

SLEEP DIVUL

A PARANORMAL STEPBROTHER ROMANCE NOVELLA

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Step Devil 2

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A Word of Warning

Since this is the second installment in The Bishop Rituals duet, you should know the drill. Though this is a small novella, it packs a punch. Some of the content within may not be suitable for all readers. Even if you're returning to Bishop, please be aware that this book contains blood play, horror elements, revenge, parental death, gore, cult violence, cutting, breath play and fear play.

Chapter One

LORE

My mother's cries echoed down the hall, muffled by the duct tape covering her mouth. The terror in them was still unmistakable though.

I couldn't blame her. She'd just witnessed her new husband get stabbed to death no less than seventeen times.

As I'd stood there and watched Titus Leeds thrust the knife into his father's chest cavity, I'd counted.

If I were any other girl, I would have run as far away from Titus Leeds, this twisted town and the Pine Barrens as I could get. The backwoods community of Bishop was the place where outsiders came to die.

My mother had married their leader. It had all been a trap, to feed her soul to the Jersey Devil.

And mine too.

But my new stepbrother was only a half-devil. His cruelty had just been his way of trying to get me to run. That hadn't worked.

So then he'd shifted and shown me his horns. His fangs. His claws. His monstrous tongue.

If anything, those things were just incentives for a monster-smut aficionado like me to stay.

Hearing him tell our parents he planned to consume my soul before the cult could get their hands on it should have been the final straw. That was the part where horror, fear or sheer human survival instincts should have been pushing me to put as much distance between me and my brutal stepbrother as possible.

Arousal was the last thing that should've been sweeping through my core and turning my insides molten.

What in the actual fuck was wrong with me? The list was long.

I was falling in love with Titus, a man I'd known for barely two whole days.

The fact that he was half devil just sweetened the deal, because I was what the internet coined a "monster fucker."

I'd watched a man die. There had been so much blood...

My mother, tied to the bed beside him, had reacted like any human should. And I had felt... empty. Not a trace of pity. Nothing. Nada. Zip.

I'd have felt sorry for her if it hadn't been for the fact that she'd offered me up to Titus in exchange for her freedom.

I was well aware of the fact that Gloria Brooks was a selfish person. But going as far as to sacrifice her daughter for her own survival? Would she have said that if she'd known it was me standing beside Titus? He'd made me wear his cult mask because he hadn't wanted me to be the last thing his father saw when he died.

Now, it provided me insight into the true depths of my mother's selfishness.

Slowly, a new emotion started to seep its way into my heart like poison.

"You're angry," my stepbrother murmured as we stepped into the hall, the door to our parents' room clicking shut behind him.

I turned, leaning my back against the wall as the strength in my legs seemed to vanish. "Can you always do that? Read me like a book?"

Titus was tall, and his lithe body was packed with muscle. His dark hair spilled over his eyes, but I could still make out the hot slivers of his mismatched gaze slicing through me.

Bitter tears blurred my vision until all I saw was the glowing white eye drawing closer as he approached.

His heat licked over my flesh as he pressed in, pushing me against the wall.

"Yes," he rasped as he tore his mask off my face to expose my teary eyes. "I'm more in tune with you than I ever wanted to be, Lorelei. I'm aware of every single beat of your heart.

Every twitch of your pussy as you set your pretty eyes on me. Every sweet breath you breathe. Every tear..."

He arched down, then dragged his hot tongue over my tear-swollen cheeks. Tasting them. "They all belong to me now. So don't let all this human shit bother you. It's not your concern anymore. It's mine. They are my burden now."

I sighed against him, enjoying the shocking heat of his tongue against my skin paired with the smooth steel of his barbell piercing. "You don't own me, Titus. Not until you claim my soul. I'm waiting."

The devil pulled back, his lips tipping into a dark smirk that stretched the scar on his face. "Are you really so impatient to be devoured, little lamb?"

Every sinew in my belly strung tight at his words. "Don't tell a girl you're going to eat her soul if you're not going to follow through, you fucking tease."

His eyes flashed, then his hand was on my throat, squeezing just enough to leave me gasping against the collar of his tatted hand.

"You think this is a game, Lore? I'm not like you. I'm a devil. Days ago, I was going to sacrifice your soul to my ancestor, just to get him off my fucking back. Now I've decided to keep it for myself."

The hunger in his voice sent a rush of heat through my core. I squirmed, vainly trying to escape. He laughed.

“There’s no getting away from me. You had your chance. Now it’s too late.” He leaned down, his breath a hot caress over my lips. “Now you’re mine. And I’ll do anything to keep it that way. Even if it means claiming you as my own sacrifice to keep you from the Jersey Devil’s clutches.”

“Titus...I don’t want to escape you. I should, but I don’t.” My words were strangled, laced with pleasure and pain. “You’re saving me.”

“*Saving you?*” he growled.

There was a glint of silver and a flash of red. He brandished a knife seemingly from nowhere. It was the same one he’d used to slay his father, still dripping with his blood. He brought the weapon to his mouth and ran his tongue over the flat of the blade, licking up every last trace of blood.

His hand dropped from my throat and was replaced with the knife’s point.

“Make no fucking mistake, little lamb. I’m not saving you. Either they capture you and the Elder One eats you...or I do. Either way, you’re screwed.”

I swallowed, the blade nicking my skin at the twitch of my throat. Titus’s mismatched eyes turned wolfish as they tracked the bead of blood pooling in the hollow of my throat.

This man was more than just my stepbrother. He was a lethal monster, and he was starving. Not just for my body, or even my soul. Titus Leeds was starving for love and acceptance.

Because he'd never gotten it from his father, just like I'd never gotten it from my mom.

Maybe that's what made us so ravenous for one another. We were desperate to suck, fuck and take whatever we could to fill our shriveled black hearts.

I pushed onto my toes, ignoring the blade, and licked his lips until they parted on a low growl. "We're both damned, Titus. And if we're destined for Hell, we might as well enjoy the fall."

Chapter Two

TITUS

The taste of my new little sister on my lips did dark things to me. My darkest, most primal urges hungered for her in ways I'd never experienced before.

I needed to own every drop of her. Her blood. Her tears. I wanted to be the one to make her bleed and weep, just so I could be the one to stitch her wounds and dry her tears.

I didn't just crave Lorelei Brooks, I loved her. And the thought of losing her to the same fucked-up cult that had taken my mother terrified me to my marrow.

In the few days I'd known her, she'd become my drug. My reason for living.

I needed her like I needed air in my lungs.

I hadn't been exaggerating when I told Lore that I intended to own every bit of her. My obsession for this annoying little human was getting out of hand. For three long years, all I'd cared about was giving my father the death he deserved.

I'd lost count of the nights I'd laid in bed, plotting my revenge. The fantasies had been disturbing, and highly detailed. Skinning him. Cutting off his body parts slowly, cooking him and making him eat his own organs as his hacked-up system fought to survive using the nutrients of his own body.

In the end, all he'd gotten were a few stabs to the chest.

That would have pissed me off to no end just a week ago. But now? I didn't care. It stopped being about retribution the day my offering crashed into my chest with her moving box filled with monster smut and sex toys.

My hatred for my father had been a disease, and Lorelei was my cure. Now it was time to save her from these godforsaken woods.

Too bad there was no one to save her from me.

I threw the knife to the ground and ran my thumb over the tiny slash on her throat.

Her red blood stained my skin, its metallic tang filling me with a primal lust that had me growling.

Her tiny body tightened at the sound, and the unmistakable scent of her arousal spiked the air. Unable to resist, I pushed my thumb into my mouth and sucked her blood clean.

The way her eyes popped, and her eyelashes fluttered had my cock thickening in my jeans.

It was funny how human she made me feel. At the same time, I never felt more monstrous than I did when I was

around her.

Even as the Keeper's brat, I'd never felt like I belonged in Bishop. My father had bedded the offering meant for the Elder One. I was the unfortunate product of my father's fucked-up nature. Shame incarnate.

Half devil.

Half human.

Full monster.

But with Lore, I was so much more than both my parts. Whether I leaned toward the soul-consuming, demonic side of me or the unsociable backwoods mechanic, she wanted me. In her, I'd found my home.

I wanted to crawl my way inside her and never leave.

My hand moved to caress the back of her skull—sweet at first, then my fingers tangled in her hair and yanked her head back. A tiny squeak left her, which turned to a moan when my other hand undid her jeans before slipping down the front of them and into her panties.

A few strokes to her clit was all it took before her pussy began to drip with her arousal, drenching my fingers. She squirmed, hips searching for more friction.

I pushed a finger inside her, and her inner walls twitched and throbbed at my invasion.

Fuck me dead.

I could feel her heartbeat through her pussy.

My fingers worked her flesh harder, rubbing and thrusting until her muscles began to spasm. “Come on my fingers, baby,” I purred, my tongue painting a lick onto her throat.

It was funny how my defiant little human was such a good girl for me...so long as I was inside her. Her pussy bore down on my fingers. She grew oh-so hot, and her features scrunched up in the prettiest “O” face I’d ever seen.

A swollen moan left her lips, low and winding. A shudder raced through her. Then she pushed me away, looking flustered.

I chuckled, licking my fingers clean as she shakily did up her jeans. “We have to leave now. Go straight to the car. There are a few things I still have to grab.”

My gaze lingered on her ass as she walked away, keeping her in my sights until she disappeared down the staircase.

Getting Lore out of the Pine Barrens was priority number one.

Marking her in every conceivable way possible was priority number two.

I had meant what I’d said. If it came to it, I’d devour her soul in this godforsaken place just to keep it away from the soul-starved Jersey Devil and his fucked-up flock.

I almost felt sorry for her.

Now that my new stepsister belonged to me, she had no idea how fucked she really was.

Chapter Three

LORE

If I were the type of girl who did what she was told, I would have gone straight to the truck, like Titus instructed.

He should have known I wasn't that kind of girl.

When we'd decided we were going to get the hell out of here, we'd quickly packed the car. There was no reason for me to stay in the house. But when I walked past our parents' bedroom, I heard her—my mother's sobs still bleeding through the door.

I shouldn't have stopped to listen to her muffled whimpers, but I did. And they burrowed under my skin, forcing my feet back upstairs.

I waited for the click of Titus's door and peeked into the hall to make sure he'd gone into his room before creeping back to my mom's. My attention snagged on the knife and cult mask still lying on the floor in the hallway.

Stooping to pick them up, I yanked on the mask and fisted the knife before entering the room.

The second I was inside, I paused.

Why had I come in here? To hurt her? No. Titus had asked if I wanted to kill her along with his dad, but I'd let her live. I didn't hate her enough to want her dead.

I wanted answers. Before I could leave with Titus, she had to answer for what she'd said about offering me up in her place.

When I approached the foot of the bed, her sniffing stopped when she noticed me, her face paling. She was shaking, weakly tugging against the bindings holding her wrists to the headboard, trying to escape.

Ezra Leeds' corpse lay beside her. His body was a grotesque mess, with his chest cavity torn open and his horrified expression boring into the popcorn ceiling. His blood had soaked into the sheets, staining everything red.

My mom arched off the mattress in a vain attempt to escape the wet sheets. It was a pitiful scene.

By the look that flashed over her eyes, she thought I'd come back to kill her. She started to sob again, tears cascading down her cheeks. I approached her side of the bed and, with a shaky hand, pointed the knife at her throat. "I'm going to remove the tape. Scream, and I'll kill you."

With her nod, I peeled the tape off.

"L-Lorelei?"

I ripped the mask off, angry tears pricking my eyes. “So you knew it was me?”

“N-No. Not until you just spoke! H-Honey. Please let me go.”

“You told Titus to take me as an offering in your place! You’d have me sacrificed to save your own skin!” My voice started to shake along with the hand holding the knife. “You’ve always been selfish. But this is a new low, even for you.”

Fresh tears rolled down her cheeks. “I didn’t mean it. Oh, honey, you can’t think I meant it.”

“What was I supposed to think? You...you...” My voice broke.

“You didn’t think I meant it, did you? I thought you were another one of *them*. Oh, honey, I never would have brought you here if I had known how twisted Ezra’s son is.”

“Why do you think Titus killed Ezra, mom? He was never in love with you.” I jabbed the knife in the corpse’s direction. “He was the twisted one! He was never a pastor. He leads a cult that worships the Jersey Devil. He never loved you. He lured us here so they could strip us of our souls as offerings to their god. He wasn’t even human. None of them are, except for Titus. His mom was an offering. Ezra lied to her, just like he lied to you.”

By her expression, she thought I was crazy.

Maybe she was right. I was running away with a murderer, after all.

But I wasn't wrong about this. Titus had told me that the entire population of Bishop had descended from the Jersey Devil, the Lord of the Forest. Now they lived in service to him, luring human souls here to keep him strong.

I had seen the proof of what Titus was. I'd felt the ridges of his black horns when I'd held on to them for dear life as he'd fucked me. I'd seen his impossibly long tongue and felt that too.

In fact, the only thing I was certain of when it came to the enigma that was my dickhole of a new stepbrother was that he wasn't human, and that he was probably the only devil in Bishop who didn't want to feed our souls to the Jersey Devil.

"I've seen him, Mom. But he's not like Ezra. Titus is good. He cares about me, even if he likes to pretend he doesn't sometimes. He's more human than devil."

"Then let me come with you! The three of us can escape. We can leave this awful place and get out of here together."

My heart clenched. I didn't need her. But even if we never went on to have a picture-perfect mother-daughter relationship, at least she would be alive. If I let her go, there would always be a chance to have the mom I knew before my dad died.

"Titus has the truck ready. We don't have time to pack anything. You'll have to leave all your precious possessions

here.”

I expected her to put up a fight, and that would push me into leaving her behind. Because there was that lingering anger still in the back of my mind, telling me to.

“Of course, honey. So long as I get to leave here with you. You’re the only thing that matters, baby girl.”

I sucked in a breath.

The only thing that matters.

She’d never told me that before.

I bent down, cut her free and threw the knife down on the bed. “We have to hurry.”

Chapter Four

TITUS

I stood in the middle of my room, glaring at the place I'd called home for my entire life. It had been more like a fucking prison.

I wouldn't miss it. But I still had to take a moment to say goodbye. This house wasn't filled with all bad memories. My mom had done her best to make this a happy place for me. With a sigh, I turned to my dresser and stared at the glittering gold necklace sitting on its surface next to a bunch of random crap I didn't give a shit about.

When I'd buried her, I'd pulled it off her corpse and left it in a place where I could see it every night. It hadn't moved from this spot in years. I picked it up, shoved it in my pocket and stormed out the door without looking back.

My old pickup was where I left it in the garage, with Lore's boxes in the truck bed. I told her to only bring the basics. She hadn't listened. By the weight of the truck bed making the suspension sag, she'd packed mostly just books.

I smiled to myself as I walked into the garage, reached into the back and opened a box labeled “definitely not smut.” I pulled out the first book, noticing how Lore had annotated certain sections with bright paper tabs.

Thumbing to a random page she’d marked, I skimmed the text, my grin widening with every word. It was an anal scene. She’d liked this part. That would be useful information for later.

I wanted to fuck her in ways that would make most human women turn and run. Not Lore, though. She was just as twisted as me.

My cock throbbed at the thought of her wrapped around my fingers minutes ago, and the words she’d said. We were bound for Hell, her and I. Least we could do was have some fun on the fall down.

The front door opening drew my attention to the house. The book tumbled out of my hand as I stared with dumbfounded rage at who followed Lore outside.

She’d let Gloria go.

What in the fuck was she doing?

I charged out of the garage, but I couldn’t move fast enough. Gloria was already racing down the street, screaming at the top of her lungs.

“HELP! Someone please help me! They killed Ezra! They’re murderers!”

Gloria's form disappeared into the thick fog blanketing the road, her shrill cries for help fading as she bolted through town.

Shit. This was bad.

I charged at Lore, anger possessing me like a demon. She stared into the dark of the night, her beautiful eyes glossing over with tears. *Christ*. This little human had me wrapped around her finger so tight that I was fucked. Totally and completely fucked.

I grabbed her wrist more gently than I initially planned and pulled her to the truck. "Come on. Our cover is blown. We have to ditch town *now*."

I got into the driver's seat, jammed the key into the ignition and turned it. The engine to roared to life. Thank fuck I'd gotten the old girl running just a few days ago. I watched Lore as she slid across the bench seat, the slit of her eyes practically glowing as she glared out the windshield.

"All that shit she said. None of it was true. It was just a lie to save herself," she whispered. "I'm an idiot for trusting her."

I fought the urge to pull her into my lap and comfort her. We didn't have time, nor was I really one for comforting people. I didn't know how. But I did know that I wanted to hold her and touch her in ways that would take away her pain, making her feel nothing but me.

Pulling out onto the street, I tore down the road toward Bishop's welcome sign.

Gloria emerged from the fog as the car approached her. She was running across people's yards while screaming bloody murder. Porchlights flipped on, giving the fog an eerie glow.

"The only thing that matters my fucking ass!" Lore snapped, leaning over and taking hold over the steering wheel.

"Lore! What the fuck?" She wrenched the wheel, making the car veer off the road and hurtle straight for Gloria. The woman threw herself out of the way just in time, and my foot slammed for the brake.

It was too late.

The car slammed into a tree. My truck was old, pre-airbags. In her anger and haste, Lore hadn't put on her seatbelt. I shifted, unbridled strength shooting through my limbs as my horns sprouted from my head. My arms banded around her, pulling her against the muscular support my hard body provided. There was still a chance she'd be hurt, but my muscle was a better cushion than my windshield and the tree beyond.

The sound of the impact was like an explosion. We jerked violently as glass cracked and metal crunched. I opened my eyes, scanning the damage.

It was totaled. The front of the truck almost wrapped around the entire tree trunk, and steam poured off the engine.

Fuck. Fuck. *FUCK!*

My attention snapped to the rearview mirror to see front doors opening all down the street. Devils stepped out to see the commotion. Gloria picked herself up from the grass and moved toward them. “Somebody get them! They’re murderers!”

I slashed my claws through my seatbelt strap, took Lore in my arms and stumbled out of the vehicle. After adjusting her so she draped over one of my shoulders, I grabbed my backpack from the truck bed and slung it over the other.

“Hold the fuck on,” I hissed at her. Before the words were fully out of my mouth, I was racing into the tree line with Lore secured against my chest. The dark of the night swallowed us. But I knew the shadows wouldn’t hide us.

Not for long.

Without a vehicle, we wouldn’t make our way out of the woods for at least two nights. Maybe more if I couldn’t navigate the fog. By then, the Devil would wake.

Then there’d be no outrunning him.

Chapter Five

LORE

The branches whipped against me as Titus guided us through the woods at an inhuman speed. I buried my face into his back to protect it, but I savored the pain of the branches cutting into my body. It gave me something to focus on and kept me centered as the harsh reality of our situation set in.

How could so much change so quickly? Two hours ago, I'd been in bed with Titus, as close as two people could get, with our naked limbs tangled together as he'd lazily fucked into me, whispering dark promises into my ear.

Saying how he'd protect me, love me and eat my soul all in the same breath. Since then, I'd watched the man I loved avenge his mother by murdering his piece-of-shit father, I'd endured my mom's willingness to trade me to a literal devil in exchange for her freedom and I'd totaled our sure shot of escape in a split-moment decision to exact my own revenge.

Now we were running into the monster-infested woods, with nothing but the clothes on our backs and whatever Titus

had in his backpack.

I didn't know how much time had passed, but Titus was still running. His huffed breaths, the clatter of whatever was in his backpack and the whistle of branches were the only things to fill the silence.

I started counting each lash against my skin. *One. Two.* I bit back a whimper as a large branch raked into my skin. *Three.*

When Titus began to slow, instead of feeling relief, a fist of anxiety squeezed my heart. The half-devil being mad wasn't anything new to me, and, if I was being honest, I liked how he touched me when he was pissed off.

This was different.

I'd seriously screwed up. He loved that truck, and more than that, I'd totally fucked our escape plan. Leaving the Pine Barrens should have been as easy as driving out, maybe enduring a nerve-wracking spot to get gas at a shady gas station, and then boom. Home free. In a weak moment, I'd been blinded by rage. Now we had to fumble around the pitch-black woods with an angry cult on our heels.

He slipped me off his shoulder and set me on my feet. A single white eye burned into me through the darkness as he pushed me against a tree. His hands frantically skimmed over my limbs, brushing past the cuts and welts the forest had left on my skin to feel for any bone breaks from the car crash. "Are you hurt?"

“I’m okay,” I said, even though it felt like a lie. Physically, I was fine. Inside, though, I was breaking.

His concern immediately morphed to anger, his demeanor turning acidic. “What in the fuck was that? If you wanted your damn mommy dead, you should have stabbed her when she was tied up.”

“I didn’t want her to die. Not until backstabbed me. The things she told me to get free...”

Her words echoed through my mind, haunting me. *You’re the only thing that matters, baby girl.*

Lying bitch.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“You’re sorry?” he snarled, the edge in his voice as palpable as a slap. “Do you know how much you’ve fucked us, little sister?”

A shiver shot down my spine at the nickname. “We can outrun them, right?”

“You mean the flock? It’s not *them* I’m worried about. You can bet your pretty little ass they’re coming for us. It’s the Jersey Devil that I’m worried about, baby. He rises from his slumber once a month on the full moon for the Ritual. That’s in two nights. If we’re not out of here by then, he’ll find us.”

“What will he do to us?”

“I don’t know what he’ll do to me. But I know exactly what he’ll do to you.” There was a menacing bend in his tone that

sent goosebumps pricking over my flesh.

“And what is that?”

“You’ll know soon enough, because it’s what I plan on doing to you. Only he would have had the flock throw your body into the woods to rot. I plan on keeping your body and soul so I can use them both as much as I fucking please.”

I chewed my lip, dark excitement quickening my pulse.
“When?”

“I don’t know. The Elder can claim a soul by ripping an offering open. I have to tear you open in a different way.” The glow of his one white eye illuminated his sinful smirk. “And I’m going to take my time doing it.”

On the next ragged breath, his mouth claimed mine in a bruising kiss. I gasped against his searing heat as he stole all the air from my lungs.

I couldn’t breathe when my stepbrother kissed me, but I didn’t care.

Titus Leeds was better than air.

There was a crack of thunder overhead, and, a beat later, raindrops slipped through the trees. I closed my eyes and tipped my face toward the sky, enjoying the cold water on my burning cheeks.

The sensation stopped, and the sound that started up reminded me of a time I went camping with my dad, the rain drumming a beat over the camping tent.

I opened my eyes to find a leathery material covering my head. With the moon peeking through the clouds and treetops, the leather glowed a deep violet.

“Y-You have wings?”

I’d seen Titus shift twice tonight, though he didn’t have wings either time. I reached up to touch them, and stopped when his hand closed around my throat. “Don’t touch them. I fucking hate them.”

My eyes began to water, and not from the fact that his hand was squeezing my windpipe.

Titus was repulsed by the monster inside him. My heart shattered into pieces all over again, this time for somebody who was worth the pain.

Ignoring his command, I reached over my head to brush my fingertips over the velvety-smooth wings. “I think they’re beautiful.”

His white eye flashed with a blink, and the air between us buzzed. “You do?”

“I do.”

He kissed me again, this time his lips soft and gentle.

“You’re perfect for me in every way, little lamb,” he murmured against my mouth. “I just pray to whatever god that bothers listening to me that I don’t ruin you.”

“You won’t.”

“You’re stranded in the middle of the Pine Barrens with a monster you barely know.”

“I don’t care if we just met a couple of days ago. I know you.”

“No you don’t,” he sneered, his sharp teeth flashing in the dark.

“You like to pretend you’re a fucking dick, but that’s just your way of protecting yourself. You’ve had to hide who you truly are all these years. But you don’t have to with me. I see you. And I want you more than anything else.”

He stared at me with a thunderstruck expression. His face was eerily gorgeous bathed in the subtle light of his devil’s eye.

On the next beat of my heart, he was kissing me again. His hands slipped under my thighs to lift me up. Bark bit into my back as he slid me up the tree, but I didn’t care. The pain was chased away by the searing pleasure his mouth delivered to my lips, my throat, my chest.

Titus kissed me all over, licking my cuts and tracing the welts with the metal bead of his piercing.

“Fuck me dead,” he groaned against my throat. “All I want to do is take you right now against this tree.” His brow pressed against mine, his chest heaving with labored breaths, his muscles flexing against his inky flesh. He was restraining himself.

I could almost sense him straddling the line between his human side and his devil side. One half wanted to protect me. The other wanted to eat me alive.

He set me to my feet, took me by the hand and led us deeper into the woods. “We have to find shelter and wait the night out.”

“What if the cult finds us?”

“We have to take our chances. There are monsters that roam the night that are worse than a mob of devils.”

“Worse than you?”

“Depends. What do you mean by ‘worse?’ If you’re talking about monsters who want to tear you apart and have you for dinner, they’re worse.” He turned around so fast I almost crashed into his chest. “But if your idea of a truly heinous monster is the kind that can rip you apart from the inside, then, baby, I’m your worst nightmare.”

Chapter Six

LORE

If Titus was my worst nightmare, then I was dreaming and I never wanted to wake up.

Did that make me a bad person? Maybe. Either way, I didn't care. I was scared for my life, yet somehow I was still the happiest I'd ever been.

We wandered through the dark, but we didn't meander aimlessly. Titus seemed to know where he was leading us.

I breathed a sigh of relief when we came to an abandoned shack. The Pine Barrens had countless ruins of burned-out factories, dilapidated hovels from century-old ghost towns and other long-forgotten buildings, but this was the first intact structure we'd encountered since leaving Bishop.

The cabin was one room. By the look and feel, no one had lived here in years. It was still better than sleeping outside though.

“There's a fireplace!”

“No fire,” Titus grunted, slinging his backpack onto a wooden table beside the door. “The light from the windows will give away our location.”

I wrapped my arms around my shivering body. “But I’m cold.”

Titus turned his back to me, rustling through his backpack for a minute before twisting around to toss a small, rolled-up blanket at me. “That’s for covering the bed so you don’t have to lie in filth. I’ll be what keeps you warm tonight.”

“What else do you have in there?” I asked as I unrolled the blanket and spread it over the ancient mattress.

“All sorts of shit. Whenever I had to get away from my dad or the town, I took off and rugged it out in the woods for days at a time. I always have my backpack stocked with emergency gear. I would have been better prepared if I knew you were going to total my truck.” He tossed a granola bar onto the bed. “Dinner. I’d hunt something for you, but I can’t light a fire to cook. So, you’re stuck with this for now.”

“Hunt? Do you have a gun in there?”

He held up his claws and gave them a wiggle. “Don’t need one.”

I quietly ate my granola bar as I imagined Titus stalking the woods for prey.

After several moments of intense silence, Titus pulled off his flannel shirt and stalked toward the bed. My mind went

slack at the way he prowled toward me, his muscles flexing beneath his tight-fitting black tee.

He offered me the bundle of fabric. “You can use this as a pillow. And tomorrow you can wear it to keep you warm.”

I worried my lip. “What if you get cold?”

He smiled darkly. “Then I’ll wear you.”

My core turned molten as he got up on the bed and crawled over to me on his hands and knees, his white-hot eye pinning me down. “Go to sleep, little lamb. We have a big day tomorrow trying to keep you away from the slaughter.”

Wrapping an arm around my middle, he tucked me into the cradle of his body.

We lay like that for what felt like an eternity. Eventually, he arched down, grazing his lips against the shell of my ear. “I said *sleep*.”

My eyes shot open. I guess he knew I wasn’t sleeping based on my breathing pattern.

“Why? So you can jack off into my mouth while I sleep?”

There was a pregnant pause before Titus turned me around, glaring at me through the dark. “You know about that?”

“It was just a guess, but I know now. You fucking creep.”

His chest rumbled with a hellish laugh. “Run that pretty mouth all you want, baby. You can’t pretend with me. I know how much you love the idea of your cunt being open for my use. Mine to take whenever I fucking feel like it.”

My thighs clenched, and my heart rate kicked up a notch. His smirk turned smug at the way my body confirmed his accusation. Then the intoxicating curve of his lips disappeared, replaced with a serious expression that had the little hairs on my nape standing.

“If you didn’t want to... You know I wouldn’t, right? I am in control of my devil side.” His Adam’s apple dipped with a swallow. “Mostly.”

“I don’t want you to stop. You’re right about all of it. I... I like it...”

As shame started to work through me, Titus caught my head in his hands and leveled me with his mismatched eyes. “Hey. Don’t do that. Don’t feel bad for being you. You’re perfect. Got it?”

I gave a nod, butterflies whirling in my belly. “Yeah...”

“Good.” He kissed my brow and tucked me against him, this time with us face to face. “Try to sleep now, lamb.”

“I can’t.”

“What do you normally do when you can’t sleep?”

“I read.” I missed my books. They were still sitting in the back of Titus’s truck, probably ruined from the rain by now.

“What do you read?” By the smile in his voice, he knew the answer and wanted me to say it anyway.

“Demon romances are my favorite,” I admitted. “There’s something about horns, long tongues and huge demon cocks

that really do it for me. Then I masturbate and fall asleep.”

He moved his hand from my cheek, sliding it over my shoulder and curving over the dip in my waist to rest on my hip. His wings wrapped around me to draw me close. I was so warm, but it had less to do with his body heat and more to do with the warmth I felt knowing he was comfortable enough to keep his wings out.

“You don’t need a book for any of that. I’ve got everything you listed right here. Horns...” He took my hand, bringing it to his mouth to plant a kiss to my palm before guiding my touch to his horns. My fingers curled around them, the tips of them barely meeting around their girth.

“Tongue...” His tongue licked over my lips, prodding gently at my mouth. My lips parted, and the hot appendage slipped inside, entwining around my own. His piercing clinked against my teeth as he continued his slow exploration.

Titus flipped on top of me, pushing my back into the mattress. “Take your clothes off,” he ordered, his voice all gravel and sinking straight through my core like a hot rock.

He watched as I pulled my shirt off, followed by my jeans, bra and panties. It was still freezing in the cabin, but his radiant heat kept the cold at bay. My devil took a moment to take in my naked form before he hunched down, his monster tongue licking a path down my body.

His claw-tipped fingers gripped my thighs, the pinpoints of pain making pleasure spike through my body as his tongue slipped through my folds. He pushed my legs apart, and the

cool air combined with his hot breath spilled over my exposed entrance.

I looked down to see him staring at me. Even in the dark, I could make out his hungry expression. His eyes lifted, finding mine through the murk. “I’m going to fuck you to sleep, little sister.”

I bit back gasp as his lips quirked.

“Does that make your pussy wet?”

“No,” I denied in a whisper.

My devil’s brows arched, and he raised his middle finger in a rude gesture. He shifted so that his claw retracted, then slowly lowered it to my apex. “Fuck you, Lore.” He cackled at the double meaning as he pushed his middle finger inside me.

When it sank inside with ease, his gaze returned to mine. “You’re soaking wet, you liar.”

He added a second finger, then started fucking me in slow, firm strokes. He dropped his head, teasing my clit with the tip of his tongue.

Sloppy, wet noises went to war with the pound of rain on the cabin’s roof.

I sucked in a cry as his tongue slipped inside my hole to join his fingers.

As a voracious smut reader and collector of strange sex toys, I thought I was an expert in the ways of self-pleasure. Maybe I was. But even the most well-crafted silicone toys

with my nimble fingers working them had nothing on the way Titus Leeds filled me.

“T-Titus,” I groaned, eyes squeezing shut so tight that stars danced behind my eyelids. My hands flew to clutch the devil’s horns as he feasted on my insides, slurping and licking to wring as much pleasure from me as possible.

Urged on by the way I held on to his horns, he picked up his pace, fucking me until my mouth opened to release a scream.

Moving quicker than humanly possible, Titus suddenly snapped up, knocking all the breath from my lungs as his weight crashed down on top of me.

His chest held me down, the tip of his nose touching mine. His hand clamped firmly over my mouth while his glare jabbed into me through his mess of raven-colored hair.

“Keep *quiet*.”

I whimpered into his palm as the fingers of his other hand began to move again. *He was still inside me.*

“You like when I hold you down and keep you from screaming, don’t you?” He swore beneath his breath, his voice crumbling under the brunt of his surmounting hunger. His hand collared my throat.

“Fuck. Your pussy is gripping me so tightly. Is my sweet little monster whore going to come for me?”

“Oh, God—”

“Out here in the middle of the woods, I am your God. So you make sure all the prayers rolling off that tongue are made out to *me*.”

My muscles clenched, unholy pleasure shattering my nerves as I came violently. I knew I couldn't make a sound, so I turned my head and buried my face in Titus's flannel shirt, drowning in his scent of motor oil and leather.

A shiver shot through me as Titus pulled his fingers from me. I felt the mattress shift, and I lifted my head just in time to see his mouth coming toward mine. His lips tasted of me—sweet and bitter all at once. I nipped at his tongue as it stroked over my bottom lip, catching his piercing between my teeth.

A guttural growl rolled from his throat, his hands diving into my hair with his claws biting into my scalp. I released his tongue with a whimper, my hips bucking off the bed to grind against the bulge in his jeans.

He chuckled against my throat where his lips had wandered, his hot breath clinging to my flesh. “Ready for more?”

“We're not done?” I panted.

“Are you still awake?”

“Obviously.”

“Then we're ‘obviously’ not done. What was the last thing on your goodnight checklist?” He rose up on his knees and shoved the waist of his dark-denim jeans down, freeing his cock. “Demon cock?”

My eyes strained to get a good look at the large appendage cradled in his hand. The last time he'd shifted, he'd been inside me. Since then, my mind had run wild imagining a shape that matched its feel.

It was darker than the hue of his skin, at least the majority of it. It was a deep pink, almost purple color that reminded me of his wings. The overall shape was the same as his human form, with one key difference. The underside of it was curved, giving it the kind of girth that would make a girl go cross-eyed riding that thing.

The tip was already leaking thick beads of pearly-white precum that oozed around the ring of his Prince Albert piercing.

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, big brother.”

“That’s a good girl. Now turn around, face down in my shirt. Just like that. Push your ass out. Now reach around and spread those cheeks for me. Show me what belongs to me, little sister.”

Titus still referred to me as his little sister. It had seemed silly at first since our parents were no longer married, considering one of them was dead. But now I got a sense that he wasn’t calling me that because that’s what I was, or even to tease me. It was to remind me that we were the only family each other had now.

I reached around, any embarrassment drowned out by a feral desire to have him inside me, and spread myself for him.

His guttural voice punched through the haze of lust swaddling my brain. “You really aren’t scared of me, are you Lorelei? Not one fucking bit. The thought of me owning your soul forever makes this pussy drip. Doesn’t it?”

“Y-Yes.” As I turned to glance back at him over my shoulder, he slammed into me. There was so much power behind his driving hips, my hands slapped against the headboard for stability.

I buried my face in his shirt once more to muffle the barrage of moans and screams each of his thrusts knocked from me.

Holy fuck. If this devil was as close to Hell on Earth as I could get, I was happy to never know true paradise. Because the feel of his back bowing over, his tongue as it lashed over my spine, the clash of our bodies, the kiss of his cock inside my darkest, deepest place?

Pure, rapturous bliss.

Something between us snapped. I could feel the air growing more heated with his need exploding into a dangerous inferno. He was losing control of his humanity. Any second now, I’d be at the complete mercy of an unhinged monster.

And the most messed-up thing?

I wanted his most primal, feral side to drag me into the darkness with him.

Chapter Seven

TITUS

I was so close to losing it. She was too tight, too wet. Too perfect.

I was wrapped up in her, her cunt squeezing me until my mind broke from the pleasure of it. Monstrous need roared inside me, driving me to the brink of insanity as I lost myself in her.

For several seconds—or minutes, time was meaningless when I was inside her—my vision went dark.

All that mattered was the pleasure she offered, the feel of her and burrowing as close to her as I possibly could without rearranging her insides.

Hell, even if I had to break her. It didn't matter.

“Titus!” Her pathetic mewls jerked me from my trance. My vision focused on her backside, ice filling my veins as I registered the image of claw marks I'd made. They were shallow, thank fuck, but bright shocks of red beaded over the gashes.

At the sight of her blood, my dick should have softened. Instead, I was harder than ever.

I pulled out of her and stumbled off the bed.

“Why...why are you stopping?”

“*Why?* Lore, I hurt you.”

She twisted to look at her back before brushing it off with a roll of her eyes. “I’m fine.”

“You’re bleeding.”

Moving into a sitting position, she quickly tugged her clothes back on now that she didn’t have my heat to keep away the cabin’s chill. “So? If we’re going to be together, you should probably get used to seeing my blood. You’re a half-devil. You have claws for freak’s sake.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

Her lips slashed with a dubious frown. “Says the guy who wants to eat my soul.”

“That’s different.”

She held my gaze, her arms folding over her breasts. “How?”

“It just is,” I scolded.

Her eyes followed me as I trudged to the table and angrily went through my backpack. I unpacked some tools I kept—a roll of duct tape, a wrench, a swiss army knife. Then I packed them away again. I wasn’t looking for anything in particular. It was more of a comfort thing.

These things were the last possessions I had of my old life. As much as I was glad to leave it behind, touching them calmed me down and reminded me of my human side, and how it was more important than ever to keep that part of me present around Lore as much as possible.

After some time, I was able to shift back. I'd ruined my shirt from the holes my wings had torn, but I didn't care. All that mattered right now was that I hadn't hurt her, at least not enough where I couldn't forgive myself.

I felt her attention hot on my back, almost like she could read every thought going through my mind.

"I like both sides of you, you know," she said after another stretch of uncomfortable silence.

"You shouldn't. There's a part of me that wants to hurt you." I weighed the wrench in my hand, growling in displeasure. "It wants to crawl inside you and split you open."

"I want that," she answered matter-of-factly. Like she knew without a doubt I wouldn't hurt her.

She trusted me implicitly.

"No, you don't, Lore."

"Don't tell me what I want, asshole."

I shot her glare full of warning. "I'm telling you what I should want. Because as much as I want to indulge some of the twisted fantasies going through my head right now, my main priority is keeping you alive."

“Look...” Breathing a sigh, she rose off the bed, crossed over to the table and hopped onto its surface. She shoved against my shoulder, forcing me to collapse into the chair beside it. “You already gave me the warning, remember? So we’ve been through this. ‘I don’t want to do this with you. I’ll devour you until there’s nothing left.’ Yada yada yada. I already signed the waiver, okay? So, can we please just accept each other for who we are? You’re a crazy half-devil mechanic who can snap at literally any moment. And I’m the crazy, demon-loving chick who almost ran her mother over with a truck and is still regretting the fact that she missed.”

I lifted my eyes to her, searching her face in the dark.

I’d meant what I’d said about being her God in these woods. What she didn’t know yet was that no matter where we were, she’d always be my Goddess.

I ran my knuckle over her inner thigh, from her knee up to her apex. “I made you a promise. I told you I’d protect you. I might talk a lot of shit—”

She snorted. “A *lot*.”

I growled, and she clamped her jaw shut so I could continue. “But my vow to keep you safe means I have to keep myself in check too. I know you’re not some fragile waif. You’re stubborn, and you don’t easily break. That doesn’t change the fact that you’re still human.”

Her pulse accelerated, and I didn’t miss the way her eyes centered on my lips. Knowing what was going through her

mind, I reached up. My hand curved around the back of her neck and pulled her down until her lips met mine.

She sighed against my mouth, her arms bending around my shoulders. “I think I’m ready to sleep now.”

I carried her to bed, then settled in behind her in the position I knew humans called the big spoon.

I stroked her hair as she drifted off, her steady breathing pattern confirming that she was asleep. So it came as a surprise when she started to speak. “Can you fly?”

“They don’t work. They’re just an ugly deformity as a result of my mixed breeding.”

She made a sleepy huffing sound. “They’re beautiful...”

I found myself smiling, loving this soft moment with her that I was sure she wouldn’t remember come morning. “Can I ask you something in return, little lamb?”

She made a sleepy sound of confirmation.

I thought about not asking it. It was stupid to think someone could love me, considering what I was. But curiosity ate at me like a parasite, pushing words from my mouth before I could take them back. “Do you love me?”

“You’re the only thing that matters...”

My dark heart clenched in my chest. It wasn’t an outright yes, but there was something in her words that told me this was better. It carried a weight to it I didn’t understand. Not yet.

I bent over her, pressing a gentle kiss to her temple. “I look forward to taking you apart so I can figure you out, Lorelei Brooks. Then I’ll put you back together again, just the way I found you. Because you’re perfect as you are.”

She shifted in her sleep, mumbled something unintelligible, then said, “The bookstore’s having a sale on hardcovers. Can we go?”

I chuckled softly, then kissed her again. “Yes, Lore. Just as soon as I get you out of this hellhole.”

Chapter Eight

LORE

My dreams were erratic the entire night.

At one point I was in a bookstore, perusing the shelves during a sale. It was a recurring dream I had, one of the few I actually enjoyed. Though, this time was a little different. Titus was with me, carrying all the books for me as I stacked my pile so high until all you could see of him were the points of his horns and his tatted fingers.

Then the scene changed. It was dark, and I was sitting in Titus's truck. Only now I was behind the steering wheel, chasing my mother down Bishop's main street. Dark glee skipped through me as the space between her and the vehicle shrank. The truck slammed into her, and she exploded into a cloud of smoke.

When the smoke cleared, Titus appeared. We were still in the bookstore, but things had gotten heated. The books were sprawled out on the floor. I could see more of my step devil's horns now, way more. He was shirtless, with his jeans unbuttoned and shoved down enough to expose his tight

Adonis belt. I had my back to the bookshelf, my legs wrapped around his waist as he pumped into me.

Seeing his toned, ink-swathed muscles ripple had a lick of desire slipping between my thighs even as he fucked into them.

“Do you love me?” he asked, his voice oddly distant even though he was right here.

“Yes. You’re the only thing that matters to me.”

I wasn’t sure why I said those words. Maybe it was because it’s what my mom had said to convince me to let her go. Only coming from my mouth, I meant them. To me, it was better than saying “I love you.”

My mom had definitely instilled some kind of complex where I was desperate to hear those words with a touch of actual sincerity behind them.

The scene changed around me, but this time Titus said the words, fucking me as the books caught fire. Soon, a blazing inferno surrounded us. His rhythm didn’t so much as falter as he kept pounding me. I held on to his horns as his wings spread around me, shielding me from the dancing flames.

I woke up with a gasp, the world spinning as Titus hauled me off the bed.

My clothes clung to my skin, which was slick with sweat, and the cabin was illuminated with firelight. *Fire.*

The cabin was on fire.

As Titus whisked me out the door, I snatched my arm out and grabbed the backpack just in time.

The cold night air was a sweet relief, but only for a moment.

The cabin was surrounded by six figures dressed in white, wearing the same creepy cult mask Titus had made me wear when we'd killed his father.

They must have split up to look for us. It wouldn't be long until they were all here.

Titus tucked me tighter against his chest, his eyes frantically searching for a way out. With the burning cabin behind us, and the six cult members spread out in front, escape without physical confrontation was looking pretty bleak.

They lowered their hoods, one by one, and kicked off their shoes.

“What are they doing?” I asked in a whisper.

Titus's rage was visceral, burning hotter than the fire at our backs. “Shifting.”

No sooner than the word had left his tongue, they began to morph before our eyes.

One by one, the men turned into monsters. Their robes hid most of the change, but their wings still expanded from their backs in a sickening crunch of bones and shredding fabric.

Their horns were longer than Titus's and stuck out of their masks. My attention dropped to their feet, morbid intrigue

working through me at the hooves that poked out from the hem of their robes. Freaking hooves!

I realized their deer-like masks were more than just a style choice. It allowed room for the shape of their devil skulls.

Titus set me to my feet and pushed me behind him. “Whatever you do, stay back. And if I tell you to run, fucking do it. No arguments.”

“You can’t be serious about fighting them all!”

Titus’s only response was a gruff scoff as he shifted. His wings were smaller, and his body was still human. But there was something about his aura that dominated the space surrounding him.

“*Favkae, ole nik offera, Titus,*” one of them said.

A chill worked through me at the strange language they used. It sounded ancient, exotic and completely inhuman. As they spoke, I started to get the gist of what they were saying by their gestures and the general hostile mood in the blistering air.

Titus had betrayed them, and they were here for revenge.

The half-devil answered back in the same foreign tongue. By the cultists’ response, I took a wild guess that Titus was basically telling them to eat shit.

They didn’t like that.

Four of them surged for Titus. The one closest didn’t make it more than a few steps before he fell to the ground, his throat

gaping and blood gushing onto the forest floor.

Titus licked his claws, wings flexing behind him. “Who’s next?”

A heady cocktail of horror and fascination slammed through my veins. He’d moved so fast, I’d barely seen him twitch. Now a monster lay bleeding out at his feet, wheezing his final breaths.

Titus Leeds was more deadly than I could have guessed.

Swampish heat crept between my thighs, making me curse my traitorous freaking vagina. Why did watching Titus murder men to protect me turn me on? This wasn’t the time or place. To confirm that, two of the devils’ masks shifted in my direction.

Could they smell my arousal?

They started for me, their glowing white eyes flashing behind their masks’ slitted eyeholes. “Look at this human slut,” one of them said to their companion, switching to English. “Why would the Keeper’s boy betray us all for this skinny little bitch? What’s so special about her, Titus? Her cunt can’t be that good.”

A cruel laugh echoed from behind the other cultist’s mask. “I say we give her a taste and see what the fuss is about.”

“No!” Titus lunged for them, but the other three cultists were surrounding him.

I dropped the backpack to the ground and fumbled for the wrench I’d seen Titus pack last night. When my fingers closed

around the metal handle, I muttered a victorious, “Yes!”

I brandished the wrench, the flames ravaging the cabin flashing in its metallic surface.

The robed devils jumped back at my makeshift weapon. Then they realized it was a wrench and started to laugh. “Foolish human slut. What exactly are you going to do with that?”

One of them swiped a claw at me, and I ducked—just in time with how the sleeve of his robes brushed the top of my head. I jammed the head of the wrench into his crotch. When he crumpled to the ground clutching his damaged goods, he lifted his face to the sky and he started muttering prayers.

I rose to my full height and looked down at the monster with a manic smile. “Praying to your Elder? Tough shit. I hear he doesn’t wake up from his nap until tomorrow. Should have waited a day to fuck with us.”

Mustering all my strength, I brought the wrench down on the man’s skull. My makeshift weapon caught on his horns, cracking them. His screams of pain only encouraged me. I bludgeoned him over the head again and again, until his mask cracked, revealing his blood-smattered face.

He had the head of a goat with glowing white eyes, and a mouth twisted in pain.

Locking eyes with him, I didn’t let up, smacking him again and again until his robes ran red with blood. Eventually, his

skull caved in, and the glow of his eyes flickered and dimmed.

Brutal silence.

Then I gave a crazed laugh. “That’s what I’m going to do with the wrench.”

I looked up to find Titus with his fists raised, chest heaving. Only his attention wasn’t on the devils he was fighting. They’d all paused to watch the bloody display I’d just put on with dumbfounded expressions.

“You’re going to pay for that, bitch. That was my cousin,” the fourth devil hissed.

I laughed, holding the blood-soaked wrench up like a baseball bat. “Shocker. From the sounds of it, your backwater town is just one big happy, inbred family. Queue the banjo noises.”

When he stalked closer to me with murderous intent, Titus threw himself at him. But the other three devils were already on top of him. Two wrestled him into a choke hold while the other started laying punch after punch into his stomach.

“Titus!” I took my attention off the devil approaching me for just a moment.

It was long enough for him to slap the wrench out of my hand and grip my throat. I sputtered in surprise and clawed at the hand holding me.

“When I’m done using your pussy, I’m gonna cut it off and keep it as a little keepsake to remember you by. The Elder One

won't mind me taking that. All he's after is your soul. I'm going to have my fun with you, and then, tomorrow night, I'm going to have fun watching him cut your soul out of your body."

I wanted to scream, but I couldn't. His crushing grip left me wheezing for air. My vision started to swim, and the next thing I knew, I was on the cold ground. My assailant kicked my legs open with his knee, his rancid breath hot on my skin.

This wasn't happening.

Titus screamed my name, followed by the sounds of a struggle, bones breaking and flesh tearing. Then the man was being thrown off me. Titus stood over me with the raging fire at his back. His mismatched eyes were wild with bloodlust.

"Lore, run!"

Disoriented, I flipped onto my hands and knees to see two more dead men on the ground. I scrambled to my feet, shaking my head. "I'm not leaving without you!"

The two remaining cultists were already charging at Titus. He gave a frustrated snarl and turned just in time to block the first blow, but not the second or the third. He cast me a sidelong glare, serrated teeth clenched and his chest rising and falling harshly. "I said go!"

Tears flooded my eyes, making his face go blurry. I turned, then I ran into the woods as fast as my feet would carry me.

Chapter Nine

LORE

As I ran, the branches whipped against my face. This time, though, the sting brought no comfort.

I'd left him. For all I knew, he was dead, sprawled amongst the trash he'd killed to protect me. I could have helped. I'd killed one, maybe I could have taken down a second with a little more time.

I was lying to myself.

One of them had been seconds away from raping me. Titus had sacrificed himself to give me time to escape. But escape where? I was lost. There were more cultists roaming the woods. Soon, they'd find me. Then, come the full moon, they'd feed me to the Jersey Devil.

Even if by some miracle I managed to find my way out of here, then what? I was just supposed to go back to regular life? Fat chance.

I'd helped him murder his father. I'd bashed in the skull of one of my almost rapists.

How were things ever supposed to go back to normal? They wouldn't.

I didn't want to go on living at all without Titus.

This wasn't the time to cry, but the tears came anyway.

I loved him. In two days, I'd fallen stupidly in love with my cruel stepbrother. He was the only thing that mattered now.

And he was probably already dead.

With a pathetic sob, I forced my feet forward. I wasn't sure how long I ambled aimlessly through the woods. My eyes ached from all the crying, so probably a while.

A snap of a branch from not far off had me freezing in place.

Something was following me. The cult members? No, they would have been louder.

I swallowed thickly, feeling the roar of my pulse in my ears. Titus had said that monsters roamed the Pine Barrens at night. I'd been so upset, I'd forgotten to stay quiet.

Who knew what horrors of the night lurked in the shadows, waiting to pounce? Titus had made a mean joke once about how I wanted all the nightmarish monsters to come out and fuck me. Maybe in books that was fun, but in reality, all I wanted was Titus.

Another crack of a branch sounded. More rustling. My jaw tightened, and my palms started to sweat. Then, dead ahead of me, huge, glowing yellow eyes appeared.

A silent scream caught in my throat. Terror immobilized me as the creature emerged from the trees. It was so huge, I had to crane my head to look at it. Its skin was almost like bark and its antlers like branches. But its body was unlike anything I'd ever seen. It was like a deep-forest cryptid in a found-footage horror movie.

It took a step for me, its head canting so far to the side its neck should have snapped. It just kept going until its head was almost upside down. Creatures with animal heads weren't supposed to smile, especially this thing. It didn't have lips. Its head was all bone, but somehow it was smiling, the stretch of its gaping maw looking more like a frown with the angle of its head.

"Delk na vi, humanae."

An ice-cold chill lanced through me. It was speaking to me in the same language the cultists spoke. There was no possibility that this thing was friendly. There was a hunger to its cadence, and as it stared me down, it began to salivate.

I took off running through the woods, my feet slapping against the forest floor in rhythm with my pounding heart.

There was no way I was going to survive this night. If this thing didn't devour me, something else would.

Even though my hope of survival was shrinking with each terrifying second that passed, I forged on. I couldn't let Titus's sacrifice be for nothing. As I ran for my life, I drew more and more attention.

Eyes of all shapes and sizes appeared through the dark, blinking at me through the shrubbery and from the treetops. Everywhere I looked, there was something that wanted to make me its dinner. *Or worse.*

Hope soured in my chest as I broke through the dense trees into what looked like a town. I raced down the street, disappointment making me sob between gulps of breath.

It was abandoned. No one was here. I knew the Pine Barrens were known for their abandoned towns and ruins, but did this have to be one of them?

Why couldn't I have stumbled across someplace populated?

I knew the monsters chased me from out of the woods, but I didn't dare look over my shoulder. I had to keep running. Maybe I could lose them if I found someplace to hide...

I took a sharp turn behind a stone structure that looked to have been a factory once, and found myself standing in an overgrown graveyard.

There was nothing in front of me except for more trees. I could keep running, but I got the sense that my chances were better out here.

Chances. Who the hell was I kidding? I was going to die tonight. At least I was already standing in a graveyard. How was that for irony?

The funny thing was, I wasn't scared anymore. I felt completely numb without Titus.

I wasn't going to go down without a fight. But I wasn't stupid enough to think that I was going to make it to sunrise.

Taking in a breath, I slowly turned to look behind me. The monster approached, its spindly legs stepping into the graveyard while its drool rained down over the mossy headstones. I stooped down, picking up a thick branch from nearby. Too bad I'd left the wrench back in front of the cabin.

The creature made a skin-crawling sound. Was it laughing at me? I didn't blame it. A branch wasn't going to do shit against a forest spirit older than most of the trees here.

It spoke to me again. My brain couldn't make sense of the words, but there was some instinctual part of me that understood. A little alarm went off in the back of my head, screaming at me to *run*. And stupid me, I ignored it.

I was sick of running.

I stood my ground, holding my stick at the ready even though putting up a fight was futile. It didn't matter if I died and went to Hell; Titus would be there, though he'd never let me hear the end of it.

“Come at me, fucker.”

I regretted the words the second they flew out of my mouth. The creature rolled up onto his hind legs and, for a moment, he looked like a tree—the tallest in the entire woods. His hind legs were tipped with hooves, but his fronts were hands with freakishly long fingers. He stretched out an arm, reaching for me.

Before he could touch me, something exploded from the tree line behind me. A much smaller monster leaped onto its back, his stance wide at the back of its neck and, with all his strength, snapped one of the creature's horns off.

My heart thudded hard in my chest. It was Titus.

With the jagged side of the broken horn pointed toward the creature, my half-devil stabbed downward, spearing the creature through the back of the skull. It screeched and began to fall in slow motion. Titus leaped off and landed in a delicate crouch before the gigantic creature collided with the ground, making the earth quake.

I dropped my stick and ran toward my stepbrother. This was Titus, but he seemed different. He was covered from head to toe in blood. His dark hair was caked in it, and his skin was streaked with dirt and sweat.

He'd managed to kill the cultists by the feral look behind his eyes.

None of that stopped me from going to him. Before I could throw myself into his arms, though, he caught me by the throat.

"Careful. I'm not in control right now, little lamb." His voice had a grit to it that hooked in my belly.

"You're alive..." I rasped in disbelief.

"For now. I told you to keep quiet. Fortunately, all the noise you were making made it easy to track you. But I wasn't the only monster of these woods to take notice."

“Thank you for killing it.”

The half-devil’s brows twisted in annoyance, the silvery marks of his scar stretching. “You think that’s the only one?” He pulled me against his hard muscle, twisting me around so my back was flush with his chest. I sucked in a breath through my teeth as countless eyes peered at us from the forest.

“The hunt is on,” he said in a low voice against the shell of my ear. “Do you hear them whispering amongst themselves in the Old Tongue? Do you know what they’re saying?”

I chewed my lower lip, giving a slow shake of my head.

“They intend to make you theirs, little lamb.” His hands slid up to cup my jaw, the tips of his fingers so delicate as they stroked my flesh. “But they’re about to see that you are already claimed.”

I closed my eyes, trying to study my breathing as my heart rate kicked up. It was funny that it was beating harder now in Titus’s arms than it did when I was running for my life.

Now it was beating out of a sense of dark excitement.

The curve of his hand slid down my throat, roving over my chest before dipping into the neckline of my shirt—his shirt. His fingers paused, playing with the buttons. “You already carry some of my scent. But it’s not enough. I’m going to drown you in me, Lorelei. I want you dripping in my cum so every creature of these woods knows you belong to me.” His hand cupped possessively over the swell of my breast.

A moan slipped past my lips as he palmed my soft mound. Gentle, but firm. Then his demeanor flipped on a dime and he ripped open the shirt, sending buttons flying. He tore my bra on the next breath and flung it into the grass.

Both of his hands cupped me, pinching my nipples between his thumbs and forefingers. My head fell back onto his shoulder and I cried up at the moon, which was nearly full.

“Titus,” I whimpered. “Please.”

“That’s fucking right, baby. Beg me to take your sweet little pussy in front of all the horrors of the Pine Barrens. Beg me to show them the only monster you should be scared of is me.”

“Please!”

He pinched my nipples harder, making me thrash against him. He liked it when I struggled, by the way his cock thickened in his jeans against my ass. The dynamic between us had shifted. He’d finally let his full devil side loose to kill those men, and now it was here, ready to tear me open in ways he wouldn’t have before. But I wasn’t scared.

Instead, I felt safe.

Desired.

And with the adrenaline coursing through my veins, I felt more alive than ever.

I’d always been a lover of monsters. Now was my moment to kick my obsession with demon dick up a notch. Especially now that I had Titus to keep the other monsters at bay.

His lips found my neck, delivering a series of bruising kisses to my delicate flesh. “I’m going to make you scream,” he vowed, his teeth dragging over my throat.

“You keep your mouth off me, devil *freak*.”

The air buzzed, swollen with dark and tumultuous sexual tension. Maybe I’d gone too far by calling him a freak. He was sensitive about his devil side. But a beat later, his mouth curled into a sinister grin against my throat. Then his tongue snaked past his lips, curving over my throat to wrap around my neck.

He was choking me with his tongue.

I choked, more in surprise than from lack of breath as his hands tore the fly of my jeans open and wrenched them down my hips. He wedged his fingers between my thighs and worked them between my folds. There wasn’t much space to move since my jeans kept my legs clamped, but I liked the way he had to fight to slip inside me—to find me soaking wet.

His open-mouthed chuckle against my jugular made me shiver in filthy fucking delight. He was a depraved devil with his tongue coiled tight around my throat and his fingers sliding through my folds. Not to mention his smell—it was absolutely diabolical, with his usual masculine scent doused in the metallic tang of other males’ blood.

Being the twisted monster fucker that I was, these details drove my arousal into a frenzy.

I needed him inside me.

“Please.” To any of the onlooking monsters, it might have looked like I was begging for Titus to let me go. But he knew me better. With another chuckle that made his entire tongue vibrate around my neck, he sunk two fingers inside me.

And just like he promised, he made me scream.

Chapter Ten

TITUS

There was one thing better than having my tongue wrapped around Lore's throat so I could feel her shudder with her scream, and that was feeling her frantic heartbeat through the walls of her pussy as it clamped down on my fingers.

She was alive.

I'd found her just in time.

Last night, I didn't want her to see me like this—fully shifted and half out of my mind with lust. Now, with the blood of monsters soaking my skin, the fog of the Pine Barrens filling my lungs and my possessiveness rushing through my bloodstream like poison, I didn't give a fuck.

All that mattered was her.

Tasting her.

Feeling her.

Owning her.

If I weren't drunk with devilish lust, I'd keep her quiet. Find a place to hide her until dawn and then get the hell out of these woods before the full moon. But all rational reasoning had gone out the window when I saw that piece of shit put his hands on her.

Anger had possessed me, setting my internal demon free.

I'd tried to sate this part of me with revenge. But spilling the blood of the flock members that had tracked us down had done fuck all to suppress my devilish urges. It had only made them worse.

I didn't give a fuck about laying low now. I wanted the entire woods to know she was mine. And if anything had the balls to try and take Lore from me, I'd do to them what I'd done to the trash devil that tried to rape her.

The thought of the bloodshed had me unwinding my tongue from her throat. Then I picked her up and tossed her over a gravestone, her ass sticking out and her belly flat against the marble.

The sweet scent of her arousal flooded the air as she peered over her shoulder, glorious hellfire sparking behind her eyes.

She wanted this as bad as I did.

My hand curved over her ass and squeezed, blood going straight to my dick at the way she quivered against me.

My free hand dropped to the fly of my jeans, pulling out my engorged member. She craned her neck, straining to see the

devil cock I was about to fuck her with. She licked her plush lips, and gave a wriggle of her hips.

Oh. If only she knew what I was about to do to her, maybe she wouldn't be so eager.

Because I had every intention of making her scream in front of the horrors that watched us from the dark.

I almost wanted them to be tempted out of the shadows. By her scent. By her bare, beautiful flesh. Then I'd kill them, just like I had with the others. Lore needed to know I was more than a killer.

I was her protector.

But none of the monsters dared step into the graveyard, not with the devil at her back, looming over her like a dark angel.

Lore bucked her hips against me, pretending to try and get away. Really, she was just ready for me to fill her.

I laughed, making her skin prickle with bumps. "You're so adorable. So impatient to be fucked by a monster."

Cupping my hand, I reached around and held it in front of her. "Now spit."

Confusion furrowed her brows. "What?"

"Did I stutter?" I snapped. "Fucking *spit*."

Another flush of heat worked through her, and her scent made me salivate. My little lamb loved being ordered around. Hocking up as much saliva as she could, she spit into my waiting palm. I inspected it, rolling my eyes at the pathetic

little pool before fisting my cock with a wet *smack*, working the liquid over my shaft.

Her lips parted on a quiet gasp as she watched my tongue slither from my lips. Tendrils of saliva dribbled over her back to slick between her ass cheeks.

Good. *Now* she was ready.

I pushed my cock between her ass cheeks and guided the tip to the puckered ring of flesh, feeling her body stiffening beneath me. A smirk touched my lips. She was starting to get the picture.

“Wait. Titus—” Her protest gave way to a garbled moan as I slowly pushed into her ass.

“Wrong hole!” she gasped, her hands smacking against the marble gravestone, gripping the edge for dear life.

“You don’t have any wrong holes, baby. Not to me.” I nudged my hips, sinking another inch into her. “Relax. The pain will go away soon.”

As I spoke, my voice crumbled. The feel of her was fucking heaven, not that a devil like me would know anything about actual Heaven. But Lore’s body was as close to paradise as I’d ever come. Her body was sinful perfection. Her pussy was tight, but her ass? Fuck me dead.

She gripped me so tightly that it was a struggle to keep myself from coming, and I hadn’t even gotten all of it in.

My claws dug into her hips until little pinpricks of blood dotted her skin. Her breath shuddered from her body, and tiny

pearls of sweat streaked down her back. She was working so hard to take me as I stretched her, forcing my length inside her at an excruciatingly slow pace.

I arched over her, caging her against the gravestone, and licked the shell of her ear. “My sweet little sister was a virgin when I first met her. Were you naive enough to think I wouldn’t be claiming all of your holes? I told you I’ll own all of you, Lore. And that means *all* of you.”

“Oh, God.” She began to pant as my hand came around, the pads of my fingers working over her swollen clit.

My smile turned dark and manic. “That’s right, baby. In these woods, I am your God.”

The pleasure of her body wrapped around mine had my mind going hazy. I was drunk with my need for her, and I couldn’t hold myself back any longer. With the last thrust, I was fully sheathed inside her. Then I pulled out, only to slam back inside her. She gave a jerk, and her inner walls convulsed around me as her fingernails scraped against the stone.

She screamed my name, making me drive into her again and again until the rhythm of my strokes had her weeping with an intense mix of pleasure and pain.

I’d done drugs before. I’d fucked other girls. I’d done a lot of stupid shit I’d regretted over the course of my sad life, always chasing a high. But nothing, *nothing*, compared to the high of feeling Lore’s body spasm around me just as she was about to come.

“Come for me, little sister,” I demanded against her ear, my tongue flicking over her cheeks to lap up her tears.

Then the little brat turned her head, smirking at me through the dark. “*Make me.*”

Oh, my defiant lamb. “With fucking pleasure,” I growled.

Keeping my index finger over her clit, I slipped my ring and pinky fingers through her soaking folds and pushed them inside her pussy. Then I slid my other hand around to cup her cheek while two claw-tipped fingers hooked inside her mouth.

All three of her holes were now filled. I pumped into her ass, finger-fucked her pussy and forced her jaw open so all the creatures of the night could hear the obscene noises I knocked out of her with every thrust.

Her body clenched with her release, her ass clamping around me like a fucking vise. It was enough to push me over the edge with her.

I spilled inside her with a roar.

A tiny moan fluttered past her parted lips as my seed filled her. Her body went limp against the headstone and her eyes locked with mine, almost like she was silently begging me to take the last part of her she had to give me.

As much as I ached to take her soul, something told me that now wasn't the right time.

Draping myself over her, we lay together on top of the headstone as dawn began to break. The eyes disappeared from

the tree line as the monsters withdrew to their dens and ruins for the day.

We'd done it. We'd made it through the night.

Barely.

I looked up at the pale-pink and blue sky, where the moon was beginning to fade. When it appeared again, it would be full, and the Elder One would rise from his sleep.

If he caught us, he'd try to take her from me. I wasn't strong enough to take him in a fight. I'd have to do something else. Something crazy.

Terrifying plots worked through my head as the sun rose, making me hold on to Lore just a little tighter.

Chapter Eleven

LORE

We walked back to the cabin in silence. The rising pressure to get out of these freaking woods before sunset was palpable.

I glanced at Titus, who'd eased up some since the graveyard. He'd needed to blow off steam, and I was happy to do that for him. Even if it hurt to walk a little.

"It would have been nice if I'd gotten a little warning," I said, trying to break the awkwardness with a joke.

He cast me a sidelong look, dark brow raised. "With what?"

I tapped my ass, and he gave a nod of understanding. "Ah. Well. Would have been less fun that way. I'd say I'm sorry, but I'm not."

"Prick."

He grinned to himself, his attention turning back to the path ahead of us. "Don't pretend you didn't love every fucked-up second of it, sis."

I sucked my bottom lip between my teeth, biting back my objections. I couldn't lie to him. He knew how much I loved it when he gave in to the dark chemistry that was constantly brewing between us.

And the fact that we'd had an audience had somehow made it better.

Jesus. I was going to need a whole lot of therapy after getting out of here. *If* we got out of here.

I glanced back at Titus, who'd shifted back to his human form. I knew he preferred it, but a part of me couldn't help feeling a little disappointed. There wasn't anything quite like being pinned beneath a vicious monster, knowing they could easily break you.

"Careful, girl," he said, a silky purr rumbling from his chest. "You keep eye-fucking me like that, and I'll bend you over and take you in a new hole."

"A new one? You've already fucked all of them."

He gave a dark chuckle. "Then I'll make a new one."

I stopped dead in my tracks, gaping at him in disbelief. "You're disgusting."

He threw his head back, rolling his eyes before slowly turning to face me. "Yeah." He gestured to his blood-splattered body. "Look at me, baby. I'm Hell walking. You're the one that gets so fucking wet for me whenever I open my mouth. Don't blame me for taking advantage of that."

He strode toward me, stopping when there were only a few inches of space left between us. “You know I’d never hurt you. I wasn’t so sure before but after last night, I know my devil wants to keep you safe. And if I ever did something to hurt you, to really hurt you, all you have to do is say the word, and I’ll stop.”

I chewed my lip. “What word? ‘Stop?’”

He gave a thoughtful pause, and his lips spread wickedly after a moment of contemplation. “No. I wouldn’t stop then. Even if I don’t own your soul yet, we’re connected. I know when you’re not enjoying yourself. But if having a safe word makes you feel better, let’s make it...Finders Keepers.”

My breath caught as memories flooded back. “Alright.”

He smiled softly, bending to brush a kiss on my brow. “Good girl.”

We walked for several more minutes until we came to a clearing in the trees. I blinked rapidly, my gaze skimming the scene we’d stumbled on. No, not stumbled. Titus had led us here on purpose.

It was the cabin—what was left of it. It had burned down, the last blackened remnants of wood still crackling with embers.

I scanned the ground, looking for the bodies of our attackers. “Where are the cultists?”

He gestured to a burning pile of debris. “There.”

“Oh.”

“Well, most of them. Here.” He picked up the backpack from where he’d left it on the ground and tossed it at me. It was heavier than I remembered.

There was something unsettling about the weight of the bag. I looked at Titus, who was staring at me with a wry smirk. “Look inside. I got you a present.”

I opened the backpack to discover that his *present* was a severed head. It wasn’t the head of a man, but a full-blooded devil. Its fur was clumped with blood, and its white eyes bore up at me from the bottom of the backpack.

Even though he’d been wearing a mask last night, I knew who it was.

I swallowed thickly, noticing that there was something stuffed in its gaping mouth.

“He didn’t die by getting his head torn off,” Titus said in a smooth, silken voice. “In case you’re wondering. I ripped off his dick, then choked him with it.” His one white eye gleamed with mischief. “Even though there were only a couple of inches to gag him on.”

I noticed something else cushioning the beast’s head. “Are those his...?”

“Hands,” the half-devil confirmed.

My jaw fell open. “Why?”

Titus gave a flippant shrug as if I were asking why he’d left the toilet seat up. “Because I did. It’s over, and that’s that.”

“You could have come looking for me right away. Instead, you decided to take your time disemboweling this garbage. Why?”

Titus’s demeanor went from invasive to exasperated. His shoulders fell, and he heaved a sigh. “I cut off his cock because he tried to hurt you with it. And I cut off his hands simply because they touched you. I should have come straight for you, but my devil needed to...relieve some rage.”

This was the part where I should have been horrified. Once again, though, I continued to impress myself with just how messed up I really was.

Because seeing the head of my second almost rapist and knowing he’d been strangled by his own pathetic lump of flesh sent a flood of molten heat through me.

I lifted my attention to Titus and found him already looking at me with a knowing smile. “You know, most boyfriends give their girl jewelry or something.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not just your boyfriend. I’m your half-devil stepbrother and soon-to-be owner of your very soul. This is better than a necklace anyway.”

I couldn’t agree more.

“You can’t give me presents like this when we get out of here. You’ll have to be a normal guy.”

He laughed. “I don’t think I’ll ever be normal, babe. You won’t be either. I watched you crush the skull of a devil. Which was hot as fuck, by the way. But you’re still a

murderer. There will always be times that we'll have to pretend.”

The half-devil prowled toward me, the outline of his horns falling over me as his shadow stretched across the blood-soaked ground, even though he wasn't shifted. “Behind closed doors, we can be our twisted, hell-bound selves.”

I wasn't sure what life would look like for us after we escaped the Pine Barrens. Where would we go? Would we get normal jobs, and I'd come home to the half-human man who owned my soul like it was no big deal?

Part of me was almost too scared to imagine the future, because there was a part of me I couldn't convince that we were going to get out of here.

Titus's smile fell, and his mismatched eyes flickered between mine as he searched my gaze. “We're going to get out of here, Lorelei.”

I closed my eyes and leaned against his chest, savoring his masculine heat. “Say it again.”

His strong arms banded around me, pulling me close. “We're going to get out of here.”

He said it a few more times, but it didn't matter how much he repeated it.

It still felt like a lie.

Chapter Twelve

TITUS

I'd be lying to myself if I didn't admit that I had some doubts we'd be able to make it out of the Barrens without facing the Jersey Devil. But I knew deep in my core that if he did catch us, I'd fight like hell.

I could practically taste her rising anxiety. After last night, she had to know I'd protect her, even if it meant throwing myself into the flames to save her.

This was the first time I admitted that, even to myself. In this part of the woods, the way of life was to eat or be eaten. But this little human was more than just my prey. She was my reason for fucking breathing at this point. And while there was still breath in my lungs, I'd fight like hell to ensure there was breath in hers.

Fuck me. This would have been way easier if we just had a car. I had a pretty good idea of our location. It would have been easy to guide us to a town and hotwire a car. But I didn't trust any civilization. Bishop was the only all-devil town, but there were Leeds descendants all over the Barrens. So it was

just our luck when we stumbled upon a house in the middle of the woods with an old pickup truck parked out front. Unlike the last place we'd found, this one wasn't abandoned.

The advantage was that I wouldn't have to fuck around with the vehicle too much.

The obvious drawback was that we'd have to be quiet.

I tugged on Lore's hand, pulling her after me. "Come on. I'm gonna hotwire the truck."

I reached to test the truck door's handle to see if it was unlocked, but didn't get further than that. The house's door swung open, and out stepped an elderly man with a long beard and a shotgun aimed at my head.

"Step away from my truck, boy."

I slowly raised my hands up and stepped back, keeping Lore behind me. I kept my mouth shut as I waited to see if he recognized me. Any non-shifter who was part of the Old Faith would recognize me as the Keeper's son, even if they weren't Bishop citizens.

There was no flicker of recognition on the man's face. I could probably kill him, but that would likely upset Lore. While I debated our options, Lore stepped around me.

"Don't shoot! Please help us! We're just trying to get out of here. We're...lost. Maybe we can borrow your phone?"

The man's eyes narrowed in suspicion, then he lowered his gun. "Fine. Come in. Don't touch anything."

He ambled back inside, the screen door slamming shut behind him.

I gripped Lore's wrist, pulling her toward the trees. "Come on. Let's go."

She wrenched her arm out of my hand and shot me a glare. "No. This guy wants to help us. He's gonna let us use his phone."

I blinked at her, giving her a look as if to ask, *are you crazy?* "You mean you actually want to use his phone? I thought you were just trying to distract him. Lore, we can't trust him. We can't trust anyone out here."

She snorted. "He's a little old man. What's he gonna do?"

"And I'm just a twenty-one-year-old mechanic. Harmless, right? Even if he isn't a member of the Old Faith, who are you going to call? A taxi?"

The slits of her eyes turned dagger sharp. "Yes, actually. This is still New Jersey, bro. Not an alien planet."

I glared at her, but she held her ground, her jaw set. She was so stubborn. So fearless. And so trusting. I was getting ready to throw her over my shoulder, but she was already bounding toward the house's front door.

"Lore! Get back here!"

She made a tiny *ha* noise over her shoulder, as if it was silly for me to think she'd obey. Unless she was speared onto my cock, the girl wasn't very good at following instructions.

Grumbling, I charged after her.

The cabin smelled damp and dusty. It was dark, and the interior was straight-up creepy with its '80s wooden paneling and newspapers stacked all around the room. Yellowed newspaper and magazine clippings were pinned to every spare inch of the living room walls. Unease wound through me as I skimmed the headlines. Almost all of them were articles on the Jersey Devil. It wasn't uncommon for citizens of the Pine Barrens to be obsessed with the myth. It's what the Barrens were most famous for, and it drew tourists to these woods. The myth was engaged in by everyone around here, whether they were part of the Old Faith or not.

Still.

It didn't do much to ease my suspicions.

"Thank you so much," Lore said to the man, who'd collapsed into the beat-up recliner in the corner of the room, his attention falling to the old box TV sitting on a few milk crates.

"Fine, fine," he dismissed, then gestured to a doorway. "Phone is in the kitchen."

I followed Lore into the adjoining space. "I don't like this. The guy is obsessed with the Jersey Devil," I told her, keeping my volume low.

"So what? Isn't everyone here?" she countered.

"Yeah. But I'm also covered from head to toe in old blood, and he's just totally cool with that?"

Her doe-like eyes darted down my frame, and she chewed her lip as she took me in. My dick thickened in my jeans at the way she flushed. “Looks like it could be mud. We are in the woods, after all.”

“Just make your call so we can bounce.”

Lore wrinkled her nose at the rotary phone affixed to the wall. “How am I supposed to use this thing?”

“You should be more concerned about what number you’re going to call. No taxi will come to these parts. We’re too far off the main roads.”

She picked up the phone and held it to her ear. I watched as disappointment slowly crept across her face. “There’s no beep. The line isn’t working.” She placed the phone back on its holder and rubbed her fingers together, frowning at the dust. “It hasn’t worked in a while.”

“Fuck. I should have never let you come in here.” I took her by the hand and pulled her back into the living room. “Come on, we’re leaving.”

I stopped in my tracks, growling at the way the old man had gotten out of his chair and was now standing in the doorway. This time, he didn’t have the gun. He didn’t need it.

He’d shifted into his devil form, confirming my suspicions.

“Where are you going, Kinsman?” the devil rumbled in the Old Tongue. *“Not running away with your offering, I hope.”*

I shifted, holding my claws up threateningly. *“You have one chance to step aside, old man, before I tear you to pieces.”*

“*Old man?*” He laughed, the gravelly sound making Lore scooch in closer to me. “*Do you not recognize me, Titus? What has the Leeds family come to where we don’t recognize our own family?*”

“There are hundreds of us!” I snarled in English. There was no reason to keep this conversation from Lore. “How the fuck should I know what some seventh cousin, or whatever the fuck you are, looks like? I hate this family. You all can go burn in Hell for all I care.”

“*Ungrateful half-blood bastard. I remember telling your father that if he had any sense, he’d sacrifice you with your mother. He always thought you’d take his place as the Keeper one day. But look at you. Helping a human escape. Your mother’s blood makes you weak.*”

“We’ll see who the weak one is.”

I lurched forward, claws ready to slash his throat.

He danced out of the way, more nimble than I’d expected. Shit. This was going to be a pain in the ass. Devils weren’t like humans. They only got stronger with age.

And this asshole was *old*.

Chapter Thirteen

LORE

As the two devils went at each other's throats, destroying the room in the process, my mind was flying a million miles an hour trying to figure out what I should do. What *could* I do?

My attention immediately went to the shotgun the old man had propped against the door.

I took a moment to tamp down my nerves before flinging myself into the room. I was so close...My arm stretched out, my fingertips brushing the barrel.

"Lore!" Titus's booming voice screamed at me in warning. I jerked my gaze to see Titus running for me, but it was too late. The older devil was closer, and his reach was longer.

He grabbed my arm just as I took hold of the gun and wrenched it out of my grip, then spun me around to face Titus with the gun pointed at my cheek.

"It will be sad for our Elder One to be cheated out of his offering. But I think you are the more precious treasure,

Kinsman. So I will blow her brains out if you don't do exactly as I say.”

Titus's eyes widened as he tracked the movement of what I presumed was the gun. An emotion I'd never seen him wear spread across his face.

Fear.

The last thing I heard was Titus screaming my name before there was a sharp crack over the back of my skull, then darkness swallowed me.



When I came to, I was in a dark room that smelled of mold, and something worse. Maybe rat shit? A moment later, I registered the firm muscle beneath me. Titus was holding me.

“How's your head?” he murmured softly.

I reached to feel the back of my skull, my fingers lightly probing the spot where I'd been struck with the butt of the shotgun. “Tender. But I'm okay, I think.” I looked around, blinking through the darkness. “Where are we?”

Titus refused to look at me, his glower glued to the bars over the only window in the place. “The old man's cellar,” Titus revealed through clenched teeth, but only after making me wait for an awkward beat before answering. “Or should I say, *Uncle Pete's* cellar.”

A million things I wanted to say burned at the back of my throat, but all I could push out was a weak-ass, “I’m sorry.”

“I know.” He sighed, his cadence softening. “It’s okay.”

Tears of frustration stung my eyes. “No, it’s not okay. You told me not to trust this guy, and I did. Now look at where it’s gotten us. He’s probably going to keep us here until nightfall, then have the cult come and get us for their freaky ritual.”

“That’s exactly what’s going to happen, lamb.”

With my whimper, Titus swiveled his gaze back to me. He pressed a finger beneath my chin, tilting my face so our eyes locked. His one white eye burned into me through the dark. “Hey. None of that. You’ve been a total badass throughout this entire thing. Don’t go acting like a scared little girl on me now.”

“But I’ve fucked everything up.”

He gave a one-shouldered shrug. “You’re human. It’s in your nature to trust other people of your kind in certain dire situations. It’s the whole pack-mentality thing. You wanted to trust the old man, and, if he were human, chances are he would have helped us.” His one white eye slivered. “Too bad he turned out to be like me...”

Sensing the hurt in his tone, I reached up to cup his head in my hands. “You’re human too, you know. I think that’s why you indulged me. You like seeing all my human idiosyncrasies. You’re learning to be more human, learning to trust more. It just...bit us in the ass this time.”

The half-devil gave a slow nod. “Yeah. I guess. Maybe I’ve been too obsessed with the fantasy of feeling human, *being* human. I’ll never be fully human. And I’ll never be a full devil.”

I frowned at him. “So what? What’s so horrible about being a little bit of both?”

He blinked at me, seeming caught off guard by the question. “I don’t belong anywhere.”

My heart ached at the unguarded pain underscoring his words. My lips feathered over his in a gentle kiss. “You belong with me, Titus. Nothing else matters.”



The hours crept by on their hands and knees as we watched the light die outside the cellar window. Soon, it was pitch black. The full moon was just visible over the treetops.

Titus now stood beside the window, an undesirable expression carving his features. He was as beautiful as ever with the silver light flooding through the window, painting his face in strips of shadows cast from the bars.

“The fog is thick tonight,” he whispered, more to himself than to me. “He’s awake. He’s coming.”

My insides quivered. My nerves were a fucking wreck, but for some reason, I wasn’t scared.

If anything, I felt ashamed for being so blindly trusting. “The second they let us out of here, you should try to run. Leave me behind. You’re fast. You can escape, especially if you use me as a distraction.”

For the first time in what felt like hours, Titus turned away from the window, and his intimidating glare pinned me down to the stack of newspapers where I sat. “This was never about me escaping Bishop. If it were, I would have left long before your trash mother ever dragged you to this godforsaken place.”

“Then what is it about?”

“It used to be about avenging my mother.” His gaze softened, almost looking pained. “Now that I’ve done that, all I care about is being with you.”

Muffled voices suddenly sounded from outside. Amber firelight flooded through the window, painting the wall with Titus’s demonic figure, making him appear even more intimidating. His wings flexed behind him, and his gaze grew distant. “The Ritual. It’s begun.”

Chapter Fourteen

LORE

The night air hung heavy with the taste of smoke and loathing.

As several robed devils guided us out of Titus's uncle's basement—at gunpoint—their murderous intent was palpable. Everyone watched us through the slits in their masks as we marched to the roaring bonfire that had been lit in front of the house.

There were so many of them. At least three dozen, maybe more.

The little flame of hope in my chest flickered and died. There was no fighting our way out of this one.

Titus shuffled closer to me, his claws lacing through my fingers. “Do you remember what I told you back at the house?” he whispered, his white devil's eye glittering in the dark.

I did remember; I'd never forget. But I wanted to hear him say it again anyway. “Remind me.”

“Whatever human emotions are weighing you down—fear, trepidation, whatever the fuck they are—they are not your burden. They’re mine. Because I own your heart, little lamb. And after tonight, I’ll own your soul too.”

A heady coalescence of anxiety and excitement shimmered through my veins. “What if the Jersey Devil beats you to it? What if he kills you first? What if he kills both of us?”

“Then your soul will be tethered to mine, and we’ll burn together.”

Despite the terrifying circumstances of what he was suggesting, my lips tipped into a wry smirk. “Aw. So romantic.”

The cultist at my back jammed the barrel of the gun between my shoulder blades, making me stumble forward. Titus turned with his teeth bared, fearlessly looking down at the shotgun’s barrel. He said something in their ancient-sounding language that made the devils squirm uncomfortably.

Even when they were armed, full-blooded monsters were intimidated by my half-devil stepbrother. This little fact brought me comfort, even though I knew this wouldn’t be the case with the Jersey Devil.

At least there was the satisfaction of knowing these lesser devils were shitting themselves in Titus’s presence.

The figures were clothed in white robes that glowed orange in the dancing flames of their fire, and a flickering shadow

stretched behind each cultist like a ghostly figure watching over them.

The bonfire's flames lapped and licked at the night, embers flitting through coils of smoke.

"Beautiful," I found myself whispering without meaning to, enamored by the bizarre and macabre allure of it all.

"Yes," Titus agreed. I felt his eyes hot on me, though, instead of the fire.

My belly fluttered. There was so much love and adoration in that single syllable. Okay. So I was, in all likelihood, about to get my soul bitch-slapped out of my body by one of the most notorious cryptids in the country—a monster that wasn't even supposed to be real—and all I could think about was how lucky I was to be loved by my step devil.

The circle of cultists parted, allowing us to be pushed inside, then fanned out behind us once more.

Titus stood tall with his hand still wrapped around mine and his wing folded around my shoulders to hold me close. He was trying to keep me safe, even if it was just an illusion. I closed my eyes and focused on his warmth.

Then, the chanting started.

The voices of the cultists wove together, perfectly in unison. My brain couldn't make sense of the words, but my soul seemed to understand on some level. It was haunting, carrying all the soul of the forest.

Foreign words gave way to a single sound: *drum, drum, drum.*

It was like they were mimicking the sound of a church bell, marking the start of their service.

Drum.

My heart rate jumped.

Drum.

Titus's hand squeezed mine tighter.

Drum.

“Come forth, come forth, Elder One, and accept our offering to thee,” Titus rasped beneath his breath, translating the chants of his brethren.

I noticed all the cultists' cowls shift, their heads turning in one direction. I followed their attention, squinting past the fire to see a hulking silhouette approach.

For the first time since entering the circle, the icy claws of fear raked down my back. Despite the fire's blaze, a deathly chill washed over me as the circle of cultists parted, allowing the monster to step into the fire's glow.

The Jersey Devil looked nothing like Titus.

His body was covered from head to toe in fur. While it had the arms of a man, its legs were that of a goat. His horns were knobby with many points. They reminded me more of a tree branch than the horns belonging to a demon. Its wings were similar to a bat's—leathery, brown and aged. Its head was

fleshless, and its skull was similar to a horse's. Its eyes were the most unsettling, though, because they were alight with white fire that seemed to fill its entire skull.

Even though the Jersey Devil didn't have pupils, I got the sense that his attention was centered on Titus. For an awkward beat, they sized each other up through the bonfire's swirling smoke.

When it spoke, goosebumps exploded over my arms. Its voice was straight-up demonic and as deep as Hell.

Whatever it was saying, it was speaking directly to Titus. Its hellfire gaze flicked to me, making my breath latch in my chest before returning its attention back to my stepbrother.

Titus responded in a level tone, almost sounding smug.

I was sure the Jersey Devil was asking if Titus had killed his father. He was, of course, confirming it. There was no use lying. Even if he thought he could wriggle out of it and deny the whole thing, he wouldn't.

Titus Leeds was proud of the fact that he'd finally avenged his human mother.

The Elder One hummed—in disapproval or approval, I couldn't tell—and stepped into the bonfire.

I watched in unholy awe as the flames turned white, licking over its flesh like writhing veins made of fire. Stark horror crept into my chest, fisting my heart as it dawned on me how Titus got his facial scar.

The Jersey Devil had hurt him. As the puzzle pieces came together, I realized that Titus' scars did look like claw marks under the burned and twisted flesh.

The Elder One tipped its head to the sky, where the full moon peeked over the branches that lined the clearing. Its arms stretched out, and its wings unfolded.

Waiting for its offering.

I braced myself, waiting for the sacrificial knife to drop. Or whatever a devil did when claiming a human soul. Instead, the circle opened and someone pushed a woman inside.

My heart crystallized when I saw who it was.

Gloria Brooks was still alive. Her hair was a mess, her eyes were swollen from crying and she was filthy. Her dirt-crusting cheeks were streaked with tear tracks. She struggled to her feet, fear filling her eyes as she took in the terrifying scene.

Even with the horror stark on her face, I couldn't seem to summon any pity for her.

After several seconds, she noticed me. "L-Lorelei? Lorelei! Help me! What's going on?"

"What's going on is that you're realizing everything I warned you about is true. Feel foolish now?"

My mom's eyes grew as wide as dinner plates. "Help me! I'm your mother!"

I wasn't sure what she expected me to do. I was helpless, just like her. Still, the smallest dose of satisfaction worked

through me at the fact that she thought I had power here.

Good.

I wanted her to think that I had the option of saving her. Because either way, she'd get no help from me. Not after breaking my heart into pieces.

The Jersey Devil reached for Gloria, who was paralyzed in place by her dumbfounded fear. She cast one last hopeful look at me, a last-ditch effort to summon so much as an iota of sympathy from me.

Lifting my chin, the firelight's angle shifted, casting ominous shadows across my face. "Goodbye, Mother."

My mother's screams washed over me and, to my surprise, I felt nothing.

Nothing at all.

Not as the Jersey Devil's flaming fingers encircled her throat. Not as he lifted her into the air and opened his maw. Not as a white ball of blazing light tore from her throat and shot into his mouth, feeding his flames.

Not even when he flung her limp body to the ground and flock members picked her up, carrying her off into the shroud of pine trees.

I knew where they were taking her. She'd join the other offerings to wander the woods and rot in her listless madness.

Titus's thumb rubbed over my knuckles, finally chasing away the numbness and eliciting some emotion. The resulting

spread of warmth in my chest had nothing to do with my mother.

When the Jersey Devil had had his fill of the first offering, he raised his hand, pointing a great claw in my direction. Titus took his wing from around my shoulders and let go of my hand. Instead, he stepped in front of me and was shielding me with his body.

“Umero estil ne terka,” he snarled through clenched teeth.

The Jersey Devil leaned away, looking physically taken aback by whatever the half-devil had said.

The entire circle tensed in discomfort.

Fuck. I'd almost consider giving up my soul just to understand the exchange. The Elder Devil answered, his flames leaping high from his eye sockets. A strange sound bellowed from his chest, and it took me a moment to realize he was laughing.

Murmurs danced down the procession of cultists.

Slowly, everyone turned their attention to me. Dozens of white eyes burned into me, making the little hairs on my nape stand. My heart was beating so hard, I could feel it in my mouth.

“Titus,” I whispered. “What’s going on...?”

“I think I figured out a way to get us out of here. But you’re not going to like it.” He turned back to face me, taking both of my hands in his. I wasn’t sure if it was a trick of the shadows

or if he was really smiling like a maniac. “Or maybe you will.”

There was a dark bend to his tone that had my insides twisting into knots. “Spit it out, devil.”

“I made a bet with the Elder One.” His mismatched eyes glinted in the bonfire’s glow. “He thinks I’m more human than devil.”

Titus took a step closer to me. His demeanor was so menacing, I instinctually took a step back. “He thinks me weak. He’s challenged me to claim your soul. Right here. Right now.”

Another step forward.

I took another back.

I swallowed thickly. “Now? In front of everyone?”

Titus nodded, talking toward me with tumultuous hunger banked behind his inhuman gaze. “Yes. I know my little lamb does well with an audience. If I can successfully mark your soul and claim it for myself, he’ll allow us to leave.”

“And if you can’t?” Something told me I wasn’t going to like the answer.

“If I fail to take your soul, then he’ll devour both of ours.”

I froze. My heart thundered inside my rib cage. I wasn’t sure what I’d been expecting, but it wasn’t that. I’d entered the center of the ritual circle knowing I probably wouldn’t be

leaving without some devil or another sinking his claws into my soul.

Titus was so sure of his abilities—even though he'd never marked a soul before—that he was staking his own soul on it. Risking himself for a chance to save me.

The butterflies in my belly turned to angry bees. I wanted him. And he was right. As it turned out, I was a bit of an exhibitionist.

The fact that we didn't have much of a choice here should have sobered me up from my lustful haze...but it didn't.

Titus's nostrils flared as he breathed in my arousal. A smile twitched on his lips.

The little space left between us buzzed, and adrenaline raced through my bloodstream. He was watching me so intently, his one pale eye bright.

He tweaked an eyebrow at me, a silent question. "*Are you ready to do this?*"

Part of me said "*hell no,*" but there was a bigger, louder part of my brain screaming *yes*.

I gave the slightest of nods, and mouthed, "Okay."

In that heated moment, everything snapped. The pressure was on to make it out of these woods alive, heightening the stakes and making this the darkest and most dangerous game we'd ever played.

Lucky for us, we were the perfect players for the challenge.

Chapter Fifteen

LORE

If Titus was nervous, he didn't show it. This was it. Do or die. Or rather, fuck or get eaten. And not the fun kind of "devouring."

"Run, little lamb. Or be slaughtered." The dark intent dripping from Titus's words had me running. It's not like I had anywhere to go. Everywhere I turned, I was blocked in by the wall of cultists. Their glowing eyes leered from behind the slits of their masks, but I was barely paying attention.

Titus's claws sank into my sides, wrenching me back into the circle's interior. I yelped, my core pulsing and throbbing at his touch.

He threw me to the ground and we went rolling, stopping with him on top of me with his palms flat against the dirt on either side of my head. "Finders Keepers?"

I blinked up at him, my brain stalling out for a second before I parsed what he was saying.

Even now, in front of all these monsters, he was reminding me that I had a safe word. I wasn't sure what he'd do exactly. Maybe give it to me in the most gentle, vanilla way possible. But that's not how I liked to have my step devil.

I didn't care who was watching.

I wanted him to peel me open, peer inside the deepest, most secret parts of me and *salivate* over what he saw.

I reached up to smack him, but he caught my wrist just before the blow landed. Surprise gave way to sinuous glee. He chuckled sadistically, his grip tightening enough to leave a bruise. It wouldn't be the only mark he'd leave on me tonight.

“You're so tense, baby. Loosen up.” He licked his lips, and his tongue piercing gleamed in the firelight. “Or maybe it's my job to help you with that.”

I sucked in a breath, gaping up at him. He just smiled right back, looking so damn pleased with himself. Nope. He wasn't nervous at all. Titus was confident as ever that he'd claim my soul and we'd waltz out of here scot-free.

Keeping one hand firmly on my wrist, he used his free hand to tuck a lock of hair behind my ear. One hand cruel, the other gentle. In a way, it was just like him.

His human side soft, his devil side...well, like this.

And my body betrayed just how much I loved whatever part of himself he saw fit to give me.

Titus arched down, his face so close that his breath caressed my throat. Then he licked along the column of my throat,

tasting my pulse point. “I’m going to do filthy fucking things to you, Lorelei. Every devil here will wish that you were theirs.”

The flood of adrenaline slamming through my veins was intoxicating. My head swam, my thighs clenched and my pussy was molten wet. Given how acute their senses were, I was sure every devil here could taste my arousal.

And that just made me drip all the more.

Every time Titus mentioned showing me off, his possessive streak flared up and I dripped like a damn faucet. So much for self-preservation. Not that I cared; we’d passed the point of no return.

“I love it when you’re like this, Lorelei.” Titus’s tongue painted a lick over my throat, then dived lower, dipped beneath the neckline of his shirt I still wore.

He laughed as goosebumps rose over my breasts. Just as his tongue teased over my nipples—the pink buds hardening against the flannel button-up—he withdrew the appendage, and I squirmed at the sudden loss of heat. My hips bucked off the ground, writhing against his pelvis to find his rock-fucking-hard cock.

He canted his hips, grinding my ass into the dirt with a maniacal laugh. “You’re such a pretty little monster slut, aren’t you? So eager to be eaten.”

His fingers slipped from my wrist to hook into my shirt, playing with the plunging neckline where I’d tied it shut—

since he'd already ripped the buttons off during our graveyard adventure. "Your arousal is so strong. I doubt there is a monster within a mile radius who can't taste the sweet perfume of your dripping pussy."

Defiance flared inside me, and I flashed him a too-sweet grin. "What's your angle here, devil? Are you trying to fuck my soul out or are you trying to chase it out by boring it to death?"

His eyes flashed. Then his tongue whipped out and he slapped me across the face with it. I gasped and, with the parting of my lips, he plunged the thick appendage down my throat. I bucked, choking at the sudden invasion.

As I gagged and sputtered, his wicked fingers hooked inside my shirt and ripped it open, baring my breasts.

He peeled my jeans and panties off with one smooth movement, dropping them to the ground beside my head. Then his attention turned toward freeing himself from his jeans.

With his tongue shoved down my throat, I could barely think straight. But in a way, it was the perfect distraction. All my senses were heightened, overtly aware of him and him alone. Every graze of bare skin and every tumbling breath from his gaping mouth. I thrashed around him as he spread my thighs apart, sinking inside my pussy on the next beat of my heart.

He filled me from both ends, making me helpless to do anything but lay there in the dirt and take him.

His devil cock spread me with perfection, full and throbbing. His veiny shaft was yet another sensation to lose myself in, the pleasure of it overriding any lingering nerves as dozens of monsters watched us.

His mismatched eyes took up most of my vision, the flames of the fire framing the edges.

So fucking full.

I didn't know I could feel this filthy, this depraved, this fucking good. His sweat-soaked skin sliding over mine was a comforting intimacy amongst the wet, lewd noises our bodies made as they clashed together in unholy union.

This wasn't real. It couldn't be real.

My fingers flew to his head, one hand knotting in his hair while the other curled around his horn.

With every stroke of his cock and every thrust of his tongue, he pushed me closer to mind-obliterating bliss.

But that's how it was with Titus. Nothing else mattered when he wore me like this, whether we were in the back of his truck bed or in the middle of a demonic ritual circle with an entire cult watching us screw each other's brains out.

He was the only thing that mattered.

The rest was just unimportant details, flavoring at best.

My muscles seized when Titus's tongue changed motions. It was almost like he was searching for something. I then realized that's exactly what he was doing.

Jesus.

It's not like I knew the specifics on how the whole soul-marking thing worked. I definitely didn't imagine it would entail Titus shoving his tongue down my throat and digging around inside me like he was looking for a cereal-box prize.

Dazed from all the stimulation, I noted the way his index finger had dragged over my skin.

A garbled mewl left me as he pushed the claw into my chest.

Holy shit.

He was carving something into my flesh. The pain was chased away by pleasure, and the smell of blood mingled with the scents of sex, sweat and smoke.

The night was cool, but Titus was an inferno.

Then, something inside me shifted. I lay there in dazed disbelief as Titus withdrew his tongue from me.

So many things happened at once.

I jerked, screaming with the violent release that crashed over me like a tidal wave.

As his tongue slithered back inside his mouth—*swallowing* something—he pulled his cock out of me, then wrapped his hand around his girth and gave it one, two, then three pumps. Thick ropes of cum came shooting out, painting my navel, my breasts and my heaving chest.

As my orgasm tingled through me, dots of light peppered my vision.

I couldn't make out what he'd carved. My flesh was covered in a thick layer of blood and cum. Before I could find the words to speak, he bent down and licked away the filth, leaving a clean view of the fresh wounds.

The design was a collection of demonic-looking runes.

“My name. In Old Tongue,” he purred, answering my unspoken question. “It's my mark. Now every demon, devil and monster will know that your soul belongs to me.”

“It worked?”

A smug smile curved his lips. “It fucking worked.”

I craned my head to peer at the bonfire. The Jersey Devil was gone. The bonfire started to subside, its haze of smoke coiling up into the paling sky. Daybreak was just around the corner.

I collapsed back into the dirt, the most satisfying of sighs winding through me. The footsteps of the cultists sounded and faded as they all retreated into the woods.

“Bye, fuckers. Hope you enjoyed the show.” Titus snickered, sucking my flavor off his fingers before giving a two-digit salute to their retreating forms and then collapsing back into the dirt with me.

He propped himself up on an elbow, turning to peer at me. “Jesus Christ. That was fucked. Perfectly fucked.”

I laughed. “Since I met you, you’ve been telling me how fucked I am. So...what’s it feel like? To own my soul, I mean?”

His eyes lit up as they skimmed my freshly marked chest. “It feels like I’m finally home, Lore.”



Several hours later, we stood at the border of the Pine Barrens, looking beyond the trees to the world beyond.

“So, what do we do now?” I scooted closer against Titus, and he threw his arm around my shoulder, holding me close.

It seemed like such a dumb question, but after everything we’d been through, it was a valid one. After all that, how could we possibly go back to a normal life and do normal things?

He looked at me, and the sunrise’s golden glow lit up his relieved smile.

Fuck me dead. He was ridiculously gorgeous when he smiled.

“I don’t fucking care. Anything. Whatever humans do. It doesn’t matter so long as I’m with you.”

Titus shoved a hand into the pocket of his jeans and withdrew something gold and sparkling. It was a necklace with a little L pendant affixed to the delicate chain. I blinked at the devil, brows scrunching in confusion.

He scrubbed the back of his neck with his hand, his face flushing. Holy shit. Titus was blushing.

“It was my mom’s necklace. It’s the last thing I have of her. Her name was Lisa, funny enough.” His mouth twitched with the faintest of smiles. “Normally this sappy shit isn’t my thing. But I want you to have it.”

My throat throbbed with emotion as I nodded and spun around, pulling my hair back to allow him to clasp the necklace in place.

“There.” He took me by the shoulders and guided me back to face him, his fingertips turning the “L” pendant over. “It looks perfect on you.”

My heart melted as I reached up, catching his hand in mine and giving it a squeeze. “I like this side of you. ‘Sappy’ looks good on you, bro.”

His smile grew, and a fire ignited in my soul as he leaned down to kiss me.

It was a moment and an eternity, all in a kiss.

He broke away from me, and I turned my gaze back to the woods. “What about Bishop? What about the future offerings?”

My half-devil sighed, his expression darkening in my periphery. “That’s a problem for later. Honestly, it might just have to be someone else’s problem. You’re the only thing that matters to me now, Lorelei.”

I gaped at him, my heart feeling full and warm. It was as if it had absorbed all the sun's light and now was ready to burst out of me.

Those words. They were the same ones my mom had told me before she betrayed me. Only coming from Titus's mouth, they actually meant something.

From Titus's lips, they meant the whole fucking world.

The End

A Note from the Author

Thank you so much for reading *Step Devil 2!* If you enjoyed the book please consider leaving a review! It helps other readers find my work and any reviews (even just star ratings) totally make my day!

I believe this is about it for Lore and Titus' story for the most part, but I see us returning to Bishop in the future because there are more mysteries to unpack! ;)

In the meantime, if you're wanting to stay up to date on my upcoming releases, hear about my business, check out cool character art, or just get to know me, follow me at any of the links below!

