even now when he was tired. There was an air of authority and superiority that had me thinking he was definitely more powerful than he looked. And how did someone like him end up working for the Guild?

The Guild was a governing body formed of humans and all types of mythical creatures. It was designed to keep everyone in line since the moment the veil between the human world and everything else fell. To me, they were glorified pencil pushers, but they did keep the peace. Mostly. We still had the odd factions that liked to rise up against something 'other' but for the most part, the Guild worked to keep everyone safe.

"I can feel you watching me," he said with his eyes closed, the mug of coffee cradled in his hands while he breathed in the aroma.

“I find you fascinating.”

That had his eyes blinking open. “Why?”

“I can’t feel your power.”

“Ah. Would you like to?” A feral grin spread across his handsome face, showcasing some sharp looking canines behind his full lips.

An unbidden shiver ran down my spine. I kind of did want to feel it. To know what it felt like to be truly terrified. “It’s tempting.”

His smile turned curious. “Really?”

“Hmm,” I said with a nod. “I don’t fear a lot, being a Reaper, and also, you know, being dead. Having nothing left to lose puts a lot of things in perspective.”

“We all have something to lose, Roux,” he said with a grim set to his jaw.

“What did you lose?”

His eyes turned cold. “Enough.”

I held his gaze as long as I could, trying to decipher all the emotions swirling in the vortex of his eyes, but I didn’t know him well enough to figure them out. Well, this conversation got a little dark. I needed to lighten the mood. I wagged my eyebrows. “Wanna try and scare me?”

He laughed and then looked surprised, like he couldn’t believe he’d just made that sound. He narrowed his eyes at me, trying to decide if I was being reckless or not.

I was totally being reckless. But that was the fun of it.

“Fine,” he finally said. “But you asked for this.”

“I know. Want me to sign a disclaimer or something?”

He chuckled again as he walked around the table. “No, but you will need to stand.”

I did as he asked and watched as his eyes brightened and his skin took on this star-like quality. Almost like diamond dust glimmered beneath it.

“Wow,” I breathed.

A faint blush rose to his cheeks, and it shimmered like rubies. “Forgive me, but I have to stand close.”

I nodded, a little too nervous to find words. I licked my lips in anticipation as he stepped further into my personal space. He rested his thumbs against my temples and took a deep breath.

“I don’t normally need to stand this close to use my power, but this helps control it so I can use a small amount.”

I nodded and swallowed, my mouth suddenly dry. “Okay.”

“I’ll be watching you closely and I will pull back if I think it’s too much. Ready?”

I nodded again. Oh, shitballs. Maybe this wasn’t such a good

Darkness slammed against my mind, sending me deep into a vast swirl of shadow. Laughter surrounded me, a deep cackle that skated along my skin. Coldness seeped into my veins,

freezing my limbs before a tingling sensation spread through me. But it wasn't unpleasant. It was... pleasurable.

Whatever this was, it felt the opposite of scary. I was *enjoying* this.

Did that mean I had some odd kinks?

My nipples tightened against the lace of my bra, and I squeezed my thighs together, trying to control my reaction. But it was no use. Heat flooded my core as Atticus threw more power into the connection, trying harder to push my mind into a nightmare, but it just made me want to get closer to him. To rub myself against him to see if he was hard. To see if this was turning him on as much as me.

A growl ripped through the air, full of anguish and desperation, but at what? I couldn't tell. I was drowning in the darkness, hot and needy, my eyes rolling backwards as lust and electricity surged through me. I could hear whimpers – which were probably me with the sheer frustration of wanting, no *needing*, to come.

Holy mother of the Gods.

My entire body went nuclear. I cried out, exploding in a sensation that had my body trembling with such an intensity my knees buckled. Strong arms wrapped around me and prevented me from falling to the floor. A whimper broke through my lips as the world slowly came back into focus, the darkness in my mind receding until all I could see was the horror-filled gaze of Atticus.

He jolted, dropping me and I had to brace my hands on the table behind me to stop from tumbling to the ground. There was panic in his eyes as he flinched backwards.

“Atticus?”

“I’m sorry. That was... I’m sorry.”

“I’m fine. I—”

“Shit,” he growled, his voice tinged with anger and desperation. “Shit.”

I reached for him, but he scooted further away from me. He started pacing, his hands flailing wildly as he mumbled to himself, and I didn’t miss the evidence of his own arousal bulging in his dress pants. I let him pace and took a moment to centre myself. My legs still felt like jelly and the aftereffect of that orgasm was still sending delicious little jolts through my body.

He suddenly stopped and faced me. “I need to leave.”

“What?” He couldn’t do that. He couldn’t leave me without explaining what the fuck just happened.

“I’m sorry.”

“You’ve said that already.”

He grabbed his jacket and threw it on, not even looking at me. He was muttering under his breath, but all I could catch was ‘stupid’ and ‘shouldn’t have done that’. And then he fucking left.

Chapter Seven



Rafe

I watched Atticus flee the office like the devil was on his tail. What the hell had happened in there? I could feel Roux's distress through our bond, and I found myself walking towards her before I realised I was even moving.

She stood hunched over the desk, her bright red hair shielding her face from my view. The three of us had a strange bond. Rayne and I could sense where she was and if she was distressed or in danger, but other than that we couldn't feel anything. It was our job to protect her so that was all we needed to know. We had, however, gotten better at reading her and guessing how she felt. She wasn't one to use words to describe her emotions. She'd usually bury them beneath snark and sarcasm, but Rayne and I had been with her a long time now. She couldn't hide from us.

I gave her a minute to compose herself and waited for Rayne to turn up. It didn't take long, and he stormed in with revenge on his mind. I hoped Atticus had a good hiding place.

"Where is he?" Rayne shouted.

"He went that way," I said pointing down the corridor.

My twin growled and started to leave the room, but Roux grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"It's fine, Rayne. I'll be fine."

"But he hurt you," he said softly. "We can't let that stand."

She stepped into his space and curled herself into his chest. A normal person would be running from a growling Hell Hound, but not Roux. She just sighed deeply and burrowed deeper into his arms. It was moments like this that were the most painful for us. I wanted to kiss her and tell it would be okay.

"It was my fault," she said. "I asked him to do it."

I huffed. That didn't make it any better. She was still upset, and we didn't like it one bit.

She turned towards me, her green eyes pleading. "Don't go after him. For me?"

I groaned. I hated it when she did that. She knew I could never refuse her when she looked at me like that. "Can I at least cut his dick off or something?"

She laughed and I relaxed a little. Rayne smirked above her head, and I was glad he was also feeling less violent. I didn't

mind violence, but violence with Rayne usually lead to death.

“No. You can’t do that,” she said with a smile.

Rayne ran his hands down her back. “Oh, we see how it is. We can’t take his dick because you want it.”

She blushed and I knew my twin had the right of it. Huh. Didn’t see that coming.

“It’s not like that,” she rushed out and I had to hold back the smile. It was *clearly* exactly like that with this guy, it was just unusual that it happened so fast. When she had started dating that no good, lying, two faced piece of shit vampire, that was after a lot of back and to. They chased each other for ages before she finally gave in but this... whatever this was with the demon it felt instant. Was this fate?

Just a shame the guy seemed to be a bit of a dick. I mean what kind of guy upset someone and then ran away?

Roux reached out and took my hand. “It wasn’t his fault. I was curious about his power, and I asked him to use it on me. It just didn’t go the way he expected.”

“Okay. If you say so. Just be careful.” I wrapped my arms around her, sandwiching her between myself and Rayne. I kissed the top of head, loving the sound of the contented sigh that escaped her beautiful mouth and just took a moment to enjoy the feel of her pressed between us.

Rayne frowned at me over the top of her head. This wasn’t doing either of us any good. She just felt right there. Like she fit. Rayne and I had found this feeling with someone once

before, someone who just clicked with us and fit with our unusual dynamic. He was special and perfect and then he'd rejected us. It was safe to say, we couldn't even bare hearing the guy's name without a slice of pain cutting through us.

Roux took a deep breath and then broke free of our little cocoon. "Come on, we have to plan for tonight."

That we did. I loved the club Destiny, but I did not love the Fates. They scared the shit out of me. They looked at you and just knew *everything*. And that was terrifying.

I didn't want to search the Fates out, but I knew Roux wasn't going to let this go. I admired her determination to help Thane just as much as I hated it. I wanted to surround her in bubble wrap and hide her away from the world to protect her from all the evil in it. I knew she was capable of looking after herself, I just didn't want her to.

"How do we even get a meeting with the Fates?" she asked as she headed back to her office.

"You ask nicely," I said as I plopped down on her sofa. Rayne dropped down next to me, his thigh pressing against mine. He needed the connection after the moment with Roux, just like I did.

"Really?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

"No," Rayne said, rubbing his chin. "You offer something worth having."

Roux sat in the armchair opposite and pulled her hair into a messy bun on top of her head. I preferred it down, but that was

only because I like to play with it and fantasise about wrapping it around my hand as I fucked her tight little pussy.

Rayne gripped my thigh, picking up on the salacious turn of my thoughts. We could feel what the other felt, so if I was turned on, he was turned on. If he was injured, I'd feel the same thing even though my body wouldn't show the damage. Twin Hell Hounds were a freak of nature and shouldn't exist, but Rayne and I shared a soul, meaning that we were two bodies with half a soul each. We were so intrinsically linked, that we couldn't be without the other. If he died, so would I.

"What do you think I can offer?" Roux asked, a cute pout on her lips.

That was the question and the bit I was looking forward to least of all. The Fates had a way of extracting a price that was higher than the value of the information they were offering. You had to be wary and clever to come out with your soul intact.

Rayne leant forwards. "What about a soul?"

"What?" Roux practically screeched. My thoughts exactly.

"We can't give them a soul," I said. "That's against the law."

He shrugged and relaxed back into the sofa. "Just a thought."

"What about a favour?" Roux said slowly. "Something to be taken at a later date?"

"It could work. But it will leave you open to potentially doing something you don't want to," I said.

She frowned, her eyes straying over to the window and taking a moment to think. For several minutes I just watched her, enjoying the way she stroked her finger over her bottom lip as she thought. It was like I could see the cogs turning as she worked out what she could afford to give.

“Fuck it,” she said suddenly. “There’s nothing I won’t give for a chance to save Thane. I’ll offer them a favour. Surely a favour from the Grim Reaper is worth some information?”

“Hmm, but remember, if you find Thane, you might not remain the Grim Reaper,” I said, trying to keep my voice calm. I didn’t want her to know that this idea terrified me.

“No,” Rayne said, the word barely above a whisper.

Oh, boy.

“I beg your pardon?” Roux said sharply.

“I said no,” he repeated. “I won’t let you make a deal that could end up with you doing something you’ll regret later.”

Roux stood slowly and started to walk towards my twin, her power moving through the air and making my cock hard. “I don’t need your permission. If you don’t like it, Rayne, you don’t have to come.”

My twin swallowed, his heart racing and his cock pressing against the zipper of his jeans. Ever since we’d taken that vampire into our home, Rayne had started to show some moments of submission. He’d never done it before, but I could feel him itching to fall to his knees for Roux. If only this wasn’t forbidden and against the law. If only it wasn’t

punishable by a severance of our bond, I'd pull her into my lap and sink my cock deep into her wet heat. But I couldn't do that. I couldn't risk what we had in case we lost everything.

"I'm in charge, Rayne, not you, and if I want to offer a favour, then I will. And there's nothing you can do about it. Understand?"

Rayne's hands curled into fists as he nodded. "Yes."

"Good," she said simply before reaching for her tablet off her desk. She fired off a message and I took a minute to try and calm my brother. I wrapped my hand around his fist and coaxed his fingers to relax. He closed his eyes and intertwined his fingers with mine, taking a deep breath.

"This gets harder every day," he said under his breath.

I rubbed my thumb along the back of his hand, the touch as calming for me as it was for him. "I know."

His eyes met mine, the bright blue the same as my own, and I was floored by how much pain and sadness and *want* I saw in their depths. But we couldn't have her. We could love her from a distance, but we could never love her in the open. It sucked balls.

Major fucking balls.

"It worked," Roux said in disbelief. "Here. Look at this."

She thrust the tablet into my hand and there was indeed an email from the Fates.

Dear Roux,

Thank you for you very generous offer. We find ourselves intrigued and we will make ourselves available to you this evening.

Enter through the VIP access, enjoy yourself for a while and we will find you when we are ready.

D

P.S. the theme tonight is diamonds. Tell your pups to wear something sexy.

“Wear something sexy?” I growled. “Why the fuck would they want that?”

Roux’s eyes went wide. “Because you’re ridiculously good looking. Come on, you have to.”

Rayne huffed and I had to agree. I wasn’t a piece of meat to be paraded for someone else’s viewing pleasure.

“Please? For me?” she pleaded, clutching her hands beneath her chin as if she were praying.

I looked at my twin who rolled his eyes. He could never refuse her.

“Fine,” I grumbled. “But I don’t like it.”

Roux squealed in delight and threw herself at us, wrapping her arms around our necks and sighing. “I know. But thank you. It means a lot that you’re helping me.”

I didn't know how long we sat there like that, but all too soon it was time to go and get ready.

Chapter Eight



Roux

The club Destiny was the hottest spot in Infernium, our capital city. Anyone and everyone wanted to be seen here and there was always a queue to get in. I hadn't been for a while, but I knew that you could end up queuing for hours just to get in for a few minutes. But that wouldn't be us tonight. Nope. Tonight, I got VIP access. To say I was excited, was an understatement.

The twins, on the other hand, looked like they were chewing glass. And what the fuck were they wearing? They were going to have everyone fawning all over them. Sexy didn't even begin to cover how they looked tonight. They were both in ridiculously tight-fitting black leather pants that left nothing to the imagination and in a sheer shirt that looked like they had tiny diamonds weaved into the fabric. Their black hair was left

looking a little wild and they'd lined their eyes with a thick black ring of eyeliner, making them seem impossibly blue.

I couldn't stop staring at them. And neither could anyone else. Heads kept turning and craning wherever we went and, as soon as we got to one of the bars inside, we were immediately served.

"Well, hello gorgeous people. What can I get for you?" The bartender was a demon with skin that shone like a night sky and big eyes that watched us with curiosity and a hint of desire.

"Bourbon. Top shelf," Rayne growled and wrapped a hand around my waist. His fingers brushed the exposed skin there and I shivered.

The bartender's eyes went wide, and a smile spread across his blue lips. "Sure, and what about you handsome?"

Rafe leant across the bar and rested his hand on his chin. "I'll have the same, please."

Holy mother of the Gods, I couldn't take my eyes off Rafe's ass. It looked so fucking delicious as he leant closer to the gorgeous bartender. I groaned. These boys were going to kill me tonight.

"And for you, sweetness?"

I snapped my attention back to the demon and chose to ignore the grin on Rafe's face. Asshole. "I'll have something fun and a little wild. Surprise me."

“You got it,” he said with a wink. “Go sit in the booth over there and I’ll bring it right to you.”

“Thanks,” I said and walked towards the VIP section. It took me a minute to realise the twins weren’t following me. I glanced over my shoulder and found them both, unashamedly, staring at my ass.

I knew what was between couldn’t go further than the flirting but Gods, to know how much they wanted me always had a surge of lust shooting through my veins. I cursed the rule that meant we couldn’t be together. Damned it to the Depths and danced on its fucking grave. There were so many times I wanted to give in, but I just couldn’t put them at risk. They were my family, and I couldn’t lose them.

“Coming boys?”

They snapped their gaze to mine, and I didn’t miss the way their eyes glowed in the dark. A slight amber tone peeking through the blue showed me just how turned on they were. Gods, I wanted them. I pressed my thighs together, trying to stem the flow of my desire. Their nostrils flared, no doubt smelling how turned on I was.

This was going to get out of hand soon. And part of me didn’t care one fucking bit.

The pair of them stalked towards me, their steps slow and predatory. They stopped inches from me, close enough I could feel their heat, but not close enough I could feel their touch.

Rayne dipped his mouth next to my ear. “Are you wet for us?” Fucking Hell. “We can smell how wet you are, Roux.”

I squeezed my thighs tighter, but it did nothing to help. If anything, it made it worse.

Rafe gripped my chin and pulled my face towards his. He brushed his nose along my cheekbone and my body tightened at the contact. “We really shouldn’t be doing this.”

“But I like this,” I whimpered. “I want it.”

His movements stopped, his breath hot against my skin. Then his tongue darted out, tasting the skin just beneath my ear.

Holy fuck.

My entire body jolted, desire skyrocketing to my core and making it clench with need.

“Shit.” He rested his head against my shoulder, his back rising with every deep breath he took. “You taste so fucking good. It’s not fair.”

There was a lance of pain through his words, coupled with desperation and anguish. He was right. It wasn’t fair. At all.

He pulled away and stood next to his twin, the pair of them wearing the same expressions of need.

“Here we are,” a cheery voice called, breaking the tension and bringing the three of us back to the moment. He placed the drinks on the table and looked between the three of us. “Any chance you’re looking for a fourth?”

I let out a surprised laugh. “We’re not together.”

Disappointment had his smile falling. “That’s a shame, honey. You three look like a triangle of hotness I’d want to be in the middle of.” He shivered and licked his lips. “All that desire and lust is just crackling deliciously through here.”

Then he shrugged his shoulders and left, leaving the three of us in a somewhat somber mood.

I took a swig of my brightly coloured drink and sweetness danced along my tongue. Whatever cocktail this was, it was yummy. It was a red colour with a sparkle running through it. Tasted fruity but there was almost a buzz that felt like popping candy exploding in my mouth. I grabbed a cocktail menu and flipped through the pages until I spotted the little thumbnail image of it.

Crimson Necrosis.

How fitting. I drowned the rest of it in one before slamming the empty glass down on the tabletop. “I’m going dancing. I’m sure we will be found when the Fates want us.”

Then I ran away from my gorgeous Hell Hounds and lost myself in the music that pulsed out of the ridiculously large speakers on the other side of the room.

Bodies swayed and rolled all around me. All people lost in the beat of the music; a thumping energetic number that instantly made me want to surrender to it.

Hands were all over me, hips pressed against me, and I didn’t care. For a moment, I could be free.

A cool hand wrapped around my waist, brushing the skin my dress didn't cover. I say dress but it was a scrap of diamond encrusted fabric that barely covered my tits and ass.

I tensed as I realised who it was currently wrapping their body around me from behind.

Magnus. The vampire who'd ripped out my heart and hurt me in a way I'd never really recovered from. And I hated that he could still affect me, that I still remembered how good we were together.

His lips found the shell of my ear and I shuddered beneath his touch.

"You look good enough to eat," he said as his lips trailed down my neck.

"I'm not on the menu."

He smiled against the side of my throat. "Shame."

His mouth left my skin, but he didn't move away from me. Instead, he locked his hips against mine and started grinding and swaying to the beat of the music. For a moment I forgot our history, forgot the pain and the anger and just enjoyed the feel of him against me. Maybe I was weak and pathetic, but I knew, beneath all the anger, I still loved this asshole, and, for a moment, I wanted to remember what it felt like between his arms. I just hoped that the twins didn't—

A strong grip yanked me out of the vampire's arms and shoved me behind them. I sighed as I found myself staring at the sheer, sparkly shirt-covered backs of the twins.

I didn't like Magnus for what he'd done to me, but the twins, they *despised* the man. Everyone around us had stopped dancing, the anger the twins were emitting cut through the air like a knife.

"Stay away from her," Rafe said, his voice low and dangerous.

"Or what?" Magnus said with a shrug of his shoulder.

"You'll die," Rayne said simply.

I groaned. Honestly, these two were idiots sometimes. "You can't go threatening a king in front of a room full of witnesses."

"Don't care," Rayne huffed.

I tried to walk between the twins, but they wouldn't budge. Fine. Fuck the lot of them.

I left them to their alpha-macho-bullshit and went to get another one of those cocktails.

"Hey sweetness. Trouble in paradise?"

"What's your name?"

The midnight-coloured demon smiled wide, showcasing a mouth full of sharp teeth. "Arioch but you can call me Ari."

"Well Ari, to be honest I've no fucking clue *what's* going on with those three. Can I have another crimson necrosis?"

"Like that one, did you?"

"Yes. Very fitting."

Ari raised a dark brow. "Is it?"

"You don't know who I am?"

"Should I?"

"I just thought with the drink choice you knew?"

Ari shrugged and looked apologetic. "I just let fate choose. Something told me to make you that drink, so I did."

I propped my elbow on the bar and rested my chin in my palm. "I'm a Reaper."

He let out a rich, musical laugh and nodded. "Then yes, it would indeed be a fitting drink."

Ari set about mixing me another drink and I lost myself in watching him work.

"Why does my love life have to be so complicated?" I mused aloud.

"Where would the fun be if life was simple?" Ari said with a chuckle.

"I'm not sure I want 'fun', I think I'd settle for just 'happy'. I've got a vampire ex who seems to pop up unexpectedly, my Hell Hounds that it's against the law to love, and something happened with a Metus demon that I don't even know what to think of and why am I telling you all this?"

"I'm a bartender, love. Think it's part of the job description. Metus demon sounds pretty cool though. Never met one of them before. Are they as scary as people say?"

I shrugged. "He wasn't to me but everyone else seems to avoid him. I guess that's because I'm a Reaper."

"Maybe. Or you're his mate."

My stomach dropped. "What? Nope. That can't... um... just no."

Ari gave me a sympathetic smile. "Do you know much about demon mates?" I shook my head. "Well, we only have one and usually our powers don't work on them, or work in unexpected ways."

A flush crept up my cheeks as I remembered what had happened with Atticus earlier today. "What do you mean by unexpected?"

His brow raised. "You really want me to answer that?"

"Um, maybe not."

"Perhaps you should just talk to your demon," Ari said as he placed the drink in front of me.

"I would, but after the... incident, he fled. I don't think he will want to."

Ari covered my hand with his. His fingers were warm and smooth, and his touch was gentle. "I can assure you, if I was lucky enough to find my mate, I'd be dying to talk to them. If a little terrified."

"Thank you, I'll try and find him."

"Good. Now, I think your escort is here."

"Huh?"

Ari pointed over my shoulder, and I looked behind me to find a giant fire demon stood behind me. Jeez, the guy was fucking huge! With flaming red hair, fire in his eyes and a suit that was losing a battle to contain his bulging muscles.

“Roux, please come with me.” His voice was raspy, like it was filled with smoke. I glanced behind him to find the twins and Magnus, but they’d disappeared. “Your friends have been moved to where they can work out the differences in a more private location.”

I winced. Oh boy, they weren’t going to like that. “Well, I hope you put them in a room that can withstand some serious destruction.”

The fire demon’s lip curled into a smirk. “It’s been taken care of. Come. This way.”

I followed him out of the main VIP area and through a concealed door. Beyond was a corridor that was blissfully quiet. After the pounding of the music, my ears were ringing slightly, and the silence back here was a bit of a relief. As I climbed the stairs to meet the Fates, I had to decide how much I was willing to sacrifice in order to save Thane.

Chapter Nine



Roux

The private office of the Fates was ridiculously sumptuous. Everywhere was gold and velvet and luxurious fabrics. They were clearly rich but when you knew everything worth bartering, I bet you could set your own price. No wonder they were rich.

The three of them sat in a row along the long sofa, each holding a glass of champagne. They were stunning. A set of androgynous triplets that were dressed in the same pant suit in varying shades of yellow. Dawn was in a pastel shade, Dayna in a bright sunshine and Duskia in dark mustard. The three of them stared at me and I knew, they could see everything about me that was, is and could be all in the blink of an eye. It was a little intimidating.

“So, you’re the new Grim,” Dayna said, their voice like a song.

“Yes,” I replied. “I’m hoping you can help me find the old one.”

“Hmm, Thane has got himself into a spot of trouble, hasn’t he?” Duskia tutted, their voice somehow sounding older than Dayna’s. Or maybe it was wiser.

“Can you help me?” I asked.

Dawn looked at me curiously. “We can tell you whatever you want to know but you can only ask one question of each of us.”

“So, you accept my offer?” That surprised me. I thought they’d want to negotiate terms or something.

Duskia grinned widely and I found it a bit unnerving. “Oh yes. Your terms are very satisfactory.”

“But to make an official contract, we will need to bind your word.” Dawn got to their feet and strode towards me, their blonde hair swaying behind them like a golden curtain.

That meant they wanted to do a magical oath. I could do that; I’d already decided I’d do whatever I needed to get Thane back.

“May I take your arm?” Dawn asked, pulling a knife from inside their jacket pocket.

I nodded and held it out, watching as they sliced into my forearm whilst muttering ancient words. There was a sharp

sting, but it wasn't a deep cut. Dawn dragged their finger through the blood that pooled there all while still chanting those ancient words. Magic sizzled along my skin and settled into my bones. The wound healed and, once Dawn had finished the spell, there was a large symbol that looked like two stars on top of each other surrounded on one side by the moon and on the other, the flares of a sun.

Dawn returned to the sofa and sat with their siblings.

"Now, Reaper," Dayna said. "Ask us your questions."

Okay. This was it. Three questions. I needed to be specific because I had a feeling that they'd be stingy with the answer if my question was too open.

I looked to Dawn, the Fate who saw the past. They had their chin propped in their hand and an eager glint in their eyes. "Ask me, child."

"What did you all discuss with Thane when he visited three nights ago?"

Dawn's eyes widened and a slow smile curved their full lips. "He asked me to tell him the story of where Nyx and Erebus disappeared to."

"Why?"

Dawn tutted and sank back into their seat. "Ah ah, just the one question. I will not tell you more."

Dammit. Why the hell would Thane want to know about Nyx and Erebus? Everyone knew the tale of the dark lovers. How they were separated and punished by the other Gods for

creating too much darkness in the world. It was said that Zeus cast them out into nothingness, sworn to be separated forever from each other. Nyx was banished to the night sky and Erebus to the Depths of Hell, the pair never to set their eyes on the other ever again. It was sad really. But what was Thane's interest in it?

I turned to Dayna, the Fate who could see what is and wondered how to phrase my question this time. I needed to know where Thane was but was it more important to know that he was okay?

“Where is Thane staying safe?”

Dayna chuckled at my question, their eyes brimming with laughter. “Very cleverly worded.” They pursed their lips and I guessed they were thinking about how little they could give away with their answer. “His safe space is the Mansion of Night.”

Where the fuck was that? Was it even a real place?

My last question was the most important one. It was about the future, or what could be. I knew the future wasn't set in stone, that there were things we could change but I also knew that pivotal moments had to happen and that there was no changing those.

But what to ask?

Duskia waited with a wicked curl to their mouth. They could sense my deliberation and were taking amusement from it.

If I had any chance of finding Thane, I needed a moment when I knew where he'd be. But equally I knew Duskia could tell me something that would be stupidly unhelpful like Thane would be in the Mansion of Night, wherever the fuck that was.

“Where should I go next if I want to find Thane?”

“Now that,” Duskia said, pointing her finger at me, “is a good question. Go to the gates of Olympus tomorrow. You'll find something illuminating there.”

“Thank you,” I said with a small bow. I still had more questions but at least I had some answers and something to look into.

“We will let you know when we want to call in our favour,” Dayna said as I turned to leave.

“It will be soon,” Duskia added. I was grateful for that. I wasn't sure I wanted this particular debt hanging over my head for the rest of eternity.

I was just reaching for the door when the temperature suddenly dropped, and the light disappeared from the room. I looked back over my shoulder and the Fates were suspended in the air, their eyes glowing white and their hair whipping around them in a phantom breeze.

What the actual fuck?

“There is a darkness in you that is darker than the night,” they said in unison, which was a little creepy. “You are not what you seem, and you are not where you should be. When

the door of secrets opens, he will find you and all will be revealed.”

A sonic wave of magic flew towards me, hitting me in the chest and I stumbled backwards into the door. Images flew through my mind but none of them made sense. Red eyes. Black diamonds. Stars and darkness. Fire and tears and anguish. I fell to my knees with the onslaught and just as soon as it started, it was over. The low lighting came back on, and the sudden silence was deafening in my ears.

I found the Fates watching me with an expression tinged with curiosity and fear. If something scared the Fates, that couldn't be good.

“Um, what was that?”

“No more questions, child,” Dawn said, a slight tremble in their usually sure voice.

“But—”

“Leave us,” Duskia snapped. “Grab your friends and go.”

Dayna took a step forward, the only Fate with pity in their eyes. “They're in the holding room at the end of the hall. They did it to themselves.”

“Did what?”

Dayna smiled softly. “You'll see. Goodbye Roux.”

Then the three of them vanished into thin air with a pop.

What the fuck was all that about? And what was that weird premonition? What the hell did that mean? Maybe I should go

and see Hades. I wasn't overly fond of that idea but he might know what the Fates meant with all that weird mumbo jumbo shit.

I strolled down the corridor and stopped outside the door at the end of the hall. I could hear the three of them, so I at least knew they were all still alive.

"—can't believe you'd think that. There was more at stake than you could possibly comprehend," Magnus shouted.

"And we couldn't possibly understand, could we?" Rafe snapped.

"It wasn't that. I didn't want to put you at risk," Magnus added.

"That wasn't your decision to make," Rayne roared. A thud followed, a fist against a table maybe.

I felt a bit guilty about listening in to a conversation that was clearly meant to be private, but I wanted to know what had happened between them. What had caused such hatred to fester.

"You treated us like we were nothing," Rafe said. "That Christmas meant everything to us and you just laughed in our faces."

Gods, I could picture the twins now, arms wrapped around each other and matching expressions of rage and pain.

"And that's not even the worst of it," Rafe continued, his voice angry and trembling. "You went and did the same thing to Roux. You pushed her away like she meant Jack shit."

My heart clenched because Rafe was right. I had felt like nothing when Magnus had broken my heart. It still fucking hurt now.

I couldn't stand to listen to anymore, couldn't stand the hurt and pain I could sense in the twins. I opened the door and found the twins just as I imagined, except Rafe had a split lip and Rayne had a black eye. Magnus looked rumpled and I understood what the Fates had meant. There had clearly been some fists flying. What I hadn't expected, was for everyone to be standing so close. There was a pleading glint in the way Magnus was looking up at the twins and there was an air of desperation lingering between them. If I hadn't come in when I did, would I have come into a very different scene? One that was suddenly falling into a full blown fantasy in the forefront of my mind. Mother of the Gods, the three of them would be something to watch.

"Roux," Magnus said, his voice soft, barely above a whisper. Like he was worried I'd find out his dirty little secret.

"I think you should leave," I said calmly with my head held high. "I think you've caused enough damage for one lifetime."

He bowed his head and I watched as the fight drained out of him. His shoulders fell and his mask of indifference crumbled. He looked at me again and his ruby eyes were filled with remorse, anguish and longing. It hit me square in the chest and I instinctively reached out for him.

"Just tell me, Magnus. What's going on?" I brushed his cheek with my fingers. He closed his eyes and whimpered, as

if my touch was too much to bare. “Please. Let me help.”

“I can’t,” he replied. “Not yet. I’ll explain everything but it just isn’t time.”

I sighed and pulled my hand away. I wanted to believe him, but it was always ‘not yet’ or ‘soon’. “It never seems to be the right time for you, Magnus.”

“I know, and I’m sorry. I really am. Please, if you can believe anything, believe that.” Then he took a last long glance at the twins and I before he squared his shoulders and left.

Rayne pulled me into their heat and I melted into their embrace. I took a moment to find my centre, my footing. Magnus always seemed to knock me off course, I always thought I knew where I was but then he’d pop into my life and boom, there’d be a curveball or a moment where I’d relapse and just want to hold him. He had so many secrets, so much that he wasn’t telling me and I just knew there was more to him than met the eye. I just didn’t know if I could ever forgive him for what he did to me or whatever it was he did to the twins.

I glanced up at them. “Wanna walk about it?”

“Not really,” Rayne replied gruffly.

Rafe took a deep sigh. “It was a Christmas some years ago, long before you started seeing Magnus when he approached us at a pub. He wanted punishment for something he’d done and we agreed. We connected with him in a way we’d never felt before.”

“We wanted to come to an agreement,” Rayne added.

My eyebrows shot up. They *never* made an agreement with someone unless the connection between them all was super strong.

“We didn’t know who he was at first, or what he’d done but we punished him anyway,” Rafe said, his hand finding his twin’s.

“It wasn’t until the morning after we discovered everything.” The growl in Rayne’s voice had a shiver running down my spine, and not in a good way. “Turns out he’d murdered the royal family and took the throne. He wanted punishing for that.”

I’d heard the rumours surround Magnus’ rise to power. That he’d slain hundreds, or he’d murdered innocent vampires. But those stories had never sounded like the Magnus I knew. Perhaps I’d been gifted with seeing a side of him that no one else had. Not that it mattered anymore. He’d thrown me away like yesterday’s trash.

“We gave him that punishment,” Rafe said, venom lacing every word. “We gave him *us* and he rejected us and called us dogs in front of his precious vampire elders.”

My blood instantly boiled. How dare he! What kind of monster would do that to someone? That vampire had some serious explaining to do before I chopped his dick off with my scythe. I was fucking furious. Maybe I’d gouge his eyes out, no, I’d take his fingers off one by one, no — fuck. There was too much fucking choice with what I wanted to do to that

vampire. But one thing was for certain, I was gonna make that asshole pay.

Chapter Ten



Magnus

I hated myself. Genuinely hated everything about me right now. Gods, the way the three of them looked at me had my stomach twisting in fucking knots. I had to believe this was all worth it, but as they stared at me with pain, anguish, and hatred in their eyes, I just felt like the worst sort of being on the planet.

I stared at my throne, a gaudy piece of furniture that had a ridiculously large back covered in gold. I hated that too, but it was necessary for the role I was playing. I had to keep reminding myself that I wanted this. That I wanted to be king. It was my right by birth, and I'd taken it back from those that had stolen it from my grandfather. The last ruling family, the Morettis, had been evil in all senses of the word. Vile and villainous with no limitations on the things they'd do. In my

grandfather's day, Lucas Moretti had been his adviser and best friend. Or so he'd thought. He'd never seen the betrayal coming until it was too late. Lucas murdered him and took the throne after the biggest coup the vampires had seen in centuries. I'd been on an assignment in Vienna, trying to expand our business ventures, when Lucas killed my grandfather, my parents and my sister. I'd come back to find that all trace of them had been wiped from the history books and I was expected to bend the fucking knee.

I made a vow in that moment. That I'd destroy the Morettis and take back what was mine. I'd do to them what they'd done to my family, but I'd make them suffer tenfold. So, for the next few decades I played the loyal soldier, doing all the lowly and degrading tasks I was set without grumbling at it. I bided my time until the moment was right, and I killed Lucas and his sons with a fucking smile on my face.

Then I'd sought out the Thornley twins to punish me because I felt a little guilty over my actions. And I needed something for me, a memory, a moment that I would carry with me to keep me from feeling completely and utterly alone.

Then I had ruined the connection I'd shared with them because I knew I needed to rule in a way that wasn't too different from how Lucas had ruled. Vampires were fickle creatures, and the Elders were very set in their ways. If I suddenly changed everything I'd be overthrown in days. I was playing the long game here and that meant no relationships. No real connections. No love.

Roux had been an exception. She'd snuck beneath my defences and before I knew it, she'd worked her way into my heart. She'd gotten too close and I couldn't risk losing her, so I pushed her away the same way I had the twins.

I'd made my bed, and now I had to lie in it. I just wish it wasn't so cold and fucking empty. But I was close. I had made changes over the last few years and slowly, the vampires were coming around to a new way of thinking. The biggest change was the blood banks. I'd reduced the number of human deaths by vampires by introducing the blood banks and feeding rooms. Because of this, we were starting to be seen as people and not monsters. Vampires were becoming more widely accepted and I was in negotiations with the Guild to get a seat at the big table. We'd always been seen as too vicious and impulsive before, but now I'd brought us into the big leagues. And even the Elders couldn't deny that was a good thing.

"Good evening, your majesty," Cyrus said, his angular face in a pinched expression. He didn't like me, he was a fan of the 'old way' of doing things but he also respected the royal line. He'd also proved useful in the last few years, advising and following orders like a good little soldier should. But that didn't mean he was safe from death. If anything, him being wary that any moment might be his last made him more pliant. He was the walking definition of that old saying. Keep your friends close, but your enemies even closer.

"Evening Cyrus. Anything to report?"

“It’s been relatively quiet this evening, sire. Although we have had another instance of a vampire feeding from an unwilling.”

For fucks sake. “We have rules for a reason, Cyrus. Don’t these vampires understand what I’m trying to do?”

Cyrus shook his head, his naturally white hair bright in the moonlight streaming through the tall windows. “They only see what they can’t have now, not the bigger picture.”

“Do you see it?” I asked, hoping to find some vindication for everything I was doing. Even if it was from a man who hated my guts.

“I see it, your majesty. I may not agree with everything you’ve done, but we have never even had a hint of a seat at the Guild before.”

At the head of the Guild were representatives from all the most powerful factions, covens, packs etc. but the vampires had always been overlooked because, let’s face it, we’d always been impulsive, vicious and just too fucking bloodthirsty. Now, under my leadership, we were respectable, refined and more measured. *I* was worthy of being at that table.

“Thank you, Cyrus. Is the vampire still alive?”

A feral grin grew across Cyrus’ face, showcasing his fangs. “Yes, he’s in Crypt.”

I grinned back. That was absolutely fucking perfect.

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The Crypt was a giant cavern under the castle. An old dungeon that had been fashioned into a simple fighting ring with viewing space all around. It was one of the old traditions I'd kept because occasionally us vampires needed to be the monsters we were and this was a perfect outlet for that.

It was a barbaric way of passing judgement, but if the accused could walk out the Crypt alive they were free to go. It was that simple.

But no one left alive.

I began stripping off my shirt and Cyrus watched me with a curious expression. I didn't have to go in the ring. I was King and I had champions to fight on my behalf. But tonight, I felt like getting my hands dirty.

"Don't tell me you don't approve, Cyrus," I said with a smile.

"I do, actually. It's good for your people to see you willing to go into battle. I'm just curious as to why now?"

"I've had a shit evening and I need something to take my aggression out on."

Cyrus looked towards the prisoner in the corner. He was a big vamp, with lots of muscles and an aggressive demeanour. His hair was slicked back and he had an angry scar running the length of the left side of his face.

I handed my shirt to Cyrus. "Think I stand a chance?"

Cyrus gave me an appreciative look and I had to admit, if I wasn't convinced the guy would cut my throat in my sleep, I'd

be tempted. He was an attractive guy, but I only had eyes for two men, and I'd destroyed their fucking hearts.

"I think you'll decimate him, your majesty. I'll be watching from the stand." He walked backwards down the tunnel, his red eyes shining in the darkness and watching me intently.

I cracked my neck and stepped out into the fighting circle to the sound of the crowds roaring and screaming. To the yell of bets being made and wolf whistles.

"Ladies and Gentlemen and monsters in between." Cyrus' voice boomed through the cavernous space and the crowd descended into silence. "We're here to serve judgement on Butch Collins who is accused of feeding from an unwilling victim. How do you plead, Butch?"

The massive vampire snarled, his lips pulled back and spittle dangled between his yellowing teeth. He stared at me intently. "Not guilty."

I grinned. I was going to get my fight. If he'd pleaded guilty it would be straight to an execution. My talons grew out of the ends of my fingers, lethal and sharp, and my fangs descended. I couldn't remember the last time I'd felt this bloodthirsty. It was humming through my veins, singing and demanding satisfaction. I held the bigger vampire's gaze. He locked cocky, like he thought he could win this. He was about to find out how wrong he was.

"His majesty, King Magnus Beauchard has acquiesced to the request for trial by combat and has decided to see to the punishment himself. It is a fight to the the death."

The crowd roared. Some no doubt looking forward to my possible demise, but most just excited for the bloodbath.

“At the sound of the bell, you may begin,” Cyrus said, before walking back to sit the the chair to the right of my throne on the viewing platform.

The ding of the bell rang loudly, echoing around the room, and signalled the start of the fight.

Butch grinned at me, still cocksure. The idiot. I was a Master Vampire and I was going to slice him into little pieces.

**

My hands were slippery with blood and I was struggling to keep Butch pinned beneath me. He was covered in slices from my talons, his skin ripped and bleeding. He'd stopped being able to heal himself a while ago and I was surprised he was still trying to fight. His body had already given up.

He'd also lost an eye when I'd pushed my thumbs into his sockets to make his beady little orbs pop. And now, I was in the middle of defanging the bastard. I could understand his desperation to get away from me. Vamps without their fangs were useless, but I guess this asshole should have thought about that before sinking them into an unwilling woman.

The crowd roared around me as I pressed on Butch's fangs and I loved the way they finally caved under the pressure of my thumbs. Butch's scream was loud and painful and I may have basked in it a little, my primal side enjoying the way he writhed beneath me as I destroyed him piece by fucking piece.

“Kill! Kill! Kill!” the crowd chanted in unison.

I looked down at the pathetic vampire beneath me and decided it was time to put him out of his misery. I sank my fangs into his neck, gripping the flesh between my teeth and I pulled.

Blood sprayed high, coating my face and even reaching a few of the vampires in the front row who licked their lips appreciatively. Butch gargled for a few moments before his skin turned grey and life finally faded from his eyes.

I spat out the chunk of his throat and faced the crowd. “This is what happens when you break the rules.” I spun in a circle and looked at them all. All of them riding the high of the battle, practically frothing at the mouth for the blood of the dead vampire at my feet. I needed to keep them off the streets and the best way to do that was with a blood feast. “Cyrus, call the blood banks. Let’s have a party.”

The crowd screamed and cheered and I roared with them, feeling better than I had in months. I was king, and I was fucking winning.

Chapter Eleven



Roux

An entrance to Olympus stood on the outskirts of Infernum. Olympus itself wasn't in the Underworld but you could get to it via the portal. If you knew where to look, you could find portals everywhere. It was early morning and I'd snuck out before the twins would notice I was missing. They'd be pissed when they realised I'd left them behind but I was not in the mood to deal with anyone this morning. My head was still reeling from my chat with the Fates last night and I still hadn't worked out what they'd meant. I needed the space to process and I wasn't going to be able to do that with two overly possessive and overly protective Hell Hounds dogging my every step.

I loved those guys but sometimes, being around them was a lot to handle.

This particular portal to Olympus was in a field in the middle of nowhere and this place was entirely suiting my mood today. A large oak tree stood tall against the horizon, older than I could possibly imagine. This tree had stood here for thousands of years and its trunk was so wide I couldn't even stretch my arms half way around it.

I pressed my palm to the rough bark and instantly felt the magic humming through it. Like a tingle running through my fingertips. I whispered the incantation that all Reapers instinctively knew and the magic hum grew bigger, becoming vibrations I could feel in the ground beneath my feet.

A swirling white light erupted out of the tree and burst into a huge portal. Wind whipped through my hair and my long coat flapped behind me. I stared at the bright light, wincing a bit at the sheer radiance of it. Portals always amazed me. I didn't use them very often and I didn't even need one to go topside, that was just in an elevator— which always seemed really practical — and most creatures could teleport themselves wherever anyway. Portals were rare and beautiful and the only way to get to Olympus.

I'd been to Olympus once when I had started working closely with Thane but my place was down here. I'd felt uncomfortable when I'd been up there. A sense of wrongness made my skin itch and I couldn't wait to leave the place. Thane had had a meeting with Zeus, I didn't get to meet the guy, I wasn't important enough at the time, but I'd got this sense of opulence and indulgence up there that wasn't too dissimilar to the way Hades' palace felt. But I didn't feel

uncomfortable around Hades, even if the guy pissed me off more than he did anything else.

Urgh, I'd have to check in with him later. He'd probably know something about why Thane was so interested in the story of Nyx and Erebus. The guy was old as fucking dirt, so he probably knew them personally. I also wanted to make sure the soul collecting was going alright. His Royal Guard were good at protecting him, but they weren't made for collecting souls of the dead. Was it wrong that I felt a little gleeful at the prospect that Hades might be struggling and hating this? Who was I kidding, I was probably going to laugh in the guy's face if he admitted he couldn't do something, then I'd definitely gloat.

It was with that cheery thought I stepped into the portal and felt my insides rearrange themselves as I travelled up to Olympus.

I stepped out with a lurch and almost tumbled to my knees, but I saved the landing. I successfully avoided smashing my face into the ground like an idiot — which was what happened the first time I travelled via portal — but I still couldn't quite nail the landing though.

The sun was high in the brilliantly blue sky and there wasn't a cloud in sight. The sound of waves lapping on the shore carried on the slight breeze and it was perfect tee weather. Which didn't suit me at all seeing as I was dressed in so much black leather. I loved my Reaper uniform, but at the moment, it sucked balls.

Gods, it was so warm. I was grateful in that moment that I was dead and couldn't sweat or the situation would definitely be dire.

I strolled down the avenue and towards the gates, but something felt off. Like there was something missing.

Then I realised.

The place was empty.

When had it turned into a ghost town? And why did no one in the Underworld seem to know? I had a sudden panic I'd portalled to the wrong place but nope, there were the gates in all their pearly whiteness. They're just as you'd imagine too. Tall and white and blindingly bright, surrounded by clouds and usually there were guards stationed either side, but today, there were none.

There was something fishy going on here.

"You're a long way from home."

A soft voice came from behind me, and I almost shit my pants.

"Dude, you can't creep up on a person like that."

Helios grinned at me. "Sorry."

He didn't look apologetic at all. His smile was wide and cheeky, a dimple making him look younger than he was. His hair was the colour of the sun, and his eyes were the same hue as a cloudless summer sky.

"Where is everyone?" I asked.

His smile faltered a little, but he recovered it quickly. “Big meeting up at Zeus’ place.”

“Oh. And you’re not invited because...?”

“Someone has to keep watch,” he replied quickly, a little too quickly if you asked me.

He leant his lean frame against the pearly white gates which, as a Reaper, I could do but it would feel very uncomfortable. We ferried the damned and we didn’t belong in a place of the pure, and Zeus had made it so we wouldn’t forget. No wonder Hades hated being here. Fuck, I wanted to claw my skin off.

“Why are you here, Roux?”

“Fate,” I replied simply.

“Ah, and how are the triplets? Still as morbid as ever?”

I chuckled. “Yep, but I’m trying to find Thane, so I had to see them.”

“Of course, he’s got himself into quite the pickle, hasn’t he?” Helios tilted his head to the side, his eyes a little wild as he watched me. I’d always thought he was a little mad, but he was the God of the sun and he saw all. I imagine that would drive you a little insane.

“What do you know about Thane’s disappearance?”

He crossed his arms over his chest and smirked. “Not going to offer me a favour in exchange?”

I sighed. Why did everything have a price? “What do you want?”

His eyes darkened and wait, was the sky darkening? This all suddenly felt ominous. “A kiss.”

“What?” I spluttered.

His face brightened, as did the sky — which was weird. It was strange seeing the world affected by the presence of just one man. I knew he was a God, but seeing it so viscerally was mind boggling.

“It’s just a kiss, Roux.”

“But why?” The guy was gorgeous! I couldn’t imagine him struggling to find a willing bed partner.

“Because I want to feel loved. I want you to kiss me as if you loved me.”

There was a sadness in his voice that had my heart aching for him a little. How could he have lived so long and never loved?

He must have sensed my question because he rubbed the back of his neck and bit the inside of his cheek.

“Do you know how impossible it is to fall in love when you know everything about someone’s past? Every mistake they’ve made? Every error of judgement? Every sin? Every lie they’ve told?”

“Well, when you put it like that...”

“So, for a moment, even if it’s a lie, I want to know what it feels like. I want you to kiss me as if you were kissing one of your Hounds.”

I swallowed. “Know about that then?”

He laughed softly. “Yes, I see everything Roux.”

I looked away, shame creeping up my throat and causing my skin to flush.

Helios tucked his finger under my chin and pulled my gaze back to his, smiling warmly at me. “You shouldn’t be ashamed of it, Roux. Love is love and it’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

If I had a heart, I was sure it’d be melting at those words.

“Alright,” I said. “I’ll do it.”

I closed my eyes and pulled the image of the twins to the front of my mind. I thought about everything they made me feel, the joy, pain, anguish, desperation but most importantly the love. Helios was right, I did love them. I loved them with everything I had, and it was with that thought that I sealed my lips to Helios’.

I kissed him like I’d been starved, and his mouth was the only thing that could save me. But it shattered me. Broke me apart into pieces because I wasn’t kissing *them*.

I stroked my tongue along his and he moaned into my mouth. I clutched at his shirt, dragging his body closer to mine and he wrapped his hands in my hair, holding me tight and angling my head for easier access to the back of my throat.

His lips burned against mine, the heat of the sun tingling across my mouth, and it had desire pooling in my core.

Then he ripped himself away from me, his chest heaving and his fingers flexing against my skin as if he couldn't decide whether to push me away or pull me closer.

"Wow," he said, licking his lips. "That was quite something."

"Was it?" My voice trembled with emotion. With unshed tears for a love I could never have and a love Helios might never experience.

"Hmm yes," he said softly, "Thank you for sharing that with me."

"Um, you're welcome. I guess."

Helios stared into my eyes a little longer, a wistful smile curling his luscious mouth. A mouth that was swollen and plump from my kiss.

He took a step back and his carefree mask slipped back into place. Guess it was back to business then.

"So. Thane. He was here seeking entrance into Olympus a couple of days ago, but the guards wouldn't let him in."

"Why?"

"He was raging like a madman, shouting that Zeus had played us all. That he knew Zeus' dirty secret."

"The fuck?"

Helios laughed and tucked his hands into his pockets. "My thoughts exactly."

"When was this?"

“Just before G.R.I.M got shutdown.”

Well, this was getting interesting. “Are you suggesting Zeus has framed Thane?”

He shook his head. “I’m merely giving you the facts and events as I saw them.”

“Is there anything else you can share?”

His eyebrows drew together, and he opened his mouth to speak but stopped himself before he said anything.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I shouldn’t say. It will change everything.”

“Helios, you can’t drop a bomb like that and then not say anything!”

“I know, I know,” he said, his hands held up placatingly. He worried his bottom lip and he looked to the ground for a minute. “There’s more to you than meets the eye. I can see it in the darkness of your mind.”

“What does that mean?”

Helios started to walk backwards. “I can’t say more, Roux. Thank you for the kiss, it means more to me than you’ll ever know.”

“Helios! Don’t you walk away from me! Don’t you disappear—” But it was too late. He vanished into thin air leaving me with more fucking questions.

Chapter Twelve



Roux

Hades was pissed. He was ignoring me at the moment, but I could see the muscle twitching in his jaw, and I don't think I was imagining the audible grind of his teeth.

I'd just told him what I'd been up to, about the conversations with the Fates, and the trip to Olympus. I didn't mention the kiss with Helios, but I did tell him about the chat we'd had. Since I'd stopped talking, he'd barely acknowledged me. I gnawed at the inside of my cheek as I watched him pathetically attempt to distract himself with stupid paperwork.

I squirmed in my seat, the wooden chair creaking beneath me and Hades snapped his pen between his long fingers.

I winced. "Sorry."

"Did I say you could speak?" he snarled.

Oh, boy. Maybe I should make a run for it? My eyes darted to the door, but Hades caught me looking.

“Come here.” His tone brooked no argument. Shit.

I stood and walked over to his desk, dragging my feet behind me. I’d never seen him this angry. Even when I’d accidentally broken the arm of his favourite Royal Guardsman. That was totally his fault, by the way.

Hades stood from his chair and fuck, the look in his eyes told me he was going to kill me. That he was going to enjoy cutting me up into tiny little pieces and scatter my remains in all different parts of the world.

I totally should have made a run for it.

I stopped when I was directly in front of him. His chest was rising with deep, measured breaths and I knew he was trying his best to stay calm.

“Sooo....” I started.

He held up his hand, cutting me off. “How could you be so stupid?! What would possess you to bargain something of that magnitude with the Fates?”

“Now hold on a minute, big fella. That’s up to me to decide. I made that deal with my eyes wide open, and I would do it again if it meant helping someone I care about.” What an asshole, trying to lord it over me like a king — which he was, but that was beside the point.

“What if they make you do something illegal? Or immoral? What then? You can’t say no. Did you even *think* to add

stipulations to your favour?”

I shut my mouth. He might have a point there.

“For fucks sake, Roux.”

I winced again. “I know! I know, but I was thinking about saving Thane and you weren’t going to help me! You’re just swanning over everyone like you’re king of the fucking world —”

“I am the king!”

“—when you should be helping me! Thane is one of you! He’s a God and you’re what? Just going to let him be framed by Zeus?”

“You don’t know that,” Hades said, but he didn’t seem entirely convinced.

“Then help me!” I squared up to him. “Prove me wrong. Or are you too chickenshit to even try.”

“How dare you!” he roared, the fire in his eyes blazing so intently I could feel the heat brush my face. “You don’t know the first thing about what I do, about the secrets I keep or the plans I have underway. You have *no* idea, Roux, and I am not going to share them with you.”

“Well, isn’t that just fucking convenient. Keep your secrets and whatever else you’re hiding. I don’t need your help. I’m going to find Thane without you.” Then I turned my back on him and started to walk away.

“Roux. Do not walk away from me,” he shouted. “You will stay here and listen to me!”

“Make me,” I threw over my shoulder with a snarl before continuing with my exit.

Hades roared and leapt over his desk. He grabbed my arms and pinned them to my side before dragging me backwards. I tried to scramble out of his grasp, but he was a fucking God, and I had no chance. He wrapped both my wrists in one of his large hands and forced me to bend over his desk until my face was pushed into the cool leather. My feet were kicked wide, and the weight of Hades pressed against my back.

His lips found my ear. “I’ve been wanting to punish you for too long. That was the final fucking straw.” His teeth nipped my earlobe and I bucked beneath him.

“Get off me, you asshole!”

Smack.

I sucked in a startled breath. “Did you just—”

Smack.

His hand came down on my other cheek, the sting disappearing almost as fast as it came.

“Hush now,” he said as he soothed my ass. “No more talking.”

“This is ridicu—”

Smack.

Tears sprang to my eyes. That one fucking hurt.

“I said no more talking.”

Oh, Gods. His hand came down on my ass again and why was I just standing there, taking it? Why was it so hot? Was my ass red? Was Hades’ hand print on my skin?

Smack.

“Such a good little Reaper for me,” he cooed as his fingers stroked my burning flesh. I could feel the heat of his hand through my leather trousers.

I moaned at the endearment. What the fuck was wrong with me?

I tried to close my legs, needing friction on my core, but Hades smacked me again.

“Stay still,” he growled. “Take your punishment like a good girl and I’ll reward you.”

I fucking melted.

Smack. “Why are you being punished.”

“Because you’re an asshole!” I yelled back, refusing to give in, but barely holding back the need to thrust my hips backwards to see if this was turning him on just as much as it was me.

He smacked me again.

“Ow,” I whimpered. That one had a bite to it.

“No, because you’re reckless and you break the rules.”

Smack. “Because I set the rules and decide what you can do.”

Smack. “Because I’m in charge and you need to learn that.”

Smack.

A sob welled in my throat, but I refused to let it free. I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction.

He smacked me again, this one even harder and I yelped.

“That’s it, baby. Don’t hold those screams back. I want to hear them all.”

I lost count of how many more times he spanked my ass. My skin was probably raw. It burnt and stung, and tears dropped down my face at the humiliation but also because I was *enjoying* it.

“Who’s in charge, Roux?” Hades asked softly, his voice calmer now he’d taken his anger out on my ass.

“You,” I gritted out.

He rubbed soothing circles over my tortured skin. “And who do you belong to?”

I swallowed, unable to get the words out.

Smack. “Who do you belong to?!”

“You!” I screamed. “You, Daddy!”

What. The. Fuck.

Excuse me, what did I just say?

Hades pressed himself against my back and moaned long and hard, the sound reverberating through me. “Oh, baby girl, do you know how fucking perfect you are?”

And why did that make me want to fucking preen?

Hades ground his hips against mine, digging his erection into me painfully. “I’m going to make you sing for me.” He swiped his tongue up the side of my face before resting his mouth against my skin. “I’m going to own you, Roux. Body and fucking soul. You were born to be laid out like this beneath me. So fucking beautiful. So goddamn perfect.”

His words were hot against my skin, branding them onto me and marking me forever. I was his. I always had been.

And now he was going to claim me as his own.

Hades stepped away from me and I immediately felt the loss of his warmth. I peeled myself from his desk and looked straight at him, defiance in my gaze even after all that.

“Kneel,” he growled.

It took me a minute to process his request. My legs were shaking and there was some part of me that was still resisting.

Hades gripped my chin harshly and towered over me. “I want you to kneel. I want you to show me how grateful you are that Daddy punished you.”

Embarrassment had a flush creeping up my throat. But I knelt. I sank to my knees like a good girl and Hades grinned at me wolfishly.

He thrust his thumb between my lips, stroking my tongue and oh my Gods, why was that so dirty?

“So fucking perfect.” He undid his belt and opened his zipper, the sound overly loud. Then he released his cock and holy fucking shitballs. There was no way that thing was fitting in my mouth. It was huge and thick, and the tip glistened with pre-cum. He rubbed the tip of it against my lips, smearing me with it. I flicked my tongue out to taste it and a moan of appreciation clawed its way out of me.

“That’s it, baby. Show me how much you appreciated that punishment.” His voice was low and raspy, and it had a shiver running up my spine.

I reached for his cock, but he smacked my hands away.

“No hands. Just that pretty fucking mouth, baby girl.”

If I had a heartbeat, I bet it’d be running a riot in my chest. I opened my mouth as wide as I could and wrapped my lips around the fat head of his cock. It took me a minute to find my rhythm and spit dribbled down my chin. I didn’t seem to have much finesse, but I made up for that with sloppy enthusiasm. Hades didn’t seem to mind though. He stared down at me with fire in his eyes, his gaze unrelenting and fierce.

I took him deeper into my throat with each pass, until he was pressing against the back of it. He gripped my hair in his fist and forced his cock deeper, until I could brush the dark curls nestled at the base of it. Tears sprang to my eyes as my throat convulsed around his cock, my gag reflex working to remove it. My hands flew to Hades’ thighs, gripping them beneath my fingers, but he just held me there, staring at me, testing me to see how much I could take.

When he finally released me, I fell backwards, tears streaming down my face and saliva coating my chin. I pushed back up onto my knees and opened my mouth wide. I wanted my reward.

“Such a sight,” Hades said, stroking a hand down the side of my face before gripping my chin tightly. “Don’t move.”

I stared up at him and waited while he began to fist his magnificent cock, pumping himself hard and fast, the muscles in his forearms straining, his chest rising rapidly. The fire in his eyes could have melted me. He looked down at me like I was nothing more than prey and I was lapping it up. My core was aching, dripping, and I wanted nothing more than for Hades to fucking own me.

“Gods, you’re beautiful, Roux. So fucking perfect. My little Reaper.”

The hand on my chin tightened as he found his release, and fuck, I nearly came myself. Cum fell on my tongue and down my chin before he slipped his cock back into my mouth. I sucked him clean, enjoying the taste of every single drop I could find.

He pulled his cock from my mouth and dragged his thumb through the cum on my face, pushing it into my mouth, not wanting to waste a single drop.

“Say thank you,” he said, his voice barely above a growl.

“Thank you, Daddy.”

“Fucking Hell,” he mumbled under his breath before he dragged me up to my feet. He smashed his mouth against mine, his kiss wet and filthy, his tongue delving deep and scraping the roof of mouth. He ripped open the button on my trousers before thrusting his hand into my pants and touching me where I needed it the most. He sank his fingers inside me in one quick thrust.

“Fuck yourself on my fingers. Show Daddy how much you need it. How much of a dirty little whore you are for me.”

My moan was fucking obscene. I rolled my hips against his hand, spreading my legs wider to give him better access. His fingers made a filthy squelching sound as I moved, showing him how much I really liked it.

“That’s it, baby. So wet for Daddy.” His teeth scraped down my neck, nipping at the sensitive skin and sending little jolts of ecstasy through me.

I rocked my hips back and forth, angling them until Hades’ fingers brushed that perfect spot deep inside me. I cried out.

“That’s it,” he crooned. “If you want to come, you’ll have to do it yourself. Show me how much you want it.”

“Daddy,” I whined, clutching his shirt. “Feels so good.”

“That’s it, baby. Come for me. I want to see you fall apart.”

My orgasm slammed into me, hitting me like a tidal wave. It ripped through me as Hades continued to pump his fingers into me until it was too painful, and I had to push him away. Blackness danced on the edge of my vision and if Hades

wasn't holding me up, I'd have collapsed in a puddle on the floor.

"Wow," I said.

Hades chuckled. "Wow, indeed."

He brushed my hair back from my face, his gaze soft and warm. Then he lifted me and carried me around his desk before sitting in his chair and pulling me into his lap.

I sighed, the sound content, and I melted into his embrace.

"Are we going to talk about this?" I asked quietly.

"Not right now, no. I know we need to, but I just want to enjoy this moment with you." He stroked his hand up the length of my back and I suddenly wanted to purr like a kitten. Who knew Hades liked to snuggle. The thought had me smiling and tucking my head tighter under his chin.

Chapter Thirteen



Hades

Roux sat curled in a little ball on my lap. A moment of regret flashed in my mind before I immediately vanquished it. I was not going to feel guilty over this. There had always been something simmering between Roux and I and it was only a matter of time before it had erupted. I just hadn't thought it would take her putting herself in real danger that would push me over the edge.

"Why did you give the Fates so much hold over you?"

She looked up at me, her green eyes wide and vulnerable. "I didn't mean to. I just wanted to find Thane. Something is wrong, Hades. Olympus was empty and Helios knew something was going on but wouldn't tell me. I mean, Thane had been shouting like a mad man when he'd last been to Olympus, which is just something I can't imagine."

I agreed. Thane was always so put together. The man was more rigid than an army drill sergeant. Everything was in a specific place, everything he owned had a purpose. For him to suddenly be shouting at the gates to Olympus, something must indeed be very wrong.

“What do you know about Erebus and Nyx?” she asked, her fingers playing with the buttons on my shirt.

“The dark lovers?”

“Yes, the Fates said that’s what Thane went to ask them about.”

That was odd. They’d been gone for centuries and had become somewhat of a myth after the passing of all this time.

“Nyx and Erebus were a perfect match, in every way. She was the Goddess of night, he the God of shadows. I don’t know what changed, but they were suddenly going down a darker path, creating dark and deadly creatures that would terrorise our world and the human world. We needed to stop them. The council of the Gods met, and the decision was made to separate them and punish them in different ways.”

“That’s so sad,” Roux said, her words quiet against my chest.

I pulled her up to look at her and I could feel sadness pouring from her. There were tears pooling in her eyes and I brushed away the ones that tried to run down her cheeks. “Why are you so sad, baby?”

“I dunno,” she said, her face leaning into my touch. “I guess I just feel sad for them. That they had this perfect love, and

your punishment was to separate them.”

“Yes, but we couldn’t let them continue what they were doing. We had to punish them.”

“But this would have been worse than death for them.”

It would have been. It wasn’t one of our proudest moments, but those were days when Zeus ruled as a vengeful God. He’d mellowed a lot since then, but there were times in the old days when he was very absolute.

“What happened to them?” she asked.

“Erebus was condemned to the darkest depths, a place that would never see the light. And he’d be responsible for killing anyone who set foot into his new lair. Nyx was doomed to wander the night sky alone, forever parted from her lover. They say that every time she cries, a new star is born.”

“That’s horrible.”

I hummed my agreement. “No one has seen either of them since.”

“Really?”

“They were banished in their incorporeal forms, never able to touch another living soul or leave their realms ever again.”

“Wow,” she huffed. “When you punish someone, you really know how to do it.”

“Yes, and don’t you forget it,” I said with a wicked grin. A flush crept up the side of her neck and she swallowed

nervously, no doubt remembering the moment she shouted 'Daddy'.

Gods, she'd been perfect. Who knew that was buried deep within her somewhere. I reached out and tucked her hair behind her ear, loving that she leaned into my touch. She was so responsive. So perfect.

"Do you know how long I've wanted to touch you this way?" I asked. She shook her head, her bottom lip caught between her teeth. "Since you strolled into my office like you didn't give a shit who I was. It didn't matter that I was the king and there were rules, you walked in here like you owned the place, and I was instantly hard at the thought of punishing your sweet little ass."

She snorted. "I am not sweet."

"No, I guess not." I pressed a soft kiss to her lips and her eyes fluttered closed. "You certainly taste sweet though."

Her lips were soft beneath mine and I took a moment to just enjoy exploring her. I'd wanted this for so long, avoided it for too long, that I was going to take my time.

I teased her lips with my tongue, tracing the seam and pulling back over and over again until she let a little frustrated moan break free. I smiled against her mouth as I slid my tongue against hers, tilting her head and controlling everything. She kept trying to speed up, but I was in control here. Not her.

Her hands dipped beneath the hem of my shirt, her fingers following the lines of my abs, slowly trailing lower. I was hard as a fucking rock and there was no way she couldn't feel it beneath her. I mean, my pants were still wide open.

I should stop this, move us somewhere more comfortable but I couldn't seem to pull my mouth from hers, couldn't make my hands leave her skin. I was addicted to her, and I was taking the chance to lose myself in her.

“Yo! Kingy! Where you at?”

Shit.

I'd got so lost in Roux that I'd completely forgotten that the Revenants were due to check in.

Roux looked startled and tried to scramble off my lap, but I wrapped my arm around her waist and held her tight.

“Baby girl, sit still,” I whispered by her ear. “We don't want the Revenants to see how hard you make Daddy's cock.”

Her eyes went ridiculously wide, and the tip of her tongue flicked out to wet her lips. “Yes, Daddy.”

My cock twitched. Sweet fucking hell. “You're going to be the death of me.”

The corners of her mouth tipped up into a grin. “That sounds like a challenge.”

“Behave,” I growled, but there was no real heat behind it.

She settled herself comfortably in my lap, rubbing her ass against my erection as she moved. Minx. Next time I'd make

her sit on my dick and watch her squirm every time I rocked my hips. Bet she wouldn't be smiling saucily at me then.

We'd just about managed to situate ourselves comfortably and, more importantly, decently, when Nox and Rook wandered in.

"You're supposed to knock," I grumbled. But it was pointless. They never knocked. I'd created the Deathwatch Revenants back when I'd been given the Underworld several millennia ago. They were my personal protection, but I was currently using them to collect the tricky souls, something Roux would normally be responsible for. I hoped this didn't turn into a cat fight, but, then again, anything was possible where the Revenants were concerned.

"Ooh, hello. What do we have here?" Nox asked, his black eyebrows wriggling on his pale face. "Is that my liege in a compromising position with a lady? I am shocked."

Rook slapped him in the chest. "Pack it in, asshole. Let's give him the report and then we can leave him to his cock warming."

I sighed and pinched the bridge of my nose. Roux just sat there, her elbow resting on the desk with her chin in her hand and a cheeky smirk on her face. Why was everyone enjoying this but me?

"How's your new pet?" I asked and Rook's smirk immediately dropped.

"She's not a pet," he spat.

“Your lover boy Korbin seems to think she is,” Nox said.

Roux leaned a bit closer to me with a questioning gaze in her eyes. “New pet?”

“On the night of the last Blood Moon they received a sacrifice in the form of a pint-sized necromancer. I think you’d like her. She’s feisty.”

“Brought him to his knees, is what she did,” Rook said gleefully. Fuck, I was hoping he wouldn’t mention that. The first time I’d met her was in the cemetery and she’d pulled a *Moroi* from the Depths. I’d thrown my weight around a little and tried to put her in her place. Let’s just say, it backfired.

“I definitely want to meet the woman who did *that*,” she said cheerfully.

My stomach dropped a little. Those two together would actually be a nightmare. “Maybe later.”

“Aww, is Hades a widdle scaredy cat?” Roux mocked.

“No,” I replied indignantly while the two idiot Revenants sniggered behind their hands. “We just have a lot to do right now.”

Roux laughed, and it was a glorious sound that boomed through my office, even if it was at my expense. “Oh, this is too good. You really *don’t* want us to meet.” She turned to the other two. “What’s your necromancer’s name?”

Rook beamed, his smile wide and his green eyes bright. “Raevyn.”

“Well, tell Raevyn to come find me and we’ll have some fun. Lord knows she’ll probably need a break and some female company at some point.”

Rook raised a green eyebrow and looked like how I felt at the thought of those two getting together. That it would be chaos, and someone would probably lose a limb. Nox, who looked like a dark Angel with his brilliantly blue eyes and wild black hair, positively glowed with glee.

I needed to get this back on track. Roux was fidgeting and rubbing herself against my cock, which was still painfully hard. “What do you pair have to report?”

Roux sat herself up straight, knowing that this was her job they were doing. Gods, I hoped they were doing it justice.

Rook brushed his green hair out his eyes, his expression serious. “Everything is going well. We haven’t had any tricky souls escape us yet.”

“Ooh there was that one advorsus that had us running around a bit,” Nox said with his creepy smile on his face.

An advorsus was a soul that had turned evil and hostile, refusing to leave the world of the living and would quite often possess someone to try and stay under the radar. But it was impossible to stay that way. The dead aren’t supposed to mix with the living, and evil souls will fester until even the most ignorant humans will start to notice something is wrong.

“What happened?” Roux asked, leaning forward slightly.

Nox took a step forward. “Well, we were tracking this soul and—”

“That’s enough,” I interrupted. I wasn’t in the mood for a tall tale of wild adventure. Once Nox got started, it was impossible to make him stop.

The boy pouted at me, and it’d be adorable if I wasn’t concentrating so hard on not blowing my load beneath Roux’s delectable ass.

“So, you’re not having too many issues?” Roux asked, a little worry in her voice.

I wrapped my arm around her waist and pulled her closer to me, choosing to ignore the smug look on Rook’s face. Asshole.

“No. It’s all going fine, but we will find you if we need help with anything,” Rook said.

Roux gave a single nod in his direction, and I could tell this was hard for her. Soul collecting was intrinsically linked to the very core of what she was. I imagine it would something akin to me not being part of the Underworld anymore. Utterly devastating.

“Thank you,” she said softly, before cocking her head to one side. She turned to face me a worried expression on her face. “I need to leave. Something’s happening at G.R.I.M.”

“Do you need me?” I asked.

Her smile was wide but didn’t quite reach her eyes. “Not at the moment. My Hounds are in distress.” She leant closer and

pressed her lips against my ear. “Can we pick this up later? Please, Daddy?”

I wrapped her hair around my fist and yanked her head backwards, loving her gasp of delight that brushed my cheek. “Oh, yes, baby girl. We will most definitely be revisiting this. Now, give Daddy a kiss before you go.”

She pressed her lips to mine, the touch a barely there whisper of things to come and I couldn’t wait to explore this with her. Jeez, my cock was aching just thinking about all the possibilities that lay ahead of us now.

She tugged my shirt down, making sure I was covered before she vanished into thin air.

“Daddy?” Rook asked, a smirk crossing his plump lips.

“Fuck off,” I growled but they both just laughed.

“I’m going to win the bet,” Nox suddenly shouted.

“What bet?” I demanded.

“The one about when you’d finally give into Roux,” Rook said. “I’d been more optimistic. Thinking you two would have got together a few years ago. Nox is closest so he will indeed win the bet.”

“I see,” I mumbled, my finger tracing my pursed lips. “And what do you win?”

Nox’s face went pale at my question. “Um... nothing. There was no prize. Gotta go now, bye!” Then he vanished into thin air leaving Rook standing there looking sheepish.

“Goodbye, your majesty, and for what it’s worth, I’m happy for you.” Then he too disappeared into thin air leaving me sitting in my chair wondering what the hell had just happened.

Chapter Fourteen



Atticus

The Hell Hound twins stared at me with the most feral expression in their eyes. They were fascinating. They shouldn't exist, but there they were, completely identical down to the last hair on their heads. I would love to study them, to figure out how they work together. I knew that wouldn't exactly be moral, but it wasn't every day you met something that shouldn't exist. Hell, I was a rarity. Metus demons were hermits, yet here I was working investigations for the Guild. But that was my own fault. I'd had a momentary lapse of judgement and sent someone mad. They *might* have been someone important, like a high-ranking Guild official, but they were assaulting my sister and I just saw red. Safe to say, that guy would never touch another living creature again. I may have trapped him inside a nightmare, unable to wake and

unable to dream. It was a horrible existence, but the bastard deserved it. I got stuck working for the Guild because I was too valuable a tool to just dispose of.

And now, I was staring at two very vicious Hell Hounds who were about to rip me into teeny, little pieces, all because I suggested that I interview Roux. Apparently, that was a no go because I'd left her distraught the last time we were alone together. But I had a reason for that. It had terrified me, and I'd fled. Not my finest hour, but shit, I wasn't expecting her reaction.

"Absolutely not," the one on the left said. I had no hope of remembering which one was which.

"There is no way we are leaving her in your care again," the right one added.

And fuck, they were snarling at me. This was not going to end well.

For them.

I flared my hands out to the side, ready to flood them with my power – not to really hurt them, but certainly to give them something to think about – when there was a loud pop and an angry voice roared through the air.

"What the fuck is going on?"

Roux appeared in the room followed by a blast of air pushing through the room as her magic dissipated.

The left one pointed one of his large hands at me. "He wants to interrogate you."

“And we won’t let him.” The right one took a step closer to me but stopped when Roux marched in front of them.

“*This* is what you pulled me away from Hades for? I’m out searching for answers, and you are here swinging and measuring your fucking dicks?”

The twins blanched. Again, I was amazed. She had complete and utter control over the pair of them. Normally, there would at least be some autonomy, but they seemed to look at her like she hung the fucking moon.

I snorted and instantly regretted it when she turned the full force of her fury on me. I flinched. The skin on her face was flickering and I could see the intricately carved bone beneath. Her eyes were two black voids and pretty terrifying actually. And that was saying a lot when I was the stuff of most peoples’ nightmares.

“And you!” she spat. “What else could you possibly want with me after our little interaction yesterday, hmm? Feel the need to make me feel like shit again?”

I dropped my gaze, suddenly unable to look at her in the eyes. “I’m sorry. I should never have left. I just...”

She took a step closer, the anger softening in the lines of her face. She was so beautiful. So unexpected. So wonderfully mine. I just didn’t know how to deal with that. We Metus demons were rare. It was rarer still to find a mate.

“I think I know why,” she said quietly. “But we can talk about that later. For now, I will answer your questions, because

every little thing will hopefully help us to find Thane and figure out what he's been up to."

She turned away from me and spoke quietly to the twins. The pair of them didn't take their eyes off me until she slapped them both in the chest to get their attention. I didn't know what they were muttering about. I didn't have super hearing like other demons, so I was relying on their facial expressions and the twins weren't giving anything away.

My heart was pounding in my chest. She'd quickly become my obsession. Since that moment when my power touched her mind, I'd been replaying it in my head over and over again. She consumed me. And I wanted to lose myself in everything that was her. A thought which was absolutely terrifying.

I'd resigned myself to walking this world alone. I'd already lived for a long time, been paying my debt off to the Guild for decades and I'd given up on finding my true mate. But there she was. With bright red hair and eyes that were as green as any forest I'd ever seen. How the fuck was I supposed to convince her to forgive my stupidity?

The twins made some harsh grunting sounds, no doubt they were supposed to intimidate me, but I was a nightmare demon. They'd had to do better than that to scare me. Then they stuck two fingers in front of their eyes and flicked them to me.

I rolled my eyes at them. "Ooh, scary."

"Fuck you, demon," the left one spat.

I blew them a kiss. "In your dreams, bitch."

They both started forward at my insult, but Roux slammed the heels of her hands into each of their chests and pushed them backwards.

“Out! Now!” she roared. “I will not have a bloodbath in here.”

She rubbed soothing circles on their chests and they both seemed to calm immediately. Maybe the rumours were true. I’d heard they were closer than they should be, but other than a little bit of affection I’d seen between the three of them, there was nothing to suggest that it went beyond that. If I had seen something, I’d be honour bound to report it to the Guild, but if she was my mate, I doubted I could do that to her. Their connection clearly went soul deep. In any other pairing I’d say they were destined for each other, but those three were nothing but doomed.

After some gentle soothing from Roux, the two Hounds finally left, leaving me alone in a small space with someone I had the unrelenting urge to claim.

Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea after all.

Roux closed the door, then turned and leant on it, staring at me with determination burning in her eyes. “So, do you want to interrogate me first or talk to me about what happened yesterday?”

I huffed a laugh. Neither was an easy decision, but the interrogation would probably be best to get out of the way first. It’d also give me a chance to work out what the fuck I was going to say.

I pointed to the chair opposite Thane's desk. "Have a seat."

She plonked herself down with all the grace of a baby giraffe.

"Aren't Reapers supposed to be graceful and, like, floaty?"

She gave me the middle finger and then propped her feet up on the desk. "Ask your questions, but I should probably warn you, I'm tired, pissed off and I will stick my knife in your eye if you try to run away from me again."

I grinned and leant closer. "Don't tempt me with a good time now."

She narrowed her eyes at me but there was a small tug of a smile in the corner of her mouth. "Let's get this over with."

I gave her a nod and got comfortable in Thane's chair. "Can you talk me through how you met Thane?"

"When I awoke in this life, I knew nothing about who I'd been."

"Nothing?"

"Nope. No name, no memories. Nothing."

That was unusual and something I'd never heard of. "Where does Thane fit into all this?"

"He found me," she said with a smile that spoke of fondness. "He said he had been sitting in his office when he'd had an urge to go for a walk. He found me stood in the middle of a field crying as I stared at the sky."

"Why were you crying?"

“I don’t know. I just remember this overwhelming sense of loss and grief, but I didn’t understand why.” She cut her gaze to mine, the sadness there nearly had me jerking out of my seat and wrapping her in my arms. “Even now, when I think about that moment, I still feel grief, but I don’t know who or what I’m grieving. I just know I’m missing something.”

My heart clenched for her, which was an uncomfortable sensation considering I usually lived surrounded by the terror of others. For her to arrive in the afterlife with no memory of who she was, and the only thing lingering was a sense of loss, she must have felt so off kilter and alone. Part of me was glad she had Thane take her under his wing. Another thing that was unusual.

The more I thought about it, the more that everything about Roux seemed unusual. I’d checked the records and there was nothing linked to her previous life. She’d never existed before arriving here as a Reaper.

“Do you think Thane did it?”

Her face turned fierce. “No. Absolutely not. I think he found out something Zeus was keeping secret, and that asshat had Thane framed.”

My eyes blew impossibly wide. “Did you just call Zeus an asshat?”

“Yep,” she replied, popping the ‘p’.

“I hope he’s not listening in,” I said with a laugh. “But, on a serious note, what do you think Zeus did?”

“I don’t know exactly but—” she stopped talking and I knew she was worried about what I’d report back to the Guild.

“This conversation stays between us. I want to solve this as much as you do. If it’s any consolation I don’t think Thane did it either.”

Her eyes turned to slits. “Why?”

I sighed and leant back in my chair. “Because Thane seems like he’s ridiculously meticulous. I mean *everything* is logged in minute detail. There’s no way he was stealing souls on the side.”

The tension left Roux and she seemed to heave a sigh of relief. She dropped her feet off the edge of the desk and leant closer. “I think it has something to do with Erebus and Nyx. The Fates said that Thane was asking about them and then they went all floaty and creepy and started mumbling about a darkness before vanishing faster than a snow cone in Hell. And Helios said Thane was raging like a madman, accusing Zeus of lying to us all and keeping secrets.”

“Well, you’ve been busy. And what does Hades think?”

“What?” she asked, the hint of a blush creeping up her cheeks.

“When you came in you said you were out getting answers with Hades.”

Her blush darkened. “I was, I was just... um...”

Oh. “You were *with* Hades?” Her spine straightened and I realised I sounded judgemental. “Sorry, I’m not judging, just

curious. I thought Hades wasn't interested in anyone since, you know..."

Her expression softened. "Since his wife died."

I nodded. Just something else Roux had managed to change. He must have had lovers since then, but I had a feeling he felt differently about Roux and *that* was the interesting thing.

But the Erebus and Nyx connection was odd. I wondered what that was all about. And how was I going to figure out the mystery that was Roux?

"Would you let me enter your mind?"

She grinned. "Want to bring me to my knees again?"

My cock throbbed at the memory of her reaction to my power. If I hadn't been so freaked out by the fact that I'd just impossibly found my mate, I'd probably have fucked her over the desk, and Gods, did I want to do that now. Especially with the way she was looking at me, like she wanted me to devour every inch of her.

I stood and walked around the desk towards her before taking her hand and pulling her to her feet.

She needed to know the kind of monster that I really was beneath the corporate suit. What she was going to be letting between her legs. I might have freaked yesterday, but today, I was all in.

I turned her so her back leant against my chest, and I brushed her hair over her shoulder to expose her neck. I gripped the

pretty column of her throat between my fingers and squeezed gently.

“I’m not a gentle man, Roux,” I whispered by her ear. “I will want to break you, pull you apart into tiny little pieces before fucking your tight little pussy and making you scream so hard that you’ll be begging me to stop.”

Her breath hitched and I felt her throat swallow beneath the press of my lips.

“Atticus,” she whimpered.

“You belong to me, and I’ll never let you forget it. But first,” I nipped her earlobe, “I need to figure out what’s going on in that pretty little head of yours.”

Chapter Fifteen



Roux

Atticus held me in his arms, his breaths caressing the back of my neck and I had a sudden urge to run just to see if he'd chase me.

"Will you let me roam free in your mind?" he asked, his voice a low rumble.

I turned around and looked deep into his fathomless eyes, trying to figure out if I could trust him. But I think my heart already knew the answer. "Yes."

"Come over here. The more comfortable you are, the easier it'll be." He led me over to the sofa in the corner of Thane's office and he sat down before patting his knee. "Lie down and pop your head here."

“Okay,” I said, following his instructions and getting comfortable. He brushed the hair away from my face and stroked the strands. The calm before the storm.

“Close your eyes, take a breath and relax.”

“Will it hurt?”

His hand stilled in my hair. “It shouldn’t. But I’m not sure what I’m going to find.”

I wasn’t going to panic. Here was a chance to find answers to some questions I’d had for a long time. Who was I before? Where did I come from? What had I lost?

I grabbed his other hand and interlinked our fingers. “Alright. I’m ready.”

Then I closed my eyes and waited.

Something teased at the corner of my mind, like a little breeze that tickled my temple.

“Relax,” Atticus said softly.

I took a deep breath and as I exhaled, that breeze pushed past a barrier and entered my mind.

It was strange, I couldn’t see anything but I could feel a coolness shifting through my memories like a Rolodex. Then it just stopped.

Atticus grunted and his hand twitched in mine. “There’s something here. Something blocking me.”

“What?”

“I don’t know. But it’s powerful. Maybe even ancient.”

Well, that didn't sound good. Or possible. Something ancient? We only used that term in relation to the Gods.

His hand suddenly gripped mine tightly and he took a sharp inhale. I could feel him pushing against something in my mind, almost like he was trying to kick a door down.

I tried to tell him to stop but he gave one more powerful blast against the wall, and a sharp, piercing pain sliced through me.

I screamed and my back arched off the sofa. Bones crunched. Sounds grew louder. My body grew hot.

Then there was nothing. Absolutely nothing.



“Roux?”

I opened my eyes to the night sky, but why was it sad and full of fear?

“Roux? Oh, thank the Gods.”

Someone was talking to me, but I couldn't pull my brain from the foggiest of sleep. My thoughts moved like molasses. Sticky and slow.

Strong hands gripped my head and was I being rocked? There was a to and fro motion, but it felt weird. Like it was sideways.

“Atticus?”

“Yes. I’m here. I’m sorry.”

Gods he sounded panicked. I tried to remember what we’d been doing but everything felt a little fuzzy. “What happened?”

“There was a block in your mind, and I attempted to breach it. Something’s wrong here, Roux. I’ve never come across anything like this.”

Well, that wasn’t exactly comforting. I mean, I knew *something* must be wrong with me because I had no memory of the Before but not this. This just gave me more questions. Like who would do this to me? And why?

I pulled myself up to a sitting position and my eyes immediately fell on the two prone figures on the floor.

“What have you done to my Hounds?” I pushed off the sofa and raced to them, relieved when I found them merely sleeping. Rafe had fallen with his head landing on Rayne’s chest, and they just looked adorable all curled up together.

“I just put them in a deep sleep.”

“Why?”

Atticus sighed. “They came in here ranting and raving at me and it was all very distracting. So, I just put them to sleep,” he said it as if it were the most normal thing in the world. He didn’t even seem apologetic.

“You can’t just put people to sleep whenever you feel like it.”

“Why not?” he asked, cocking his head to the side and looking at me like I was the crazy one. “They were about to transform into their beasts and get in the way. I merely removed that obstacle. I was more concerned about you than your precious Hounds.”

“Well, don’t do it again. Now wake them up.”

“Do I have to?” he said with a pout.

“If you don’t want me to shove my scythe up your ass, yeah, you do.”

He grinned widely at me and there was a touch of madness in it. “As you wish, kitten.”

“Kitten?”

“Yes, you’re cute with little claws and your threats just make me smile. Like a kitten.” He booped me on the nose as he strode towards the twins.

“My claws aren’t little,” I said, whilst releasing my talons. They were about four inches long, black, and finished in a ridiculously sharp point. I didn’t get the opportunity to use them much, but they were definitely not little.

I grabbed Atticus’ arm as he walked by and forced him back to the sofa.

“You sure you want to play this game?” he asked with a grin. “You won’t win.”

I pushed him down and straddled his thighs, wrapping one of my hands tightly around his throat. My nails dug into his neck

and he hissed as they broke the skin. Just a little. Maybe I was a kitten, they liked to play with their food too.

With my free hand I sliced through the top button on his shirt. I cut them all away one by one until I could spread his shirt wide open and holy moly. His chest was a wide plane of dips and valleys that I wanted to trace my tongue along. His moonlight iridescent skin was covered in black runes, dark thick lines that swirled across his torso and made him look completely otherworldly.

I whimpered at the sight of him. I trailed a claw down the middle of his chest, putting enough pressure that it left a thin red line but didn't make him bleed. The muscles flexed beneath my touch and heat coursed through my body, pooling in my core and making me wet.

There was a wildness to him, something savage and I should have been running from him, but I wasn't. Instead, I was toying with him, pushing him to see if I could make him snap.

His hands wrapped around my waist and pulled me closer, locking our hips together. A moan left my lips as the hard length of him pressed against me and a needy sensation started to burrow under my skin. I could feel something growing between us, pushing us towards a moment that would change us forever. I'd never felt so desperate for someone before. Like my life depended on connecting with them in the most intimate way.

Atticus watched me, his gaze unrelenting as I squeezed his throat tighter. I knew he was playing pliant for me, that he

could overpower me in the blink of an eye, and that should have scared me, but it only made me want him more.

I leant forward, closing the distance between us, and pressed my lips to his. He kissed me back, but there was a restraint to it that I wasn't expecting. Did he think I would break?

"Atticus," I moaned. "I'm not fragile." I nipped at his bottom lip when he tried to pull away, tightening my teeth until he hissed a breath. A spot of blood pooled on his lip and I swiped it away with my tongue. A burst of darkness trailed along my tastebuds, it fizzled and popped, and I hummed at the taste of him.

The world tipped as Atticus rolled me, trapping me beneath his large frame. He was so much bigger than me that I wasn't escaping without a fight, not that I wanted to, but there was something hot about being caught by him.

His mouth met mine and there was no holding back from him this time. He forced his tongue deep into my mouth and my eyes widened as I realised his tongue was forked like a snake. Fuck, that was hot.

I tightened my fingers in his hair, holding on whilst he ravaged my mouth. His power started to curl around me, dark waves of energy that tingled against my skin and had my body desperate with need. I arched up against him, trying to get as much friction as I could, but it wasn't enough.

"Please," I begged.

There was a sharp sting as he bit the side of my neck. “All in good time, kitten.” His eyes met mine. They were completely black, the swirling colours disappearing in the wake of his desire. “I’ve waited centuries for you. I’m going to take my fucking time.”

I whimpered, my body aching and desperate. Every touch he made set me on fire. Atticus trailed kisses down my throat, along my collar bone and then he ripped my shirt straight down the middle, exposing my breasts to his hungry gaze. The scrap of black lace that I was wearing was no defence against his hunger. He ripped through my bra and, before I could complain, his tongue was wrapping around my nipple and pulling it into a taut peak.

“Fuck, you’re perfect,” he growled as he tossed his shirt away, exposing more of his delicious skin. His mouth went back to exploring my torso, kissing and licking until my mind was a mess. I could come just from his mouth alone.

His fingers opened the button on my trousers, and he sat back to slide them down my legs. He threw them behind him, eager to get back to exploring my body.

His power grew, sparking against my skin and sending delicious little jolts of electricity through me. I could feel it tugging at my own magic, demanding it break free and join his. I let go of my own restraint and everything intensified. I was on the very edge of ecstasy, needy and desperate. If I didn’t have Atticus buried within me, I was going melt into a

puddle of need. I'd never be whole again. He'd awoken something within me that could only ever be satisfied by him.

A whine left my throat as I unashamedly rocked against him. "Please, Atticus. I need you."

"Fuck," he rasped. "I don't think I can be gentle."

I gripped his jaw in my hands, my claws digging into his skin. "I don't want gentle. Fuck me. Claim me. Make me—"

He surged forward, capturing my mouth with his own and his hands turned feral. They ripped at my underwear, tearing them from me and tossing them away. He pulled back and stared at me with such reverence that I melted a little bit more.

The cool air hit my skin and I shuddered.

"Are you ready for me, kitten?" he asked as his fingers trailed up the inside of my thighs. Gods, this was fucking torture. I burned for him.

"I'm ready," I said as I held his dark gaze, the world fading to a blur around us.

The grin on his face as he finally touched me where I need it the most, was fucking feral. There was a possessiveness in his gaze that had me preening beneath him. As I stared deep into his eyes, I could sense how powerful he really was, how dangerous and old. His eyes had seen the world change and now they were staring at me like I was the highlight of his existence.

His fingers moved achingly slowly over me, keeping me teetering on the edge but never letting me fall off it.

“I don’t mean for this. I mean for what being with me will mean,” he purred, his thumb circling my clit.

“What?” I managed to gasp out.

“That if you let me between your legs, I’m going to fucking brand you. I’ll own you and I’ll mark you as mine, completely.”

Holy fucking hell.

That. I wanted that.

A deadly expression spread across his beautiful features. “Ready to fuck a nightmare, kitten?”

Yes. A thousand times yes.

“I want you,” I said simply.

His dark eyes flashed, and a wide deadly grin curled his mouth before he slammed it back against mine. It was desperate, a toxic kiss that would have me wanting him forever.

My magic surged beneath his touch, my Reaper form showing beneath my skin where it collided with Atticus’ power.

I wrapped my legs tight around his waist and I dug my nails into his back. I knew I was drawing blood, but he didn’t seem to care. In fact, I think it spurred him on.

He thrust two fingers inside me, the touch so unexpected I cried out.

“Let me take you away from all this,” he moaned against my mouth. “I could put your mind in a little box and keep you all to myself.”

“You won’t do that,” I said gripping his back tighter, causing him to flinch.

He chuckled mockingly. “You’d trust me that much?”

“Yes.”

A savage growl left his mouth as his hands went to his trousers, hurriedly working them open and letting his cock spring free.

Holy fuck.

He was huge.

A cocky grin spread across his mouth as I watched him pump himself, taking in the sight of him. There was a ladder of piercings along the underside and a pair of piercings crossed through the head. My core tightened at the sight of it. Gods, he was going to put that inside me. Who knew he’d been hiding *that* behind his fancy suit.

He pushed my legs wider, so he had complete access to my pussy. I gasped as he pressed the hard head of his cock against my entrance.

“Brace yourself, kitten.”

Then he thrust deep inside me.

Fuck!

He was so big, and those piercings... shit. It was obscene how huge he felt inside me.

“Fuck,” he groaned. “You’re so goddamn tight.”

“Or maybe you’re just so huge.” I gasped loudly as he started to move, those fucking piercings hitting all the right spots inside me. His hands gripped my hips tightly, holding me still while he pounded forcefully into me. He used me. He didn’t make love to me. He took what he wanted and I fucking loved it.

“Fuck,” he said with a sharp inhale. He wrapped a hand in my hair and yanked my head back to expose my throat. His teeth sank into the spot where my neck met my shoulder and I cried out at the sting. His power intensified. Darkness swirled around the edges of my vision and a dizziness hit me as he started to move faster. I felt wild, out of control. My own death magic surged under my skin and reached for him, whipping into a frenzy as we moved together.

Black shadows exploded from me as I struggled to contain my magic. The room seemed to grow colder and darker as we stormed towards our climax. My hands moved up to his shoulders, gripping onto him with as if he were my life raft, I could feel the blood pooling beneath my fingers as I clung to him.

The room faded to black, filled with his nightmares and my death magic. I could only focus on Atticus. The one bright light in the room. The only thing grounding me as he pounded

into me harder and deeper until I was right there. Ready to explode.

Atticus released a feral growl, and that was all I needed to throw me headfirst into ecstasy. He fucked me through my climax, pushing my orgasm beyond bliss into pure goddamn euphoria. My body was filled with pain and pleasure, blackness dancing at the edges of my vision.

“Come for me again.” Atticus’ voice was a hard command and fuck, my body listened.

It hit me like a fucking tsunami. Raw and painful and so goddamn beautiful.

A connection snapped into place between us, flooding through me with the power of lightning bolt. I screamed out his name as he somehow managed to fuck me so hard, the sofa frame broke beneath us. But that didn’t stop him.

“Fuck!” I screamed.

He gripped my chin. “Look at me. Watch me as I fill this pussy with my cum.”

I whimpered in exhilaration. Barely clinging on, but I wanted to watch. I *needed* to see it.

Raw power surrounded us, swirling into a cacophony until Atticus roared with his release. He fucked me with a pace that should have destroyed me. His cock pulsed as he filled me with his release.

Then I felt it.

The moment his heart stopped, and his soul became mine.

His eyes blew wide, his back arched, and then he blacked out.

Chapter Sixteen



Roux

The greatest sense of relief filled me when Atticus took a deep breath. I had felt him die, just for a second, but long enough that I felt his soul leave his body. I'd a feeling that I *may* have branded a mark on it, but I'd never had a mate before, so this was all new territory. The more concerning thing at the minute was that with Atticus unconscious, the twins were waking up and I was lying here naked with an equally naked Atticus on a broken sofa. Talk about embarrassing.

I could attempt to teleport, but Atticus and I were still intimately connected and that wasn't going to go well for him if I decided to vanish. I couldn't teleport anyone but myself. I sighed; I was just going to have to endure the lewd comments from the twins.

“Roux?” Rafe groaned while he stretched out his limbs. “When I find that demon, I’m going to kill him.”

Rayne just huffed as he rolled to his feet but the pair of them froze when they took in the sight of me wrapped around the demon they wanted to destroy.

“Am I still dreaming?” Rafe asked his twin.

Rayne merely grunted in response, refusing to take his eyes off my nakedness. His fingers flexed by his side, almost like he was stopping himself from reaching out and touching me. Gods, I wished they could.

Rafe tilted his head to one side as he took in my embarrassment. “I feel like I’m missing something here.”

“Well...,” I began but Rayne held up his hand, stopping me.

“I need to leave,” he said, pain twisting his features. “I can’t... I want...” He grunted as he got to his feet and fled the room.

“Rayne! Wait!” his twin shouted, but he’d gone.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, wanting so much to be able to comfort them, to be able to be with them. Some days it hurt just looking at them, for them to see me like this, in a way they’d never have me, was probably unbearable. I knew I’d feel the same if I ever saw them with someone else.

Rafe pressed a kiss to my forehead. “It’s not your fault. I’ll find him and calm him down before he does something stupid.”

“Okay, that’s probably wise.” The last time Rayne got really angry a Royal Guardsman ended up in the hospital. That was not a fun one to explain to Hades.

Rafe looked at Atticus, a glow of curiosity in his blue eyes. “He’s quite cute when he’s asleep.”

“I’ll tell him you said that.”

He laughed. “I’m gonna make him pay for putting us to sleep though.”

I grinned up at him. “I expect nothing less. Just don’t hurt him too much, I think he’s going to be sticking around for a while.”

“What do you mean?” Rafe asked with his hands on his hips.

“I’m his mate.”

Rafe’s expression stuttered for a moment before pulling into a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “That’s... I’m happy for you.”

Somewhere deep down I’m sure he was, but all I could feel from him at the minute was sadness tinged with a little jealousy.

“Rafe...”

“I’m going to find Rayne. We’ll come back in a bit.”

When they’d got used to the idea that Atticus was probably sticking around for the foreseeable.

I nodded and let him go, taking a little bit more of my heart with him.

I don't know how long I lay there, on Thane's broken sofa, stroking my fingers through Atticus' soft midnight blue waves, but there was a grumble and a groan and then he was craning his neck to look up at me.

I smiled down at him, loving the way he seemed to still be a bit drowsy. "You look adorable right now."

"No, I don't. You take that back," he replied with a pout. "I'm a walking nightmare, I am not adorable."

I traced his lips with the tip of my finger. "My cute widdle nightmare."

He nipped the end of my finger, his sharp teeth pinching it and I yelped a little. "There's nothing little about me, kitten."

I giggled, honest to Gods, giggled like a schoolgirl. What the fuck was wrong with me?

Atticus lay back down his head on my chest and I ran my fingers through his hair again. I swear the guy was one second away from purring.

"This is a first for me," he mumbled with a low contented rasp.

"What? Sex?"

"No. Cuddling."

My hand stilled in his hair. "You've never cuddled?"

"No. Nightmare demons are not an affectionate species. Even after sex. It was always just about the act, never about the intimacy of it."

“So you’ve never been held like this? Touched like this?” I asked as I went back to stroking his hair.

“No. But I like it. I like it because it’s you, Roux.”

And with those words I fell for him a little bit more. Who knew Metus demons liked to be cuddled? Although, the thought of Atticus cuddling with someone else both amused and angered me. I didn’t want him touching anyone else but me and boy, was that a possessive thought. A spot on my sternum grew hot and Atticus pulled back from me to look at it.

There, right down the middle of my chest, were a swirling collection of delicate black marks that matched some of the designs on Atticus’ torso. They were beautiful.

Atticus let out a contented sigh at the sight of his mark on me. “What thought made it burn, kitten?”

I blushed. “The thought of you touching anyone else. I think I’d probably gouge their eyes out with a spoon if anyone so much as looked at you.”

He hummed appreciatively at my words, his fingers tracing the black lines that ran the length of my sternum. “Possessiveness is a good look on you. Makes me want to fuck your beautiful cunt again.”

I jolted at his dirty words but I couldn’t deny the fact that my core clenched at the sound of them.

“I know you have a connection with the twins, and while I don’t completely understand it, I won’t stand in the way of it or

anyone else your heart might choose. You chose me. That's all that matters."

How was he so perfect?

"I like you with my marks," he said, his fingers dancing across my skin.

So did I. A lot. I loved the way I felt branded by him. Marked.

Owned.

It was only then that he realised the twins weren't where he left them. "Where are your Hounds?"

"Well..."

"The only way they could have broken from my hold on their mind was if I'd died."

"Um..."

"Did sex with you kill me?" he asked an amused, and slightly puzzled, look gleaming in his starry eyes.

"Um...I think it did."

"What?"

"Only a little," I replied. "And not for very long."

"Huh."

"Pfft. It was like a couple of seconds, really."

"Does that happen a lot with your sexual partner?"

"No, you're the first."

He looked at me strangely. Like he wasn't sure whether he was annoyed or intrigued. Eventually he just shrugged his shoulders and curled back up on my chest.

“No questions? Or how dare you?”

He gave me a manic grin. “I’m still here. Can’t have done that much damage to me. Besides, I quite like the idea that sex with you is a deadly experience.”

“It certainly is,” I said with a laugh. “I saw your soul and I um... I may have marked it.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. So that the world knows you’re mine, too.”

He pressed a kiss against the mark on my chest. “I don’t mind that one bit, kitten.”

Chapter Seventeen



Rayne

The squelching sound as I drove my knife deeper into the leg of this scumbag echoed around the large room.

“No! Stop!” he screamed, sweat dripping from his brow.

I wasn’t going to stop. I’d never stop.

I plunged the knife deep into the meat of his thigh and let the man’s screams soothe my battered heart.

Torturing the damned was one of the ways I liked to relax. I needed to destroy something to help me to let go. And fuck did I need to let go after seeing Roux naked in the arms of another man.

It *hurt*.

The mostly naked man in front of me whimpered. “No more, please.”

“You don’t get to decide that,” I growled and the guy paled even further.

I didn’t know what he’d done, I didn’t care. I was just here to carve some flesh from bones, maybe remove a finger or two, and hopefully bury the pain that burrowed under my skin. He was tied to a chair in the middle of the room wearing nothing but a pair of white pants. He must have been about fifty when he died. There were wrinkles around his beady little eyes and his hair was thinning at the back.

This guy wasn’t screaming enough. I could still hear my heart fracturing.

I reached for his fingers and one by one, I twisted and pulled. Loving the sound of the bone crunching and the man screaming. Gods, the sound was beautiful.

I reached for his other hand when a strong arm wrapped around my waist and held me tight.

“This won’t help, brother,” Rafe said as he rested his chin on my shoulder.

I huffed but didn’t reply, too far gone into my anger and desperation that words were difficult.

Rafe let go of me and walked to the door, pulling the file I hadn’t even bothered to read. It contained all the information about the guy currently bleeding all over the concrete floor. I didn’t bother looking. I just selected a guy who needed torturing very painfully.

“Oomph, this guy definitely deserves all that you’re serving today, brother,” Rafe said as he walked back to me. “Meet Richard Smythe. He liked to murder little children after raping them.”

My anger only intensified. What kind of filth did that?

I snarled at the man. No wonder he was here for painful punishment.

“Well, it’s your lucky day, Richard,” my twin crooned. “Today you get two for the price of one.”

Richard paled even further. He looked as white as the porcelain tiles on the walls. “No. Please.”

Rafe walked over to the table, and I knew which instrument he’d select. The surgeon’s scalpel. I preferred brute force when it came to torture, but my twin liked to explore slowly. To learn the most intricate way to make someone fall apart. I loved to watch him. He was methodical, attentive, focussed. I just liked to make them scream.

“Did you listen to the children when they begged you to stop?” Rafe asked, his voice calm and low.

Richard whimpered but didn’t say anything.

“I’ll take that as a no then,” Rafe said before carving a thin line into the man’s chest. Blood trickled down his torso, over his round belly and into the cheap, shitty white briefs he wore.

Rafe turned to me with a wide grin and a manic look in his eyes. “Come on brother, let’s play.”



We'd sent Richard back to his cell with barely any flesh left on his bones. His skin would grow back overnight, and he'd get to be tortured by someone else all over again tomorrow. That was his world now. His existence.

I still didn't feel great. I still wanted nothing more than to wrap Roux in my arms and just hold her in bed. It wasn't even about the sex anymore. Don't get me wrong, I wanted her, Gods, I wanted her. I wanted to sink into her and watch her fall apart between me and my twin, but it was more than that now. My heart ached for her.

Rafe was cleaning his hands, but he wouldn't look at me. He was avoiding telling me something.

"Just tell me."

Rafe sighed and came towards me. He wrapped his hand around my jaw and rested his forehead against mine. We'd always been close. Probably too close. But we needed each other in a way most people wouldn't ever understand. Twin Hell Hounds were a freak of nature. They just didn't exist. Rafe and I shared a soul, two halves that intrinsically linked us and we'd feel what the other felt. Our mother died giving birth to us and our father always blamed us for her death. I took the brunt of our father's anger, protecting Rafe as much as I could, but if I was recovering from his last reprimand, I left Rafe vulnerable, and our father exploited that.

It wasn't until we were big enough that we finally killed him. Ripped him to pieces and left him for someone else to find. But the damage he'd done was imprinted onto to us. We were aggressive, angry, and unstable. No one wanted us. No one until Roux. She saved us just by existing, and by choosing us. We'd be hers forever. It just sucked that she was our mate, and we couldn't do anything about it because of the stupid fucking law that forbid any intimate connections between a Reaper and their Hounds.

Rafe's fingers flexed in the strands of my hair. He didn't want to upset me, but he took a deep breath and focused on my eyes. "Roux's mated with Atticus."

Shock hit me first. Followed by anger. Then hate. I stepped back from my twin, unsure of what I might do. My hands shook. My chest... fuck. It hurt. I gasped and suddenly had no bones in my body to hold me up. I stumbled backwards, catching myself on the wall that was smeared in blood. I couldn't breathe. Couldn't catch my breath. Everything was slipping through my fingers, spilling from me like water, drowning me.

"Rayne," Rafe whimpered, my emotions no doubt overwhelming him. I reached for him, fisting his shirt between my fingers as I tried to keep hold of something. But it was no use. My knees finally gave way and I wailed. A howl that contained everything I felt. All the pain and suffering. All the loss and grief for something we'd never have. A love we'd never experience but something we'd see every day in her face as she looked at someone else.

It should be us.

We both fell to the floor, arms wrapped around each other as we let the toxic emotions ooze from our souls.

“We’ll be alright,” Rafe mumbled, his voice shaky.

“We’ll have to be,” I replied but I wasn’t confident in my answer. I felt hollow. Empty. And I knew the only person who could fix that, would be Roux but that was never going to happen. Rafe and I were just going to have to get used to the emptiness. Which fucking sucked.

Chapter Eighteen



Roux

I left Atticus working in Thane's office. I wanted to find the twins, but I could sense their sadness through our bond. They'd find me when they were ready. I knew that if I found them now, I'd only make things worse and that was the last thing I wanted to do. I wish they could find someone to ease their pain. I knew Atticus would never replace what I could have with them. The twins and I were connected in a way that went beyond family. We were bonded, linked in a way that meant we would be a part of each other's lives forever.

My mind turned to Magnus. I knew now that there had been something between the three of them, a connection that none of them could deny. But was it salvageable? I knew there was more to Magnus than he portrayed to the world. I'd *seen* it, felt it. It was why I still loved him. Something just didn't sit right

about what I'd seen when I'd walked in on him with someone else. And the stories about how he became King? I don't know. The guy was a mystery wrapped in a conundrum. Impossible to figure out. And he always seemed to be on the cusp of telling me something, of dropping his mask, but he never did. I think it was that, more than his betrayal, that had me walking away. That he wouldn't trust me enough to share with me whatever it was that he was hiding from the world.

A cloud of smoke erupted into my office, followed by a bang so loud my eardrums nearly burst. Gold glitter exploded everywhere, and I fell into a very ungraceful sneezing fit.

"Bless you, honey."

Once the glitter and smoke dissipated, I caught site of a man perched on the edge of my desk. He was wearing impossibly tight white skinny jeans with artfully placed rips in them the length of his long legs. He'd crossed one in front of the other and he sat there with his pretty head cocked to one side like a German Shepherd.

Fuck, there was glitter everywhere.

"You're gonna clean this up, aren't you?" I asked, eyeballing the offending mess all over my floor.

He arched a well plucked eyebrow. "Honey, do I look like I clean?"

No. That he did not. Everything about him was spotless. His white blonde hair was swept away from his forehead, and he wore a white blazer with nothing underneath. His entire skin

shimmered with the gold glitter and his eyes were framed with gold liner that made his green eyes seem impossibly bright.

“Who are you and what do you want?”

“Ooh, straight to the point. I like it. I have a message for you.” He reached into his blazer and pulled out a crisp, white envelope.

I took it from his outstretched fingers and instantly recognised the owner of the strong, elegant script script emblazoned on the front.

Thane.

“Where did you get this?” I asked, a sudden coldness seeping into my skin. If Thane had sent this, he was definitely still alive.

“I got it in a little forest by the River Styx.”

I looked at the envelope again and noticed the seal. A pair of winged shoes. “You’re Hermes.”

“The very one,” he replied, his gold painted lips pulled into a broad smile. “I know you’ve met a few Gods, but we’ve never crossed paths which is definitely a shame.”

He was definitely not what I was expecting. “I thought Hermes was an old man.”

“Sometimes I am,” he said with a shrug of his shoulders. “Depends what kind of mood I’m in, and who I’m visiting. And right now, darling, I feel like being beautiful.”

“Aren’t you Zeus’ personal errand boy?”

His eyes flashed silver for a second, a harsh scowl dragging those perfect eyebrows low, but it was gone as soon as I'd seen it, making me wonder if he'd actually scowled. Especially since his mouth was pulled back into that wide grin again. "I'm many things, but yes, I have a loyalty to Zeus that not many possess. Are you going to open it?"

"And give you something to gossip about?" I said as I tucked the envelope into my back pocket.

"Can't blame a God for trying," he replied with a shrug.

"Is the Mansion of Night by the River Styx?"

He looked at me curiously and I wondered if I'd given too much away. Gods weren't exactly known for their secret keeping skills. "Not sure. Thane gave me the note days ago."

"Oh," I replied, a little disheartened. That meant he might not be alive at all. "So why only deliver it now?"

He shrugged again. "Those were his instructions."

"Oh," I said again, unsure of what else to say.

"Well, I'm going to head off. I've got a hot date with a demon, and I'm determined to have some fun with him."

"Wait," I shouted before he had a chance to vanish. "You deliver messages everywhere, just tell me, could you deliver something to the Mansion of Night if you had to?"

He tipped his head to the side. "If someone asked, yes. I could." Then he vanished leaving behind another cloud of gold fucking glitter.

“Asshole!”

At least I knew this Mansion place was real, even if it sounded like some cheesy lair out of a teen vampire movie.

“What the fuck happened in here?” Lila said as she strolled into my office.

“Hermes.”

“Ah. What did he want?”

“Gave me a letter from Thane.”

“What?” she gasped.

“Don’t get excited. Apparently he wrote it a few days ago.” I pulled it from my back pocket and cracked the seal. My heart dropped to my stomach as I unfurled the crisp white paper.

My dear friend.

If you’re reading this it means I’m in trouble and you’re probably dealing with a lot of backlash, for which I’m deeply sorry.

Please don’t come looking for me. I know you, Roux. You’ve probably already started searching for me, but I’m begging you, please don’t come and find me. There’re dangerous things happening and I don’t want you to get caught up in them.

Stay safe.

Thane.

“Aww, he called you friends,” Lila said with a touch of disbelief. I couldn’t believe it myself really. Wait. Was it a clue? Like in those spy movies when someone does something out of character to try and send a secret message? No. Thane wasn’t that imaginative. I think was genuinely calling me his friend. How sweet. It also just made me more determined to find him.

“Lila, get a message to the twins, we’re going to the River Styx tomorrow.”

“Why can’t you tell them?”

It was a fair question because normally I’d just reach out through our bond and send the message that way. “Um, something happened, and they saw and then they left and now I kind of don’t want to disturb them.”

“Shit, babe. Wanna talk about it?”

I took a deep sigh and rushed the words out as fast as I could. “I mated with Atticus and the twins found out and now they won’t talk to me.”

“Whoa. Hang on. You mated? With a demon?”

I nodded. “Yep. I’ll be honest, I didn’t see that one coming.”

Lila threw her arms around me and squeezed tight. “Congratulations. I’m so happy for you!”

“Thanks babe,” I said with a smile, and I realised, I was happy. Yes, it might be unconventional, but Atticus had chosen me, and I had chosen him. We were meant for each other, and I couldn’t wait to explore the possibilities between us.

“Ooh. We’ll have to celebrate when all this is over. You should have a commitment ceremony and a shindig over at Destiny. And we can invite everyone and—”

I slammed my hand over her mouth to shut her up. “Yes. To all that. But can we discuss it all *after* we find Thane? I need to get G.R.I.M HQ back up and running because I do not like having this damn scythe.”

The fucking thing was heavy, a weight on my shoulders I didn’t want. As soon as I found Thane, I was handing the blasted thing right back.

Lila nodded enthusiastically behind my hand, so I removed it slowly, just in case she started babbling again. She didn’t, which was a relief. Normally she’d go on for hours about something like this, but she must have sensed my distress over the twins because, while the exited little gleam didn’t leave her eyes, she didn’t start talking wedding colours.

“Okay, I’ll get a message to the twins for you, no problem. Do you want the daily rundown?”

“The what?”

Lila grinned like the Cheshire Cat. “Thane always had a daily list of what’s going on. Nigel would always do it for

Thane and since you're the big boss now, I thought you'd like one."

I pinched the bridge of my nose. Urgh, this job just got better and better. "Fine. What do I need to know."

"Norman has issued a statement about the investigation. He's kept it vague, said you're handling things and that we won't be issuing any further statements until the investigation is complete. No souls have been unaccounted for so the Royal Guard must be handling things relatively well," Lila said, counting the items off her fingers. "The Games have been announced and invitations will be arriving shortly."

My ears perked up at that. The Games were held on Olympus and were presided over by Zeus himself. The Games tested all participants in various different skills, from strength to cunning and puzzle solving to accuracy. They opened with a grand ball held in Zeus' mansion and all the deities would be there.

"Think I'll get an invite? It might be a good opportunity to sniff around." Something was going on up there and I was determined to get to the bottom of it, especially if it involved Thane somehow.

"I'd expect so. You are Head Reaper now, even if it's only temporary," Lila replied, her hands resting on her hips. "What's going on?"

"What do you mean?"

She huffed and sputtered. “Something is weird and doesn’t feel right. The whole thing with Thane, the ghosts disappearing—”

“Wait, what? Ghosts are disappearing? Since when?”

She nodded and stepped closer, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Yes, and for about a week. I went to the Last Spirit to meet up with a couple of friends and overheard a few people chatting. A board has gone up in there with the faces of the spirits who have gone missing.”

I grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m just worried,” she said chewing her bottom lip. She was a ghost but a very old one and attached to the power source here at G.R.I.M HQ. Most ghosts who lingered in the afterlife had unfinished business but some, like Lila, had been given new purpose and been granted permission to anchor themselves to someone or something. Lila chose this place. She wanted to help ferry the dead, so that’s what she did, and she’d be doing that until she decided she had had enough of this life. Then, when she was ready, I’d help her move on.

“I’ll keep an ear out, Lila. You’re right though, something is going on. There’s a weird sense of unease lingering, and I can’t put my finger on why or what it is. I’m hoping it has something to do with Thane and when I find him, I’m going to get to the bottom of it.”

She squeezed my hand back. “I know. Sorry I didn’t mention it before, you just seemed to have a lot on your plate.”

“There is always room on my plate for you, babe,” I replied fiercely. “No matter what.”

“Okay,” she said with a firm nod. “Now, tell me what secrets that demon is hiding behind his suit.”

I laughed, grateful she was pulling our conversation out of the gloom. I knew the missing ghosts were important, but right now, I just wanted a moment to enjoy a giggle with my best friend.

And boy, did we giggle.

Chapter Nineteen



Atticus

I could hear my Roux laughing abominably loud with her ghost friend and it tugged at the bond that was wrapped around my heart. It was like a warm glow stretched all the way to my fingertips and I wasn't sure what to make of it. It felt so alien, but so good.

There was a spark of lust that I sensed in her and I didn't need to guess what those two were talking about. It was completely distracting me from typing up my report for the Guild. I didn't think Thane was responsible for the missing souls. There was just no evidence and it made me wonder why I'd been sent on this wild goose chase. Although, if they hadn't sent me, I'd never have found Roux. It made me feel a little weird that I'd be grateful to the Guild for something but it was massively outweighed by the joy I felt at finding her.

There was another loud laugh and then Lila was scurrying past my office with a wide smile. She looked at me and blushed before running off.

It wasn't long before Roux was sauntering in, her own bright smile firmly in place. "What are you doing?"

"Wondering what you said to your friend to make her look at me like that."

She wagged her eyebrows, her grin positively salacious. "What you're hiding behind your suit."

Ah. *That*. I grabbed her hips and pulled her into my lap before capturing her mouth with mine. Gods, it had barely been a few hours but I'd missed the taste of her on my tongue. She moaned deep into my mouth as I slid my tongue along hers.

"I could spend all day kissing you," I said, pulling her firmly against my erection.

She ground her hips against mine, her pussy scraping along the ridges of my piercings and making my cock throb. "How's the report coming?"

"It'd be finished a lot sooner if I weren't distracted."

She gasped mockingly. "Are you suggesting that I'm stopping you from working?"

"Yes." I nipped her neck. "Now go so I can clear Thane's name."

“Okay, okay,” she laughed. “I need to prepare for tomorrow anyway.”

“Why? What’s tomorrow?”

She pulled a letter out of her back pocket. “Thane sent me a message and Hermes said Thane gave it to him near the River Styx so I’m going down there with the twins tomorrow.”

She held it out to me and I scanned over the lines. “But he says here *not* to look for him but you’re going to anyway?”

“Yes. Hermes says Thane wrote this days ago. He could be hurt or in danger. I’m not leaving him to face any of this on his own.”

Her eyes held mine with a fierceness that I found hot. She looked like she was going to take on the world even if the odds weren’t in her favour.

“Then I’m coming with you.”

“No,” she said with a shake of her head, her long red hair shimmering around her shoulders. “I can’t ask you to do that.”

“You’re not asking and I’m coming. You’re my mate, Roux and you’re stuck with me.”

She placed a quick kiss against my lips. “Okay. You can come, but you have to play nice with my Hounds.”

“Only if they play nice with me,” I grumbled. Truth was, I found their relationship with Roux a little intimidating. There was so much history between them, so much that had

happened and I knew they loved each other. I just felt like a bit of an outsider. But for her, I'd do my best.

"I'll make sure they do." Her brow furrowed and her mouth turned down a little in the corners. "I know everything has changed between us, but Rafe and Rayne are part of my life and always will be. Yes, I wish they could be more but—"

I placed my hand on her mouth. "I know there's a law preventing relations between Reapers and their Hounds but if anything were ever to happen between the three of you, I'd never say anything. I swear it. I can see how much you mean to each other and I'm sorry that it's forbidden."

She pulled my hand away and I hated there was a sadness in her eyes. "You have no idea how much I hate that law, but I love them too much to risk losing them forever."

"Will the king not change the law?"

"No. I've asked. And I understand why he won't. I just hate it."

I pulled her back into my arms and rubbed my hands up her back. "Well, maybe we can petition him together."

"You'd do that for me?"

"You're my mate. I'd do anything for you." And it was true. I had a sudden insane need to just see her happy and if that meant helping her so she could be with Rafe and Rayne then that's what I would do. Even if I kind of wanted to see how far I could push them before they snapped. But that was just part of my nature. To find pressure points and push on them until

someone broke. Part of me thought they might actually enjoy that. Being hunted and chased until they were caught.

“What was that thought?” Roux asked as her finger traced my bottom lip.

“Hmm?”

“Your eyes darkened, and your breath hitched. What made that happen?”

“I was thinking about your Hounds and how much fun it would be to break them.”

Her mouth formed a delicious little ‘O’ before her lips pulled wide into a grin. “Let me know if they ever agree. I’d like to watch.”

“I bet you would,” I replied as I gripped her chin between my fingers. Her eyes widened and her body relaxed further into my hold. I loved how responsive she was to me. All the little movements she made that showed me just how turned on she was. How desperate she was for me. I couldn’t wait to learn them all. “Open your mouth for me.”

She opened it wide, and I licked from the tip of her chin all the way to her top lip before delving deep into the wet heat of her mouth. I swiped my tongue along the roof her mouth, loving how her hips rolled against mine. How she gasped deep in her throat and moaned deliciously. I hooked my thumb into her mouth and held it open.

“Take out my cock,” I ordered, and her hands flew to my pants, undoing them in a blink of an eye. “On your knees,

kitten.”

Again, she did as I demanded, her chin never leaving the grip of my hand, nor her mouth closing around my thumb.

“Such a good girl for me.” I gripped the base of my shaft and placed the tip of my dick against her tongue. She shivered at the contact, and it took all my restraint not to thrust right to the back of her mouth with one thrust. “You ever sucked a cock like mine before?” She shook her head. “Just watch your teeth against the bars, and you’ll do just fine, kitten. Now suck.”

She closed her mouth around me her tongue slid down my length and along the barbells until the head of my cock was nestled at the back of her throat.

“Sweet fuck, your mouth is something else.”

Her moan vibrated along my cock, and I jerked in her mouth. She bobbed along my length, swallowing me over and over again, taking me so deep that her nose brushed my pubic bone. Goosebumps broke over my skin as she sucked me, twisting her tongue over the crossed barbells at the head of my cock and making my knees weak.

I fisted my hand in her hair, holding her still. “I’m going to fuck your face now.”

Her jaw went slack and sweet fucking gods, she let me use her mouth exactly how I wanted. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head as I thrust deep into her throat, her muscles constricting violently as I forced my way further down her throat. Her hands gripped my thighs, but she didn’t stop me.

She knelt there, her eyes glazed over with a lust-filled haze, and I almost fucking lost it.

I pulled out of her mouth, a string of saliva running from my cock to her chin. I let her have a moment to regroup before I pushed back into her mouth. “I’m going to come down your throat and you’re going to take every drop.”

She whimpered and I could sense her need to come through our bond.

“Touch yourself, kitten. I want you to come with me.” I could barely get my words out I was so worked up.

Roux thrust her hands into her pants, her fingers working furiously over her pussy. Gods, the squelching sounds she made were fucking obscene.

“I’m so fucking close. Show me how much you want me to fill you with my cum.”

Her mouth worked faster, her cheeks hollowing as she sucked me harder. Then I was falling over the edge, my knees buckling with the pleasure coursing through me as I shot my load down her throat. I felt the moment she came. Her entire body jerked, and her eyes rolled back in her head as her muffled scream rippled against my sensitive cock.

She licked my cock clean, making sure she got every drop just like I’d asked her too. When she finished, she released me with a pop.

“Think you can finish your report now?” she asked with a wide grin plastered across her messy face.

I gave a breathless laugh. “Yeah. Think I might be able to manage now.”

Chapter Twenty



Roux

The River Styx was an odd place. It was caught somewhere between beautiful and horrific. A wide river situated next to a lush forest with souls floating through its waves. Some days you could hear them groaning beneath the water, caught in an endless cycle of drowning in the sorrows of their own making.

The twins were eyeballing Atticus and yep, growling like possessive assholes at him. I sighed. We needed to have a proper conversation about this change in our dynamic, but they'd been hiding from me since they'd awoken from the floor in Thane's office and seen me with Atticus. I could tell they hadn't slept well. There were dark circles under their eyes and there was a wildness about them that made them look like they were on the edge of madness. It hurt seeing them like

this. Knowing that they were in pain and there was nothing I could do about it. It crushed me.

Atticus squeezed my hand and I found him looking at me with concern. He looked gorgeous today, his midnight blue hair swept off his face and another dark suit clinging to his muscles. I wondered if he ever wore anything else or if the suit was his go to outfit. I'd love to see him in a pair of ripped black jeans and a leather jacket. Fuck, I'd bet he'd look like a terrifying demon then. Aggressive and mysterious and all mine.

He trailed his finger along my cheekbone. "Where did your mind go then, kitten?"

"Whether you wear anything different and what your ass would look like in jeans."

He laughed and dropped a kiss on my forehead. "I'm sure that can be arranged. Now, let's find this mansion."

Atticus pulled away and I caught Rayne looking at me with such longing in his eyes I nearly ran to him, but he turned away. I needed to fix this. I wanted things to go back to how they were. Well, no, that was a lie. I wanted them in the most intimate and loving way possible, but it was never going to be that. Which fucking sucked.

I turned my attention to the forest and walked over to the first row of trees. The bark was black, like it had been charred by fire and the leaves were a bright mix of orange, red, and green as if they were perpetually caught in the autumnal season.

A wave of something familiar washed over me, which was weird because I don't think I'd ever been to this part of the River Styx before. I stepped closer to the first tree and put my hand on the bark. There was a soft vibration as if there was magic running through the heart of the tree.

"I've been here before," I mumbled.

"Have you?" Rayne asked.

Rafe placed his hand next to mine, his finger brushing mine.
"When?"

"I don't remember."

"You've been here but you don't remember?" Rafe asked, a puzzled frown above his bright eyes.

"I don't know," I replied, my fingers tingling with the magic hum travelling through the tree. "There's just something about this place that feels familiar." A familiarity that was deep in my bones, but I couldn't quite grasp the memory.

The trees stretched for miles, and the mythical mansion could be anywhere. If it even existed on this plane. It might not even be here. We were only here because this is where Thane summoned Hermes to give him the message. So, if the mansion wasn't here, what brought Thane here?

I stepped beyond the first line of trees and a tugging sensation pulled me deeper into the woods.

"Roux, where are you going?" Atticus called.

"I don't know."

I just had this weird feeling, like something had burrowed deep in my chest and was leading me deeper into the woods. Towards what, I didn't know.

"I don't like this," Rayne grumbled.

"You don't have to like it," I snapped. "But I need to find Thane, and something is telling me to go this way."

"Hey!" Rafe shouted back, grabbing my arm. "I get that you want to find Thane. We all do. But that is not an excuse for you to put yourself in unnecessary danger."

"You can't just follow this blindly," Rayne added, the pair of them looking at me with matching expressions of worry and concern.

I looked to Atticus, hoping to find some kind of support but his expression matched the twins.

Atticus stepped forward, standing shoulder to shoulder with the twins. "They're right, Roux. This forest is full of creatures, and some may have the skills to lure you to your death. We don't know what we're facing."

I pulled my arm from Rafe's grip. "Don't you think I know that? Look, there is more to Thane's disappearance than meets the eye. Something is going on at Olympus. Something weird. We have to find him. I..." My words trailed off, the sudden sorrow at the thought of losing my friend eating them up.

"I know you feel honour bound to find him," Rafe said as he pulled me into his arms. "And we will find him."

Rayne wrapped himself behind me and squished me in the middle between him and his brother. “You mean everything to us, Roux. We aren’t going to risk losing you.”

Rayne wasn’t one for expressing his feelings, so hearing those words had a lump forming in my throat.

“I know,” I muttered softly, just taking a moment to enjoy their touch. “But this doesn’t feel like something leading me to my death.”

“What do you mean?” Atticus asked, watching the three of us with a mix of curiosity and interest. I was glad to see there was no judgement in his eyes, not that I was expecting any. I just know the relationship I had with the twins often raised a few eyebrows. To be honest, I think Atticus was drawn to the twins and I couldn’t wait to see how that evolved. Even if it wasn’t sexually, I think Atticus wanted to delve into the minds of Rafe and Rayne, like he wanted to see what made them tick. He’d said he wanted to break them, and I had to admit, I was curious as to what that would entail.

“I mean that it’s more like something is calling me home,” I said looking into the depth of the woods. My feet itched to walk deeper into the forest, like I couldn’t resist, even if I wanted to.

“Okay. Let’s go,” Atticus said as he turned towards the direction I had attempted to walk in earlier.

“Just like that?” I asked, a little shocked.

“Yes,” he said with a nod before a feral grin showed off his sharp teeth. “Besides, I quite fancy the idea of a fight. Sounds like fun.”

Rayne huffed a laugh and stepped away from me, and closer to Atticus. “When you put it like that... what are we waiting for?”

Rafe kissed the top of my head and headed towards his twin, leaving me questioning what had just happened. I thought the twins didn’t like Atticus, but now, with the promise of death and violence they were suddenly best friends? I wasn’t sure I liked this new development.

Atticus turned back to face me when he realised that I wasn’t with them. “Come on, kitten. Lead us onwards.”

“Kitten?” Rafe asked with a cheeky grin, and I suddenly wanted the ground to open and swallow me whole.

“Yep,” Atticus said with a wolfish smile before turning his attention to Rafe. “But I’m not telling you why. If she wants to share that with you, that’s her choice.”

Oh, thank the gods. I wasn’t sure how the twins would feel about that story.

“I like it,” Rafe replied. “Makes her seem cute.”

“I am not cute,” I ground out.

“You are a little,” Rayne said, holding his index finger and thumb out.

“You do know I can kick your asses, right?” I was right. I did not like the twins and Atticus being friends.

The three of them threw their heads back and laughed and something about the image made my heart lurch. I wanted so much for that to be my future. The four of us together, but it would never be. Maybe Hades would see it differently after everything that had happened between us. I’d have to ask again, and with Atticus saying he’d help, perhaps it would change his mind. If I were being honest with myself, I was still surprised and unsure what to do with what had happened between Hades and me. I hadn’t seen him since and I was worried that he might try to brush me off or pretend it didn’t happen. Well, I wasn’t going to let that happen. And I was going to make him see that he was wrong about Reapers and their Hounds, even if I had to piss him off to do it. That was always fun. Seeing how far I could push him before he snapped.

The sensation beneath my solar plexus lurched and brought my focus back to the forest in front of me. I pulled my scythe out of the shadows and promptly dropped the thing.

“You okay there?” Rafe asked with a snigger.

“Yeah. Forgot it was Thane’s scythe. It’s fucking heavy,” I said as I bent down to pick it up. Stupid fucking scythe. As soon as I wrapped my hand around it, I felt my death magic burst to life in my veins. Power hummed through me, and I felt ready to take on anything this forest threw at me. “Come on. Let’s go see what we can find.”

Then the four of us stepped into the darkness and into the unknown.

Chapter Twenty-One



Rafe

Roux looked glorious with Thane's scythe casually resting over her shoulder. Like a total badass. I think all the black leather helped too. And the killer boots. Chunky black things that wrapped halfway up her slender legs with laces and buckles from the base to the top. She was in a fucking sexy get up and I both hated and loved that I got to see her in it most days. I just wish I could peel her out of it too.

Rayne grunted in agreement next to me, understanding the desires I was thinking about. We couldn't talk telepathically, like some people often thought, but we could pick up on each other's emotions and guess what the other was thinking with surprising accuracy.

Rayne threw a glance at Atticus who was currently trailing behind Roux. The forest had gotten thicker the deeper we

went, and it forced us to walk single file.

“What do you make of the demon?” my brother asked.

I shrugged. Whether I liked it or not, he was mated to Roux. That made him part of our family. There was something about him that set me on edge. I knew my twin could feel it too. Like the guy was too powerful for his own good. It scared me a little to be honest. Kind of wanted to make me run as far away from him as possible. But that thought also made my blood run a little hotter. There was something about fear and danger that made my dick hard. I wanted to run, just to see if he'd chase me. I'd never felt that kind of primal urge before, the need to feel like prey. Perhaps that was what was drawing me to him. That he made me feel powerless. Hell Hounds were powerful creatures and there wasn't much that would be able to take us down, other than ancient beings, so the fact that he'd managed to knock me and my twin out with a mere flick of his hand had been quite something.

I'd been pissed when I'd woken and seen the two of them together, then I'd had to calm my twin down before he decimated a number of damned souls. I am happy for her, after everything with Magnus she needed something like this. Especially since she often felt vulnerable over not knowing her history. She was a mystery, but that didn't stop me wanting or loving her.

“I think he'll be good for her,” I said to my twin.

“Hmm,” he replied with a tight press of his lips.

“What is it?”

“He intrigues me.”

“He does me.”

Rayne stopped and let his gaze linger on the man. “There’s something about him I find fascinating.”

As if he could feel our gaze upon him, Atticus glanced over his shoulder at us. He cocked his head to one side and his eyebrows squished together. He was striking to look at. Mildly terrifying too with those bottomless eyes that drew you in and held you captive.

“I think he’s intrigued by us too,” I said slowly, not removing my gaze from Atticus. His lips quirked up at my words, and he gave a slight nod as if agreeing with me.

“Think he’d let us play with him?” Rayne asked, excitement tinging his tone.

Atticus’ grin turned savage before he turned back to watching Roux’s back.

I slapped Rayne on the back. “I don’t think we’d be the ones playing, brother.”

I felt the shiver that ran through Rayne as if it were my own. Seemed as if he liked that idea.

“Come on you two,” Roux shouted. “I think we’re nearly there.”

If only we knew where ‘there’ was. We’d been traipsing through this fucking forest for ages with no sign of any life other than a weird sense of being watched. But none of us

could see anything in the trees. Roux just kept walking, following whatever that feeling was in her chest. I just hoped it wasn't leading us to our death. If I died in this forest, I was going to—

A sharp sting cut across my face, and I put my hand up to my cheek. When I pulled my hand away blood coated my fingertips. "What the hell?"

I looked behind me and there was a thin arrow sticking out of the tree. Something shot me. With a fucking arrow.

Then all Hell broke loose.

Roux started yelling and attacking whatever was in front of her, but the forest was still too dense to see clearly what it was.

"Run!" I shouted. We needed to get out of here. We were practically sitting ducks because the trees were so thick here. Everyone started running. Branches cut my skin as we ran past, the cuts healing quickly but still stinging like a bitch.

Before too long we fell into a clearing. A wide-open space beneath a canopy of branches. It was so dark here, the leaves blocking the sun from reaching the undergrowth. The life around us couldn't be good if it thrived in the shadows.

A chorus of low growls sounded from around us and my beast was instantly on alert. There was something evil lurking beyond the treeline, something old. Something I'd never seen before.

"Rafe, Rayne. I need your Hounds. One in the front, one in the back. Atticus, stay with me," Roux shouted above the

growls.

My twin and I instantly shifted. This is what we were here for. To protect our Reaper. Normally we'd be in Hound form to track the souls but right now, she needed our beasts to fight.

Bones cracked, fur sprouted, and I let my beast take over. My senses instantly sharpened, and my breathing turned into heavy pants. I could sense my twin behind me, but I didn't want to take my eyes off the trees. I could smell them, whatever they were, and they smelled like death. Putrid. Acrid. Pungent. I don't think we'd ever come up against anything like this before.

Red eyes glowed in the depths of the trees and then they started to step out of the shadows. Long twisted limbs crept towards, their skin slick like black oil. They were tall, taller than my beast. My head stood five feet above the ground but these creatures were even bigger. They had long, gaunt faces without eyes and mouths that hung open with rows of several sharp razor-like teeth. In the centre of their faces were two large nostrils that seemed disproportionately large to the rest of their features.

"What are they?" Roux asked, voicing my question.

"Druden," Atticus replied. "Demons of the Wild Hunt."

That would explain the big nose then. All the better to smell their prey with.

"Any weak spots?" Roux asked.

“Top of the neck behind the ear there is a soft spot in their outer hide. Just don’t let them bite you. Their venom will kill you,” Atticus replied as he stepped one foot back, spreading his weight and getting ready for battle.

“We stick together. We don’t know how many there are, and it looks like we’re surrounded,” Roux said.

My gaze skulked around the edge of the open space, clocking at least five Druden. There must be at least that many behind me.

We could do this.

A sharp crack cut through the air.

I growled in warning, and another arrow whizzed towards us, hitting its mark with a thunk.

Pain radiated through my shoulder, but it wasn’t me that was hit.

Rayne!

His bellow twisted my insides, but I couldn’t go to him right now. Not when the fucking Druden started rushing towards us. I could sense it was deep in the hollow of his shoulder, it wasn’t going to kill him, but it was going to hurt like a bitch. I rolled my shoulders, feeling the arrow as if it had pierced my own skin.

Roux roared and attacked, swinging her axe high above her as she ran at the Druden. I launched myself at the closest one, avoiding the snap of its teeth. I sank my teeth into its haunches and the taste of rotting flesh filled my mouth. I spat out the

chunk I'd bitten off and tried not to gag before I attacked it again. I went straight for its throat, sinking my fangs into the soft spot Atticus mentioned and shook the Druden. Its neck snapped and the creature went limp in my arms. I dropped its body to the ground and turned to face the next one.

One down, nine to go.

The four of us bit, slashed and sliced through the creatures until they turned tail and ran. Relief surged through me as I watched them disappear back into the trees. I turned back into my human form and took stock of all the injuries. Rayne had managed to pull the arrow out, but his arm was limp by his side. A little rest and that would heal. I could still move my arm, but I got a stab of pain every time I did. Roux looked okay, a couple of scratches but no bites. Atticus was the same, a little worse for wear but nothing serious.

"You fight well for a pencil pusher," I said to him with a laugh.

"Watch your tone, pup," he replied with a deep rasp that did something weird to my insides. He smirked at me, like he knew exactly what he'd done to me, before turning his attention back to Roux.

I walked to my brother who raised his eyebrow at me.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Not a clue," I replied with a shrug. I'd think about that later. First, I wanted to check his wound. It was deep and ragged, but it would heal.

The sound of a twig snapping had my eyes whipping towards the tree line. There was an outline of a man holding something, but it was too dark for me to see. He took a step forward and my heart dropped.

It was a crossbow.

Time stood still. I couldn't move quick enough. I felt the rush of air past my ear as the arrow flew past me and landed straight in the middle of Atticus' chest.

Whoever was attacking us was smart enough to know Roux was a Reaper and already dead. An arrow wasn't going to do much but piss her off. But Atticus... he was very much alive.

I watched in horror as shock spread across his face and his knees buckled before he fell to the ground.

The sound of Roux's screams would haunt me forever.

Chapter Twenty-Two



Atticus

Pain seared through my chest, ripping through me as if agony had taken up residency in my veins. It crippled me.

I fell to the ground, tumbling backwards, unable to break my fall because my limbs had stopped working. I stared up at the canopy above me and wondered why I was so cold.

“He needs Thane.”

“He’s not here.”

“Thane! You bastard!”

They were all scrambling around me, but it was too late. Even I knew I wasn’t going to come back from an arrow to the chest without some sort of miraculous intervention.

Roux's face appeared above me. She was so beautiful. Even covered in the blood of her enemies. Like a warrior goddess sent to exact revenge.

Her mouth was moving but I couldn't hear anything. The world was fading fast. No. That wasn't right. It was me that was fading from the world.

My head lolled to the side, and I saw the figure in the woods. The one with the simple crossbow who'd managed to catch me by surprise. He crouched between the trees and watched patiently while the life left my body. It was strange, watching him watch me. There was something peaceful about the connection between the two of us. I didn't know who he was, or why he'd want me dead, but he held my gaze with an unrelenting fascination.

I could feel my heart spasming around the arrow. It must be coated with something made with verum mors. It was a poison nicknamed 'true death' and was a surefire way to kill any prey. Even an immortal or ancient. That's why I felt so cold. Why I could feel my life fading. The poison seeped through my veins and turned the world fuzzy.

Strong hands gripped my chin, and my eyes were drawn to two pools of bright blue.

"Rafe..."

"No. Don't try to speak," he said with panic blazing in his eyes. "I need you to invoke the Death Rights." Confusion must have shown in my eyes because he continued to explain. "Call Thanatos. Please."

“He’d better be fucking listening,” Rayne growled.

“Shut up.”

“Roux,” Rafe snapped. “That’s not helping.”

“He can’t do that!” Roux cried. “He’ll be tied to him forever.”

“He needs to. It’s his only hope.”

I tried to speak but all I could manage to do was gurgle blood. This was it. The moment I died.

Hands wrapped around my face and Roux was there, tear tracks down her cheeks and sorrow in her eyes. “Please call him. If it’s the last thing you do. Call Death.”

I swallowed, the coppery taste of my own blood sinking into my stomach, and with the last bit of breath I could muster, I said one word.

“Thanatos...”

White light exploded all around me, blinding me. I felt weightless and free, and the pain had gone.

Was I dead?

The face of an angel materialised above me. He was so beautiful. Eyes as blue as the sky and hair like spun golden threads. I didn’t think Death would be beautiful, but he was.

“Forgive me for this,” he said, his voice melodic and pure.

For what?

He leant closer, his hands threading through my hair. “This is going to hurt.”

Then he pressed his lips to mine and pain like I’d never felt exploded through my body. Like knives slicing the skin from my bones and Hellfire searing my veins.

The world faded to black.

And then there was nothing.



The first thing I noticed was the weight on my chest. It felt like there was a bloody anvil sat on there. The second thing I noticed was that I wasn’t breathing.

Fuck. I was dead.

Panic crept in. I’d never panicked like this in my life but all of a sudden, I was falling into a full blown panic attack.

Hands wrapped around my face and the angel appeared above me again. “Take a deep breath. In through your nose and out through your mouth.”

Shit. Why was this so hard? A whimper left my mouth, and I realised I was actually terrified. Me, a nightmare demon, was scared.

“You can do it,” the angel said. “Just breathe with me.”

I held his stare, those sky-blue eyes calm and his voice soothing my frazzled nerves. I took a deep inhale and instantly felt my body relax.

“That’s it,” he encouraged with a small smile, his thumbs stroking across my cheekbones. I don’t know how long we stayed like that, just breathing, but I was grateful to whoever this guy was for bringing me back from the edge.

“Who are you?” I asked when I finally felt in control of myself.

“Thanatos, or Thane for short.”

So this was the Grim Reaper. The guy we’d all been searching for.

“You’re not what I was expecting,” I mused aloud.

Darkness filled the room and the temperature dropped. Thane’s form elongated until he loomed over me, shadows surrounding him and forming the cloak that hid his skeletal form. His eyes burned bright silver in the depths of his hood, and I could sense his smile, even though I couldn’t see it.

“Is this better?” he said, his voice impossibly deep and guttural.

“Meh, you’re not that scary.”

He laughed, a wet and raspy sound, before morphing back into the angelic version of himself. I still couldn’t wrap my head around how someone who looked like him, could be Death personified. It just didn’t seem to make much sense.

A silence developed between us, both of us looking at the other. I knew I had to ask what had happened. I felt different and I could tell something about me had changed. I just didn’t understand what and I wasn’t sure that I wanted to know.

Thane just stood there, casually by the side of my bed looking like he'd stepped off the front cover of a magazine. His hands were tucked into the pockets of his dark slacks and his white shirt sleeves were rolled up to the elbow.

"Ask the question, Atticus," he said calmly, my name rolling off his tongue as if it belonged to him.

I swallowed past my nerves and looked Death straight in the eye. "Am I dead?"

"Yes," he replied with a nod.

Well, at least that answered that question. "How am I here?"

"I saved you."

"Why?"

He fixed me with a hard stare. "Because you called me at the moment of your death, and I saw the brand on your soul. You belong to Roux. After everything she's been through, I couldn't let you cease to exist."

I felt like there was something else he wasn't telling me, some other reason why I was now sitting here in this bed. I could sense him holding back but, maybe I was reading him wrong. I'd just met the guy and he had just saved my life. I didn't remember calling him but the whole thing was like a fuzzy memory. All I could remember was the pain, Thane's face and... Heat rushed up my neck. "You kissed me."

"Yes," he replied a little breathlessly, his gaze dropping to my mouth briefly. "I gave you the Kiss of Life. Literally."

“So, what happens now?”

Thane frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I’m dead.” Fuck. Saying it out loud made it seem even weirder. “But I’m not in any kind of afterlife and I’m still breathing.”

“Only because you’re still used to it. That’s why you panicked. Your body doesn’t need to breathe, so it wasn’t, but your mind flew into a panic because it still thinks you should be.”

“Oh,” I replied lamely, unsure what else to say.

Thane reached for me, wrapping his large hand around mine. “It will take some getting used to. And I am sorry this has happened to you. I never meant for anyone to try and find me, let alone put their lives at risk for mine.”

“I followed Roux. She is everything to me and I would lay my life down for hers in a heartbeat. She cares for you, Thane. She wasn’t going to let you face whatever this is alone.”

He squeezed my hand and something like sadness flared in his eyes. “I know. But it doesn’t change the fact that you’re now bound to me in a way you’ll never be able to escape.”

I flinched. “What?”

He smiled at me, but it was a sad one. “In order to save you, I bonded your soul to mine. You are now marked by Death. Congratulations.”

“What?” I said again with a slow blink. This wasn’t sinking in. It was bad enough that I was fucking dead, but now I wore Death’s mark. Holy shit.

Thane stared at me like I was an idiot. “We are forever linked. While I live, so do you.”

“So, if you die...?”

“Then you cease to exist, and your soul will end up wherever mine does.” He said it so casually, as if he were discussing the weather and not my fucking soul.

“Wait a minute. How am I even talking right now?”

He sighed and I was starting to get annoyed with him. Excuse me for asking how the fuck I was walking and talking when I should be *dead!*

“You’re being kept alive by my death magic. Roux has that too. It’s how she branded her mark on your soul. While I’m alive, I keep you fuelled with the magic.”

“Will your magic ever run out?”

“No. It will only run out when I die. Which is unlikely since I’m, you know, Death.”

“I feel different. Is that normal?”

He cocked his head to the side, a frown curled through his blonde eyebrows. “Different? How?”

“Like there’s something burrowed under my skin.”

He pursed his lips, and I had this sudden urge to touch them. Would they be as soft as they looked? And where the fuck did

that thought come from? I'd never thought about kissing a man before. Yes, I wanted to play with the twins, but that was purely out of curiosity to how they'd react to my power. It wasn't sexual, was it?

His eyes blew wide, and he muttered something under his breath. "I'm sorry. I have to go."

"Wait, Thane!" But it was no use. The man had bolted from the room like his arse was on fire leaving me alone with the fact that I was dead. I placed my hand over my heart and there was nothing. Just a stillness that had me feeling very weirded out.

What the fuck was I going to do now?

Chapter Twenty-Three



Roux

Thane ran past us like death was chasing him, which would have been amusing if it weren't for the fact that I was concerned about him. He'd barely said anything to us since turning up and saving Atticus and even that he hadn't gone into much detail over. I'd never seen that kind of magic before. I was worried about what he'd done to Atticus and in turn, what that had done to him. I could still feel Atticus' soul, but there'd been a moment where I thought I'd lost it and I'd never felt so terrified in all my life. It was fleeting but I felt an emptiness that seemed immeasurable. It made me feel hollow and I couldn't bare to think about how I'd have felt if I'd truly lost him.

"I'll be back in a moment," I said to the twins. I knew they were concerned over Atticus too. I wasn't sure where that had

come from, but I think they moved past the hate when they fought together.

They both responded with grunts, not in the mood for talking. I couldn't blame them. I was still trying to make sense of everything. I mean, Thane had brought us to the Mansion of Night. How the fuck did he know where it was? And what exactly was this place? It was almost like it was in its own little pocket dimension, hidden by numerous wards and very powerful magic. When Thane had stepped into the forest clearing, I'd been shocked and relieved. I'd been so focussed on Atticus that I hadn't thought about where the guy had come from but then he'd saved Atticus and brought us here. The Mansion of Night had been in the clearing all along, just hidden. I know that's where whatever the sensation in my chest was leading me to, I just don't know why. What was so important about this place?

The mansion was huge. Built from black stone, this massive palace was intimidating. Thane had said some words in a language I didn't understand and then boom! There it was. Sitting among the trees looking it should be the residence of a dark queen. It looked more like a castle than a mansion and, as I strode down the corridor with patterns of stars along the walls, I wondered who owned this place. Thane hadn't told me anything yet. I had a feeling I was going to need to drag that information out of him. I didn't care that he was my boss, me following him out here took us well past those lines. We needed to figure out what was going on and I had a feeling Thane knew more than I thought he did. But I'd think about

that later. Right now, I wanted to see Atticus. I needed to see with my own eyes that he was alright. I couldn't relax or think about anything else until then.

I knocked on the door and I could have cried at the sound of Atticus' voice when he called out. I practically ran through the door and towards him, not stopping until I'd wrapped my arms around him and placed my head on his chest.

"Oomf, careful there, kitten. I'm still a bit sore," Atticus said with a small smile.

"I'm sorry," I said, pulling back but he wouldn't let me go.

"It's okay," he replied. "Don't go. I don't mind the pain if I get to hold you."

I melted into his embrace a little more, lying down beside him in the large bed. "I thought I'd lost you."

He didn't say anything and was so quiet for a few moments that I thought he'd gone back to sleep. But when I lifted my head to look at him, he was scowling. "Atticus?"

"I think you did lose me a little."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm dead," he gritted out, almost struggling to say the words. "Thane wouldn't even explain what he really did. And then he rushed out of the room when I asked him to explain the intricacies of how he'd bonded my soul. The man is an asshole."

"He's... complicated."

He frowned. “Complicated?”

“He’s old, like old as the beginning of time old. I don’t think he’s ever soul bonded anyone before, I bet he doesn’t even know what that’ll do to you. I wish I’d thought about calling him at death’s point before. Then none of this would have happened to you.”

He rolled to his side, wincing as he did, so that he could face me. “Nothing that happened was your fault, Roux.”

I looked away, unable to hide the guilt I felt. “If I hadn’t followed Thane, you wouldn’t be here.”

“Look at me,” he ordered, and my eyes flicked back towards his. “It *wasn’t* your fault. I chose to come with you. Now, where are we?”

I filled him in on everything that had happened since Thane turned up and on the Mansion of Night. When I finished, he attempted to get out of bed.

“Atticus, what the fuck?”

“We need Thane to start talking. And I’m going to make him.”

“No. You’re going to get back in that bed. You need rest.”

“No. I need answers. And so do you.”

“You need to heal.”

“I’m fine,” he snapped back before his knees wobbled slightly as he looked for a shirt. It was only then he seemed to notice the large bandages wrapped around his chest. He

smoothed his hand over the strips of white with an almost puzzled look on his face.

I walked round the bed and curled my fingers around his. “Let me change them, then, only if you feel up to it, we’ll find Thane.”

He nodded and let me guide him back onto the bed. I stood between his open thighs and set to work removing the old bandages and inspected the wound. The skin was pink and puckered but it had healed well. I couldn’t look at it anymore so I quickly wrapped him back in fresh bandages so I wouldn’t have to see it.

My hands trembled, the images of him being shot and falling to his knees running through my mind again.

“Roux?” Atticus’ fingers wrapped around mine. “I’m still here.”

“I know,” I replied, blinking away tears. “But at what cost?”

“Roux—”

“You died.” I glared down at him, all the anger and hurt bubbling out of the bottle I’d shoved it in. “You got shot and there was nothing I could do.”

“It’s okay, I—”

“It’s not okay! I can’t lose you, not when I’ve just found you.” Emotions tumbled through me like a whirlwind. I was angry and sad and hurt, and I couldn’t quite get a grip on anything.

“Well, from what Thane said, it’s unlikely I’ll die again so I guess you’re stuck with me,” he said with a soft chuckle.

The sob I’d been holding back wrenched itself from my throat and Atticus wrapped me in his arms, peppering the top of my head with kisses. He tilted my chin back and captured my mouth with his in a savage kiss. I could taste all his anger and desperation, his fear and need, as he thrust his tongue deep into the heat of my mouth.

His hands slid down over my hips and round my ass. “Take your clothes off,” he said, his voice low and gruff. “Now.”

I peeled my black tank off and wriggled out my leather pants leaving my clad in my sports bra and thong.

“All of it, Roux. Take it all off.”

I took my underwear off and stood there naked, feeling the heat of his gaze as it roamed over my skin. My nipples pebbled in the cool air, my back arching under his perusal and when his gaze hit the apex of my thighs, it took every ounce of restraint not to touch myself. “Your turn. I want to see you, too.”

He unzipped his trousers and shimmied them down his legs. His dick was standing proud, those fucking piercings catching in the low light and making me shiver in anticipation.

I couldn’t hold back any longer, I trailed my fingers down my breasts, pinching my nipples and rolling the hard nubs between my fingertips.

“Fuck,” Atticus gasped, almost sounding in pain.

I trailed my fingers lower, over my abdomen, over my pubic bone and then slid them through the wetness that was pooling between my folds.

“Oh, Gods,” he moaned. “Come here. Ride me. I need to sink into that wet pussy right fucking now.”

He grabbed my wrist and pulled me forwards. I had to catch myself on his shoulders he’d pulled me towards him that eagerly. I straddled his thighs and rocked against his cock, his piercings rubbing deliciously against my clit and sending little jolts of pleasure deep into my core. He laved my nipples before drawing one into the heat of his mouth, sucking on it and making my core throb with need.

I threw my head back, arching my spine and fisted my hands in his hair. My hips rocked backwards and forwards, seeking enough friction to throw me over the edge. Mewls and moans escaped my lips as Atticus drove me closer to that edge.

“Atticus, please,” I begged, desperate and needy.

“Lift up.” He raised my hips and positioned the head of his cock at my entrance. He held me there, on the precipice, keeping me from sinking down on his length. “Wait.” He sucked on my neck before pulling me down and slamming into me with one swift and deep thrust.

I cried out, deep and guttural, but then his hand was around my throat, squeezing tight and holding me in place so he could kiss me while he fucked me.

We moved slowly, his strokes deep and slow. His piercings dragged over the walls of my pussy and every stroke had my body quivering. I whispered into his mouth, begging for more until he finally snapped with a growl.

He flipped me, rolling him beneath me and hooking my knee over his shoulder.

Holy shitballs. That angle had my body spiralling out of control, hurtling towards the precipice in a frenzy of breath-stealing sensations. We crashed over it together, our souls touching for a moment before being dragged under the waves of our release.

We collapsed onto the bed together, curling up and just enjoying the moment where we could just be. I'd nearly lost him and if it hadn't been for Thane, I would have.

I don't know how long we lay there, limbs entwined, but I knew we needed to leave the haven of this room. We needed answers, and only Thane was capable of giving us those. He might not want to answer them, but I was bloody well gonna make him.

Chapter Twenty-Four



Thane

What had I done?

I'd bound a soul to mine, that's what I'd done. It was stupid and impulsive and *fuck!* I pulled at the strands of my hair, the pain across my scalp grounding me.

It was reckless. That's what it was. I'd never bound a soul to mine before. It was something usually saved for loved ones, but I'd seen Atticus lying on the ground, his soul slipping away, and I was instantly captivated by something. He was beautiful, and that wasn't a word I used often. I'd tried to deny it as I'd stood over him, watching his soul slip away, but I couldn't. I saw him and instantly wanted him. Everything else disappeared, replaced with a sudden, inescapable need to possess him. It rocked me to my core and I did the one thing that would make him mine forever.

And it was fucking stupid because he already belonged with Roux. Was already marked by her. How was I going to compete with that?

A hunger burned deep inside me. A yearning that crept out of the darkness at my centre and I instantly knew it was Atticus' emotions I was feeling. I lived in a world shrouded with death. It was all I could feel. All I knew. My own emotions had always been smothered, buried beneath the darkness that surrounded death, so this desire and lust currently sparking my veins, wasn't mine. It was *his*.

It's the reason I'd fled earlier. That bolt of desire had hit me straight out of the blue and I'd panicked. It had felt so alien, so odd... so *good*. I'd wanted to revel in it. It was so new to me. I wanted to dissect it. Dissect Atticus. I wanted to know what made him feel that. What had sparked it. I wanted to break him into little pieces just to find out what made him tick.

He was going to become my obsession. It was a good thing he was already dead. I had a feeling that my obsession might have ended up killing him.

An image of Roux flashed before my eyes, her head thrown back in ecstasy, her neck exposed. I had a sudden urge to bite it. Wait. That wasn't me.

Atticus... he was fucking Roux. And I was what? Seeing it through his eyes? Fucking hell, I could feel her around my dick, clenching and rocking her hips as if she were actually above me.

I stumbled and threw my hand out to catch myself on the wall. I'd never needed a release like I did right now. Fuck.

I crashed into through the door next to me, practically falling through it and slamming it behind me. I ripped my pants open and released my aching cock. I braced one hand on the wall and the other I wrapped around my shaft, pumping tightly and wildly. I was so worked up with all the sensations I could feel through the soul binding, that it barely took any pumps before my knees buckled beneath me and I fell to the floor as pleasure crashed through me. I wrapped my hand around my mouth to stem the moan that escaped as my body shook and trembled. My cum shot over my fist and coated the floor but I didn't stop stroking my dick until I'd milked every drop.

What the fuck was that?

I'd never felt lust like that before. Never felt so consumed by the sheer desperation to come. I'd always needed pain to find satisfaction, and even then, it was nothing compared to the sheer bliss I'd just enjoyed.

A knock sounded on the door, and I jolted. Shit. Had someone heard? How long had I been sat here?

"Thane, you in there?" Roux asked through the door.

"Yes."

"Can we talk?"

"Give me a minute."

"No, Thane. Now."

I looked at the cum coating my hands and the floor. At least I'd had the good sense to fall into a spare bedroom when I'd had the sudden need to jerk off. "I need a minute. Maybe two."

She huffed but grumbled her assent through the door. It was one of the things I liked about Roux. She was pushy but knew when to back off which suited my temperament well. I wasn't good with other people. I was socially awkward and preferred the company of the dead to the living. Because I lacked the ability to feel, I lacked the ability to understand and empathise well with others. Roux said it made me a cold-hearted bastard, but I couldn't find it in me to be offended. I just wasn't wired that way.

I cleaned up my mess and walked out to the lounge area to discover everyone sitting there waiting for me. Rafe and Rayne looked at me curiously, both of them sitting there with their heads cocked to the side with matching furrowed brows over their eyes. Roux sat in Atticus' lap; her face was concerned but her posture was relaxed. Atticus on the other hand, stared at me, those fathomless eyes tracking my movements across the room. There was something dark lurking in them as he watched me, and I wondered if he knew what I'd done. How hard I'd come to the sensations he'd unwittingly pushed through our bond. A shiver traipsed up my spine as I relived it. My cock taking notice and hardening behind the zipper of my slacks. Atticus' eyes blew wide. Could he feel it? Could he see?

He swallowed slowly and I knew he could feel something. Interesting.

“So,” Roux snapped, pulling my attention to her. “What the hell is going on?”

I sighed and placed myself in the chair opposite her. “I’ll be honest, I’m not entirely sure. Souls are going missing, and I don’t know how. Or why. But it’s like I can feel them disappearing like smoke. The more I try to hold onto them, the further away they get until they’re just gone.”

“They don’t make it to judgement,” Atticus said slowly, his lips pursed. “In my investigation—”

“Investigation?” I interrupted. “You work for the Guild?”

“Yes,” he replied.

That was surprising. “But now you’re not?”

His gaze dropped and he disappeared into his thoughts for a moment. “I don’t know. I guess not. I suppose that’s a perk of being dead. Your debt to the Guild gets wiped.”

Interesting. I’d have to explore that story later. “Forgive me, I interrupted you.”

“Yes, well, as I was saying, in my investigation I discovered that there’s be a record of a soul arriving but that’s it. From there they just vanish.”

“Means something is taking them between the topside and the Underworld,” Rafe said, and his twin grunted in agreement.

Roux leant forward. “How though?”

“My best guess would be a syphon of some sort,” I said. It would need to be a powerful one to contain a soul. Souls were a vibrant source of energy and would need something with an immense amount of power to contain it. “Whoever is stealing them knows exactly what they’re doing.”

Roux nodded in agreement. “But why? What would you do with all that power?”

I looked her straight in the eyes. “Anything. With the number of souls going missing, you could become the most powerful creature in the world. More powerful than a God.”

“Well, shit,” Rayne grumbled.

It was only then I noticed the mark on Roux’s arm. “What is that?”

“What?”

“On your arm. Why do you have the sigil of the Fates on your arm?”

She looked down at it, almost liked she’d forgotten she’d got it branded on her skin. “Because I made a deal with them for information about you.”

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t know where to start looking for you. I needed help so I made a deal with them and here we are,” she said, her words clipped.

“I told you not to look for me,” I said, curious as to why she was angry. Was she upset that she’d made the deal?

She huffed a breath. “Yes, but I’d already found the clue you left in your library.”

“Clue? I didn’t leave a clue.”

“You didn’t leave a book upside down on your shelf?” Rafe asked, his dark brow cocked.

“You really think I left one of my books upside down?” I drawled. I would never do something so sacrilege.

“If Thane didn’t do it, then who did?” Atticus mused but I was having a hard time getting past the way my name sounded in his mouth.

“Someone who knows enough about him to understand how he thinks,” Rafe said.

“And someone who knew he went to Destiny,” Rayne added.

This was all starting to sound like a wild conspiracy theory.

“Has anyone been following you?” Atticus asked me, his eyes searching mine with intrigue.

I shook my head. “Not that I know of but—”

A loud knock sounded at the front door halting our conversation. The tension immediately rose in the room, and everyone stood, ready to spring into action.

“Expecting any other visitors?” Roux whispered.

“No.”

She pulled her scythe from the shadows and my heart clenched a little at the sight. That was my scythe and I wanted it back. There was an emptiness that I couldn’t seem to fill

while my scythe was missing. I wanted to take it back, but I knew if I tried to touch it now, it would do some serious damage to me. Scythes could only be handled by the Reaper they were bound to, and right now, mine was bound to Roux.

“Come on,” Roux said with a wide grin. “Let’s see who’s stupid enough to knock on this door.”

I watched the four of them disappear into the hallway and had to agree. Whoever it was behind the door, was definitely a fool. A smart one to have found the place, but definitely a fool to think they could gain entrance here.

Chapter Twenty-Five



Roux

“What the fuck are you doing here?” I asked when I saw who the idiot was that knocked on the door.

“Is that any way to greet an old friend?” Magnus asked with a smug curl to his mouth.

The twins growled behind me, and Rayne launched past me, grabbing Magnus by the throat and slamming the guy into the ground.

“How did you find us?” Rafe barked as he ran towards his twin, dropping to his knees the other side of Magnus who was now squirming in the dirt, trying to escape. Thane stood to one side, his hands tucked into his pockets, his face showing nothing but boredom. Atticus watched the scene unfolding with curiosity, his arms folded, and his head tilted to one side.

Magnus gasped some incoherent words, and I was undecided about stepping in to save the bastard. Part of me was enjoying his discomfort immensely but we weren't going to get any answers out of the vampire this way.

I sighed and stepped towards the twins. "Let him go, Rayne." He let out another growl and squeezed tighter. "We need to know why he's here. You can play with him after."

Magnus' face paled a little at my words. Good. He should be worried but at least Rayne listened. He stood from the floor and went back into the house without a backward glance, slamming the door behind him. I cast a quick glance at Rafe but he was already standing and following his twin into the house.

I looked at the vampire currently laid out at my feet and propped my foot on his chest. "Be a good boy and stay there."

He had the audacity to grin up at me, so I pressed firmer on his chest and rested my weight on my knee.

"This place is warded to the heavens. How the fuck did you find us?"

Magnus said nothing, just turned his arm over so I could see the matching sigil on his arm to the one I had. "I had a conversation with the Fates. They told me where I could find you."

"And why would you want to find me?" I asked. "Aren't you busy with all your kingly duties?"

His red eyes flashed at my jibe. “Yes, but this is important. There’s more at stake than just finding Thane.”

I narrowed my eyes. “What do you mean? And don’t fucking say you can’t tell me.”

“Can we have this conversation inside?” he asked. “I’ll tell you everything. I promise.”

I stared at him for a moment, trying to decide if I could trust him. I expected to see the mask that he usually wore but all I saw was him. There was an openness in his eyes that I hadn’t seen for a long time, and I was hopeful that this was going to be the moment when he would finally tell me everything.

“Don’t lie to me and don’t piss the twins off. I will let them eat you.”

He grinned. “Promises, promise.”

I rolled my eyes and stepped off him, leaving him in the dirt and walking into the house. The twins were in the entrance hall waiting to dissuade me from hearing him.

“You can’t let him in,” Rayne spat. “He’s got nothing but lies and half-truths.”

“Look, he’s here for a reason,” I said walking past them. “Let’s hear him out.”

“No,” Rafe said firmly.

I span around and stared at the defiance I could see in their eyes. “I get that you two have history with him, so do I, but if the Fates sent him here there must be a reason. We’re paddling

up shit creek and we've got a hole in our fucking boat. We need all the help we can get and if Magnus is here to help, I'm not turning him away."

"You're blinded by your love for him, Roux. Can't you see that?" Rafe said, stepping closer.

"And you two can't see past your hate!" I spat, causing the pair of them to flinch. "I get that he hurt you, fuck, I can't look at him without feeling my heart crumble again, but this is bigger than us. Bigger than him. And I can't do this without you."

They looked at each other, indecision warring in their expressions as they silently communicated with each other.

"If it helps," I said, "I've told him that you'll eat him if he pisses you off."

They both huffed a breath, but I could see some of the tension leave their shoulders.

"Fine," Rafe growled. "But we don't like it one bit."

"Understood."

They both gave me a short nod and turned to towards the room we'd been in earlier.

"You okay, kitten?" Atticus asked softly as he stepped through the door.

"Suppose you heard all that?" I asked, hanging my head.

He tipped my chin and placed a soft kiss on my forehead. "I did, yes, but more importantly, so did he." Atticus looked over

his shoulder and I followed his gaze until it landed on Magnus. The vampire looked like he was chewing glass, his jaw tight and his eyes on the floor. Good. He had a long way to go before I even considered moving past what he'd done to me or the twins.

I looked back at Atticus and found him watching me intently. "I'll meet you in there. You too, Thane. Give me a minute with Magnus."

Atticus gave me a small nod and another kiss on my forehead. Thane gave me a long look but followed Atticus. There was something weird between the two of them, but I hadn't figured out what it was yet.

"A Metus demon? Really?" Magnus asked, genuine surprise in his voice.

"Yes," I said quickly. "I'm his mate."

"What? How's that possible?"

"I don't know, but he is. I've marked him too."

Something like anger flashed in his eyes at my words. We'd never discussed the status of our relationship, so I didn't know what he had to be pissed about. He was the one I found with his tongue down another woman's throat. I didn't even know I could mark a soul. Doing it with Atticus had been so instinctive and felt natural. I'd never had that feeling with Magnus, which just showed how unstable our relationship had been.

"If I could go back—"

“Well, you can’t,” I interrupted. “You made your choice, for whatever reasons, and this is where we are. You have no one to blame but yourself when it comes to me or the twins.”

“You’re very protective of them,” he snarled.

“Yes, I am. They’re my family. I’d do anything for them. A concept which just seems alien to you.”

He at least had the grace to look fucking sheepish. “There are reasons. I couldn’t share them with you then, but I want to now.”

“Now that *you* are ready.”

“Yes.”

“And I suppose I should be grateful for that, hmm? That the mighty King Magnus is now finally ready to speak his piece?” I walked closer as I flung my words at him. “Fine. But you say your piece and then you go because I was done waiting for you a long time ago.” Then I turned my back and began walking away.

“I had a sister once.”

I stopped dead in my tracks. He had a sister? How did I not know that? I turned back to him and watched as a myriad of emotions played across his handsome face.

“What was she like?” I asked softly.

He smiled, the curve of his mouth full of sorrow. “Full of life and very cheeky. You’d have loved her.”

“Why don’t you talk about her?”

“Because it’s painful and reminds me of the path I chose. Roux, I know I have a lot to explain, just give me time. I want to make things right. With you, Rafe and Rayne.”

I pursed my lips. “You hurt them. A lot.”

He winced. “I know. I never thought I’d find something like I did with them. It was unexpected and beautiful, and I know I ruined it. But I want to fix it. I want to fix everything, Roux. Just give me a chance. Please.”

I chewed my bottom lip. I wanted to give him a chance, but would it hurt me in the long run. Would he hurt Rafe and Rayne? I know they could decide for themselves whether to listen to Magnus but I know that if I took the first step, they’d be more inclined to follow.

Magnus took a step closer, closing the distance between us. He was close enough that he could wrap his hands around my face. My body trembled. It had been so long since I’d been touched like this by him. I knew I still loved him, and that’s what made me so angry.

“Please, Red,” he begged, using his old nickname for me. “Please.”

“Fine. But this is your last chance. If you fail this, we’re done.”

His smile was bright and wide, and I’d forgotten how wonderful it was. Urgh, it tugged on my heartstrings and I wanted to bathe in it a little.

“You won’t regret this,” he said, his face beaming brightly.

“I hope not. You’d best tell me everything, Magnus. Everything. And if you lie to me again, I’ll strip your skin from your bones and turn you into a new pair of boots.”

He laughed and I couldn’t help my answering smile. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Come on, let’s get this over with.” Then I turned away from him before I could do something stupid. Like kiss his gorgeous face.

Chapter Twenty-Six



Roux

To say the atmosphere in the room was frosty would be an understatement. Rafe and Rayne looked like they were about to murder Magnus while he sat there with a grin a mile wide on his face. Atticus and Thane sat in the chairs next to each other, clearly avoiding looking at the other which was weird. I mean, what was that all about? I wanted to ask, but I wasn't sure they even knew what the answer was. I wasn't even sure I knew what I was looking at other than it was weird.

"I think it would be best for everyone here if you started talking," Thane said to Magnus in an almost bored tone. I could just about detect a hint of something beneath the boredom, but I wasn't sure if it was anger or amusement.

The twins growled at Magnus, and I could see the restraint they were using to remain in their seats. Their shoulders were hunched, their backs ramrod straight and their jaws clenched ridiculously tight. If Magnus didn't start talking soon, I wasn't sure he'd make it out of here alive.

"Vampires have been found with their blood drained," Magnus said.

"Bullshit," Rayne snarled.

"I agree," I said. "If that were the case, why haven't we heard anything about it?"

Magnus' grin turned cocky. "Because I know how to keep a story from the press."

I snorted, recounting the endless pieces of gossip I'd read in various different media rags. "I doubt that."

"It's true. But I'm not going to argue over it with you. Something is taking vampire blood and I don't know why. I met with the Fates to try and get an answer but all they told me was about this place and that I'd need to find you. So, here I am. Why are you all here?"

"I followed Roux," Atticus said with a chuckle.

"So did we," Rafe said, and his twin nodded.

"I came looking for him," I said pointing at Thane.

"I came looking for Nyx," Thane said nonchalantly.

"What? Why?" That was not what I thought he was going to say.

“Because I think she’s the key to everything,” Thane replied and turned to Magnus. “Do you remember about ten years ago when there was the break in at the Vault?”

“Yes, but nothing was stolen, and the keeper couldn’t describe what happened,” Magnus said with a pinched brow. “It was all a bit of a mystery.”

“Yes, but I think something *was* taken,” Thane said leaning forward.

“What?” I asked.

“I don’t know. But I want to find out.”

“What’s the fascination with Nyx?” I asked, remembering that we all seemed to have spoken to the Fates about them.

“Yes, why did you ask the Fates about them?” Rafe asked Thane, his thumb rubbing along his bottom lip.

Thane’s blue eyes darkened. “Have you noticed the changes in the Underworld? And Olympus? The quiet? The darkness?”

“I went to see Helios and Olympus was empty. He said that everyone was at a meeting with Zeus, but I didn’t believe him.”

“And if souls are going missing as well as vampire blood, something must be going on.” Atticus ran his hand through his hair, disheveling his midnight blue waves.

“And ghosts,” I added as the conversation I had with Lila jumped to the front of my mind.

“Since when?” Thane asked, a frown furrowing his brow.

“About a week.”

“This can’t be good,” Magnus mumbled, his fingers steeped in front of his face.

“No shit, Sherlock,” Rayne snapped. Rafe squeezed his twin’s thigh in an attempt to hold Rayne’s anger back. Those three needed to have it out in a locked room or something because this shitty attitude wasn’t helping anyone.

Magnus sighed deeply but he surprised me by getting out of his chair and walking over to the twins. He dropped to his knees in front of them and whispered some soft words. They were too quiet for me to hear but they certainly had an effect on Rafe and Rayne. The anger trickled away from them, not completely, but enough that we could continue without the sharp tongues. For a moment, I thought Magnus might reach for them, but his hand stayed by his side, his fingers trembling with need. There was such longing lingering between the three of them that we could all feel it in the air. It was so tangible and so sad to see, I just wanted them to be happy, but they needed to get past their own egos to solve this. Gods, I hoped they solved it.

Magnus returned to his seat and some of the tension dissipated from the room. “So, the question is, what would someone be doing with all that power?”

“Nothing good,” Atticus said, his eyes dark.

“Agreed,” Thane said as he stood from his chair and walked over to the window. He tucked his hands into his pockets and dipped his chin, watching the night sky beyond the pane.

I walked over to the God, noticing the rigid set of his jaw. “What is it, Thane? What’s really bothering you?”

“I can’t help but wonder if Nyx and Erebus are planning to return. There’s just something in the air that feels like them.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, taking in the side of his face since he refused to look at me. There were dark rings under his eyes and he looked like he’d lost weight.

“Back before they were banished, there was always this feeling of being on a knife edge. One wrong move and chaos would run free. That’s what I feel now. And when I look at you...”

My heart sank. “You what?”

He turned towards me then, and I was amazed that I could see so much emotion in his eyes. They were usually so cold, like drops of ice reflecting the sun.

“I see a darkness that is incomprehensible.”

Shit. If my heart could still beat, I’m sure it would have just lurched. “That’s what the Fates said. That there was a darkness in me and that I wasn’t where I was supposed to be.”

Thane frowned and dragged his bottom lip through his teeth. “Did they say anything else?”

“That when the door of secrets opens, he will find me and all will be revealed.”

“Shit,” Thane said under his breath.

I grabbed his arm. “What?”

“I think we need to get into the vault.”

Atticus scoffed and I turned to look at him. There was an expression of disbelief across his face. “You can’t be serious?”

“Yes,” Thane replied crossing over to where Atticus sat. “It’s the only way we’ll get answers.”

Atticus stood from the chair, going toe to toe with him. “And what about the creatures going missing? Are you going to find them in the vault?”

Thane frowned, a cute little crinkle between his eyes. “Why would they be in the vault?”

Oh, boy. I forgot Thane could be a bit literal at times.

“What?” Atticus asked. “That’s not what I meant.”

“You’ll soon learn Thane takes everything literally,” Magnus drawled. “It’s both amusing and annoying.”

Thane scowled at the vampire and if looks could kill I think Magnus’ life would be shortened considerably.

“Oh, that’s kind of... cute,” Atticus mumbled.

I barely held back the snort that threatened to escape. There was *definitely* something weird existing between the two of them. Especially if Atticus found Thane’s oddities cute. I thought it would make me jealous, the thought of Atticus with someone else, but I found I was just intrigued by it. Atticus had said he didn’t mind the possibility of me being with more than one man, I guess I didn’t mind the thought of Atticus with someone else either.

Interesting...

I'd have to park that thought and talk to him about it later.

"You have to see that this is a bad idea? No one gets in the vault," Rafe said, his tone darkening with every word.

"Why?" Thane asked, sinking back into one of the chairs. I was glad he wasn't facing off with Atticus anymore. It made me nervous and, well, a little bit turned on.

"Well, for one thing, nobody is allowed in. And another, it's a fucking vault. You can't just stroll in. And don't forget about all the booby traps, labyrinths and monsters that are supposedly down there," Magnus explained.

The vault sat under a club of the same name, which was run by Prometheus. His punishment was to spend eternity watching over the entrance, so he'd built a business over the site to keep himself entertained. It had taken on various forms over the centuries and its current shell was a high end club. The only problem was that it sat topside and was impossible to get into without permission. Something that Prometheus was unlikely to give us.

I wondered how that person had managed to sneak in the last time. "Did anyone say how the last person broke in?"

Magnus flicked his gaze back to me. "No. I think Zeus wanted to keep it all hush hush. Bad for business if someone can break into something that was supposed to be impenetrable."

Rayne scoffed. "I bet it pissed Zeus off."

I hummed in agreement. “Why don’t we go and have a conversation with Prometheus. Perhaps if we explain what’s happening, he’ll let us in?”

“I can’t tell if you’re being serious or not,” Thane said, his eyes narrowed.

“I think she’s being serious,” Atticus said, a small smile curling his lips.

I shot a glare at him. “What’ve we got to lose?”

“Besides our existence? Not much, I guess,” Magnus said dramatically while throwing his arms wide.

I could feel anger starting to bubble in my veins. Did they not think I was taking this seriously? I huffed out a sharp breath, trying to expel the fury that was simmering below the surface. “Well, what else are going to do? We can’t just stay here forever, and I don’t see any of you coming up with any other ideas.”

The twins looked at each other, worry in their gaze but also a sense of acknowledgement. They knew I was right.

“Fine,” Rayne huffed.

“But we don’t like it,” Rafe added.

Go fucking figure.

Chapter Twenty-Seven



Magnus

Once we'd come up with a plan for heading topside to the vault Roux, Atticus, and Thane left the room, leaving me alone with the twins. Gods, this felt awkward. There was a tension in the room that hadn't been there before, a thickness that felt like I could reach out and touch it with my fingers. My instincts were instantly on high alert, ensuring I was ready to fight for survival.

They stared at me unrelentingly, their gaze cool and assessing.

"So," Rafe began, his voice dark and calm, "you're coming with us."

It wasn't a question, but I answered anyway. "Yes," I replied, my fingers squeezing my thighs. Gods, I was nervous. My throat was dry, and my body felt rigid. The pair of them

watched me, Rafe with a calmness and Rayne with burning fury in those beautiful eyes that were so blue.

“Why?” Rayne growled.

“Because I want to find out what’s happening to my vampires and...” I trailed off, unable to put into words how much I needed them. How much I needed to close the divide I’d put between us.

A firm hand suddenly gripped my chin tightly and I found myself looking into the cool gaze of Rafe. I knew how to tell them apart just by looking in their eyes. That’s how well I knew them. Rafe, the calm one on the outside, the charming psychopath and Rayne, the sociopath with violent outbursts. I’d been watching them over the years since that night we spent together, keeping an eye on them, unable to stay away. It was an obsession, watching them from the shadows, watching their differing levels of violence. Just waiting until the moment was right.

“And what?” Rafe said, his fingers digging into the flesh of my cheek. I whimpered at the pinch of pain. “Tell me, boy, and don’t lie.”

“I want to atone.”

Rafe’s nostrils flared at my words, his sharp intake of breath loud in the room. “I’m not sure you can.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” And I was. I wanted so much to just pick things up where we’d left off, but I’d hurt them. A lot.

“Why did you reject us?” Rayne spat.

Now was the time for honest truths. If I ever wanted to put things right, I needed to tell them everything. No matter how much it hurt me to do so. “I was trying to protect you.”

“We’re Hell Hounds,” Rafe said.

“We don’t need protecting,” Rayne added.

“Normally, I’d agree but...”

Rafe squeezed harder still, and I winced. I was sure he’d just sliced his fingernails into my skin. “Stop stalling, boy. Just tell us.”

“Vampires are fickle creatures. If the Elders thought I had feelings for a pair of Hounds, you’d have been publicly murdered as a warning to others. You’d have been made an example of and there would have been nothing I could have done to save you.”

Rayne scoffed. “You expect us to believe that? You made us feel like the shit on the bottom of your shoe and you’re expecting us to *thank* you? That we should be grateful that you *saved* us?”

“No! I’m trying to explain!”

“Well do better,” Rafe seethed. “At the moment, when we look at you, all we see is the look of disgust in your face. All we hear is the sound of your voice calling us dogs.”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, overcome with the emotion I was trying to keep buried. “You were too precious to me to lose.”

Rafe's fingers loosened around my face. He glanced at his twin, and they had a silent conversation, their eyebrows moving with quiet questions.

Rayne focused his attention back on me, kneeling before me and pinning me with his intense blue gaze. "We believe that *you* believe that. But it isn't going to change the fact that every time we look at you, we want to strip your skin from your bones and hear you scream over and over again until there's nothing left of you but the shadow of your former self."

I gulped. Shit, that sounded awful and why was my dick perking up? Trust me to find everything the twins said sexy. It didn't matter if it was dirty words or threats, that low delicious tone they used had me hard as a fucking rock.

I tried to adjust my hips to relieve the pressure behind my zipper. I hoped it had gone unnoticed but the pair of them cocked their heads to the side, the movement uniform and a little eerie.

"Please," I begged. "Just give me a chance. That's all I'm asking."

They had another silent conversation, and I couldn't stand it. Couldn't stand the silence.

"I need you," I blurted. "So much that sometimes I can't stand it. I ache and I'm tired. Tired of ignoring the need I have for you, of fighting against how much I want to burn the world just so I can be free to take what I want."

"That's not how the world works," Rafe said slowly.

“No. And I needed to make the vampires better. I needed to take back the throne. But now I’m ready.”

“For what?” Rayne asked.

“To take what’s mine.” I rushed forwards and captured Rafe’s mouth with my own, whimpering at finally being able to touch him again. Gods, I was so desperate, so needy. I poured everything into that kiss. All my sorrow, pain, and hope.

Then everything changed. Rafe pulled away, confusion and lust burning in his eyes, before his brother swooped in and sealed his mouth over mine. He forced his tongue past my lips, and I gasped deep into his mouth. I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t focus. Rayne stole my breath as he aggressively took what he wanted.

Then he too, pulled away leaving me dazed and confused.

Rafe’s hand tightened on my chin again. “You don’t touch us without permission, boy. That’s the only free pass you’ll get.”

Rayne trailed his fingers lightly over the bulge in my pants. “And don’t even think about touching this.”

My hips arched into his touch, chasing the light press of his fingers, but Rayne just chuckled and withdrew his hand. Bastard.

“Now, you listen to me,” Rafe said, his tone dangerous and low. “You might be coming with us, but don’t think that we won’t punish you at the drop of a fucking hat. In front of the others if we have to.”

“I know,” I replied, hope slowly unfurling in my chest. “Just let me try. Please. That’s all I’m asking.”

Neither of them said anything but I could see the conflict warring in those blue eyes. I knew they wanted me with the same desperation that I wanted them, but I’d hurt them and tainted the moment we’d shared. I didn’t know how long we stayed there for, but there was a moment that the pair of them seemed to come to a decision. They shared a look, and I knew, there was going to be a world of pain and discomfort for me.

And I couldn’t wait.

“You set the rules of the game last time,” Rafe said darkly.

“Now, it’s our turn.” Rayne wrapped his hand around my throat, his wrist settling beneath his brother’s. They looked so aggressive, and they were both there on their knees for me. It was a power trip for sure.

“Rule number one,” Rafe started. “You tell the truth. Always. Nod if you agree.”

I nodded.

Rayne leant closer, his chin brushing his twin’s shoulder. “Rule number two. We own you.”

I gulped.

“Do you understand what that means?” he asked, his grin feral.

My heart raced, which was uncomfortable considering it usually beat extremely slowly. Gods, it felt like the thing was

trying to burst from my chest.

The pair of them stood, dragging me to my feet, before letting go of me entirely. I kept my hands by my side, despite the fact that I wanted to touch them. Needed to touch them.

“It means that if we do this,” Rafe began, “then you’re all in. We won’t let you go ever again.”

I should be running, as far away as I possible could. Instead, I dropped to my knees and presented my self like a good boy. “I’m all in. Make me yours.”

The pair of them gave a sharp inhale. Gods, they were beautiful. Like angels hellbent on revenge, with fury and determination in their gaze.

“Break me,” I said, barely above a whisper. I knew this was the only way to tip them over the edge. They needed to punish me just as much as I needed them to.

“It would be so tempting,” Rayne said as he pulled his bottom lip between his teeth.

“Punish me, Rayne. Make me feel it. Show me how much you hate me. I deserve—”

He slapped me hard across my face, halting me into silence as the sharp sting blossomed across my cheek. Then he gripped my chin between his thumb and forefinger.

“You deserve more than we can give you, vampire. But right now, I want to feel your throat squeeze my cock as you gasp for air.”

Fucking Hell. My entire body trembled with need. It'd been so long since I'd felt their touch, but the intensity that had flared between us then, absolutely combusted right now.

It was with shaky hands that I reached for Rayne's zipper, undoing his jeans, and pushing them down his powerful thighs. When they pooled at his feet, he stepped out of them and kicked them away, leaving him clad in his black boxers.

I flicked my gaze to Rafe, catching his intense gaze as he watched us, palming himself through his jeans. It was hot having his eyes on me. Knowing that he was watching everything I was doing, and I could feel his gaze leaving a trail of fire against my skin as he stared at his twin and I.

Rayne tugged me forwards until my mouth was tracing the outline of his rigid dick through his underwear. I inhaled deeply, taking the scent of him deep into my lungs, mouthing over the spot that was already wet. Was he as turned on as I was? Gods, I couldn't think beyond what I could see and smell at the minute. Everything else was merely peripheral.

I tugged his underwear, pushing them until they fell down to the floor and I went back to Rayne's perfect dick. I'd forgotten how gorgeous it was. Thick, heavy, and flushed. I swiped my tongue over the end of it, enjoying his sharp taste, before sucking on the end of it.

Rayne corded his fingers through my hair and yanked my head backwards. "Oh no, baby. You can do better than that. Open your mouth wide and show me how much you want my fucking dick."

Fuck. Those words were like lightning to my core. I sat there and opened my mouth wide like a good boy. Rayne fed me his cock and didn't stop until it was pressing against the back of my throat. The weight of it was heavy against my tongue, the taste of him bitter against my tastebuds making my already hard dick leak behind my zipper. My hands gripped my thighs, desperate to touch Rayne but wanting to please him more. He hadn't given me permission to move them, so I kept them where they were.

Rayne pulled back, giving my aching throat relief, but it was short lived. The hand in my hair gripped me firmly while he pummelled his cock into my mouth. Saliva dripped down my chin, tears streamed down my face and Rayne watched me as I fought against my instinct to fight back. He brutalised my mouth while his twin watched, his hand down his pants gripping his dick tight and matching his brother's strokes.

"Gods your mouth is so fucking good, baby," Rayne muttered, lost in his pleasure as he used me. "Open wider."

Rayne brought his other hand to join the first, twisting the strands until pain sliced across my scalp. I moaned around his dick, close to coming in my pants completely untouched. I was so fucking close.

"No coming until we say, boy," Rafe growled, guessing my thoughts. He strode from his chair, jeans open, large dick swinging free. He knelt behind me and rested his chin on my shoulder, before running his hand over the rigid bulge in my

pants. “Your orgasms belong to us, Beau. Only we get to say when you’re allowed one.”

I whimpered at the sound of my old nickname. I’d missed hearing it. Missed them.

Fuck, I’d missed them so much.

Rafe’s hand surrounded my throat and squeezed. Dizziness started to sink in, but it brought with it a sense of euphoria. My heart was going frantic in my chest, trying to keep me alive as the twins brought me to the edge of death. I didn’t need to breathe but I could still absorb oxygen to enrich my blood. Without it, I became slower, more sluggish.

My eyes started to roll backwards as I crept closer to the point where my lungs would shutdown. To when my primal side would take over to help me survive.

Rayne must have been keeping a close eye on me because he chose that moment to pull out of my mouth.

I fell backwards into Rafe and gulped breaths, feeling my blood revitalising with every lungful of air.

“You’re so fucking perfect,” Rafe said as he swiped his tongue up the side of my face. “I love the taste of your tears. So goddamn sweet.” He licked his lips as if trying to get every last one of my tears.

“This won’t be the last time you cry for us, Beau,” Rayne said as he pulled me to my feet. He smiled wolfishly at me. “I guarantee it.”

My legs trembled beneath me from being on the ground for so long, but they threatened to collapse with Rayne's words.

"This it it, Beau. You had your chance to run," Rafe said by my ear.

Rayne grabbed my chin and held my gaze. "There's no escape from us now."

"I'm not going anywhere." Then I smashed my mouth to Rayne's. It was a greedy kiss, demanding when I had no right to demand anything from the twins, but oh, how I wanted them. I wanted them to choose me. To claim me. Brand me and make me theirs. I was ready before, but now I yearned for it with everything I had. I'd meant it when I said that I was all in with them.

Rafe pushed in against my back, his erection digging into my ass as he ground his hips against me. His mouth latched onto the side of my neck and sucked hard. Jeez, that was going to leave a mark and I kind of loved that. Loved the idea that everyone was going to know I'd been branded by the Thornley Twins.

Rayne pulled away and spun me around to face his twin. Immediately, Rafe grabbed my hand and pulled it towards his cock, wrapping my fingers around it. The moan that left his mouth was pure sin. I shivered at the sound of it.

Rayne nipped at my earlobe, his breath tickling the sensitive skin. "Squeeze his cock, Beau. Make him feel it. Make his knees tremble."

Rafe's intake of breath was sharp as I followed the instructions, pumping my hand up and down his shaft with a firm grip. My own cock was throbbing, almost to the point of pain. I needed them to touch me. Needed the release, desperately.

"Please," I begged against Rafe's mouth.

"Please what?" he replied, a wolfish grin curling his beautiful mouth.

A whimper fell from my mouth, suddenly too wound up to form words. My skin felt too tight, my body too tense.

Rafe looked behind me at his twin. "I think he wants us to touch him."

Rayne hummed in amusement as he grabbed my chin, tilting my head backwards until I was looking up at him. "Is that right?"

"Please, please, please—"

"Hush, now," Rayne said as he stroked down the side of my face. "I'm going to make it all better."

A sob of relief worked its way out of my throat.

"Aww, look at that brother," Rafe said sweetly. "He thinks we're going to let him come."

The last thing I saw before my world turned upside down, was Rayne's eyes darkening with determination. Then I was in motion, thrown across a lap, my trousers and boxers around my ankles and my bare ass in the air.

I hadn't even registered the pain until the sound of a smack ripped through the air.

Fuck. That hurt.

Fire spread across my ass, my skin heating where Rafe had hit me. I knew it was him because Rayne had crouched at the side of the sofa to watch the pain spread across my face.

Over and over Rafe slapped my ass. Never quite in the same place but I could never tell where he was going to hit next. My entire body was rigid, waiting for the moment he'd strike me again.

"Relax, baby," Rayne said in a comforting tone. "Take your punishment like a good boy, and we'll reward you."

Rafe's hands ghosted over my burning skin, his touch soothing, calming. His fingers traced down my crack, over my taint and the underside of my balls. Gods, it wasn't enough. Nowhere near enough.

Then he went back to spanking me. The pain so intense that tears spilled from my eyes. The pain went deeper and deeper, claiming more of my soul the more times he hit me. It blurred the world, until I didn't know where I began or ended.

I cried out and my body froze. I was so close, so fucking close.

"More," I breathed. "More pain."

Rayne's grin in front of my face was feral. "You're so fucking perfect, Beau."

“As you wish,” Rafe growled.

Time vanished as he continued to spank me. The skin of my ass and thighs burning. The longer it went on, the more the pain lost its sting, morphing into liquid heat.

Every jolt rocked my cock against Rafe’s thigh, the touch a barely there whisper. Enough to keep me hard, but not enough to tip me over the edge.

Then it all stopped. No touching. No pain. Just... nothing.

I exhaled shakily and blinked back the unshed tears.

“This is only the beginning, little vamp,” Rafe whispered, making goosebumps erupt over my skin. “We will brutalise you, mark you, and brand you as ours. You’ll wear our marks with pride. You’ll be our masterpiece, Beau.”

I sobbed then. “Yes. That. I want—“

My words vanished as Rafe finally grabbed my aching cock. It felt so good that I groaned long and hard.

“Look at you. Degrading yourself by fucking his fist like you’ve been begging for it,” Rayne chuckled.

I didn’t care if it was humiliating. There was no way I could stop. I needed it.

“Who do you belong to, Beau?” Rafe said, his voice tight.

I moaned through a sob. I couldn’t take any more. It was too much. All too much.

“Answer me!” Rafe snapped, his hand tightening around my cock and making my entire body jerk.

“You!” I cried hoarsely. They fucking owned me.

“That’s right,” Rayne cooed, his thumbs brushing away the tears that had escaped my eyes. His hands gripped the sides of my face and forced me to look deep into his eyes.

“I’m s-so close,” I sobbed. “Please.”

Rayne leant closer, his lips brushing mine. “Come for us, Beau.”

Lust exploded through me and I slammed my cock into Rafe’s fist as I started coming. I screamed as I finally let go, watching as Rayne swallowed it deep into the back of his throat.

I cried in earnest then, everything I’d bottled up finally escaping the cage I’d kept it all in. And the twins just caught me. They wrapped me in their arms and held me through the tears.

I’d done it. I’d finally found home.

Chapter Twenty-Eight



Rafe

Beau had finally submitted to his exhaustion and fallen asleep in our arms. I looked at my twin, completely smitten as he stroked his fingers through Beau's thick locks. I don't think either of us expected *that* to happen.

I imagine Beau had wandered into something incredibly cathartic. The way he gave in to us, submitted to our demands, was fucking hot. A groan slipped out my mouth as I thought about it, my cock pressing uncomfortably against my zipper.

Rayne chuckled. "Want to wake him up so he can take care of that for you?"

"It's tempting," I mused, the thought of his lips around my cock making it twitch.

Rayne looked at the sleeping vampire with a sadistic grin across his face and fire dancing in his eyes. I almost felt sorry for Beau.

“Wakey wakey little vampire,” he sang while tightening his hand in Beau’s hair.

“I don’t want to,” Beau mumbled sleepily. His head was in Rayne’s lap with his bare ass in mine.

“Come on, baby. I want you to take care of something for me,” Rayne hummed.

I sucked one of my fingers into my mouth, an idea popping into my mind and taking root. I circled his hole with my wet finger, loving how it fluttered beneath my fingertip. I pushed in, and holy fuck, he was so tight. I couldn’t wait to bury my cock in him, all the way to the fucking hilt. I worked another finger in, loving the sound of Beau’s hiss as he started rocking his ass backwards. Our little vamp wanted it bad.

“That’s it, open those eyes for me,” Rayne said soothingly, coaxing Beau out of the land of the dead. It had been a little weird watching him sleep. He literally slept like he was dead. He didn’t breathe and his heart didn’t beat and he was cold to the touch.

I heard the sound of Rayne’s zipper and felt the instant wet heat wrap around my cock as Beau sucked him down. Gods, I could feel his hot, wet tongue as if it were my dick in his mouth, not Rayne’s.

“Goddamn,” Rayne moaned when Beau sucked him all the way to the back of his throat.

I could feel the muscles of his throat tightening, working to expel Rayne’s dick and fuck if that didn’t have me grinding my hips up into Beau’s, rubbing against him. He elicited a moan that I felt vibrating along the length of my dick. *Sweet fuck*. That boy’s mouth was made for sucking cock.

He worked Rayne thoroughly, but unhurriedly, taking his time to learn the things he liked. It wasn’t long before Rayne was gripping Beau’s hair tightly and fucking Beau’s face. My brother was impatient at the best of times and struggled giving up control. The only time I’d seen it was when he’d let Beau feed from him and that had been as hot as Hell. Totally a dynamic I wanted to explore later. But right now, I was enjoying the way Beau looked with his face stuffed of my twin’s cock.

Beau’s throat constricted convulsively. I wrapped my hand around it so I could feel it as he swallowed. The movement of his throat sent little bolts of lust through my veins that exploded periodically.

“Fuck,” I grunted and fucking lost it. Shivers ripped through me, my balls ached and my cock pulsed with each release. Cum covered my chest, and some managed to reach my shirt which I’d pulled out the way. Clearly not enough to avoid all my release though. For fucks sake.

My twin had his head thrown back and his jaw open in a silent scream and poor Beau was working his ass on my

fingers, frantically trying to reach his own release. I curled my fingers, finding that sweet spot that had his body convulsing and jerking.

“Right there!” he screamed. “Oh, Gods. So close.”

I thrust my fingers against his prostate over and over again until he was a squirming mess.

Rayne gripped his chin and placed a gentle kiss against his lips. “Let go, Beau.”

And he did. Ropes of cum shot out his cock coating the sofa beneath us. We hadn’t even touched him there and that was one of the most beautiful things I’d ever seen.

I eased my fingers out of him and pulled him towards me, wrapping my arms around him and tucking his head beneath my chin.

“Holy fuck,” Rayne groaned as he scrubbed his hands down his face. He looked at me and I knew he felt the same. This little vampire bundled in my arms was finally right where he belonged. Now we just needed to make it permanent.

**

It was fucking impossible to stop touching him. Rayne and I had cleaned him up and dressed him again, and now he was sat curled between the two of us. I was touching him everywhere, his hands, his back, arms, anywhere I could reach. Fuck, I was turning sappy. I could sense Rayne’s grin, but I was choosing to ignore it. It wasn’t like he was any better, since he was hiding the damn thing in Beau’s hair.

“So,” Beau started. “What do we do now?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Beau looked up at me, his red eyes filled with concern. “What happens next? I want this. Want you. I’m all in. I just...”

Ah. He wanted some sort of commitment from us too. I placed a soft kiss against his lips. “We’re all in too. We are going to mark you as ours, but we will need to work up to that.”

An adorable frown worked its way across his forehead. “Why?”

Rayne nipped at Beau’s ear. “Do you know anything about Hell Hound mating?”

Beau shook his head.

“Well, it’s similar to how other shifters mate. We have to be sure of our partner, there needs to be complete trust, and love. The mark itself is given during a moment of intimacy—”

“Fucking, in other words,” Rayne interrupted, and Beau sniggered.

“Yes, but I was trying to make it sound a little bit more romantic.”

“You can be romantically fucking me,” Beau said with a smirk. “Pound me into the mattress but make it slow and deep. Romantic-like.”

I rolled my eyes. “Fine. During a moment of romantic fucking, we will bite you. There is an element of magic involved but I don’t know how to explain it. It just happens. Like it’s instinctual. Or so I’ve heard. I’ve never seen one so I don’t actually know.”

“So do you do it one after the other or...” Beau trailed off, probably because of the grin on my face.

“Oh no, little vamp. We’re two halves of one soul,” I stated, waiting for the moment the penny dropped.

“We’d have to take you together,” Rayne whispered by his ear. “At the same time.”

Beau’s eyes went wide and his body shivered with what I hoped was a jolt of lust. “Fuck.”

“That’s the plan,” Rayne said with a grin.

“I see what you mean about working up to it. Your dicks are huge.” There was a tremble in his voice, and I didn’t like it.

I wrapped my hands around his face. “You’re ours now, Beau. We will take care of you and make sure you’re ready.”

Rayne tilted Beau’s chin back and pressed a tender kiss to the side of his mouth. “We’re going to ruin you.”

Again, Beau shivered. He liked being made to feel weak, helpless. Vampires were high up on the evolutionary scale and there wasn’t much, apart from Gods and Reapers, that would be able to kill one. Him surrendering to us had to be an aphrodisiac for him. The fact that he trusted us not to rip his throat out was a turn on for me too. Especially after everything

we'd already been through. He was literally content to put his life in our hands and I was both humbled and excited by that. Humbled because he clearly wanted this to work, and excited because I couldn't wait to push him to the fucking edge. He had no idea what he was letting himself in for and I couldn't wait to take him on that journey with us.

"Come on," I said before I could put some of my dark ideas into practice. "Let's go see if they're ready to go. Lord knows we've been in here for hours."

"Do you think they'll know?" Beau asked sheepishly.

"What we've been up to?" Rayne asked, his head cocked to one side.

Beau nodded and I laughed. "We smell like sex, you look positively violated, and Rayne is looking at you like his next meal."

Beau grinned widely. "Good."

Then he turned on his heel and stepped into the corridor leaving me with my jaw in the floor.

Rayne placed his finger under my chin and closed my mouth. "He's perfect, isn't he?"

"Yes," I said with a nod, still a little stunned at how eager Beau was to show everyone who he belonged to. "Absolutely perfect."

Then we followed him out the room and went in search of the others. We had a vault to potentially break into.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



Roux

The moment Magnus walked out of that room I knew. There was a definite post-coital glow about the three of them and the tension that had been there earlier had gone. I hadn't expected to be jealous, but it hit me like a wrecking ball, knocking me backwards and breaking something within me. They'd fixed whatever it was and yes, I was happy for them, but I hadn't realised how much seeing the three of them together was going to hurt.

I also thought the twins would have put up more of a fight. Maybe this thing between the three of them was just too powerful to resist. Was it inevitable?

"They look happy," Atticus mused as he packed some gear into a bag. Fuck knows where Thane got all this shit, but I was grateful. There were all the trademark tools for breaking and

entering, ropes, weapons, and other tactical gear. Yes, we were all powerful creatures with supernatural abilities, but even we weren't capable of everything. Better to be prepared than caught with your pants down.

"Yes," I replied, answering out of politeness rather than anything else. Urgh, it hurt to look at them. The three of them were grinning. Even Rayne who was miserable most of the time.

"Roux," Atticus said softly, cupping my shoulders and turning me to face him. "Talk to me."

I heaved a deep sigh, unsure where to start with putting my feelings into words. "I want it to be me to make them smile like that. I want to be a part of them too."

I felt guilty saying that, and I worried that Atticus might not think he was enough for me but I knew he was open to more. With more than just me too.

"Instead of thinking about what you're missing, go after what you deserve." He knocked my chin with his knuckle. "Go talk to them. Tell them how you feel. They aren't mind-readers, Roux, and it's unfair to them if you don't use words to express your feelings."

"Okay, but only if you go and talk to Thane."

"What?"

"There's something between you two, and I think you need to figure out if it's normal attraction or something to do with your soul bond."

He looked away from me, hiding his eyes that were usually so full of emotion. “I don’t know what it is. It’s like there’s this draw to him, something pulling me towards him and I don’t know if it’s the bond or something else.”

“Would it be so bad if it was something else?”

“No,” he said slowly, “it’s just I’ve never...”

“Been attracted to a man before.” I got it. I did. Must be scary to have to navigate through something you thought you were sure of, only to come out questioning everything you knew about yourself.

“Perhaps you should talk to Magnus?” I offered and Atticus frowned. “Until the twins, he’d never looked at a man before.”

“Really? He seems so comfortable with them.”

“He is now.” I looked to where the twins stood with Magnus, noting the subtle touches between the three of them. They did look comfortable with each other and I was happy for them. “But I imagine it was a bit of a shock to his system to find himself with not one man, but two.”

I could see the cogs turning behind his eyes as he looked between me and the other three men.

“I might speak to him, then. And I’ll have a conversation with Thane.”

“Good,” I said with a nod. “I want you to be happy, and if that includes other people, then that’s okay.”

He wrapped his hand around my neck and pulled me towards him, brushing a soft kiss against my lips. “How did I get so lucky with you?”

“I don’t know, but I’m just as lucky,” I replied with a grin before kissing him again. It soon turned from chaste to devastating as he devoured my mouth with his tongue and licking every inch he could find. I moaned deep into his mouth when he sucked on my tongue, sending lust burning through my veins. When he pulled back, I was breathless, just as he was. Impressive considering neither of us needed to breathe anymore.

“Wow,” a husky voice said from behind us.

I looked and found Magnus starting at me, his eyes a smouldering, deep ruby red and his lips wet, as if he’d just licked them.

The twins looked at me like they wanted to devour me, like I was the only thing that was going to save them from starvation.

My nails bit into the flesh of my palms as I held back the need to touch them. Gods, the tension in here was so thick it felt like I could choke on it.

“Roux. I need you to see this,” Thane said as he strode into the room, snapping the tension immediately. Poor thing, he was often completely oblivious to what was happening right under his nose.

“See what?” I asked a little breathlessly.

Thane grabbed my hand. "Come with me."

He dragged me from the room, up the stairs and onto a long gallery. There was a march of footprints behind me and, as I glanced over my shoulder, I saw Atticus, the twins and Magnus in hot pursuit.

"Where are we going?" I asked but the God didn't answer. "Thane!"

He stopped so suddenly that I slammed into his back. "Do you know whose house this is?"

"What?" I was confused. "I thought it was yours."

He shook his head. "It was left to my safekeeping, but it isn't mine."

"Whose is it?" Atticus asked as he stepped closer, almost slowly as if he didn't want to startle Thane.

"I don't know why I didn't see it before," Thane muttered, his eyes wide and a little wild. It was strange seeing the guy so frazzled.

"See what? You're not making any sense," I said.

His hand squeezed mine and I felt the bones in my hand crunch together. "You. She's you."

"You're gonna need to start making some more sense, Grim," Rafe drawled. "Talking in riddles isn't going to help anyone."

Thane looked deep into my eyes. "But she's you. Don't you see it?"

I stepped closer to him and placed my free hand on his cheek. “Who Thane? Who do you see?”

He pointed over my shoulder. “You. I see you.”

“Oh, fuck,” someone muttered. Another person gasped. Whatever was behind me couldn’t be good.

I turned around and found myself staring at a giant portrait.

Of me.

But it wasn’t me. It couldn’t be. She was wearing clothes that were at least two centuries old. Dressed in a deep midnight blue, with a pile of brilliantly white hair piled in curls on her head, was a woman who was the spitting image of me. She smiled, like she was amused by something that was a little saucy. A juicy secret perhaps.

“There are more,” Atticus said as he wandered down the long gallery.

I followed him, looking at all the portraits. She was in all of them, from various periods in history. Just the same in each one. The same hair and eyes, the same saucy smile.

“Who is she?” I asked, turning back to Thane.

There was a look of disbelief on his face, a wariness in his eyes as he watched me walk back to him. “Nyx.”

My stomach lurched. “How is that even possible?”

“I don’t know,” he replied with a shrug.

“Reincarnation?” Atticus asked as he looked at a portrait of her from the eighteenth century.

“Maybe,” Thane said as he went to stand by the demon’s side. “But I’m not sure how. I don’t think this is the same woman. I think each of these women existed in their own time period.”

“Why?” I asked.

“We’d have heard about someone existing beyond their time,” Magnus said simply. “That sort of thing wouldn’t have gone unnoticed.”

I joined Thane at the portrait. The dress she stood in this time was a deep ruby red, the same shade as Magnus’ eyes.

Wait. The first portrait I saw, she was wearing midnight blue, the shade of Atticus’ hair.

The twins were looking at another one. “What colour dress is she wearing?”

Rayne turned to me with a puzzled look in his eyes. “Black.”

“With pale blue piping,” Rafe added.

Gods, it wasn’t just me in the picture. “You’re in them too.”

“What?” Magnus asked.

“Look at them. The red dress matches your eyes, the blue one Atticus’ hair, there’s one over there with the twins colouring too. In that one over there she’s in amber like Hades’ eyes.” I walked to the other end of the gallery. “In this one she’s wearing gold.”

“Like me,” Thane said softly.

“So, who is this then?” Atticus called from behind me. The portrait at the end of the collection was slightly different to the others. There was a sadness about her eyes, a haunted look in her expression and she didn’t smile. Her hair was hidden beneath a gable hood, but the artist had painted a few wisps of white escaping at the sides. Her dress was black with a red underskirt and red velvet sleeves. It was beautiful, and the artist had caught the shimmer of the fabric. And, while the dress matched Magnus’ colouring, I knew this referred to someone else. The red was brighter, more like a scarlet and the black was so dense, it was like shadows wrapped in night.

“I don’t know,” I replied, but there was something familiar about it, something that tugged at a memory, but I couldn’t quite grasp it. I reached my hand out, a sudden urge crawling under my skin to touch the painting. As soon as my fingers brushed against the canvas images burst in the forefront of my mind.

Red eyes.

Wisps of darkness.

A dark smile.

Broad shoulders.

They flashed one after the other until my vision turned black, and a sharp pain sliced through my skull.

There were shouts all around me, but I couldn’t make sense of them. There was too much pain. I heard a scream. Felt hands around my face.

Then there was nothing.



“This is crazy! We can’t!” I shouted, my heart racing.

“My love, we must. It’s the only way,” he replied, his eyes dark and full of fear.

“What if it doesn’t work?” I couldn’t bear it if I lost him forever. He was my greatest love, the other half of my soul.

He gripped the sides of my face. “It has too. Otherwise, we will be apart forever.” He trailed a thumb along my cheek. “I can’t lose you.”

Rapid thuds beat on the door. “Open up in the name of the King!”

“It’s now or never, my love.” He gripped my hands and dragged me towards the altar.

“Wait,” I said before crashing my lips to his and pouring everything I felt into our kiss. Tears streamed down my face as he kissed me back, just as desperately.

Fists pummelled on the door again, and we broke apart.

“Don’t cry for me,” he said as he wiped away my tears. “You’ll find your way back to me and then we will be together again.”

“Yes,” I replied before taking a deep breath. “I’m ready.”

He passed me the Diadem and whispered some words that I didn't understand. Then I faded into nothing and settled among the stars.

Chapter Thirty



Roux

I came to with a jolt and a gasp.

“I’ve got you,” Magnus mumbled as his fingers stroked through my hair.

“Get me a pen and paper,” I said as I struggled to my feet. My knees buckled as I stood but strong hands caught me before I hit the ground again.

“Slow down, kitten,” Atticus said warmly.

“Here,” Rafe said as he thrust a paper and pen into my hand. I grabbed them and furiously started drawing what I could remember. I wasn’t an artist, and I didn’t think I could draw the guy I’d seen but the crown... it seemed so familiar. Had I seen it somewhere before?

I turned the picture towards Thane. “Have you seen this before?”

“Yes,” he replied, concern furrowing his brow.

“What is it?” I asked, looking at the twists and turns of the metal in the crown. The black diamonds surround by white ones looking like little stars in the darkness.

Thane took the picture out of my hand and looked at it like he was staring at a ghost from his past. “The Diadem of Nyx.”

“Isn’t that supposed to be in the vault?” Rayne grumbled.

Thane dropped to his knees in front of me, grabbing my face between the palms of his hands. He stared into my eyes as if he were searching for my very soul. “What did you see?”

I explained the vision I’d seen with the Diadem and the man and woman and watched as Thane’s expression darkened with my every word.

“We need to get into the vault,” he said.

“Why?” asked Atticus.

Thane stood and looked at the other men. “Because I think the item that went missing was the Diadem and either no one wanted Zeus to know or he did and covered it up.”

The others dissolved into a cacophony of debate as they argued over the next best course of action, so I tuned them out and looked at the woman in the portrait, the one where she looked sad compared to the others. Who was she? And why did she look like Nyx? Why did I? Apart from the different

coloured hair, we looked alike. Did she know who she was or was she oblivious like I was. What the hell did it all mean?

I took out my phone and sent a message to Hades.

Me: So apparently, I'm Nyx reincarnated.

Hades: WTF?

I chuckled at the fact that Hades used acronyms. I hadn't expected that. I thought he'd be old school and grammatically correct.

Me: Yup. There have been others too. I'm looking at a long line of them.

Hades: Again, WTF?

I snapped a picture of the gallery and sent it to him. His reply was instant.

Hades: Why the fuck is that vampire there?

I rolled my eyes at him. He was such a surly grump.

Me: Because the Fates told him to be here. But that's not what we're talking about.

Hades: He's an asshole. But I see what you mean about the portraits. Why would I forget that was what Nyx looked like?

That was a good question. Thane hadn't made the connection either.

Me: Perhaps it was something to do with the spell he did to save her.

Hades: What spell?

Me: Not sure. Some guy said some words, handed her the Diadem and then she vanished.

I stared at my phone, but there were no bubbles saying he was typing a reply. Was that it? Had he gone. I was just putting my phone away when it vibrated.

Hades: I'll look into it. Be a good girl for Daddy or there'll be consequences.

Oomf. There went my core clenching. He wasn't even here, and the guy could make instantly horny.

"Hades is going to look into it," I said, as I stood from the ground, thankful my legs were feeling a bit sturdier beneath me.

"What's he going to do?" Magnus quipped. "Push some paper around and hope it gives him the answer?"

Rafe snorted, but instantly looked to the ground when I narrowed my gaze at him.

"Just because you don't like the guy," I said to Magnus, "doesn't mean he's incapable. Him saying he'll look into it is good enough for me, it should be for you too."

Magnus swallowed and nodded slowly. "You're right. Sorry."

I nodded at him, acknowledging his apology. It surprised me, to be honest. Magnus had never been one for apologies. Perhaps he was changing.

“So, what do we do now?” I asked Thane since he was the most powerful here and de facto leader.

“Now we get into the vault,” he said with a purse of his lips, “and hope that I am wrong, and the Diadem is there.”

“And if it isn’t?” I asked, fear creeping into my voice.

Thane’s eyes met mine, a sorrow in them that I don’t think I’d ever seen before. “Then I think it might be the reason you have no memory of your previous life.”

Oh. Was that why it was familiar? Had I tried to steal it before? Or was it familiar because I was somehow connected to Nyx? I had so many questions, but no answers.

An idea popped into my head. “Can we find one of their souls to talk to?”

“Yes,” Rafe agreed. “Surely they’d know something?”

“Not necessarily,” Thane mused, tucking his hands into his pockets. The man always seemed to be dressed in a suit. Him and Atticus made quite the delicious pair.

“What do you mean?” Atticus asked, coming to stand next to him.

“Well, Roux doesn’t know anything useful about Nyx. What’s to say these other women will?”

Thane had a point, even if he had said it in a way that made me sound like I was an idiot. He meant no harm, he was just a bit literal sometimes. I didn’t know anything other than that

vision I'd just had when I'd touch the painting. But something was nagging me about the woman who was sad.

"I think she knows something," I said as I pointed to the lady dressed in red and black. "She's the only one who is different. And from what I can tell, she's from the oldest era. Maybe she was the first?"

Atticus looked up at Thane, with something akin to wonder in his eyes. "Can you do it? Can you find her?"

Thane stared at Atticus for so long I thought his mind had gotten lost. He did that sometimes. I'd glance at him through his office window and hours later he'd be in the same spot. I often wondered where it was that his mind went to, but I guess if you were as old as Thane, time didn't really have the same meaning.

"Yes. I can do that," Thane said and then turned on his heel and left the gallery, leaving the rest of us staring after him.

"Does he always do that?" Atticus asked.

"Yep. You get used to it," I replied with a chuckle. "Come on, better make sure he doesn't do anything stupid. Like burn the place down."

Atticus fell into step beside me. "Is that a possibility?"

"Oh yes," Rayne said from behind.

"He once forgot he'd left the oven on and he had to have his whole kitchen renovated," Rafe said with a laugh.

Atticus pulled to a sudden stop. “Why was he cooking? Can he even eat?”

“He can eat but he doesn’t need to. He’s actually a really good cook,” I said. “When he can remember he’s cooking.”

“Better find him before he can cause any damage,” Rafe said laughing and we all headed in the direction Thane had headed.

Chapter Thirty-One



Thane

I was in the middle of rolling up the rug in the middle of the floor when the others joined me. I needed space to draw my sigil to call a soul to me and this sitting room seemed big enough for what I needed.

The only problem was that I needed my scythe to carve it into the floor and I didn't have it anymore. It was still bound to Roux. Which meant she'd have to do it. I was still powerful without my scythe, unlike Roux. Her power was all tied to her weapon, without it she wouldn't have death magic. I was built from it. I didn't need the scythe to channel it, but I did need the scythe to carve the floor.

"Roux?"

"Yes?" she said as she walked towards me.

“Will you carve my sigil into the floorboards?”

She looked confused for a minute, frowning as she craned her neck to look up at me. She was so tiny, and I had the sudden urge to wrap her in my arms and never let go. Wait. That wasn't my thought. I looked up and found Atticus watching her with concern. His eyes met mine and a flash of awareness ran through them. I needed to figure out how this soul connection was supposed to work but I wasn't sure I was ready to face it. I knew I'd done it to save him, but I'd also done it for me. There was something I'd seen in him I wanted, and I'd never been possessive over anyone like that before. It was a feral, demanding urge that had me wanting to steal him away and every time I looked at him, I had to battle my own will not to do just that. For someone who never really felt emotions, all these extreme ones were mentally exhausting me. I didn't know where my emotions ended, and Atticus' began.

Roux flicked her gaze between Atticus and me, one of her eyebrows curled. “You should talk to him, you know.”

I frowned down at her. “But he's yours.”

She laughed softly. “He's not a possession. I don't own him. He belongs *with* me. Not *to* me.”

I must have looked confused because her expression softened, and she laid her hand on my arm. “He's as lost as you are.”

I caught Atticus' eyes and, while I didn't completely understand what I was seeing, I could feel it. Like my stomach

was churning and a chill was creeping over my skin. Was that anxiety? Fear? Whatever it was, it was uncomfortable but if that was how he felt because of something I'd done, then I needed to fix that.

I gave her a short nod and strolled over to Atticus, my feet feeling heavy and awkward. He looked up at me with a brightness in his eyes that didn't match the rest of his expression. Fuck, I needed a crash course in emotions. How was I ever going to navigate this?

I'd suddenly lost all ability to speak. My mouth felt dry, my tongue like sandpaper and fuck, why couldn't I swallow?

Atticus looked like he was having the same issue. His Adam's apple was awkwardly bobbing in the column of his throat. I reached out and stroked my finger over the harsh bump of his throat, suddenly fascinated by it. It trembled beneath my finger, and I wondered what it would feel like beneath my tongue.

Atticus wrapped his long fingers around my wrist. "What are you doing?"

"Touching you."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to. You're really quite... pretty."

A blush flew across his cheeks and a warm tingly sensation spread through my stomach.

"Um, thank you," he replied, swallowing again and I think I just found a new obsession. I wanted to feel his Adam's apple

struggle against my cock as I fucked his throat. Now *that* had to be my thought. Unless...

“Are you thinking about me fucking your throat?”

He spluttered and coughed, the blush deepening on his cheeks. “I am now.”

“Do you want me to?”

He looked quizzically at me, his fingers stroking delicately against the sensitive skin of my wrist. I don’t even think he realised he was doing it. “Do you always talk to people like this?”

“No. But I’m not connected by my soul to ‘people’. I figured we’d moved past polite conversation.”

“I can’t decide if you’re flirting with me or threatening me,” he said with a soft chuckle.

“I don’t threaten people,” I said simply. “That implies there’s a chance of escape.”

He swallowed again, and why did I like that so much?

“You do realise everyone is watching us?”

I’d forgotten there were other people in the room, too wrapped up in him to notice. When I looked up I saw Rafe, Rayne, Magnus and Roux comfortably sat on the sofa, their eyes glued to us. All they were missing was some popcorn.

“This is hot, right?” Roux asked, a small smile curling her lip.

Rafe looked at Roux. “Death and a nightmare eye fucking?”

“Definitely hot,” Rayne replied as he nipped at Magnus’ ear.

I turned my attention back to Atticus, ignoring our audience.
“Can we continue this later?”

He nodded, his chin bumping against my hand. I didn’t want to let him go. I wanted to tear him into little pieces and figure out what made him tick. To look beneath the nightmare and explore all the things that made him scream.

“Is it me, or did the temperature drop in here a little?” Magnus asked, interrupting my thoughts.

“Are you thinking dark thoughts about my little nightmare?” Roux asked, her eyes shining.

“Yes,” I replied, finally letting go of Atticus. A shiver ran up the length of my spine and I found Atticus watching me with a darkness in those mesmerising eyes. I was suddenly cursing having to find a soul from a few centuries ago, wanting nothing more than to disappear for a few hours to explore whatever this was between us.

“There’s nothing little about me, kitten,” Atticus said as he adjusted himself in his slacks and my mouth instantly watered. If we didn’t start this summoning soon, we never would.

“Roux,” I said with a little more force than I intended, “can you do my sigil?”

She quirked her eyebrow at my tone but thankfully didn’t say anything about the way I’d spoken to her. She just stood from the sofa and walked to the middle of the room. My scythe materialised from the shadows, and she wrapped her

hand around the long length. Her death magic fizzled through the air, lowering the temperature as her Reaper form cloaked her body. She lifted the scythe high in the air in front of her and held it aloft, chanting a spell before slamming the staff into the floor.

Sparks of red erupted and sizzled along the floor, carving my sigil with a line of Hellfire. There was a lingering smell of sulphur that had Atticus' nose scrunching in a rather adorable way. And fuck, I needed to focus. Right. Sigil. Summoning.

Once Roux had finished, I stepped onto the sigil, immediately feeling the lingering caress of Roux's magic. It was soft, like a soothing caress after the upheaval of the emotions I'd just felt with Atticus. It was familiar and comforting. Just like Roux.

I stood in the centre of the sigil and felt my own magic hum through my veins. Starting at my core, it spread through to the tips of my fingers until sparks were dancing across my skin.

I fixed my audience with a grin. "I'd stand back if I were you. Or you might get burnt."

Chapter Thirty-Two



Roux

Thane erupted into his Reaper form with an explosion of fire and brimstone. Jeez, the guy was intense. Imagine dying and that being the first thing you saw. A nine-foot skeleton in a long black cloak with a crown of fire sat above his head and flames licking at his feet. He was terrifying to look at and there was an aura of real fear sinking into the room. I let it settle into my bones. It always took a minute or two to get used to his power.

“Wow. That’s uncomfortable,” Magnus said as he eyed Thane warily.

“I’d like to say you get used to it,” I said as I stared at Thane, his empty eyes staring right back, “but it’ll always feel like you’re looking at your demise.”

“Let’s get on with this, shall we?” Thane said, his voice wet and dark. It rolled down my spine like a physical thing, making me squirm.

I nodded to him, and took another step back, encouraging the others to do the same. Magic fizzled through the air, the electricity of it humming against the bones of my Reaper form as Thane’s death magic pulled it to the surface.

Thane muttered under his breath and the magic intensified, swirling up a breeze and pulling at the shadows of my cloak. The edges of the room darkened as a blossoming ball of light grew in front of Thane. It shrank in on itself, pulling all the light from the room, bathing us all in darkness and silence.

Then light exploded like a supernova, echoing with a sonic boom. Wind whipped through the room, knocking over furniture, and blasting the glass from the windows.

Then silence descended again.

A soft whisper of breath pulled my attention the middle of the sigil. There, stood in front of Thane, was the woman from the painting.

He’d done it. Thane had actually gone and found her. I let my Reaper form fade back into the shadows. I didn’t want to scare the woman. Then again, Thane was still in full Grim mode and I’m sure she could sense the ‘otherness’ in the room.

She turned her gaze to me, and her green eyes blew impossibly wide. “Who are you and how do you look upon me

with a face so much like my own?”

I stepped forward but stopped when she flinched. “I’m Roux.”

“What sort of name is that?” she asked, her brow furrowed.

“The only one I have,” I replied. “What’s your name?”

“Sabine,” she said simply.

“Time is limited,” Thane rasped as he looked down at me with his empty eyes. “I won’t be able to hold her here for long.”

I nodded up at him and turned back to Sabine. She was taking in the other occupants of the room with wary eyes. To be honest, I was surprised she hadn’t fled from the room.

“I knew someone like you,” she said, her gaze resting on Atticus.

“Really?” he replied incredulously.

“Yes,” Sabine said. “He was quite the interesting gentleman.”

The way she said that with a little bit of fondness made me think she felt the man was more than just interesting. Wow, she was certainly ahead of her time.

“Time, Roux,” Thane reminded me.

Right. “Sabine, you had your portrait painted but you were sad. Why?”

Her expression fell and she looked away from me, as if she didn’t want me to see the tears. “I lost my husband. He died

but I can't seem to remember how."

"That might be because of being pulled from the afterlife," Thane added.

"No," Sabine said, her mouth pulling down at the corners. "I remember waking one day with no idea how I got there. I just knew I was sad and that—"

"You felt you were missing part of your soul," I said, interrupting her. Her eyes met mine and I recognised the familiarity of our stories. The helplessness and fear and sorrow.

"Yes," she said quietly, looking at the floor. "I never wanted to find out where I came from because then I would have to know who he was and, with the grief I already felt, I don't think I would have survived knowing him and losing him."

I knew that feeling. When I'd woken in the middle of the field all I could feel was grief. Everything else was peripheral and a fraction of the pain and sorrow that had been coursing through me.

"Have you ever heard of Nyx?" I asked.

She frowned. "The goddess of night?"

"Yes, we think you and I are somehow linked to her," I said while indicating the rest of the guys.

"And why you think we are mirror images," she said.

"I've a feeling you were out of place in your time," I said with a laugh.

She smiled back at me. “Yes, I did. If I am being honest, I just felt out of place.”

“Like you didn’t belong there at all.” I had never felt like this was my home. There’d always been something missing and something that had never felt right. I’d made the most of my life, tried to settle and be a good Reaper but there had always been this itch under my skin I couldn’t shake. A sense lingering in the back of mind that I didn’t belong.

“Roux?” Rafe came to stand by my side. “You belong with us.”

I knew he was right; I knew I belonged with the twins and Atticus and even Hades – although I was still figuring that one out – but it didn’t negate the fact that I had no memories of Before which just made me feel unsettled.

Sabine walked towards me, her wisps of white hair escaping the gable hood just like the artist had captured in his painting. She placed her hand on my arm. “I hope you find what you are searching for. What we were both searching for.”

Then she started to fade, disappearing back into the afterlife.

“Thank you for your help, Sabine.”

She bowed her head and then vanished completely. A sadness rippled through me, and a tear rolled down my cheek. I felt like I’d lost my kin even though I’d only just met her.

Grim brushed the stray tear away, his bony finger cool against my cheek, and I succumbed to the urge to fall into his arms. I stepped into the folds of his cloak and wrapped my

arms around him. It was a little chilly, being hugged by Death, but this was right where I wanted to be.

“Thank you for finding her, Thane.”

“Anything for you, Roux,” he replied, his voice a low rumble that I felt all the way to my toes.

Chapter Thirty-Three



Atticus

“So, what happens now?” I asked the room. It had been a few minutes since we’d watched Roux curl up with the Grim Reaper. That had been odd, seeing her so comfortable with Death. And for him to seem so relaxed. From what I’d seen about Thane, he was highly strung, always observing and constantly thinking about something. But when he had Roux curled in his skeletal lap, he’d just been in that moment with her. It was... sweet. And it made me feel like I fell for the guy a little more. Not that we’d really had a conversation yet about the whole soul linking thing. I still didn’t know what to make of that, and it was clear Thane was navigating whatever he’d done to us. I knew I just needed to give him some time to understand it himself, but how long would he keep me waiting?

Thane's eyes met mine across the room and there was a bright determination sparkling in his baby blues. Looked like he wasn't going to keep me waiting too long.

"We need to head for the Vault," Roux said, as she climbed off Thane. He'd shed his Reaper form a while ago, not wanting to singe the furniture with his Hellfire.

"Agreed," Magnus said. "If we want to find out more about Nyx and the Diadem, we need to get moving. Come on." He jumped from the sofa and pulled the twins to their feet, all three of them wearing matching smiles. Even Rayne, who I'd never seen look anything but surly. Maybe Roux was right. Maybe I did need to speak to Magnus, but I didn't really know the guy. Would he even be receptive to talking to me? And the guy was a king, which was kind of intimidating.

Fuck it. I was a goddamn nightmare demon. I could do this.

"Magnus?" Why the fuck was my voice trembling?

The vampire cocked his head and fixed his ruby red eyes on me. "Yes?"

"Could I have a word? In private?"

"With me?" he asked slowly.

I nodded and caught sight of Roux giving me a double thumbs up. I rolled my eyes at her but there was a smile on my face.

Magnus shrugged his shoulders and left the room. I moved to follow but felt the hairs on the back of my neck prickled. When I looked behind me, Thane was staring straight at me,

his eyes cold and calculating. Almost like he was trying to solve a puzzle or like a killer homing in on his next victim.

A flash of heat flared through my veins as I watched him, and I wondered why I enjoyed the thought of him being predatory. The thrill of being pursued by someone stronger maybe? I didn't know what it was, but I knew it made my skin feel hot and my dick feel hard. And with that thought, I followed Magnus into the room across the hall.

I took a moment to look at the guy. He was good looking, with sharp features and high cheekbones but I didn't get the mix of confusion and wariness that came with Thane. I could see Magnus was attractive, but I didn't react to him like I did Thane. But was that me reacting to Thane, or the soul connection forcing the feelings? How did I tell the difference?

Magnus just stood there and waited, his hands tucked in the pockets of his trousers and his forearms on display. Hmm. They were nice forearms. Had I ever noticed forearms before?

"Are you alright?" Magnus asked. "You look like you're in the middle of a crisis."

A nervous laugh bubbled in my throat. "You could say that."

"Is it to do with Thane?"

I nodded. "I'm just... I don't know..." I blew out a frustrated breath. "I feel like I'm wading through something I don't understand, and I don't know if I can trust what I'm feeling."

Magnus leant back against the dining table, the muscles in his arms straining as he leant backwards. "And what are you

feeling?”

“Honestly, just confused.” I perched next to him and folded my arms across my chest. “Not only am I dead but I’m connected to Death by my soul. And on top of that I think I can feel what he feels. Am I just sensing his attraction to me? Or am I attracted to him?”

Magnus pursed his lips. “Have you asked him what he feels?”

“Not yet. I wanted to speak to you about how you dealt with suddenly being attracted a man.”

He chuckled and adjusted his feet. “Rafe and Rayne didn’t really give me a choice. Now, don’t get me wrong, they didn’t force me, it was more like they didn’t let me overthink anything. They just let me feel.”

“How do I know if they’re my feelings or his?”

“That is a tricky one. I guess until you talk to Thane and ask him what he feels, you won’t know.”

My shoulders slumped. I knew he wouldn’t have all the answers, but that didn’t make it hurt any less when he couldn’t give me what I was looking for.

“You’re right,” I said with a sigh.

“Wow, can I record that so I can play it for Roux?” he laughed.

“Absolutely not,” I replied with a smile.

He stared at me for a moment, and I could almost hear the cogs turning in his mind. “Can I try something?”

“What?”

His smile widened and something fluttered to life in my stomach. “Just trust me.”

“Okay,” I said, dragging out the syllables.

“Close your eyes,” he said softly, and I did as he asked. There was a soft brush of fingers along the sides of my face.

“Wait. What are you—”

Lips pressed against mine, warm and soft but demanding. It felt different but... not unpleasant. It actually felt nice, and I found myself relaxing into his hold. His tongue traced the seam of my lips before pushing inside my mouth. He licked the roof of my mouth, and I had a sudden urge to look at the man that was holding my tongue hostage.

He seemed so enthralled, so lost in the way he was kissing me that it turned me on. I suddenly wanted to press myself closer, rock my hardening dick against his and, shit it was so intense I had to pull away.

I jerked backwards, licking my lips, still tasting Magnus on my tongue.

“Wow,” he said, smacking his lips together. “That was...”

“Exquisite,” I filled in for him when his words failed. “I think I have my answer.”

The corner of his mouth curled into a warm smile. “Glad I could help.”

“You did,” I replied. “Now if you’ll excuse me. There’s somewhere I need to be.”

“Good luck!” he shouted after me as I left the room, but I barely heard it. I was intent on find Thane and dealing with this unsaid whatever it was between us.

“Thane! Where are you?” I shouted as I strode determinedly down the corridor. “Tha—”

“I’m here,” came the quiet response from the open doorway to my left.

“Oh.” I stopped in my tracks and faced the man causing me such torment. Sunlight cascaded through the windows behind him, creating a celestial halo. At that moment he didn’t look like he belonged to the Underworld. He looked fucking divine.

I swallowed, my tongue feeling like sandpaper in my mouth. “Hi.”

Gods, could I be anymore fucking lame.

He stepped to the side and invited me into the office. Large windows separated by floor to ceiling bookcases loomed along the back wall letting in the most gorgeous light from outside. Colourful leather-bound books lined the shelves and tall damask curtains framed the gorgeous windows. I felt like I’d stepped into a fairytale.

“I know why you’re here,” Thane said darkly.

“Good. We need to have a conversation where you don’t walk out on me when things get uncomfortable for you.”

His lips pursed and his brow dropped. “I agree. I’m sorry I left. I never meant to hurt you, but I know that’s what I did.”

I stepped closer to him, almost shoulder to shoulder as we stared at the forest beyond the window. “Why did you leave?”

He looked down at me, his eyes almost menacing. “Because I was scared of what I might do to you if I didn’t leave.”

“Like what?”

He cocked his head to one side. “I think you underestimate the depths I would go to own you.”

The light started to fade from the room as the shadows slinked from his form. He turned to face me, and I mirrored his stance, locking my eyes with his brilliantly blue ones. My first thought was that they were cold and harsh, but the more I looked, the more I saw them like the inner core of a flame. Hot, bright, and with enough power to decimate me.

“How deep would you go?” I asked, very much aware I was asking that question to Death.

His hand wrapped around the back of my neck, and he pulled me closer still. “I’d bury myself so deep within the core of your being you wouldn’t know where you started, or I ended.”

I swallowed slowly. “What of our soul connection?”

“What of it?”

“How does it really work? Can you feel what I feel?”

“Yes,” he replied with a curl to his grin that implied he knew something I didn’t.

“How did you figure that out?”

He brushed his face along mine, stopping when his lips brushed my ear. “I felt you fucking Roux. Felt the squeeze of her pussy against your cock as if it were squeezing my own. Do you know what I did?”

“No,” I replied, my voice barely above a whisper. My stomach clenched with need.

His fingers brushed the length of my erection through my slacks, his touch a mere whisper but I felt it everywhere. A moan broke free from his mouth that I felt reverberate all the way through my chest. “I took out my cock, gripped it tightly and came harder than I ever had before.”

Mother of the Gods. I whimpered, fucking whimpered at the image of Thane frantically pumping his cock and coming because of me.

“That turns you on,” Thane said. Not a question, but a statement. He knew exactly how I felt.

“Yes.”

“Can you sense how turned on I am?”

I looked at him closely and felt my desire heighten, become more intense the longer I looked at him. I could feel his desire

like a second skin, familiar but different at the same time. Was this how I could differentiate between his feelings and mine?

I leant closer, ghosted my lips across his ear and whispered the word, “Yes.”

Whatever had been holding Death back before had gone because all of a sudden, his mouth was on mine and my spine was arching backwards beneath the power of his kiss. He forced my mouth wide, making me take his brutal kiss. And it *was* brutal. He didn’t stop. He pushed my hands into the small of my back and held them hostage there. I couldn’t move. Couldn’t do anything but surrender.

Magic hummed between us, our connection vibrating as if it were a tangible thing. It swirled through me, alighting the blood in my veins until every touch felt like fire along my skin.

Thane suddenly pulled away, leaving me momentarily disorientated. “There is a question in your mind, something that bothers you. Tell me, so I can put it right.”

“You can’t just fix everything,” I said with a smile.

“Why not?” he asked.

“Because that’s not how the world works.”

“It is for me.”

Oh, how easy life would be if that were the case. For things to just be simply fixed. I suddenly understood what Roux and the twins had meant when they’d talked about his obliviousness. Perhaps that was a blessing. To not be burdened

with the more complicated things. “Well, like it or not, I am not something you can just fix. I’m not simple and I won’t be easy.”

He frowned, an adorable little furrow between his brows. I wanted to reach out and smooth the lines out, but my hands were still held captive behind my back. I rested my forehead against his, wanting an intimate connection. “Why did you really save me?”

“Because I wanted you.”

“That simple, huh?”

“Yes,” he said with a nod. “It is for me.”

“You’re going to have to explain that one to me.”

Thane pulled away and let go of my hands. “When you called to me, I could have just let you die. I didn’t have to grant you the Death Rights that you wanted to invoke.” He stroked the side of my face. “But then I saw you, and I knew you were meant to be mine. Have you ever just looked at something and instantly wanted it? Like an all consuming need to own it?”

I shook my head. “Can’t say that I have.”

“That’s how I feel about you. I want to burrow inside your skin, just to be as close to you as possible. Does that scare you?”

I smiled up at him, not in the least put off by his words. “I trade in nightmares for a living. It’s going to take more than that to scare me.”

“Good, because you’re mine.”

His words should have scared me, should have had me running for the hills, but I didn’t. I just felt sort of overwhelmed. Thane had said I was his with so much ease, with so little fight, like it was just the way it was. It was possessive and hot, and I knew he wasn’t going to let me go. Ever. The only thing that worried me was if he ever tried to leave me. I don’t know how I’d feel about that. I knew he was mine, just as much as I was his. Which was silly. We barely knew each other, but here I was, watching him stare at me with so much intensity that my toes were curling in my fucking boots and I wanted him. I wanted Thane to own me. I wanted his passion, his violence, his hands on my skin. But deep down, I wanted him because I knew he’d decimate the fucking world for me and not feel a shred of remorse.

“Come on,” I said, grabbing his hand and pulling him towards the door. “We need to leave now or we’re never going to leave.”

“I’m okay with that,” Thane said grinning. “I quite like the idea of chaining you to the radiator, so you’ll never leave.”

I smiled over my shoulder at him. “There aren’t any radiators in here.”

“That won’t stop me.” He tapped a finger against his chin. “Perhaps I’ll just chain you to my bed instead.”

I shrugged a shoulder. “I wouldn’t mind that.”

Thane scoffed. “I won’t ever let you go.”

I stepped closer, lifted my hand, and cupped his face. “I’m not trying to leave.”

“Good,” he said brushing a kiss across my lips. “Because I won’t ever let you leave. You’re trapped with me. Forever.”

And I liked the sound of that. Being trapped. Having no escape. There was something primal about it. Something insane and it had my blood heading south.

“Whatever thought has your eyes darkening, hold it. We need to get to the vault and if we start exploring this thing between us now, we won’t leave a bed for days.” When we finally gave in fully, I wanted to have the time to learn everything that makes him groan, and sigh, and shout ‘more’. We didn’t have that time right now, but I knew the anticipation would only make the moment we finally gave in so much more pleasurable.

Thane gave me one last lingering look that had my skin heating, then brushed past me without another word and giving me an eyeful of his fine ass.

“Come on, Atticus. Stop staring at my ass,” he shouted without even looking over his shoulder. I grinned and ran after him, feeling lighter about everything than I had in days. Things were finally feeling right.

Chapter Thirty-Four



Roux

The Vault was loud. It was a human club so didn't take into account supernaturals that might be visiting. I didn't have super hearing, but Magnus and the twins were wincing as we strode through the club. It was places like this that pissed me off. It was run by a God but wasn't a place for all supes. It just fuelled the tension between humans and anyone else who was 'other' and, if I were being honest, I think Prometheus was doing it to stir up shit because he was bored. I think I'd be bored if I'd been trapped in the same place for millennia.

Bright strobes flashed, their neon colours burning the backs of my eyeballs. I wanted to get to the back of the club where the offices were but making my way through the swathes of sweaty bodies, swaying and grinding against each other, was hard going. But we finally made it.

Only to be stopped by a troll.

The guy was huge and the first supernatural I'd sensed other than us. His shoulders were wider than the door frame, the black tee struggling to wrap around his wide barrel of a chest. His face was ruddy, his nose wide and his beady little eyes were watching us with suspicion.

"Hi," I said with a cheery tone and little wave.

"What do you lot want?" the troll asked, his voice as gravelly as stone.

I checked his name tag and smiled. "Glen? Your name is Glen?" He frowned even harder and a muscle in his jaw twitched. "I thought trolls were called things like Borg, or Boar or at least Butch?"

"I'm only half troll and my mum was human. Glen was her dad's name."

Oomph. Now I felt awkward. "It's a lovely name."

The guys snickered behind me, and I could have slapped the lot of them.

Glen folded his tree trunk arms across his chest and widened his stance. "What do you want?"

I couldn't blame the guy for his snappish tone. "I'm sorry. Let me start again. Hi Glen, is Prometheus in?"

His eyes narrowed and he fixed me with a hard stare. One I held and gave right back. I wasn't backing down, no matter how intimidating this guy tried to be.

“He is, but he’s occupied. Come back tomorrow.”

“Can’t do that buddy. I need to see him now.”

His spine straightened. “You need to leave.”

“Not gonna happen. Now, if I could just—”

Atticus stepped next to me and placed a hand on my shoulder. “Allow me, kitten.”

Glen eyed the Metus demon warily and I knew why. Atticus was the epitome of intimidating with his cold stare, unusual eyes, and the fact that he didn’t give off any power essence at all. It was a little creepy not to know how powerful someone was, especially if they were looking at you like they were imagining twenty different ways to slice you into little pieces.

I watched as Glen’s eyes went wide. A chill permeated the air and darkness began to seep into the edges of my vision. Jeez, Atticus was powerful. I could feel his magic brushing against my skin, a whisper of a caress that had goosebumps erupting along my arms.

A whimper cut through the air right before Glen fell to the floor, landing in a large heap of limbs. His legs twitched and his eyes moved rapidly behind his eyelids.

“What did you do to the guy?” Rafe asked as he peered over Atticus’ shoulder.

“Just gave him a mild nightmare.” Atticus stepped over the unconscious troll. “Come on. His mind was stronger than I thought, and this won’t hold him for long.”

“Sorry, Glen,” I mumbled as I stepped over him and followed Atticus down the corridor. The rest of the guys fell into step behind me and together, we strode down towards the main office. I could still hear the thumping music, albeit much quieter back here, and the bass line still vibrated through the floor beneath my feet.

“When was the last time you saw Prometheus?” I asked Thane as he fell into step beside me.

“It has been a while. A few decades. Long before this place was built.” Thane paused by a window that overlooked the dancefloor of the main club. “He’s always been fascinated by humanity. I’m not surprised he built something where he could watch them freely.”

Thane had a point. A club was a fascinating way to watch people. There were lovers, fighters, friends, enemies. Deals were struck and alliances made. It was hedonistic and indulgent. The perfect place to watch humans.

I’d gotten so lost in staring at the humans that I didn’t notice that everyone had wandered off apart from Rayne. He stepped up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist. He pressed his nose into my hair and took a deep breath. “Come on. This isn’t where you need to be.”

I leant into his embrace, relishing in his comfort. I met his gaze in the reflection of the window. “And where am I supposed to be?”

He pushed me forwards and I had to brace my hands on the window to stop myself from crashing into it. He crowded into

my space, pushing his chest against my back, and pinning me to the glass. “You’re supposed to be here. With me. With Rafe.”

I arched backwards, grinding against him, thrilled when he growled low by my ear.

He nipped the edge of my jaw. “Stop that.”

“Why?”

“Because I will finger fuck your wet cunt until you scream.” His tongue licked the length of my neck, eliciting a moan from deep in my throat. “But I can’t do that. I’m not allowed.”

“Rules were made to be broken,” I said as I rubbed my ass against his erection. Fuck, the guy felt huge through his pants. I bet he was hiding a monster in there.

“Not these ones.”

“Rayne...”

“No, Roux.” He pressed me harder into the glass, until there was no space left between me or him. “I can’t lose you. I won’t.”

“Rayne, *please*.”

A whimper sounded by my ear, right before a growl and suddenly, I wasn’t facing the glass anymore. Suddenly, I was looking at a pair of amber orbs, filled with lust and anger. “Rafe, forgive me.”

Air rushed from my lungs as he pushed me backwards until I slammed into the window. Then he was on me. His hand

tangled in my hair. His teeth sharp against my neck. Another hand frantically unbuttoning my trousers until his fingers slipped through my aching folds.

“Rayne,” I cried, his name a goddamn prayer on my lips. “Kiss me.”

His mouth captured mine with a tenderness I hadn’t expected, given how he’d just attacked me. his lips were soft, and Gods, how I’d dreamt of their taste, of how they’d feel, how—

“Rayne, no!” Rafe shouted, before body slamming his twin.

Rayne’s growl was positively feral as he fell to the floor, his eyes wild and teeth snapping.

“What the hell has gotten into you?” Rafe growled as he wrestled Rayne on the floor, pinning his twin beneath him.

“Rafe, stop! You’re hurting him!” I went to push Rafe, but I paused when I saw the desperate longing in his eyes.

“Roux. Go.”

“I—”

“Just go!” he shouted. And I did. I left Rayne scrambling to reach me whilst his twin fought to hold him back. What the hell had just happened?

Chapter Thirty-Five



Magnus

Roux came running down the corridor with tears in her eyes. I tried to capture her, but she dodged my grip. I glanced at Atticus, and he looked just as puzzled as I did, and Thane just stared in Roux's direction with curiosity. I had no idea what went through his head. I don't think he was wired like the rest of us, not that I had anything against that, I just probably needed to take some time to figure him out.

"You go after Roux," I said to Atticus, "and I'll check on the twins."

He gave me a nod and then headed in her direction, Thane following like a lost little puppy. I started in the direction that we'd come from, backtracking down the corridor, until I reached a sight that I never thought I'd see. Rafe had Rayne

pinned in a headlock on the floor and both of them were straining against each other.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Trying to stop him from going after Roux,” Rafe said through gritted teeth.

“I need her,” Rayne gasped. “She’s mine.”

I stepped closer, trying not to make any sudden movements. The amber of Rayne’s eyes told me his beast was near the surface, trying to break free, and a large, angry Hell Hound was not something I wanted to meet right this moment.

“What happened? Why is he so feral?”

“I don’t know,” Rafe replied, grunting when his grip slipped, and Rayne managed to break free. “Catch him!”

I darted in front of him, using my vampire speed to put myself in his path. He slammed into me, and I stumbled back a step. “Rayne, you need to calm down.”

“No,” he spat, “she’s mine. I will have her.”

A scent of rose petals and vanilla hit my nose. “Can you smell that?”

Rafe sniffed the air near Rayne. “Shit. Is that...?”

“Amatorium. Who the fuck puts a love potion in a corridor?”

Rafe scoffed. “Prometheus would. Just for fucking kicks. I bet he’s watching this on his security feed. Asshole.”

I held Rayne’s gaze, treating him like a wild animal. Well, that’s what he was right now. A wild animal hellbent on

fucking something. Anything that would take the edge of this lust-induced haze he'd fallen into.

"How come it's not affected you?" I asked Rafe, still holding Rayne's gaze.

"It's manmade magic and doesn't always have the same affect on both of us. I might not be going feral, but I can feel the effects of Rayne's lust."

I made the mistake of looking at the bulge in Rafe's trousers. Rayne chose that moment to charge at me, knocking me off my feet and slamming me into the ground. A couple of my ribs cracked with the impact, but I wasn't given time to process it. Rayne fell on top of me, straddling my hips and immediately rocking his against mine, seeking relief.

He sank his teeth into my neck, and I roared at the pain that came with his bite. It wasn't tender or loving. It was animalistic and fuck if that didn't have me hard as a rock.

When he pulled back, my blood dripped down his chin, thick and dark streaks against his skin. He hadn't stopped rocking against me, and I couldn't help the moan that he pulled from me. His hands were frantic as they ripped into my trousers, grabbing my cock, and squeezing almost to the point of pain.

"Fucking hell," I hissed.

Rayne took out his own cock and wrapped his hand around both, making my eyes roll backwards.

"Bite him," Rafe shouted.

“What?” I gasped, succumbing to the wicked sensations of the soft skin of his shaft moving against mine.

Rafe’s face appeared over his twin’s shoulder. “Drink his blood. Remove the magic.”

Yes. That could be possible. It could—fuck. Why was thinking so hard?

Oh, yes. Rayne was currently pumping my cock with alarming speed, making stars appear behind my fucking eyelids.

“Magnus. Now!” Rafe shouted as he wrapped his forearm around his twin’s neck, pinning Rayne and exposing his neck.

I sat up and sank my fangs into Rayne’s neck, sending the three of us tumbling into a ferocious orgasm. Rayne jerked between us, his body surrendering to his release. Hot torrents of cum splashed against my chest and I thanked the Gods Rayne had the sense to lift my shirt before coming all over it. His blood had a tang to it, but the sweetness of his orgasm took away the bitter edge the amatorium had left behind.

I pulled my fangs out of Rayne’s neck and sealed the wound with a swipe of my tongue.

“Fuck me,” I sighed as I fell back to the floor, my ribs healing with the power of Rayne’s blood. The snapping back into place was uncomfortable, but I didn’t mind a little pain with my pleasure.

“One day,” Rafe said with a breathless smile as he looked at me from over Rayne’s shoulder. Rayne currently looked

completely blissed out. Like he was high and lost to the haze.

“What the hell do they put in that potion?” I asked as I watched Rayne slowly return. He blinked rapidly before his eyes refocussed and fell on the mess on my chest.

“What happened?” he asked as he stared at my softening dick. “Why am I holding your dick?”

“Um, you were hit with amatorium, and you went feral,” Rafe said as he slowly removed his hands from his twin. “You attacked Roux and if it weren’t for Magnus, I think you and I would have had a serious falling out.”

Rayne smacked his lips together and his tongue swiped the blood from beneath his lips. Which was hot. My dick twitched in his hands, and he smirked down at me. “Like the idea of me drinking your blood, do you?”

“I’m a vampire, love,” I replied smiling, “anything to do with blood turns me on.”

Rafe groaned and stood up. “Come on, let’s clean up and find the others.” He placed his hands on his hips and shook his head. “Can’t believe I came in my pants. That’s going to be uncomfortable shortly.”

Rayne and I burst into laughter.

“Laugh it up, assholes,” Rafe snarled before fixing me with a hard stare. “I’ll make you lick me clean if you carry on.”

I immediately stopped and my stomach dipped under his intense gaze. But oh, the thought of licking him clean, degrading as it was, turned me on.

“Well, would you look at that, brother?” Rayne hummed as he swiped a hand through the cooling mess on my chest. “Looks like someone might enjoy that.” He pushed his cum covered finger into my mouth and I swallowed our joined essence down like it was my favourite fucking meal. I wrapped my tongue around his finger and took it to the next level. I pricked the end of his finger with my fangs, loving the sound of his hiss at the sting. A drop of his blood mixed with the taste of our cum and holy shit... I got hard all over again.

“I think I’ve just discovered a new kink,” Rafe said, his voice raspy with lust.

“Me too,” Rayne added. “Shame we don’t have time to explore it now.”

He gave a final squeeze of my erection before tucking me back into my pants. I cursed my initiative because now I had to walk around with a fucking hard on.

Rafe was smiling at me, enjoying my obvious discomfort. “Serves you right for laughing at me.”

“Come on,” Rayne said as he pulled me to my feet. I could still feel the cum drying on my chest, but part of me liked knowing it was there. Liked feeling it cracking against my skin as I moved. It felt like a brand, like they’d marked me.

Rayne pulled me to him and placed a tender kiss against my lips. “Thank you for not running from me.”

“I told you,” I said against his mouth, “I’m in this forever. There’s nothing you could do that would make me run away.”

“Still, I—”

I kissed him again to stop him talking. “Stop it. Yes, you broke my ribs, yes, you bit me, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“I broke your ribs?” Rayne said, the colour draining from his face.

“Just a few, but it’s okay, I bit you and your blood healed me. Call it quid pro quo.”

“Baby, I’m so sorry,” he said as he wrapped me in a fierce hug.

“Hey,” I said, rubbing soothing circles on his back. “You were under the affects of a potion. You didn’t know what you were doing and I’m not that fragile. I’m probably less breakable than you are.”

Rayne growled by my ear. “Don’t say things like that.”

I pulled back and looked at the pair of them, their blue eyes suddenly bright with hidden promises. “Why?”

“Because we might put your limits to the test,” Rafe said, his voice a rumble that I felt all the way to my toes.

I leant closer and dropped my voice to a whisper. “I’m counting on it.”

Chapter Thirty-Six



Roux

Where were they? What had happened to make Rayne act like that?

“Roux?” Atticus’ voice was hesitant.

“I’m here.” I’d found a room with an open doorway to hide away in whilst I pulled myself together. I hoped Rayne was alright. The look in his eyes as Rafe pinned him to the ground would be burned in my mind forever. I’d never seen him look so wild and desperate. For me. And while I loved that I finally knew what his lips tasted like, I hated that it was clearly because he’d been under some kind of magic. It was the only explanation I could think of for why Rayne was suddenly acting so unusually.

Atticus stepped up and folded me into his arms. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, just worried about Rayne.”

“He’ll be fine,” Thane said confidently as he leant against the wall behind him. “I’m more concerned about how many more booby traps Prometheus has left before we reach his office.”

“You think there’s more?” I asked.

Thane nodded and tucked his hands into his pockets. “Possibly. His favourite thing is playing with people. He likes to poke and prod them, pushing them until they snap.”

“Well, it’s probably a good thing that magic doesn’t affect the dead,” I said. Magic could only work on those with a heartbeat, and since the three of us were already dead or, in Thane’s case Death itself, I was betting we were safe from whatever other potions Prometheus might have stashed on his way to his office.

“I wouldn’t count on magic being the only defence,” Thane mused as he stepped towards the bookcase, no doubt enjoying the other God’s organisational skills. His fingers trailed over the neatly placed leather spines but stopped when there was an unmistakable, large click.

“Um, that sounded ominous.” I stepped away from Atticus and wandered further into the room. It was an open space with a few chairs, a low table and there was a small kitchen on the opposite side to the bookshelf.

I took another step forward and the floor gave way beneath my feet, plummeting me into instant darkness.

“Roux!”

I landed a few feet below the room and looked up to see the guys staring back at me. The twins and Magnus had joined the others, and I was glad to see Rayne was back to looking like his usual surly self.

“What are you doing down there?” Magnus asked.

“The floor gave way,” I replied.

“I’m coming down,” Atticus said but he didn’t get the chance to follow through on that. The hatch above me closed with a resounding snap.

Scuffling feet and muffled voices filtered through, but I couldn’t hear what they were saying. Probably despairing over me being down here and how could they get themselves down here to rescue me. Sometimes I think they forgot I was a fucking Reaper.

I pulled my scythe from the shadows, the magical runes casting a soft glow in the darkness, and prepared myself for whatever Prometheus liked to keep under his staff room. There was a loud thud on the floor above me and I had to roll my eyes. Either they were trying to dig through the floor, or someone was arguing.

It was nice though. Having someone trying to reach you despite being so far away. It was more about having their support and knowing they were trying to get to me so they could help me. I wasn’t on my own, and that was kind of comforting. The twins had always been there for me, battling

souls by my side, but as I listened to the guys arguing above my head, I realised I had more in my corner than I had before. Whilst Sabine had been right, I didn't feel like I'd belonged in the Underworld, I did feel like I belonged with them. They were my home. My north star. They were what guided me and kept me going, and I wouldn't have it any other way. It was why I was so worried and, if I were being honest, terrified, about taking things further with the twins. I loved what we had already and yes, I wanted more, but the cost of having our connection severed was just too high a price to pay if we were caught.

With that thought swirling around me like a warm blanket, I stepped further into the darkness. My night vision wasn't finding anything, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being watched. The hairs on the back of my neck prickled and I swear I could feel a breath brush against my skin.

A mechanical grinding ripped through the air, like giant cogs slotting together and groaning.

"Who's there?" I shouted. The noises above me stopped and I suddenly felt very alone.

A soft orange glow started to emerge from the shadows in front of me, like the embers of a dying fire. And was it me, or was it moving closer?

Nope. It was definitely moving closer.

Two red orbs appeared about twelve feet off the ground. *Please don't be eyes...* but with the way they just blinked, I think my prayers went unanswered on that one. Closer the

creature came until it stepped fully into the weak light cast by the runes on my scythe.

I had never seen anything like this before. He – if it even was a ‘he’—stood twice my height, with large horns, the head of a bull and built out of metal and fire. A large ring sat in the end of his nose and a huge sword was in his hand. My scythe suddenly felt very puny in my hands.

The beast rushed me, and I instinctively rolled out the way, avoiding his large feet. He stopped in his tracks and swivelled his large head round to look at me. I backed up and hunched my thighs, bracing for the next impact. I wasn’t stupid. I knew my limits and this guy was potentially beyond my combat skills. I was used to fighting wayward souls and the occasional idiot who decided to make the wrong decision, but this guy. Fuck. I needed help.

“Guys?!”

No one responded. Shit. I was on my own. At least for now.

The beast snarled at me, his breath huffing out his nose. He slid one foot backwards, readying himself for the moment he’d charge. The silence stretched between us as I waited for the inevitable. I wasn’t sure I was going to survive this.

Then he rushed me.

I sidestepped but couldn’t quite get out of the way. His weight slammed into me and knocked me off my feet. I went flying through the air before landing on my back with a thud.

A sharp crack had me wincing. Fuck, a cracked rib. I didn't have time to stop and heal it. I needed to fight.

Come on, Roux. Get up.

I stood, my stance a little wobbly after that hit, but I stared the beast down and beckoned him closer with a grin on my face.

He snorted and charged again. He swung his sword high in the air and I brought my scythe in front of me to block it. The impact juddered up through my limbs and fuck... that was painful.

My body took over then, using all my power and battling the beast with me. For something so big, it moved fast. And that sword. Wow. It was big. And sharp. It nicked my thigh and boy, did that sting like a motherfucker.

"You're gonna pay for that!"

The beast just growled back at me.

"Not much of a talker?"

He lunged at me again, knocking me backwards.

"I'll take that as a no then."

His hand slammed into my chest, winding me. I stepped back and tripped over something. I landed on my ass and then pain exploded in my shoulder. I looked down and saw a Hellfire blade sticking out.

"Motherfucker!" I yelled at the beast before yanking the thing back out. The blade clattered to the floor and shit, my

arm felt heavy. I needed to find a way to beat this guy and fast.

I looked at the beast again, taking in the way it was constructed. There were metal panels slotted together to make a rigid shell, but I could see the glow beneath. Maybe I could get my scythe in one of the gaps. The very thin, tiny, seemingly difficult to see gaps. Yeah. That would work. Surely?

The beast charged again and as he swung his sword high I ducked and struck at the gap where his rib cage would be.

The blow glanced off him and sparked. Well, shit. That definitely wasn't going to work.

Was there a bigger gap? Or...

Wait. I was an idiot.

I was a fucking Reaper! If it had life, I could kill it. If I weren't dodging that bloody sword, I'd face palm myself.

I pulled my Reaper form from the shadows and reached out with my magic. I could sense the guys above me, the twins and Magnus giving off more vibrant auras than Thane and Atticus. The beast in front of me felt strange. He wasn't dead, but he wasn't alive in the normal sense of the word. His life felt manufactured. Powered by something, but I couldn't put my finger on what.

His sword came down again and oops, I was doing too much thinking. That was a bit too close for comfort.

I sent my magic out, reaching for the mechanical spark that I could sense in his chest. The runes on my scythe grew brighter

as my power intensified. Fuck it. I didn't have time to play around. I threw everything I had at the beast, searching out the spark of life in his chest. It was there, a bright white ember glowing behind his solar plexus. I wrapped my magic around it and froze.

A cold chill crept along my arms. Well, that was weird. That didn't usually happen.

The chill travelled deep into my bones, up my arms before settling in my chest and heading for my toes.

Panic started to set in. This didn't normally happen when I threw this much power at a soul. Normally I'd just be able to touch the soul and retrieve it. This was something else.

It fought back.

The beast snorted and huffed a breath. Was that a laugh?

Fuck. I don't think my magic was having any effect other than making me cold.

I dug deep inside, throwing more power into the retrieval until I'd nearly depleted my magic.

"Why won't you just die?!" I shouted.

It snorted again and took a step forwards, almost like he was battling against a severe windstorm.

I was running out of time. I'd manage to make the spark in the beast dim, but that was it. I was running out of power but still the beast kept coming forwards.

I yelled as I dug into the depths of my core for anything that would help.

Something dark answered.

Something I'd never felt before.

It unfurled slowly, thick and gloopy like oil, but it was power like I'd never felt before. I didn't know what it was, but I was sure going to use it. It blasted out of me, slamming into the beast and knocking him backwards. An awful groan of metal rent the air and the beast shuddered but still wouldn't go down.

The dark power within me grew as I tapped into more of it. I could feel it seeping from me, overflowing now that it had been unleashed.

Oh, Gods. I couldn't control it.

It slipped through my fingers, and I couldn't reel it back in.

Shit. I tried to claw it back. Tried to pull it back in but it just poured out of me.

The beast sank to his knees, yelling and groaning. At least I was taking him down.

Just a few seconds more. I gritted my teeth as pain started to sink into my body, spreading like wildfire.

I pushed and pushed, clenching my jaw and tightening my limbs. I ignored the pain, I'd deal with that later.

"Come on," I shouted. "Just a bit more!"

Until finally, I pulled that spark right out of him. The metal plate that sat on his chest exploded outward and there was a look of shock in his wide eyes. He fell to his knees, his metal joints creaking and shrieking as he toppled over.

I did it! I actually did... whoa. A wave of dizziness had my body trembling and my feet suddenly felt unsteady on the ground.

I fumbled to try and hold something to steady myself but there was nothing around me. Just miles of darkness.

The runes on my scythe flickered before blinking out. Then the whole scythe vanished.

That wasn't good.

My knees buckled just as the hatch above me opened again. A bright light came from somewhere in front of me and I assumed my killing the beast had released the locks.

But I couldn't get my limbs to work. I felt so sleepy.

I fell to the ground, all my energy seeping from my body. And as I drifted off into unconsciousness I heard a deep rumble call to me from the shadows.

Soon, my love. Soon.

Chapter Thirty-Seven



Roux

I came to with a jolt. The brightest light assaulted my eyes as I opened them and I screwed them tight again. Jeez, that was bright. I tried again, but slower to let my eyes adjust.

I was on a sofa in a fancy office overlooking the dance floor below. The wall in front of me was made up of square glass panels put together like a mosaic. I sat up, watching the people moving and swaying together. They moved with such freedom, with such abandonment that it was actually quite enticing to watch.

“It’s fascinating, isn’t it?” a voice rasped behind me. It was slow and measured and sounded like there was a wisdom beyond anything I could ever comprehend contained in each syllable. So, when I looked behind me and saw a young man stood with a glass of red wine, I was surprised. He didn’t look

older than twenty-five, with sandy blonde hair brushed back from his forehead apart from one lock that fell forward, making him look more boyish.

“Prometheus?”

“Hello, Roux. I’ve been dying to meet you.” He laughed and it was as dark and rich as the wine in his glass.

“I hear you die a little bit every day.”

He took a sip of wine, the liquid staining his plump lips for a moment before his tongue darted out to swipe the lingering drops. It was a very sensual movement and had my eyes lingering on his mouth for far too long.

“Yes. That’s my punishment,” he said with a slow nod. “But you received a punishment that was much worse than mine.”

“What?”

He sat next to me on the sofa and placed his glass on a side table. He then cupped my face with his warm, calloused hands and stared deeply into my eyes. I don’t know why I let him but something about him made me feel calm.

His eyes were like liquid silver, mercurial and ever shifting, and as I gazed into them I got lost in their depths. It was like staring into the maw of a void. A vastness that held me captive.

Until he blinked and reality snapped back into place.

“What did you just do?” I asked, as he reclined back into the sofa.

“Searched for some answers.” He smiled softly and I couldn’t decide what this guy was about. He was gorgeous, all Gods were, but I couldn’t get a grip on his intentions.

“Did you find them?”

He shook his head and tapped the end of his finger on the centre of my forehead. “There’s something blocking me.”

Huh. I wondered if that was the same thing as what Atticus had seen and felt.

“Someone else has delved in there, haven’t they?” Prometheus asked, his eyebrow quirked. “What did they find?”

“Nothing,” I replied. “They found the wall too, tried to push through it and ended up unconscious.”

He rested his chin on his hand, his arm along the back of the sofa, looking relaxed. “Fascinating.”

“Is it?”

“Yes.” He nodded eagerly. “You remind me of someone but I can’t quite put my finger on who.”

“Nyx,” I said.

His head tipped to the side and his eyes roamed my face. “Yes. Why didn’t I see it before?”

“Some sort of spell.”

“It would have to be a powerful one. To make everyone who knew her forget what she looks like.”

“Yes, but we don’t know how or why it was done. And we don’t know how I fit into all this.” It was only then that I realised I was on my own. “Where are the others?”

Prometheus smiled again, but this one was full of mischief. He stood and held out his hand. “Come with me.”

I took his hand and he helped me to my feet. I was a little unsteady on them for a moment, but his sure grip kept me upright. Once I was steady, he let go of my hand and walked to a wall of TV monitors all displaying different areas of the building. The dance floor, the back offices, Glen still passed out on the floor.

“Sorry about your troll.”

Prometheus shrugged. “He’ll get over it. He doesn’t hold grudge.”

“That’s surprising.” Trolls were renowned for not just holding grudges, but nurturing them until they turned into festering pools of hate.

“He’s only part troll. His mum was human so he inherited some of her traits. Makes him a better troll, in my opinion.”

My eyes drew to the screen where the guys were. They were still in the staff room, but they weren’t arguing. In fact, they looked like they were in a determined debate.

“They seem very dedicated to finding you,” Prometheus remarked, his eyes glued to the screen. “I wonder what it is that draws them to you? What inspires such dedication?”

I watched the five of them, huddled with their heads together. Magnus sat between the twins, their arms and legs touching, and Thane had Atticus sat on the floor between his legs. The simple connection I could see between them all had my heart warming just a little more.

“Love.”

“What?” Prometheus asked as he turned to face me.

“The answer to your question. It’s love.”

He turned back to the screen, his hands stuffed in his pockets and a weariness that had his shoulders curving towards the floor. “Why are you here Roux?”

“Don’t you already know?”

“Yes,” he said with a soft smile. “But it’s nice to hear the words.”

“We need to get into the vault.”

He faced me again, those mercurial eyes fixing me with a hard stare. “I know I won’t be able to change your mind, but I’m going to say it anyway. The likelihood of you coming out alive is low. Unbelievably low. I’m asking you not to go.”

“I have to. I need to know how I’m connected to Nyx, what happened to the Diadem and why creatures are going missing.”

“And you think the answer is in the vault?”

I placed my hand on his arm and gave him my best puppy eyes. “Yes. It has to be.”

He took a deep breath and lowered his head. “I don’t usually ask twice but something about you makes me want to.”

“Well, I’ll take that as a compliment. But my answer will still be the same.”

He gave my hand a fond pat and sighed. “Follow me. We’ll grab your men on the way.”

“They’re not my men.”

He merely chuckled and left the room. I took another look at the wall of monitors, my gaze drawing to the one in the bottom right corner. It was pitch black and at first, I thought it was off, but then I saw the time stamp in the corner and knew it was a live feed.

One word ricocheted around my brain as I stared at it.

Soon.

Chapter Thirty-Eight



Roux

The guys had been pissed when I strolled in the room with Prometheus in tow and it had taken them a minute to calm down. They checked over every inch of me until I batted their hands away. They were still eyeballing me now, even as we walked deeper into the belly of Prometheus' prison.

Apparently, we only faced the booby traps because we forced our way past Glen, but as we were now being escorted by the Keeper of the Vault, we wouldn't face anymore until we'd got past the entrance of the vault itself.

I followed behind Prometheus as the corridors got narrower, the lighting faded further and doom seemed to be more imminent.

“Are we nearly there yet?” Magnus drawled from the back of the convoy.

Prometheus chuckled. “Patience is the best remedy for every trouble, vampire, but yes, we’re nearly there.”

He then threw open the next set of double doors with a flourish and there, right in the middle of the floor, was a large stone door. The low light of the fire lit porches flickered over the intricate carvings that covered the surface. They were twisting lines, and knotted curls, crisscrossing in a beautiful design that was absolutely stunning.

It was definitely ancient. I could feel the reverence in the magic that had built this door and it made me a little bit worried about how we were going to get in and what kind of things we’d find down there.

“How do we get in there?” Atticus asked Prometheus.

“I’ll tell you in a minute. But first,” Prometheus said in an ominous tone before fixing his eyes on me, “I need you to promise me something.”

I raised my brow and folded my arms across my chest. “Why?”

“Because without me, you’ll never get down there.”

“Don’t, Roux,” Rafe said sternly. “You don’t know what he’ll ask of you.”

“But if that’s the price we need to pay to get in there, surely it’s worth it?” I asked the others. They all stared back with concern and worry in their eyes but none of them said

anything. Guess that was my answer. "Okay, what do you need?"

Prometheus' eyes went wild with anticipation and a chill ran up my spine. Shit. He wasn't going to ask for anything easy.

"I want the key to this," he said as he held up his arm and revealed a small silver bangle.

It was covered in runes and delicate markings that ran the length of it. "Is this the cuff that binds you here?"

"Yes," he replied with a nod. "I want you to bring me the key."

Thane came to stand next to me and looked at the cuff. "We probably shouldn't interfere, Roux."

"But?" I totally felt like there was a but coming there.

"I never agreed with Zeus' punishment so I say we get the key." Thane held his hand out to Prometheus. "Use me to bond the pledge to."

"No, Thane. Let me," I said, grabbing his wrist.

He looked at me warmly. "I don't mind. Besides, you're already bound to the Fates. Let me do this. Let me help."

Well, when he put it that way, how could I say no?

Prometheus stepped closer and gripped Thane's forearm. He whispered the binding spell and a small symbol appeared on Thane's skin. It was a little triangle, the sign for fire, Prometheus' element.

“If we’re looking for it, we might as well know what it looks like,” Atticus said, ever the pragmatist.

“I’ve got no idea,” Prometheus replied with a weak laugh.

“Great,” Rafe huffed.

“I only know it’s done there because I can sense the power that binds it to the cuff.” Prometheus moved to the edge of the door carved into the floor. “I won’t lie to you, Roux. You’ll be challenged in a way that will test your limits, and the limits of those you love. Be true to yourself and hopefully you’ll make it through.”

The guys gathered around the edge of the door with me and a moment of panic struck me to my core. I looked at the men that had glued themselves to my side, who were putting their lives on line merely because they wanted to be with me. It both humbled and terrified me.

“You don’t have to come with me,” I said with more confidence than I felt.

Atticus stepped closer and took my hand. “Yes we do, kitten. We’re all with you. Every step of the way.”

I squeezed his hand back and looked at all the men surrounding me. I’d never felt like I’d belonged with them more than I did right at that moment.

“Okay,” I said. “Let’s do this.”

“Here we go, then,” Prometheus said before walking to the wall and pressing one of the panels. There was a loud click

followed by the sound of a large groan before the stone door started to part in the middle.

“That’s it,” Rafe said.

“That’s how easy it is to get in?” Rayne added.

Prometheus laughed again, his silver eyes bright in the low light. “Getting in is the easy bit, getting out...”

He didn’t need to finish the sentence. We all understood the danger we were about to face but we were going to go anyway. We had to. We needed to know what happened to the diadem, what happened to Nyx and now we needed to see if we could find Prometheus’ key too.

I looked over the edge and it was like looking into the maw of a void.

I gulped. “How do we get down?”

“Jump,” Prometheus replied.

Of course that was what we needed to do. Why did I even bother to ask?

“Alright. Here we go.”

Then I jumped into the blackness and hoped I landed on my feet.



I seemed to be falling for ages until I landed on the ground with a thud. The impact jarred my legs and I nearly fell

forwards and smashed my face into the ground. I heard a series of echoing thuds around me and knew the guys had dropped next to me. I pulled my scythe out of the shadows and put some energy into the runes. It was pitch black down here, so the light did little other than tell me who was standing where.

“Now, we need a plan,” I said. Heavens forbid we got split up. “We stick together, and we fight together.”

“Agreed,” Thane said.

Everyone else nodded in agreement, even if their expressions didn’t quite match their answer. I knew that everything down here was going to challenge us. We’d probably be in situations where we would be fighting to the death, but I also knew we stood a better chance standing together and so did they.

“Right. Come on, gang,” I said with false bravado. “Let’s go solve this mystery.”

There was a chorus of chuckles but the guys started moving forwards. Well, what I assumed was forwards. I couldn’t see a fucking thing beyond the nose on my—

Heat exploded in my core and the hairs on the back of my neck stood to attention. “Guys.”

They all stopped and looked at me.

“I think there’s someone here,” I whispered.

The ghost of a touch trailed across my cheek and a whisper of a breath caressed my ear.

“Hello little thief. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Oh, fuck.

To be continued...

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About the Author

Bailey Grayson lives in Cheshire, England with her two children and wonderfully supportive husband. Coffee and cake are usually found nearby to help fuel the writing (lemon cake is her favourite) and when she is not dreaming up new characters and fantastical worlds you can find her baking (usually lemon cake), playing the piano or tucked up on the sofa with a really good book.

Bailey likes to write paranormal fantasy, urban fantasy and books that are a little darker with villains you wouldn't mind meeting.

Want to stay in touch, drop her a message or stalk her? (Go on! She won't mind!)

Then you can find her in the following places:

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